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Audiences, Choreography, Publics: The Politics & Practice of Spectatorship

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Abstract

The question of how some bodies appear to others, and how those bodies collectively relate with each other, is central to choreography and to concerns of the state. When the role of theatre spectatorship is discussed in political discourse, it typically invokes the binary of the passive versus the active; the passive is dismissed as socially worthless and the active as invigorating community. I would like to explore more expansive experiences of spectatorship, in order to articulate in what ways bodies relate beyond the representational operations that underlie these terms. My approach is to use choreographic practice to create particular conditions of appearance and relation, *as* discussion and experience of spectatorial exchange. This project occurs in a context of artists' and scholars' interest in the politics of theatre's operations of appearance, and in choreography's relational productivity. It asks why, given the spectatorial relations fundamental to everyday life, we repeatedly go to performances.

The original choreographic works *Count Two*, *Practice* and *Assembly* consider how qualities of spectatorial relation are affected by performance strategies that address the potentials of linguistic structures, theatricality, materiality and viewing conventions. Drawing on a Rancièrian notion of emancipated spectatorship, *Count Two* sought to discover how the content and structure of a piece might acknowledge the spectator's activity of watching. Through its repeated re-categorisation of components, the piece invoked qualities of instability as inherent to logocentric structures. The affective relations investigated through *Practice's* embrace of the thought, felt and materially endured, provided an opportunity to attend to the ways we might experience spectatorial exchange within unstable systems, as attention to what is present. Finally, *Assembly* asked what a crowd of bodies can do other than serve representational ideas of public-ness, and suggests that an impulse to gather is also an impulse to be vulnerable. These pieces provided a chance to explore *how* relations are experienced, *as* unstable relations, *through* our many perceptive capacities. Choreography asserts itself as the production of situations of generative relating, through spectatorial experiences of choreography as a 'being-for-others'.

Introduction

This project is an investigation into the nature of exchange between audiences and the performances they watch. It will explore the type of activity that occurs when a person or group of people choose to watch others present a theatre event and why so many of us repeatedly seek out this custom. These discussions occur through choreographic practice and incorporate recent Western theoretical concerns about the nature of choreography and other forms of performance. Viewing theatre is a social affair, and a central focus will be what this relationship reveals about spectatorial relations in the public and political spheres beyond the show.

Questions of how a body can appear to others and which conditions make it publicly legible are inherent to a number of recent choreographic practices including my own. Amelia Jones phrases the question well, asking “[h]ow do bodies... come to mean to others who encounter them?” (in Reynolds & Reason, 2012, p.14). Of course the appearance of one person to another is not limited to visual experience, but an embodied and socially and politically embedded exchange. The three choreographic works I have created in this project consider how qualities of relation between people are affected by performance strategies that address the potentials of linguistic structures, theatricality, materiality and viewing conventions. Through discussion of these works, and with reference to those of other practitioners, bodies are offered as sites of multiplicity, uncertainty and production that are always in relation, and choreography asserts itself as those procedures through which bodies appear and relate.

This research situates itself at a point that draws on recent discussions in the named fields of Dance, Theatre and Performance Studies. To this degree it breaks from a historical tradition in Dance Studies that resists the association of dance with theatre in order to claim its distinctiveness (O’Shea, 2010, p.1). Instead, it expands the scope of

discussion about choreography and spectatorship by interweaving recent scholarship about the politics of performance that have occurred in Dance Studies and Theatre and Performance Studies, and extends the reach of dialogues in the latter through a consideration of choreography's relational productivity (Siegmond & Hölscher, 2013; Martin, 1998, 2013; Kunst, 2013; Lepecki 2006, 2013; Ridout 2008; Davis 2004). Theatricality is a key term in this endeavour, and has led to the inclusion of theorists who have made claims for the knowledge regimes of theatre to make sense of a range of performance events, such as Tracy C Davis and Nicholas Ridout, themselves drawing bridges across claims for distinction between theatre and live or performance art.

To this degree this thesis builds on dance as a theatre art (an association that has in part informed its absence from thinking in other named fields, such as visual arts), as means to explore mechanisms of appearance in participation with the choreographic. In turn, this has allowed a wider exploration of the potentials and politics of spectatorship as encompassing artistic, social and political operations as they pertain to a range of performance practices. None of this is to deny the unique embodied knowledges that are exercised through dance practices and performances, but to address the ways in which theatricality participates in dance's and choreography's procedures, particularly in public presentation. As such, this thesis intervenes in Dance Studies by disregarding a historical preoccupation with denying theatre, instead choosing to establish a bridge of support and exchange built on choreographic and theatre practices as useful ways for thinking politics and social organisation – theatre for its discussion of mechanisms of appearance and choreography for its shared form and material with social organisation. Ultimately, by embracing dance as a theatre art, it enables a hybrid aesthetics to evolve in its practical investigations that come to blend theatrical and visual arts traditions in an exploration of the choreographic.

How do I look?

Interrogating the nature and potential of means through which bodies appear, and the effects of those processes on how bodies are regarded, is not new to philosophy nor

dance and performance studies. Operations of governance that determine if and how some people are able to appear to others such that their rights as humans and citizens are delimited has been a focus of attention for a range of recent thinkers. Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* denotes the power of sovereign law to separate the "bare life" of bodies from that of the citizen, Judith Butler's *Precarious Life* (2004) describes the regulation of who can be perceived, and therefore who can be grieved, as at least partly constituting the public sphere, and Jacques Rancière's disenfranchised 'sans-part' effectively cannot be seen or heard within the policing of politics (Agamben, 2000, pp.3-9) (Rancière, 2010). Rancière's notion of the 'distribution of the sensible' (2004) as those conditions that precede and enable certain expressions and appearances to count as political or not has made a notable impact on articulating the intersection of politics and aesthetics in recent years, and is particularly useful for shifting dance's and theatre's relationships to politics away from concerns with representation and towards operations of appearance.

In direct response to Rancière's declaration that a drive towards consensus has led to the disappearance of politics, theatre scholar Nicholas Ridout suggests that political theatre is charged with the task of making politics appear, for which its basic mechanisms of display are well equipped (in Davis, 2008, p.19). Revisiting the etymology of 'theatricality', Tracy C. Davis redefines the term as a sympathetic breach that permits critical distance, and notes its commensurability to spectatorship in civil society. Davis extends this definition to the experience of *dédoublement* by drawing on Adam Smith's notion of the impartial spectator as the self-created witnessing of one's own spectacle (Davis & Postlewait 2004, p.145). Such criticality is essential to what Gerald Siegmund and Stefan Hölscher have named "political dance" as a result of its self-reflexive capacity to question its own means of production (Siegmund & Hölscher, 2013, p.11). In relation to Rancière they characterise choreography as distributing bodies in space and as dealing in what makes those bodies legible. Here, distribution is not explored as timeless form but an operation deeply implicated in social and economic forces. This is pertinent to Roger Copeland's revisiting of Merce Cunningham's choreographic strategies as serving "the ultimate goal of increasing the spectator's perceptual freedom... Cunningham and Cage practice (quite consciously) a

politics of perception” (Copeland, 2004, p.16). Copeland’s interpretation is dependent on a historical shift away from the formal concerns of abstract expressionism to consider spectatorial relations. These commentators, writing across disciplinary distinctions of dance, theatre and performance studies, contribute to articulating a politics of performance to which processes of watching and appearing, including engagement with means of image production, are central.

Above I state that our relation to choreographed form – the ways we engage with or understand bodies’ distributions and movements – are implicated in dominant social and economic forces. Siegmund and Hölscher have explored the inferences of this entwinement on our contemporary situation, describing neo-liberal capitalism’s dependency on the individual body and its ability to move as a basic unit of operation, and recognising that the necessities of the global economy inform the distribution of those units (2013, p.8). Elsewhere, Randy Martin has noted that financial logics, particularly those of derivatives, “suffuse the flows and structures of our daily lives,” evident, for example, in the circulation of identity as “bundling together attributes of personhood” (Martin, 2012, pp.66 & 68). Bojana Kunst has suggested that the transition from Fordist to Post-Fordist labour practices has changed our perception and relation to movement itself from an internal to an external relation; from the interiorisation of movement as synchronising the body with the factory machine, to the desubjection of the body whose relational experience of movement is appropriated by the manipulations of social control (2013 pp. 59-62). The flows and forces at work in daily life affect our understanding, as well as the operations, of our bodies in movement.

Recently André Lepecki has questioned the body’s capacity to make movement which functions as *active* movement, as opposed to movement that sustains the status quo. These ideas extend his earlier writing on the potential of stillness that acts (2006), and he calls on the notion of “Energeia” to name movement that is active by bringing the political into focus from a different perspective (2013, p.30). This distinction, between things that do, and things that appear to do but don’t, recurs throughout this document, for example in questions of whether images and actions that have come to

signify participation, social value and community, actually constitute their enactment. Such distinctions are determined by factors of impact and affect, and our capacities to recognise and name them, operations which are partly informed by the changing contextual factors described above, such as modes of production and economic forces' dependence on bodies' abilities to move. Lepecki identifies Contact Improvisation as an example of activation embedded in dance practice. He describes it as a model of "followingleading," indicating participants' capacities to equally direct and respond to each others' bodies in defining a course of being (2013, p.36). Building on a politics of theatre as pertaining to mechanisms of appearance and its potential to offer insights for thinking politics, we might additionally consider the ways in which social organisation and choreography share form (distribution, behaviour and relations of bodies) and material (bodies), and therefore that aspects of choreographic and dance practices might offer useful ways for thinking politics and social organisation.

Randy Martin's recent writing about derivatives complement his long interest in notions of mobilisation within political theory and the ways dance practices address such ideas in terms of how, and what, bodies in action might produce (1998). The perception of bodies in the act of dancing as a metaphor for social organisation has been explored by Andrew Hewitt, who additionally suggests that social choreography might impart ideology as much as rehearse it. He notes that social choreography performatively creates the order it enacts, operating as a system of production that contributes to forms of social organisation (2005). (I will discuss Hewitt in relation to the piece *Assembly* in Chapter Four). Bojana Cvejić and Ana Vujanović, in a book that notes this "double axis" for the public sphere that is both performed and socially and politically conceived, suggest a rephrasing of Hewitt's take on ideology as "*because they are doing it, they believe it*" (italics in original) (2013, p.58).¹ These discussions articulate the generative capacities of bodies in relation, and the potentials of their productive possibilities in public appearances.

¹ Cvejić and Vujanović note that this formula is "derived from Zizek's twist on Marx in which he explains how instrumental reason operates in the current form of liberal capitalism" (2013, p.58).

Bodies are generative, so what can choreography do? On page one I described choreography as procedures through which bodies appear and relate. Petra Sabisch, in direct response to the question posed here, extends its definition to the creation of relations with an audience that affects modes of perception, and modes of production, as interweaved. Discussing the work of a collection of current European practitioners, she suggests the combination of dynamic components and relational connections an individual work of choreography can create, become “*singular offers of participation for the audience*” (italics in original)(2013, p.119). Addressing a concern to articulate the relationship between contemporary choreography and practical philosophy that leaves both irreducible, she proposes choreography’s capacities in terms of contamination – the transformations that occur through a body’s existence within an environment and relations that compose it – and articulation – an act of differentiation and composition that articulates mutually informing content and expression. The choreographic works in this project, particularly the pieces *Practice* and *Assembly*, employ bodies in performance to create just such conditions of affective impact and poetic coherence.

Writing Watching: Scholarship on Spectatorship

A process of production and reception is how theatre historian Susan Bennett describes spectatorship. Her book *Theatre Audiences* (1997) explores the nature, role and activity of theatre spectators, including the ways in which practitioners, institutions and scholars engage with them. She discusses a range of approaches to recording and discussing spectatorship covering a scale that Helen Freshwater describes as marked at one end by empirical and materialist analysis (such as Dayan and Katz’s 1985 study of the ‘typical’ viewer, and the analytical approach central to many Arts Council England studies today), and at the other by the application of critical theory, post-structuralist thought and psychoanalysis (from the semiotic approach of Roland Barthes’ *S/Z* to the psychoanalysis of Herbert Blau’s *The Audience*) (Freshwater, 2009a, p.22). Developments in performance practices and in the studies on this scale have evolved in ecological relation with each other.

The scope of this project does not allow for a detailed consideration of everything on this spectrum, although the first chapter will address aspects of materialist and empirical research as it participates in the state's relationship to arts practices. Indeed, the empirical drive remains significant, from gathering statistics on audiences' shopping habits to measuring their brain activity. The *Watching Dance Project* (2008-2011)² used audience research and neuroscience to explore how spectators "respond to and identify with dance" in an attempt to measure kinesthetic empathy (Watching Dance, 2008).³ Bojana Cvejić has criticised the remit of *Watching Dance* for suggesting the primary purpose of dance is to evoke feeling (Cvejić, 2013, p.157), yet the project's publication is not specific to dance and allows space to discuss affective impact that falls outside of identifiable emotional experience (although tends to avoid addressing aspects of affect typically considered negative, such as boredom). Nonetheless, it is research driven by attempts to measure and quantify. On the basis that neuroscience describes and analyses activities in people's brains, philosopher Alva Noë has noted elsewhere that it cannot account for why we value and are affected by some works as art – impacts which depend on the entire context in which an artwork functions, and which neuroscience does not address. For this reason he suggests neuroscience would do well to learn from art's potentials for "disclosing the ways in which human experience in general is something we enact together, in exchange..." rather than try to explain its effects (Noë, 2011).

Bennett writes of "theatre as a culturally constructed product, signalled to its audiences by the idea of the event," and therefore of the need to consider theories of production as well as reception (1997, p.106). Writing before Rancière's description of an actively translating spectator, she notes that although theatre audiences are frequently called on to be passive in their behaviour, they are always active in decoding the sign systems that appear, and that non-traditional theatre restores the participative energies of spectators. Freshwater has pointed out that Bennett, like

² The AHRC funded *Watching Dance Project* was a multidisciplinary project involving collaboration between University of Manchester, University of Glasgow, York St John University and Imperial College, London.

³ Watchingdance.org

many other scholars, has been concerned to identify the participatory nature of spectatorship as a politically empowering force but without recourse to the input of non-artist or non-scholar spectators themselves. She suggests an increasing number of initiatives in the UK provide more 'meaningful' audience engagement by directly consulting spectators on the outcome of programming or artworks. These include *Fierce!* Festival in Birmingham and its 2008 initiative to invite the public to vote for one of a selection of artworks to be programmed, and Battersea Arts Centre's and other venues' hosting of regular 'Scratch Nights' in which audiences are invited to feedback on performance works which are being developed (2009a, pp.73-4). In Chapter One I will discuss *The Place Prize* as an example of audience input to a programme of dance works, that I believe undermines the potential range of engagement with those works. Where Freshwater sees consultation as a sign of respecting and trusting audiences, I suggest that in the case of *The Place Prize* it achieves the opposite by implying that the offer of an artwork alone is insufficient, and by its inability to include forms of audience response that cannot be declared nor measured.

In terms of scholarship this project does not invite the voices of spectators to its discussions, not because those voices might not contain interesting insights, but because the scope of the project doesn't reach as far as challenging the nature of qualitative information gathering and its analysis (namely, the methodological disjuncture between an artwork that creates its own *dispositif*, being measured by means of data gathering articulated through dominant logics and networks of association).⁴ Its practical experiments all launch from an understanding of spectatorship as active, and explore different performance strategies for engaging with that condition. However, none of the pieces were built from the perspective that an active spectator is a more socially valuable spectator whose existence must be proven, but from asking what might be revealed about the idea and experience of actively watching by investigating it through practice. Entwined with outcomes about

⁴ *Dispositif* is a term introduced by French philosopher Michel Foucault to describe how the named and un-named components of a given situation – from its laws to its philosophies - will relate and interact. It is translated into English as 'apparatus' but I use the French here, and later in this text, as I believe it offers a more expansive understanding of the term.

spectatorship, are findings about the role and experiences of bodies in situations of choreography and in public.⁵

The notion of embodied experiences of knowledge is essential to the discussions that follow, and it is important to acknowledge the historical role of research in the fields of phenomenology, and more recently kinaesthetic empathy, though neither provide a focus for this thesis. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's 1945 text *The Phenomenology of Perception* noted that seeing is integrated with the kinaesthetic dimensions of experience and impacted discussions and practice in dance and visual arts. In dance these ideas often served to articulate ideas about a dancer's experience in relation to truth and freedom, particularly through the writing of Sondra Horton Fraleigh who made claims for an essence of experience vivid in feeling before being focussed into thought (Fraleigh, 1987). However, criticisms against phenomenology's claims for universal bodily experience as denying variation based in bodied identity, such as race and gender, can be levelled against Fraleigh's necessarily subjective claims for dance as freedom (Butler, 1990). In her 2010 book *Choreographing Empathy* Susan Foster draws on studies about mirror neurons, in relation to kinesthesia, that suggest empathy forms the basis of knowledge of self and other. Consequently she suggests that dances that build on this process enact it as an experience of knowledge production. She states that "the dancing body in its kinaesthetic specificity formulates an appeal to viewers to be apprehended and felt" (2010, p.218). The phenomenological understanding that we experience knowledge through our bodies, and the exercise of kinaesthetic empathy through mirror neurons that permit some sense of experience of the other socially, are contextually relevant to the discussion that follows. However, as stated in its opening paragraphs, this thesis understands that our comprehension of bodies, as they are directly experienced and as they are organised, is implicated in social and political contexts, and for this reason it does not draw directly on

⁵ Freshwater's comment does raise the interesting question of how one might acknowledge spectatorial inactivity other than to name it as passive reception or through other words of detachment. Indeed, disengagement and boredom can be hugely productive experiences; in Chapters One and Four I make reference to dance works that might be considered useless and therefore expand potential values of spectatorship.

scholarship about phenomenology. Further, as stated above, it does not seek to prove the workings of kinaesthetic empathy but explore what is generated beyond such scientific parameters in an event of performance. Instead, the journey of its practical discussions lead me to draw on affect theory, especially the writing of Brian Massumi, as allowing for the not yet specified affective potentials of each present situation in which a body finds itself (2002).

The etymology of the terms 'audience' and 'theatre' do not embrace such a wide range of sense perception. Helen Freshwater has reminded us of the origins of 'audience' in the Latin verb 'audire' meaning 'to hear', and of the ancient word of 'theatre' which translates as 'place of seeing' (2009a, p.5). Freshwater also notes the problems that arise from the association of the term 'audience' with the idea of an assembled group, risking the denial of the varied individuals, and their diverse responses, that will constitute a given group of people. Indeed, in Chapter One I address the problems of claims that such a gathering might fulfil an idea of community. The difficulties of conceiving the multitude of an audience as singular has also informed a number of visual arts critics' dismissal of theatre, as well as the typical preference for the terms 'viewer' and 'visitor' in relation to visual arts exhibitions. Again, I discuss the dismissal of theatre's collective audience in more detail in the following chapter where I propose that a crowd *does* constitute the viewers of the gallery, but it is a crowd dispersed in space and time. Noting shared spectatorial qualities does not deny differences in the nature of address that can be extended by artworks appearing in such varied contexts of viewing as a theatre and art gallery, nonetheless throughout this thesis I interchange my use of the terms 'audience', 'spectators' and 'viewers'. I am not alone in this choice; art history scholar Frazer Ward's 2012 book *No Innocent Bystanders* is sub-titled "Performance Art and Audience" and regularly shifts between the terms 'audience' and 'viewer' to describe spectators to non-theatre art events (2012). In the case of this thesis I choose to slide between these names to acknowledge the range of individual experiences Freshwater notes, but also to invite a mixing of theatrical and visual arts traditions which is ultimately formally addressed through the crossbreed aesthetics of *Assembly*.

Practice-as-Research

This project includes three choreographic works that explore the nature of the relationship between performance and spectators through different performance strategies. I consider the discussion these works exercise as occurring through the events of their public presentation, which form the main focus for my writing about them in these pages. This differentiates this thesis from types of performance practice-as-research that focus on other aspects of practice such as the experience of the dancer, conditions and forms of process or serving empirical enquiry. Consequently, the chapters dedicated to each of the works *Count Two*, *Practice* and *Assembly*, are largely retrospective considerations of those events as I regard them as their maker-spectator.

In the following chapter I refer to works by artists Tino Sehgal and Jérôme Bel as indicative of practitioners whose work explores questions of spectatorship and choreography as investigating forms of relation. Related queries have also formed the basis for other practice-as-research projects, though not all of them situated in the academy. In recent years French choreographer Alice Chauchat has explored dance practices as ways of coming together, engaging scores and strategies that require participants in her workshops to make decisions about how to relate. As such, they involve political decisions about how a group of people can practice and experience organisation (Independent Dance, 2014). Chauchat is part of a group of dance-artists who established a website called *Everybody's Toolbox* which seeks to develop the potentials of online information sharing by hosting a series of strategies and scores for performance research to which other users can contribute.⁶ Here, the politics of relation and possibilities of organisation are extended by incorporating the form of online exchange. As has already been indicated, this thesis explores politics of social organisation and relation as essential to dance and choreographic practice, but does so with a focus on the specific relationship of the spectator to the staged artwork. Consequently, public performance has been chosen as the focus of practical discussion

⁶ everybodystoolbox.net

as opposed to Chauchat's dancer-participant focused workshops and the virtual space of *Everybody's Toolbox*.

In the UK, as part of the Watching Dance project (mentioned on page six), Rosie Kay Dance Company staged a performance as part of an investigation into the effects of different sounds and music on audience's responses to dance. The event was a collaboration between Rosie Kay Dance Company, Emio Greco|PC and the Watching Dance research team. Called *Double Points: 3x*, the piece involved a piece of contemporary dance performed to classical music, electro-acoustic music and in silence. Its audience consisted of specially invited individuals with varying levels of experience of watching dance, who then participated in focus groups in which they were invited to reflect on their experiences of watching, particularly in relation to the effects of different qualities of sound. Whilst this event involved a public audience it differs from the practice of this thesis because the performance was constructed in order to gather responses from specifically selected individuals, and because its researchers made those decisions according to the needs of empirical, qualitative data gathering. As described in the previous section, I reject such processes because they prescribe the form of encounter in order to serve the needs of data collection, which is evident in the case of *Double Points: 3x*. Instead, the public events of *Count Two*, *Practice* and *Assembly* explore audience encounter without the trappings of qualitative research procedures, but through conditions common to public encounters with performance. This project responds to what ideas, discussions and possibilities are generated through performance practice, as opposed to using practice to serve established parameters for scientific analysis.

This thesis adopts a specific practice-as-research methodology that focuses on exploring the relationship between what is felt, thought and materially present in the event of performance. It asks what varying grades of attention and relation might be experienced in the live event. This focus on performance does not deny the processes of artistic development and other forms of communication and research that preceded those events. Indeed, the theoretical research in these pages was in constant conversation with the development of practice, informing the dramaturgy of those

works. Processes for making are not absent from these pages, they are simply not the main focus of discussion. This is a decision that coheres with concerns I explore in Chapter One about the politics of sharing process as explaining away less easily defined impacts from encounters with art.

In the case of this document, practice-as-research raises the methodological problem of navigating the relationship between thought and matter through writing that is its own form of practice. Writing and choreographing sit side by side as practices, and as expressions and extensions of thought, whilst the development of the project saw them intermingle as explorations that informed each other. The chapters about *Count Two*, *Practice* and *Assembly* unfold my experiences of watching these works in a linear, almost narrative fashion, identifying and weaving connections across the ideas raised in these pages. To this degree, like the choreographed pieces themselves, this document provides an ordered form for thought that, at different points in time, might have been experienced as disordered, just as the development of practice was. The intention here is to offer readers a sense of how practice has served as a tool through which to discover, articulate and explore theoretical questions. Therefore this writing seeks to avoid solely engaging with what Susan Melrose terms “the backward-looking ontologisation which writing performs” (2006, p.126), wishing instead to follow Niki Pollard’s proposition that retrospective written discussion might not so much reveal a practice as enable it to “continue to think” (Lee & Pollard, 2010, p.24).

In this project the acts of composing writing and choreographing bodies frequently shared a structural process that began with an enquiry based in critical ideas, followed by formal procedures, including experiments, towards discovering expressions in response and development of those initial concepts.⁷ My challenge has been to write

⁷ That all three pieces were developed from points of theoretical questioning, as opposed to a concern with formal technique or metaphoric representation, pertains to ‘conceptual dance’ as the name applied to much European choreographic practice since the 1990s. However, as theorist Bojana Cvejić has pointed out, such denominations are frequently resisted by choreographers and curators who perceive a corresponding danger of foreclosing dance’s possibilities; choreographer Jérôme Bel has refused the term on the basis that his work is constituted by the live event whilst the name ‘conceptual’ implies thought that doesn’t require or respond to live bodies (in Conibere,

in relation to a past choreographic event, through my memory as its choreographer, as negotiated with documentation, recollections of intention and process as well as ideas discovered through this writing. Whilst I identify and converse across research questions, performance events and discursive outcomes, I do not wish to deny the gaps and collisions between forms of practice and academic writing that did not make it onto these pages. Nonetheless, navigating the relationship between thought and matter as that which is at stake in practice-based research in general, *and* in relating a sense of oneself to how one appears to others in public, is to articulate a shared foundation between the form and subject of elements of this project, one that I believe is particularly present in the piece *Practice*.

Dissertation Structure

This dissertation is divided into two parts. Part One features the first chapter which seeks to articulate the situation of the spectator today. It approaches this subject by identifying a history for thinking spectatorship in relation to the state, and how terms common to discussions of spectatorship have developed in this history: it addresses the ‘audiences’, ‘publics’ and ‘politics’ of the dissertation’s title. This chapter identifies the multiple problems of representation as it operates and is conceived in relation to the state and performance: from the state’s desire for spectators to enact particular forms of public (notably, established appearances of participation and community), to historical suspicions in political thought about the capacity of practices of representation in theatre to corrupt spectators due to theatre’s unclear effects. As such it considers spectatorial relations as the state seeks to manage them. It goes on to discuss notions of play and disruption as they inform Jacques Rancière’s radical

2008, p. 10). Cvejić notes that “discourses in European contemporary dance are... still produced out of the “meshworks” of criticism, dramaturgy, theory and curatorship, where none of these registers struggle for a paradigm, an epistemological framework or even a name” (2007). In *Count Two*, *Practice* and *Assembly* the role of critical thinking did not impede my responsiveness, nor that of others in the creative team, to qualities of expression we discovered in the processes of making. This is particularly true of *Practice* which was originally conceived as a gallery work. Like Bel, I am keen to emphasise that conceptual operations don’t foreclose liveness in processes of making or presentation.

democracy that takes unformed equality as a starting point and focuses on matters of process rather than representation. It briefly considers the practices of two artists as contextual case studies indicative of how questions of spectatorship have been discussed through recent practice. This chapter begins to articulate the uncertainties and movement inherent to theatrical and other forms of spectatorial exchange.

The state has a stake in how we appear to each other, and the question of how some bodies appear to others is central to choreography. Part Two explores this question through three chapters, each dedicated to a specific piece of choreography.

Throughout these chapters I refer to choreographic practices as procedures through which bodies are distributed and appear and, following Sabisch, as recalibrating modes of bodily relation and perception. Theatre is present as creating spheres of appearance in which bodies can be seen as, and by, a public. Bodies' explorative and creative capacities are foundational to the practice of this research, resulting in the works *Count Two*, *Practice* and *Assembly*. In each case I chose to lead studio research towards public performances to engage paths common to both makers and audiences in finding their ways to the auditorium. The course I followed inevitably involved activities including public funding, marketing, technical requirements and a range of practical and administrative deadlines. I acknowledge the part these operations play as a "relational system" of support (Jackson, 2011, p.30) and as examples of the "time-sensitive set-ups, outlines and parameters" which a choreographer aligns towards the event of performance (Melrose, 2009, p.32), but also as extensions of the infrastructures of public appearing that define our social and political lives. The latter does not so much restrict the conditions or possibilities for bodies' presentation in the sphere of performance, as make it an essential social practice.

As the first of the three works, *Count Two* begins an exploration of bodies' potentials for appearing and relating through basic linguistic strategies. It organises bodies doing different degrees of recognisable actions in a range of systematic structures, allowing for transformations of meaning and affective impact. Yet bodies don't appear by procedures alone. The significations of our bodies, or our sense of another's presence, are contingent on materiality and how materiality, signification and sense perception

interact. *Practice* sought to address these ideas in relation to the concept of non-recognition. *Assembly* works with our capacities to see multiple types of being at once, from the individual in the crowd as well as the collective whole of which she is part, to the group of people swaying as evocative of grass in a field. This piece states its theatricality within the viewing conventions of the art gallery before allowing choreography to evolve, permitting different grades of attention to the qualities of exchange in the room. It is through these practical explorations that this project seeks to discover how a practitioner can address the performer/spectator exchange outside established notions of participation and representation, in order to reveal other ways in which bodies in relation are productive.

Part One

1. The State of Theatre Spectatorship

This chapter explores the state's relationship to theatre spectatorship as entwined with notions of a public and public value. In particular it considers mechanisms of representation as they operate within Western political thought and have impacted upon ideas of how citizens should be seen to behave. Such concerns indicate the aesthetic function within politics, and the roots for philosophical and artistic strategies that seek to depart from these histories and terms.

I will briefly consider the relationship between the terms 'audience' and 'public', the problems this relationship has raised and its role in the development of certain performance practices. In the introduction I noted that recent philosophical writings about who can appear to another, how and as what, immediately imply notions of a public and public sphere. Performance theorist Simon Bayly selects "the problematic term 'public'" to discuss how theatre constitutes a gathering as a public, and as an audience, signalling "that the very notion of the public is dependent on a theatrical division of actor and spectator..." For Bayly this marks a historical problem for politics, philosophy and art in which the production of spectators has been condemned "from Rousseau to Situationism to the current and 'relational' turn in contemporary art practice," but for which the "human future" depends on the arrival of a multitude, which must therefore incur specularisation (Bayly 2009, pp.20-21). He notes the use found by philosophers Alain Badiou, Paolo Virno and Jacques Rancière in deploying the aesthetics of theatre to articulate a scene in which politics can occur (2009, p.22) In this chapter I outline the ideas of some key thinkers in line with the trajectory of this historical problem. I begin by considering the problem of representation identified in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concern (following Plato) with spectators' real felt responses to unreal representations that leave them impotent to act. This attitude is indicative of what Jacques Rancière has described as Western philosophy's belief that the spectator

is separated from capacities to know and to do (2009b). Yet Rousseau's concern with moulding a socially responsible citizen who will support the smooth functioning of a republic involves a behavioural vocabulary that in itself trades, at least partly, on representation. In comparison I consider the writing of Friedrich Schiller who offers aesthetics and notions of play as antidotes to the logocentric nature of Rousseau's thought, suggesting that experiences of the aesthetic can be socially useful.

Following my discussion of Rousseau and Schiller I consider the similarly deployed role of representation in some recent performance practices and institutional discourses that claim more active and therefore valuable roles for spectators. In forms such as immersive theatre and activities following a performance like audience voting, spectators are called on to behave in ways that have come to constitute easily recognisable activity and community, contributing to ideas of useful art. Rancière has noted how such practices indicate a continued preoccupation with "the paradox of the spectator," a concern within Western theatre that watching is corrupting and must be formally tackled in order for the performance to offer social value (2009b, p.2). Rousseau and Schiller are both modern European moral philosophers writing in conditions different from today, but whose thoughts can be traced to these current ideas. Both thinkers detected endemic moral corruption in society and whilst they sought solutions via different routes, each engaged models of thinking that prescribed particular, imagined outcomes – ideal images of healthy society – visions they beheld as spectators. Therefore operations of spectatorship are deeply implicated in their thought.

Bayly notes that theatre has come to provide a fundamental conceptual apparatus to a number of recent thinkers. Of these I focus on Jacques Rancière, providing an overview of his work and how his ideas of radical democracy might offer useful ways for rethinking the politics of theatre's form. Rancière's revision of key terms within political discussion – including what constitutes politics and the police – offer an opportunity to articulate mechanisms by which people might assert their capacities to appear to others, and therefore as and to a public, without recourse to prescribed delimitations for appearing. Ultimately, Rousseau and Schiller are concerned with

closing a gap between an appearance and its effects by establishing both in advance, whereas Rancière discusses potential social operations and outcomes in open-ended terms that refuse a specific form. The former seeks to ensure predetermined clarity and the latter does not. Of course, Rancière is also, to a degree, a spectator to his idea of politics, but only to its operations as disruptive and repeatedly assertive, not to a specific image. In line with Rancière's thought, my practice in this project engaged an idea of active spectatorship as a starting point for developing choreography, without imagining a prior outcome.

Bayly's identification of theatre's gathering of an audience as delimiting a public is pertinent to other aspects of performance scholarship. Histories of dance and performance regularly discuss certain practices as addressing politics of identity in relation to the body and its gestures, and therefore as offering a markedly political invitation to audiences. For example, dance historian Sally Banes and others have claimed that the experiments of the New York City based artists of the Judson Dance Theater (1962-64), marked a democratisation of dance because their work featured everyday actions like walking; most people could do these actions, so they were democratic (1993). However, to focus on the audience as relating to bodies through political concerns with access, or identity, restricts spectators' capacities for relation to those representational operations in existing systems of logic and association, and in which those bodies are immersed *as public bodies*. I am suggesting that audiences, as publics, must also be susceptible to the exploration of formal elements of encounter that will reveal or heighten different aspects of relational exchange. This is not to dismiss the presence of identity politics, but to open a space to consider what and how other forces of relation might be at work and what they might hold. When a public is audience to performance, its relationship with exchange might be transformed.

A number of recent artworks have offered experiences of the theatrical separation and spectatorial awareness that highlight the pre-discursive political operations I identify here (and discuss in more detail below). In this scene-setting chapter I will later consider the theatre choreography of French choreographer Jérôme Bel and gallery based constructed situations of British-German artist Tino Sehgal as key examples of

such work. The experiences their practices offer, including awareness of representations of self and the creative associations essential to social and theatrical encounters, are mechanics comparable to those of social and political appearing. Consequently their works offer a useful foundation for thinking and discussing political operations through practice, as I have sought to do in the choreographic works of this project.

Cause and Effect: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Social Stability and Surveillance

I will begin with a brief overview of Rousseau's thought focusing on his *Letter to d'Alembert on the Theatre* (1758). As scholar David Marshall has pointed out, though frequently and appropriately cited as an anti-theatrical text, Rousseau's *Letter...* includes discussion of wider operations of spectatorship in society (Marshall, 1986).⁸ His critique of theatre established a set of parameters to measure the value of forms of spectatorship in relation to the state. Modes of perceiving and appearing to others are central to key tenets of his thinking and infer spectatorship to be a constant public condition. His differentiation between certain types of viewing as beneficial to society, and others detrimental, suggests it is an activity that can be exercised in divergent ways. Contrary to his stated claim that he opposed theatre spectatorship because it required inaction from its audience members, Rousseau's real interest seems to have been in maintaining spectatorship as a singular and passive state that would impart social order and stable governance. His concerns point to structural operations of spectatorship that are shared across theatre, everyday interactions and state level governance.

In 1762 Rousseau published *The Social Contract*, his treatise on social organisation and government according to popular sovereignty and the general will. Central to these principles was the role of the responsible and active citizen whose consent to being

⁸ Recently Tony Fisher has suggested that Rousseau's critique was primarily leveled at economic distribution. (2013, unpublished conference paper at: *What is Performance Philosophy: Staging a New Field*, 11-13 April 2013, Surrey, UK).

governed by legal structures would ensure social order. For Rousseau, any activity available to a populace should serve the betterment of those people as citizens by enhancing the infrastructures that organise them. Theatre, as publicly accessible, had to accord with this aim. Within this context Rousseau addresses the subject of theatre in *Letter to d'Alembert on the Theatre* (1758), written in response to Jean le Rond d'Alembert's suggestion in L'Encyclopédie that one should be established in Geneva.

Prior to *The Social Contract* Rousseau had developed a number of theories fundamental to his thought. The hypothetical state of nature he describes in *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* (1750) depicts natural laws that carry a kind of ontological precedent to a social contract, determining as they do that certain groups of people, such as women, would be forbidden from voting and other public engagements that constitute the active citizen. He defines the concept of *amour-propre* as the vain self-regard that provoked man's fall from this primitive and noble state. The supposed advancements in knowledge of the arts and sciences, a direct result of *amour-propre*, were manifestations of the increased corruption of humanity as it moved further away from its elemental condition. Rousseau's conception of pride and egotism, and of the damaging impact of dealing in representations of oneself and others, led him to conclude, like Plato, that speech was a form of expression closer to truth than the written word (writing being a secondary representation of self).⁹ Therefore ideal social organisation would function largely on face-to-face relations constituted in public gatherings, from the people's assemblies (described in *The Social Contract*) where legislature would be determined, to festivities like the summer fêtes and winter balls advocated in *Letter to d'Alembert on the Theatre* (1968, pp.127–128)

These public events, in which citizens can be seen to interact with a clear focal subject, obviously differ from theatre in which, typically, spectators cannot be seen and an

⁹ Derrida has identified the performative contradiction of Rousseau's own writing by suggesting that if speech existed as pure presence there would be no need for writing, and that Rousseau depends on writing to correct the fundamental untrustworthiness of the spoken word. Likewise, for Derrida, Rousseau's identification of *amour-propre* is to articulate a deficiency in nature (1998, p.147).

actor will pretend to be another person. Rousseau believed these practices to be fundamentally corrupt. He describes how “an actor on the stage, displaying other sentiments than his own, saying only what he is made to say... annihilates himself” (1968a, p.81) and that spectators, “[i]n giving our tears to these fictions... have satisfied all the rights of humanity without having to give anything more of ourselves” (1968a, p.25); all of which occurs in a theatre that will “close up a small number of people in melancholy fashion in a gloomy cavern, [and] keep them fearful and immobile in silence and inaction” (1968a, p.125). Rousseau claims theatre interrupts the proper order of things for actors and spectators, and in doing so creates experiences at the centre of which are something like voids; for the actor the loss of herself and for the spectator the unearned or ‘false’ sympathy detached from the possibility to ‘act’. These voids, or distances, exist where a sanctioned order of relations would. They are distances of potential.

In contrast, the events Rousseau advocates ensure all participants perform that can be recognised through behaviour that is equally assigned. In these scenarios a subject isn’t required to state beliefs or perform actions in place of her own; the statesman addresses the public with his policies, the gymnast at the summer fête performs gymnastics and dancers at the ball dance. In each case spectators can identify the appearance of a person as signified by her words and actions, because those words and actions are consistent with that identity (unlike the actor who says she is someone she is not). Likewise, spectators can be seen to see, and not only that, they can be seen to see appropriately. In the case of the winter ball described in *Letter to d’Alembert on the Theatre* Rousseau precisely stipulates the activities of its attendees according to age, marital status and gender. People of marriageable age may dance and those watching should include a presiding magistrate, parents of the dancers and senior citizens. They are spectators because of a combination of personal attributes (age and gender) and social position (public office and marital status). That these facts determine their place as spectators means that when they watch they are in turn affirming the behaviour that signals those attributes, as well as fulfilling that identity as part of a depiction of an ideal community of citizens – they fulfil civic duty and oversee others doing the same. Respectively they constitute the presence of public law, the

private law of the home and the sanction of history. Rousseau writes that “these balls, *thus directed*, would bring the people together not so much for a public entertainment as for the gathering of a big family, and from the bosom of joy and pleasures would be born the preservation, the concord, and the prosperity of the republic” (my italics) (1968a, p.131).

The juxtaposition of the actor who forgets himself and the spectator who is taught false sympathy is where scholar David Marshall locates a discrepancy between Rousseau’s depictions of *amour-propre* and discussions of sympathy amongst his contemporaries. “Although spectators are condemned for lacking genuine sympathy, it appears that the actor is condemned precisely because he is sympathetic” since, “[a]ccording to Rousseau’s characterisations, the actor... forgets his own identity in an act of identification that carries him outside of himself. These terms are precisely the terms with which Rousseau and his contemporaries defined sympathy” (Marshall 1986, p.92). Moral philosopher Adam Smith, writing in 1759, described the process of seeking and experiencing sympathy as one in which imagination is called on to picture oneself in the place of another. Not only does the person feeling sympathy undergo this imaginative separation from self, but the subject who desires it will picture herself from the perspective of the person whose sympathy she desires, and regulate her behaviour to elicit most from them. So for Smith, the fundamentals of sympathy include the distances between the spectator and the other, and between the spectator and her image of self, as well as the imaginative function. Scholar Fonna Forman-Barzilai has suggested that Smith considered the exercise of sympathy to be an ordinary social practice essential to the construction of stable social relations, and the introduction of distances and imagination seem to be key to achieving that (2005). (As noted in the introduction and discussed later in this chapter, Smith’s formula proved useful for Tracy C. Davis’ revisiting of the term ‘theatricality’).

Marshall suggests that Rousseau’s critique of theatre should be read as an exploration of the nature of spectacular relations in society as a whole. If we consider this to be the case, and bearing in mind the function of the imagination when seeing another as described by Smith, Rousseau’s winter ball and the prescriptive behaviour for its

attendees trades on their constant condition as spectacle and spectator. By ascribing inflexible meaning to visible behaviour, Rousseau is seeking to exercise control over people's imaginative readings of each other. On the same premise he rejected Molière's *The Misanthrope* because it laughs at virtue which, for Rousseau, should only be seen to crush vice (1968a, p.43). He did not trust audiences to navigate the moral complexity of a virtuous person appearing laughable, nor did he want them to practice perceiving behaviour that produced multiple meanings. Scholar Jonas Barish has characterised the desire for this level of linguistic control as Rousseau's wish for stasis, and notes that the events advocated by Rousseau cannot be termed theatre because they remove disguise, play and confusion in place of "simple affirmation" (1981, p.293).

For Rousseau, scenarios of spectatorship are valuable when they extend the logics of social organisation at work in his ideal Republic, fundamental to which is a state validated cause and effect vocabulary of behaviour that generates consensus. This includes the visible performance of spectatorship as constant reinforcement of that vocabulary, and the surveillance of its practice between citizens. The theatre auditorium disrupts the public practice of spectatorship because it permits private reception in a social situation – 'the gloomy cavern' means spectators don't need to demonstrate their responses according to recognisable social behaviour. But the real threat to Rousseau's ideal seems to be that the ways in which theatre permits an actor to appear as more than one person, and a spectator not to present her reactions, employs the same mechanisms at work in his statecraft. Consequently the complexity and confusion that theatre allows in how one person appears to another doesn't simply disrupt the logic of cause and effect, but undermines the system of communication on which that reasoning depends. It's a structure already at work in the way Rousseau conceives his ideal social operations, because he incurs his own spectatorship by picturing images of their outcome as an external observer. Rousseau pictures the ideal operations and image of social order, to which he then wished people to adhere. The threat posed by theatre to Rousseau's thought is that through similar operations of appearing and making public as he endeavours will support his

statecraft, it permits complexity and uncertainty, and introduces spaces of potential, and in so doing confuses the role of public gatherings.

Playtime: Friedrich Schiller and Useful Beauty

In Germany, a number of years later, philosopher and poet Friedrich Schiller was contemplating the social function of arts and aesthetics from a different perspective. Rousseau's desire for all aspects of society to contribute to furthering an ideal Republic might be seen as evidence of Friedrich Schiller's assertion that practices of pure "Reason... demand unity," at the expense of multiplicity which is nature's domain (Schiller 2004, p.32). In *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* published in 1794 (just under four decades after *Letter to d'Alembert on the Theatre*), Schiller, like Rousseau, describes the immorality present in everyday life and underlying the affected manners of individuals within polite society who he refers to as "barbarians" (2004, p.49). However, writing partly in response to increasing violence and intimidation following the French Revolution, Schiller believed these acts to be the consequences of a state machine built on principles of materialism and utility born of reason. He proposed that "[t]he State should respect not merely the objective and generic, but also the subjective and specific character of its individuals..." (2004, p.32), and believed that if a regime's success depended on the suppression of the latter then it could not lead moral reform. In his terms state organisation contributed to immorality and therefore could not be the tool to correct it. Immediately, then, Schiller proposes the existence of conceptual devices outside empirical systems of thought, and that they might offer guidance on social rejuvenation. He turns to an examination of the aesthetic, particularly the private act of viewing art and Kant's notion of aesthetic play, to locate that moral source. Yet where he initially appears to advocate variety without prescription, he ultimately depicts a specific image of the aesthetically educated individual's appropriate state of being, and advocates for that condition to be widely practiced. Ultimately he engages the same procedure of thought as Rousseau by imagining an ideal model that people should observe.

For Schiller, the atemporal and transcendent nature of “Beauty” and “Fine Arts” made them resistant or external to the negative influences of a reason dominated society. As a result they carried the seeds to realise a “Moral State” whose characteristics would exist between natural force and reason. Schiller believed decent behaviour could only be guaranteed by equipping people with the means to develop instinctive moral volition, as opposed to identifying appropriate conduct by way of reason and instructing them to enact it. This instinct would be achieved following a process that led to the ‘aesthetic condition’. Schiller identifies two basic drives within each individual; the form-drive that seeks to apply order to things from an external perspective, and the sense-drive that provides internal form for external elements of the sensuous world. The form-drive relates to reason, and although reason can identify morality it cannot ensure its practice because that requires an individual’s sense-drive to provide internal form: a person needs her sense-drive to translate moral precepts into practice. Inasmuch as it is sensuously recipient, the sense-drive is related to the passive and to feeling, and inasmuch as it is rationally formative, the form-drive pertains to activity and thinking. Schiller describes these two drives as different yet essentially compatible, capable of interacting through a double process of relaxation and invigoration, the former to allow the influence of the other drive, and the latter as its effect. Acknowledging his debt to Kant, Schiller identifies this procedure as the play-drive and laments its prevention by society’s obsession with specialisation of knowledge, labour and utility, a result of the domination of the form-drive.

The play-drive leads to a state of equilibrium that constitutes the fully realised aesthetic condition. This state of being sees the counter-balance of the rational and sensuous determination of the psyche, and a state of freedom for the individual who is able to choose how to act without being dominated by either force. It’s a condition of wholeness that can best be sustained by encounters with art objects, but only artefacts whose beauty resides in their form. Further to Schiller’s claim that “[i]n a truly beautiful work of art the content should do nothing, the form everything” (2004, p.106), he describes content driven art as only appealing to one impulse over another, such as tragedy’s aim to move spectators. These practices could not be considered free arts “since they are enlisted in the service of a particular aim,” whereas “the inevitable

effect of the Beautiful is freedom from passions”(2004, p.106). Beauty, then, can be found in the form of well crafted art objects, and the effect of encountering such an object, the sustenance of a state of freedom through the aesthetic condition. Following sufficient aesthetic education an individual may develop ‘material play’, a kind of formless free association of self-created images that replace the need for external stimuli to achieve the aesthetic condition. A mind practiced at recognising and responding to Schiller’s beauty via art objects will be able to generate a similar effect through its imagination.

In *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* Schiller is not offering a practical guide to aesthetic education but making a case for it. He believed contemporary social conditions prevented such an education because lives were organised such that encounters with art were reserved for leisure time, i.e. when people were exhausted by labour and remained “too much harassed and fatigued by the struggle with want, to rally... for a new and sterner struggle with error” (2004, p.49). Nonetheless, he believed everyone carried the capacity to attain the aesthetic condition. This is markedly different from both Plato and Rousseau who prescribed singular roles and abilities to different positions in society (a form of what Rancière will later call the police order). Schiller’s contention is that anyone can develop an aesthetic condition in addition to whatever identity they already practice. This indiscrimination between people of different social status marks a distance between public identity and private capacity. So, on the basis that people can carry more than one state of identity (occupation and aesthetic condition) and the distance between the two, the aesthetic condition serves as a starting point from which moral volition can be advanced.

However, despite his assertions about the value of multiplicity in society, if contemplation of art is to fulfil its potential for creating a free individual on Schiller’s terms it provokes specific felt experiences. When passions are roused in the spectator of tragedy it creates a coerced imbalance in her sense and form impulses, whereas a response of collected contemplation indicates the appropriate activity of the aesthetic condition. The representative nature of these emotive and psychological states of being is particularly clear in Letter 25, which states that when man in his first condition

was sense dominated and merely perceived the world he was subsumed in it, but when “he sets it outside himself or *contemplates* it” his personality becomes distinct from it (2004, p.119). He continues: “[t]he necessity of Nature which governed him with undivided power in the condition of mere sensation, abandons him when reflection begins; an instantaneous calm ensues in the senses” (2004, p.120).

Elsewhere, in his 1793 letter to Christian Körner, Schiller describes an image of English court dance as a perfect symbol for social organisation, due to the flawless order, harmonious action and elegant whole in which each person exercises individual freedom without experiencing collision. It’s a vision performance scholar Nicholas Ridout has referred to as one of “totalising violence” (Ridout, 2006, p.18). For Rousseau, the prescribed behaviour of the spectator served to sustain the distribution of key signifiers in social organisation and control, including those circumstances in which spectatorship itself could be considered valuable. Likewise for Schiller, the calm behaviour associated with spectatorship fully engaged in the aesthetic condition represents social benefit due to its distance from nature (and not so distant, it would seem, from Plato’s idea of dispassionate truth). This all-encompassing and passionless order ensures that private contemplation serves a recognisable consensus.

One of the most valuable aspects in Schiller’s writing is the case he makes for thinking through politics and social order outside materialist arguments. By locating a possibility for moral recuperation in concepts of transcendence and beauty, following Kant, he was explicitly introducing notions that carry a degree of the unknown to political discourse. His articulation of individuals’ capacities for the imaginative management of their own reasoned and felt senses (via material play) appeared to privilege personal responsibility. Like Adam Smith, Schiller placed imagination at the core of means to better social organisation, suggesting that both individual freedom and effective governance rested on this distinctly private process. However, it is a course that is undone by those responses that do not specifically observe an experience of passionless contemplation. To this degree his reasoning is akin to that of Rousseau because he wishes people to fulfil an ideally imagined psychological state that will induce corresponding, and therefore equally prescribed, behaviour. The divergence between Rousseau’s thinking as grounded in serving established ideas of

the state, and Schiller's as based in ideas of the aesthetic, ends with shared structures of thought that invoke the spectatorship of the thinker to an image they wish other people to recreate. In both cases multiplicity is sacrificed for consensus. (In Chapter Four I will introduce scholar Andrew Hewitt's discussion of social choreography in which he identifies, with specific reference to Schiller, a mimetic mechanism in political thought that denies the spectator's position whilst treating the image as an object (Hewitt, 2004, p.23)).

Schiller's writing offers an early example of how political concerns can be viewed through aesthetic terms, with an inherent implication of real social change. Aspects of his thought are foundational to that of Jacques Rancière who I discuss later in this chapter, and whose writing resists a model that asks society to adapt its behaviour to realise an ideal form, instead looking to what people's behaviours might otherwise produce. Rancière's ideas are in contrast with those typical of governance today and in the next section I identify continuities in models of thought between Rousseau, Schiller and recent arts policy in the UK.

Performing Publics 1: The State and the Arts in the UK Today

Not only does theatre share formal similarities with certain political assemblies but its history is interwoven with the idea of them, and Rousseau's writing is indicative of this. In many narratives, theatre's convention of gathering people for a shared event signals the direct democracy of Ancient Athens, birthplace of theatre's and politics' public assemblies. Theatre scholar Nicholas Ridout has proposed that this coincidence of birth, as well as offering a perceived "special relationship" between democracy and theatre typically thought of in terms of participation and representation, is the result of a "myth of simultaneous origin" (in Davis 2008, p.13). Ridout draws on Jacques Rancière's radical democracy which, by taking unformed equality as a starting point from which relationships must develop and to which organisational structures must respond, disrupts those models (identified above) that prescribe an image for people to fulfil. Before discussing Rancière's thought in this section I will intersperse examples

of practices by artists, arts institutions and funding bodies that are indicative of this use of the term participation, and how they relate to recent arts policy. In so doing I will consider how these practices operate through their own logic of representation that can be traced directly from Rousseau.

Since the establishment of state intervention in arts funding, the discourse on the value of art has typically fluctuated between ideas based on Rousseau's demonstrable civic effect and Schiller's betterment of society through the civilisation of individuals. During recent decades in the UK state level discussion of audiences' part in theatre has tended to focus on the value of state subsidy. That theatre exists is generally accepted as given, but questions are raised about whether taxpayers' money should support it; if public money pays for theatre, what does it give them – its audiences, other taxpayers and the state – in return? Aside from underlining the civic duty that theatre is required to perform, this question highlights the state's representative function. Political parties frequently seek to perpetuate or establish certain terms and actions within public discourse, and therefore produce the type of public they desire (because that is the public that can join public discourse).¹⁰ It is via these devices of state representation that publicly legible terms for discussing arts practices are declared. It is perhaps not surprising to discover that recent discussions about what the arts provide in return for the money that supports them frequently, if unconsciously, invoke Rousseau's thought in both the structure of debate and the specific arguments within it. Most notable is the continuation of ideas of community as demonstrable through visible, harmonious interaction between people, and the extension of those notions into terms and events of social inclusion, access and participation that signal the restrictive impact of state sanctioned public discourse.

State support for arts in the UK began during the years of the Second World War when CEMA (the Committee for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts) was set up to

¹⁰ The Conservative Party's 2010 general election manifesto was largely built on the policy and term 'The Big Society', the stated aim of which was to empower communities rather than politicians. The term was widely established through politician and media use and became a frequent part of public discussions.

assist arts companies whose existence was threatened by the impact of war austerity. Informally practicing from 1939 and ratified by Royal Charter in 1940, CEMA sought to take arts to regions throughout the UK and to support amateur groups whose activities would be open to anyone as part of a drive to boost national morale. John Maynard Keynes, Chair of CEMA from 1941, led its evolution into the Arts Council in 1945 (ratified in 1946) which would answer to parliament but operate at arm's length from it, a mechanism distinct from the kind of state control of art practiced by Nazi and Socialist regimes (and which continues to define Arts Council England's relationship to government today). It was not until 1965 that the UK's only White Paper on Arts Policy was presented to Parliament by its first Arts Minister, Jennie Lee, under the Wilson administration. Lee's appointment was a mark of the increased significance of arts at government level, and the White Paper set out its intention for policy, noting that no coherent strategy for state support had been articulated before this time. It states that "[a] new social as well as artistic climate is essential" not just for working people to believe that they are entitled to experience arts, but also because "[i]n any civilised community the arts and associated amenities... must occupy a central place" (Lee 1965, pp.5-6). These developments occurred alongside the continued existence of the Lord Chamberlain's office as censor of theatre since 1737, a role that would continue until 1968 and that required every play proposed for performance in the UK to be approved by this office. The result was a huge amount of applications and, as Helen Freshwater has pointed out, as many inconsistencies in its reasons for granting or withholding license (Freshwater 2009b, p.12).

In recent decades the general narrative attributed to arguments for sustained and increased public subsidy for the arts has been one of instrumentalism. During the years of Conservative government (1979-97) the case for the arts was dominated by economic benefits such as increased tourism, high return on investment and job creation. The Labour government that followed (1997-2010) saw a shift in emphasis to the contribution arts made to alleviating issues of 'social exclusion', a term that became prominent in this period as indicating conditions of economic and social deprivation. In each case the rationale for state support was modified to correspond with key government targets based on other policy areas. Some commentators have

suggested that state support for the arts in the decades following the war was equally instrumental because it served as propaganda for the freedom available to citizens of Western capitalist societies during the Cold War (Vuyk 2010) (Brighton in Wallinger & Warnock 2000, pp.36 - 41). At the time of writing, Arts Council England (ACE), like many government associated bodies and departments, has been subject to significant financial cuts as part of the current Conservative led coalition government's ostensible measures to reduce the UK's budget deficit. Conservative MP Maria Miller, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and Minister for Women and Equalities since September 2012, announced in a speech in April 2013 that British culture should be seen as a commodity and a support to the UK's trade and investment by contributing to its brand identity. She cited the coalition government's austerity programme as grounds for making a case for funding on an economic basis alone (in Higgins, 2013). Her speech was declared "disastrous" by Laurie Sansom, Artistic Director of National Theatre of Scotland, who contrasted it with one by Member of Scottish Parliament Fiona Hyslop, Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs, who in June 2013 set out the Scottish National Party's views on culture, which "roots us in place, and helps to empower, enrich and shape our communities" (2013). Clearly, then, both strands of instrumental argument are in current circulation.

For the purposes of this chapter I will consider the British Labour government's emphasis on the value of participation in arts projects for achieving key social policy targets, the terms of which continue to be employed at the level of policy and within ACE's publications and guidelines today. The 1997 Labour Party Manifesto stated that the arts are "...central to the task of recreating the sense of community, identity and civic pride that should define our country" (in Dale, 2000, p.372). Soon after, Chris Smith, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport 1997-2001, added that "...culture and creativity can help to shape a *real* sense of community, can help to develop the links between the individual and society..." (Smith 1998, p.17), maintaining that "... the principal contributions that creativity makes to civil society [are]: fulfilment; identity; inclusion; challenge; and useful beauty" (1998, p.24) as well as economic development. Smith acknowledged the influence on these ideas of a series of independent studies led by François Matarasso and his organisation Comedia,

although Matarasso himself has downplayed the influence of his reports on government policy. Matarasso's stated aim in *Use or Ornament?* (1997) was to find a way to acknowledge the contribution that participatory arts activities make to society in non-economic terms claiming that arguments for economic benefit "miss the real purpose of the arts, which is not to create wealth but to contribute to a stable, confident and creative society," (Matarasso 1997, p.vii) from which wealth can be expected to grow. His focus in this report and others was on projects that sought "the active participation of non-professionals" (1997, p.v) by which he means projects that involve members of the public in ways beyond spectatorship. His case studies across a number of reports range from rural touring in which it would be common for local people to come together to prepare a village hall, house visiting artists and serve refreshments, to participatory arts festivals and regeneration projects.

In order for the projects about which he writes to be valued within public discourse, Matarasso aimed to make their social benefits measurable, something he succeeded in doing with the clear identification of outcomes such as enhanced confidence, skill-building and education of individuals, which in turn led to improved social contacts and employability, and stronger social cohesion through the development of networks and local capacity for organisation (1997, p.vi). Such consequences lead him to conclude that "a marginal adjustment of priorities in cultural and social policy could deliver real socio-economic benefits to people and communities..." (1997, p.vi). These benefits seem dominated by a rationale that, having acknowledged that some impact is experienced on an individual level, consistently identifies and traces a path towards particular types of group behaviour and interaction that fulfil a specific image of community.

Some critics have expressed concern over the effect of outcomes identified by Matarasso, whereby people living in poverty would find their situation more acceptable, therefore diminishing the possibility of them seeking to change its structural causes (Merli 2002, p.113). Furthermore, such a specific depiction of 'social inclusion' would ultimately "lead to the imposition of modes of behaviour on the poor, which the rest of society has rejected" (Kleinman 1998 pp.10-12 quoted in Merli 2002

p.113). The formidably expensive gated communities developing in cities across the globe might be considered conscious acts of social exclusion on the part of wealthy members of society, but because their separation doesn't indicate deprivation they are not called on to perform community in a similar way. Similar critiques have occurred in relation to participatory artworks themselves. In the field of visual arts, critic Claire Bishop has been critical of practices that involve direct interaction with and between viewers, sometimes within specific communities who serve as the subject of the work. She has expressed concern that the instrumentalisation of people from particular economic or ethnic backgrounds has evolved in order for culture to reflect policies of social inclusion (2012, pp.13-26). Performance theorist Shannon Jackson counters this by suggesting that works that occur in the neighbourhoods of certain communities offer a less prejudiced place to experience art than a gallery (Jackson 2011, pp.26-27). Merli's critique does not take into account Matarasso's statement that the benefits "described can have complex and unpredictable results... At a community or organisational level they may become politically uncomfortable" (1997, p.78). Likewise, in his later report into English National Ballet's production of *Cinderella* in Birmingham, which recorded the positive responses of spectators who registered no sense of challenge in what they saw, he considers the worth of their experiences in terms of gathering to affirm rather than change ideals, suggesting that ballet's challenge to contemporary values is to spend time, money and effort to no obvious material benefit, that "[t]he use of ballet may lie in its uselessness" (Matarasso et al. 1999, p.24).

The beneficial outcomes identified by Matarasso in *Use or Ornament?* don't include forms of impact that might be experienced on an internal individual level - we might call these intellectual and emotional revelation, reflection or intrigue - that don't appear to affect, at least in any observable manner, the day to day behaviour of the person who experiences them. His identification of "real...benefits," that fulfil Smith's "*real* sense of community," would suggest such responses to be somehow 'unreal'. Nor does Matarasso's list allow that "social cohesion" or "socio-economic benefits" might result from apparently incongruous or disjointed activity. Even though he acknowledges that disagreement and difficulty might occur as a result of encounters

with art, in his terms 'community' is only recognised when harmonious interaction between networks of people can be seen (Schiller's image of English dance comes to mind). Similarly, of the spectators interviewed after their viewing of *Cinderella*, perhaps some went on to have that experience mingle with other experiences in their lives in such a way as to effect anything from a quiet sense of verification to radical change. Such possibilities cannot be accurately measured, meaning that they can neither participate in Matarasso's project nor in wider political discourse in any straightforward way, indicating the limited terms of representational discourse and the restrictive impact on the subjects it describes. The question of how a practitioner might address the performer/spectator relationship outside established notions of participation and representation is what guides this project.

Performing Publics 2: Immersed in Participation

In 2005 I found myself standing face to face with an actor who pretended he couldn't see me, even though we were less than a metre apart. We were in the old abbatoir in Clerkenwell, London, where I had gone to experience *Underground* by theatre company dreamthinkspeak. This moment of facing the actor came later in a journey that I had found dissatisfying and distracting. Though I experienced some pleasure in encountering a piece of drama unmoored from typical viewing conventions, the form of this particular event did not seem to do anything other than ask me to walk around. As a result, I was on the stage looking at a constructed world close-up instead of sitting in an auditorium regarding it from a distance.

dreamthinkspeak are one of a number of companies in the UK who, over the past two decades or so, have created what is typically referred to as immersive theatre, or promenade performance. Typically such works allow spectators to wander or be guided through sculpted environments to encounter scenes, images and interactions from perspectives that the proscenium arch theatre would not allow. Probably best known amongst these companies are London based Punchdrunk, who explain on their website that "the company's infectious format rejects the passive obedience usually

expected of audiences” (Punchdrunk, 2014). My experience of *Underground* in Clerkenwell’s old abbatoir, which involved making a number of independent decisions about how long I spent in a particular place, and when and where I might move next, saw me visibly and physically participate in the event. By Punchdrunk’s terms I was not passively obedient but actively independent. However, I felt pretty compliant. Sometimes I would watch a scene and follow a particular character’s pathway to another site, and at other times I would examine a detail of the site. I responded to what the event made available to me, and to suggest this as grounds for a claim to reject obedience is superficial.

Coinciding with the development of immersive theatre is an increase in supplements to arts events. The post-show discussion, publicly available rehearsal diaries, behind the scenes documentary footage or published interviews with artists are now common adornments to performances, typically advertised as offering a more thorough engagement and a closer relationship with the work in question. These supplements serve to extend publicity but are largely a response to the notion of audience development. Central to both Matarasso’s ideas and New Labour’s arts policy is the need for arts to be seen as accessible to as many people as possible, a term that trades on its opposition to the inaccessibility implied by the association of elitism with traditional art forms. Philosopher Mary Warnock has identified a contradiction in the deployment of these terms pointing out the inclusiveness of an event like The Proms which consistently contributes to ‘high’ culture (Wallerstein & Warnock 2000, p.10), furthermore scholar John Frow has argued that the very alliance of high and low culture with particular social classes is problematic because high culture is more easily associated with the intelligentsia than any particular class (Frow 1995, p.14). Yet many of the terms and corresponding values forwarded by both Matarasso and the Labour government continue to be employed by organisations that fund, present and support a range of arts practices today. The current mission statement of Arts Council England, “Great Art for Everyone,” reiterates Labour’s ‘Art for All’ and can be understood in terms of social inclusion (2010, p.23). Just as Matarasso determined that participation defined behaviour beyond spectatorship, so ACE on its Grants for the Arts funding application forms asks applicants to forecast the number of audience members and

participants for the proposed project, as two separate categories. ACE also requires that applicants submit marketing and audience development plans to ensure those who will want to encounter the project are given sufficient opportunity. Yet beyond disseminating information about an event, audience development includes “increasing the range of audiences not just increasing the numbers of attendees,” (ACE 2010, p.2), which is also reflected in the section of the Grants for the Arts application form which asks “Is your activity directed at people who are unlikely to have taken part in this type of activity before?”, “What are the age ranges of the people who will benefit from your activity?” and “Is the activity you are planning directed at, or particularly relevant to, any of the following groups of people?” offering the following categories: “Disabled or deaf people”, “People at risk of ‘social exclusion’”, “Asian or Asian British”, “Black or Black British”, “Chinese”, “ Any other ethnic group” and “Not specifically directed at any of the above groups” (ACE, 2010a).

The level and nature of ACE’s concern in this area is evident in the numerous reports and measures of statistical data it produces on the subject. Since 2005 it has conducted the annual survey ‘Taking Part’ which collects information about children’s and adults’ attendance at arts and sport events, socio-demographic information and data about motivations and barriers to engagement. The statistics from this survey have been used to create several further reports designed to assist a range of audience development activities. Recently these include, in 2011, the publication of “Arts Audiences Insight”, an in-depth segmentation of types of adult arts attendee, created as a support tool for targeted marketing and publicity; and in 2008, a report written by sociologists including Tak Wing Chan and John Goldthorpe called “From Indifference to Enthusiasm”, an examination of patterns of arts attendance and analysis of socio-demographic factors. So, Arts Council England’s commitment to measuring, describing and creating the means to augment the numbers and types of people encountering art is clear.

The same type of commitment has fed into the work of individual artists, companies and venues, often overlapping with publicity activities. An example of this in the UK dance field is The Place Prize, a biennial competition for UK based choreographers to

create an original contemporary dance piece. The prize was inaugurated in 2004 and from its inception has involved a series of publicity components that sought to promote the award whilst making it more inviting to a wider public. Initial application for the prize requires the submission of a three minute video detailing the proposed project; as part of the publicity campaign the semi-finalists' application videos are made public, alongside a series of group and individual portrait photos and biographical information. A short film of each of the four eventual finalists is broadcast nationally on Channel 4 including an interview with the choreographer about the processes and inspirations for making the work alongside rehearsal footage. Each of these activities – the portrait photos, the biographies, the rehearsal footage and interviews – involve foregrounding the work as a result of an individual's, or a group's, process of labour; they say who the maker is, and how they make. They function as audience development because, through offering descriptions of how a work came to be, and of its authors as familiar people, they seek to make the performances less intimidating to people who typically exclude themselves or are excluded as result of wider social structures. How does this thinking impact on practices of making and encountering art?

If we return to statistics, one outcome is the uncertain impact on attendance. In April 2011 the industry magazine Arts Professional reported the latest results from the Taking Part survey as revealing "six years of audience development work has not upped engagement levels" (2011). It noted results stating that generally people engage with arts less frequently now than when the survey began in 2005. However, this has been countered in recent years, the outcome of the 2013 survey revealing a 2% increase, from 76% to 78%, in engagement with arts since 2005 (Hill, 2013).

Whether numbers of attendees has been affected or not, ticket buying patterns have; and here I will turn my focus to the post-show discussion. Typically offered as a means for spectators to garner a closer relationship with the performance just encountered, post-show discussions have become common across forms of performance in the UK, and they are popular with audiences. In a conversation with Toni Racklin, Head of Theatre at the Barbican in London, she explained that for any productions shown in

their theatres that include a post-show discussion - which is a high proportion - the evening that hosts it will always either sell the most tickets or be the first to sell out (Racklin, 2011). However, I've not found any data collection to suggest whether this is because audiences particularly value post-show discussions, or because they take the option that gives more for their money.

Post-show discussions have also informed artists' practices. In 2001 performer and self-declared 'cult cabaret diva' Ursula Martinez created her theatre work *Show Off*. It begins with Martinez handing out questions on bits of paper to audience members, following which she does a ten minute striptease, then presents much of the remaining hour-long performance as a post-show discussion, in which spectators were called on to read scripted questions. But the artist's performance in post-show discussions hasn't proved a source for parody alone. In 2010, following a performance of *The Featherstonehaughs draw on the Sketchbooks of Egon Schiele* by the all male dance company *The Featherstonehaughs*, a public conversation with choreographer Lea Anderson led dance critic Ismene Brown to write the following:

I stayed on for some of the post-show talk, without which no grant gets awarded by the Arts Council. Anderson fumbled and mumbled I-dunnos, unprepared, unthinking, essentially uninterested in giving her audience any aperçus to reward their curiosity. This kind of institutionalised self-absorption chokes the life out of modern dance....¹¹ (Brown, 2010)

Here, the (negative) review of a dance performance closes with the suggestion that Anderson's post-performance performance revealed a thoughtlessness and disdain for the audience that not only explained the problem with the work but the dilapidated state of an artform. Ursula Martinez's entertaining exploration into identity and the staged performing ego is revealed to carry worrying ramifications in Brown's judgement of Lea Anderson.

¹¹ Ismene Brown was lead dance critic for national newspaper The Telegraph for thirteen years and is now dance critic for 'theartsdesk.com' - an arts journalism website where this quotation was published.

The examples I've given, The Place Prize publicity and the post-show talk, are cases of widely practiced audience development activities that employ explanation. As already stated, they involve explanations of the labour involved in making the work and the personalities who lead the labour process. As materials and events that both precede and follow the occasion of performance, they seem to promote a clear method by which to practice the engagement they seek to encourage. That is to say, through demonstration, they seem to imply that the experience of watching a performance is improved if you can identify how it was made. These activities are performed with the intention of making artworks more inviting to people who typically stop themselves or feel excluded from attending; the explanations seek to demystify art and the people who make it, and thereby minimise experiences of confusion or alienation. However, having already mentioned statistics that are unclear about their effectiveness, I would suggest that the existence and pervasiveness of such supplements imply that a direct and non-contextualised encounter with the work is insufficient; that its value is increased when there is evidence of a labour process and when the possibility of a unique individual response (that might be alienating, confusing or troubling) is appeased. Even though these adornments are presented as means to enable greater access for audiences, and are considered key to ACE's ambitions for audience development, they restrict spectators' freedom to engage with the work in less directed terms. These factors undermine claims to "a vigorous commitment to enabling artists to take risks," (ACE 2010, p.29) because they attempt to homogenise how art should be experienced and valued, not least because it seeks to reduce risk in the spectator's experience. This is not to deny that these supplements can sometimes prove interesting and even further depth of understanding of an artwork; nonetheless they indicate the incorporation of arts practices into terms of public discourse that seek to reduce complication. Perhaps the state has countered Rousseau's concerns about the corrupting effects of theatre spectatorship by appropriating the experience it offers.

In addition to the supplements described above, The Place Prize also includes a procedure for audience voting. During the semi-finals audiences see four works a night and at the end of the evening vote for the piece they enjoyed most via an electronic

gadget. Results are displayed on a screen in the theatre in real time. Following all semi-finals the audience votes are accrued and the piece with the highest number wins a place in the final (other finalists are selected by a judging panel), following which there is another audience vote and an award of Audience Choice which is often different to the overall winner selected by the judges. At the time of the prize's launch much was made of this voting process as acknowledging audience's opinions to be equally valued as those of critics and programmers. The model here is one that says that institutional support for making something (an opinion) public is an act of validation, with the implication that if it leaves you to keep your thoughts private then it is possible it does not value them. In addition, it suggests that the offer of art in and of itself is insufficient as an expression of respect for a public who might see it. Like immersive theatre that asks its visitors to walk around the performance setting, the audience vote involves a spectacle of participation that enables an aspect of viewer engagement to be visibly measured.

Punchdrunk's claims don't account for the spectator who walks around their performances in a state of cognitive disengagement, yet who by their terms would not be considered passive. In this case a physically active body constitutes active engagement by adhering to the terms of the performance and a system of logic that says that walking is participation but thinking and feeling are not. Such appearances of participation recall André Lepecki's writing about *Energeia*, to which I referred in the introduction, about movement that appears to act but sustains the status quo, a kind of running to stand still (2013, p.30). Likewise The Place Prize's aim to tackle perceptions of dance as a difficult art form by tuning choreographers into their dependency on audiences and inviting spectators to express a public voice alongside those of critics and programmers, has created a system that measures immediate gratification whilst seeking to replicate an established image of participation. It's a process that demeans art, artists and spectators. Like the supplements discussed above, The Place's claim that audience voting expresses a respect for audience equal to that of programmers and critics, implies that the provision of an artwork alone is insufficient to constitute a valuing of its viewers. It suggests there is a deficiency in simply presenting an artwork. The work of artists is undermined by a procedure that

measures immediate response, implying the most valued aspect of the work to be immediate gratification. Yet it's a system that is also the logical outcome of policies, funding guidelines and a language that respond to limited notions of social value, participation and community, typically seeking to find them in images of harmonious interaction. In other words they are the logical outcome of processes of thought that declare that sitting and watching, or experiences of alienation, confusion and difficulty, are necessarily negative.

As an artist who questions the impact of such events I find myself in the slightly contradictory position of having unconditionally agreed to participate in post-show discussions after my own work. There are several reasons for this, including that I don't want to appear resistant to accessibility, obstructive to a producer or insensitive to the fact that presenters are under pressure to host such events. To display any of these attitudes might impede my work from being presented by that venue in the future. This situation edges towards a kind of 'productive censorship' as defined by philosopher Judith Butler i.e. an implicit self-filtering of terms before the event that render certain kinds of speech unspeakable (in *Post 1998*, p.250).¹² Productive censorship might provide a useful way to consider instrumental arts policies that render certain terms for making, presenting and receiving artworks valuable, and therefore publicly legible, or not. 'Speakable' speech might be compared to terms of public discourse that advocate certain behaviour, which Mark Ryan points out when he says that "'[s]ocial exclusion' ... is a radically subjective concept. Anybody can be socially excluded if they feel that way, or... if the new elite thinks they should feel that way. In practice, this sort of language works as a system of veiled threats" (in Wallinger & Warnock 2000, p.17). (This is not to suggest that material social exclusion does not exist, but that the language used to describe it might compound and even extend those experiences of exclusion). The nature of performance supplements in their current form threatens to declare artwork as somewhat deficient.¹³

¹² Helen Freshwater offers a succinct summary of both Butler's and Foucault's theories on censorship in the introduction to her book *Theatre Censorship in Britain* (2009) pp. 8-10.

¹³ Whilst I am critical of impacts created by some of ACE's funding criteria, I also gratefully acknowledge the financial support they provided to each piece that features in this project. The

These are issues I must tackle if I want to receive public funding. One way I might deal with the need to supplement my performance work with activities that satisfy ‘audience development’ is to address them as an extension of my practice. By a similar principle Shannon Jackson has argued the importance of remembering the people behind processes and networks of “aesthetic support,” and of the problematic disavowal of support inherent to reactionary anti-institutionalism (Jackson 2011, p.30). She usefully suggests that socially engaged arts projects might be understood as “unravelling the frame that cast the social as extra,” and that we can positively engage with contingency as an avowal of the supporting structures in which we exist (2011, pp.16 & 36). Elsewhere art critic Dorothea von Hantelmann suggests that any artwork serves to co-produce the conventions of its production, presentation and heritage, and therefore art that engages those conventions (as opposed to attempting a departure from them) contains a transformative potential that is politically and socially significant (Hantelmann 2010, pp.19–20). One of the artists she writes about is Tino Sehgal who extends his project of dematerialisation of art to the conditions of its presentation, addressing many of the operations of the institutions involved. This includes a refusal of all documentation, from photographs to exhibition contracts, requiring galleries exhibiting his pieces to participate in legally binding verbal agreements and to ensure that all marketing material remain purely descriptive. Elsewhere French choreographer Xavier Le Roy’s work *Low Pieces* (2011) involves two instances of conversation between performers and audience, whose lack of direction creates a range of difficulties and collective negotiations that enact the production of ways of being together. They indicate that appearances of collectivity can fulfil established categories whilst hosting responsive, uncertain and sometimes alienating experiences of being with others. Whilst the appropriation of discursive responses to art through projects of accessibility marks the state’s intervention within public reception, artists continue to explore new formal possibilities.

success of my applications acknowledges the openness of ACE’s assessors to ideas of spectatorship articulated differently to those on their forms, yet also to my ability to craft the concerns of my work into expressions that embrace those criteria.

Whilst Xavier Le Roy's *Low Pieces* (2011) was created in a context of contemporary choreographic research in France, and Ursula Martinez's *Show Off* (2001) predominantly via the UK's experimental theatre, cabaret and queer performance circuits, both discuss the social construction of bodied identity in relation to the performing body onstage, and both incorporate audience discussion to the performance event. Martinez playfully engages the identity of an egotistical performer (herself) having opened the piece with the literal self-exposure of a strip-tease, before inviting spectators to ask scripted questions of her. Watching the latter was to witness performer and audience members, including myself, fulfil a recognisable enactment of a relationship between the star performer and her interested audience. By drawing attention to the conventions at work in staged conversations about an artist's labour and life, Martinez revealed a level of construction at work in the supposedly less theatrical moment of the post-show discussion. To expose the typically unspoken, because accepted, rules and structures of such an event was to render our adherence to them almost fetishistic as she exaggerated the glory of the onstage diva. Yet it also noted a common and basic level of social conformity to prescribed roles, and one that challenges the idea of any identity as fixed or singular: we all play a part in conditions that make certain behaviours, and certain social identities, easier to perform than others.

Where Martinez drew attention to the conventions of public conversations in theatres by re-staging the rules of their staging, Le Roy, by removing elements of those conventions, reveals their operations through a very different quality of experience for his audience. *Low Pieces* begins with its performers sitting at the edge of the stage whilst spectators take their seats. The house lights remain on whilst one of the performers, Xavier Le Roy, invites the audience to join the performers in conversation about any subject. During my encounter with this moment the colliding discomforts I experienced seemed to be based in my sense of responsibility to modes of public and social behaviour; I squirmed at the forced moment of participation but worried a refusal of invitation would be anti-social. The self-consciousness I experienced was related to my expectation of my role in that situation, including the understanding that it was not my duty to draw attention to myself (whereas it was that of the performers

who were, presumably, trained and paid to be a focus of others' attention). This is to say that within moments my awareness of my role in relation to those around me and in this particular social situation had been comprehensively exercised; the initial act of this piece was to return my attention back to me.

Indeed, lacking chairperson or subject, the conversation that followed was a confusing, directionless mixture of silences, questions and statements, and though these sometimes made sense, they frequently clashed, were inaudible or ignored. A recurring subject was the concern that the words spoken did not constitute a 'real' conversation, marking the failure of conversation, yet at the same time, efforts to enact it. These attempts at discussion were the undertakings of its construction, so perhaps those spectators who believed its failure to fulfil the definition of conversation lay in its exposed framework – its explicit construction – might in fact have been frustrated by its not being constructed enough. Xavier Le Roy's act, then, was one of inviting and hosting difficulty in our attempts to communicate, as a means of production. And this was not an attempt to produce a specific outcome, in contrast to an event such as a post-show discussion that seeks to enable closer relationships with an artwork and fulfil an image of consensual community. Rather, it was an endeavour to provide conditions that would produce 'production itself'. 'Production itself' opened possibilities for a way of being together that was not predetermined by an external political ideology, and which was difficult and disordered. Where Martinez's scripted and therefore smooth running discussion humorously exposed the conventions and conformity of relation in the social event of theatre, Le Roy's hosting of conversation before there was anything for an audience to respond to (other than that invitation), and refusal to direct the discussion, exposed the role of those same conventions and conformities through the difficulty borne of their absence.

Low Pieces also included nudity through a series of scenes in which groups of performers collectively enacted physical behaviours indicative of other species or materials, and that constituted the majority of the piece. Martinez's nudity played on the idea of literal self-exposure as the attention seeking diva, which was destabilised by the work's constant questioning of the boundary between conceptions of the

‘performed’ and the ‘real’. The nakedness of Le Roy’s performers stated their condition as human bodies, yet simultaneously invoked other identities through the positions and actions those bodies took, suggesting driftwood, seaweed and lions, amongst other forms. Destabilisation of identity is also at work here through performing bodies that host multiple never fully committed identities at the same time. Each configuration that occurred in *Low Pieces* was of an apparently coherent group – all performers present appeared as driftwood, then all performers present appeared as seaweed – and the piece was bookended by conversations between performers and audience. The opening conversation, described above, occurred in light, whilst the closing conversation occurred in darkness and maintained a number of the difficulties already outlined. To place these conversations in a series of aesthetically coherent gatherings of bodies is to recognise their apparent coherence, and therefore the aesthetic operations at work in categories of social behaviour. In *Low Pieces*, the events of conversation might appear to fulfil an event of audience consensus, but their experiences offered processes of negotiation, difficulty and production that in part reveal the impossibility of singular identity for a group.

Both *Show Off* and *Low Pieces* recognise that each performance is constituted afresh by the particular audience that encounters it. Whilst this is more evident in Le Roy’s non-scripted exchange, it is present in the various interactions Martinez exercises with her spectators. Each recognises the active impact of every unique gathering of viewers. Whilst the three choreographic works in this thesis don’t appropriate the form of post-show discussion, in different ways they share a number of strategies at work in these pieces that serve to expand our understanding of the active spectator and possibilities of bodies in public. *Count Two* in particular engages theatricality to play with revealing and destabilising structures of relation; *Practice* and *Assembly* in different ways create conditions that note the human body as a site for multiple uncertain identities and a material presence whose physicality affects those who share space with it; and *Assembly* expands our experiences of a gathering of bodies beyond their established representational operations in political discourse. The enquiries in these works are in dialogue with those of other practitioners across fields of performance.

Performing Publics 3: Relational Theatrics

I will make a brief digression into the field of visual arts to note formal developments comparable to those outlined above, and to consider the reach of the criticality of the distances opened through theatricality. Since the 1990s in particular, a number of visual artists have built practices that, whilst free from Riddout's 'myth of simultaneous origin' as conferred upon democracy and theatre, fulfil images of community and participation as outlined above. Works in this realm have variously been described as 'relational', 'dialogic' or 'socially engaged'. I will briefly outline the well-rehearsed subject of 'relational aesthetics' as proposed by Nicolas Bourriaud and in addition to its claim to provide politically charged sociality for the individual, introduce Dorothea von Hantelmann's recent attention to modern subjectivity as shaped by the exhibition. These critics' consideration of subject formation in the public place of the art gallery or event includes the dismissal of theatre spectatorship and the theatrical as part of a practice less relevant to social and political concerns.

In Nicolas Bourriaud's essay collection *Relational Aesthetics* he describes exhibitions of contemporary art as creating "free spaces and periods of time whose rhythms are not the same as those that organise everyday life" (1998, p.16). In this sense artworks are social interstices for which a number of artists, particularly since the 1990s, use interhuman relations as their material. For Bourriaud this is a response to the general dehumanisation of interaction in society from cash machines to automated voices on alarm calls. He cites artworks such as Rirkrit Tiravanija's installation of a gas ring, water and dehydrated Chinese soup with which visitors could make and eat food together (part of Aperto 93 for the Venice Biennial), or Jens Haaning's broadcast of jokes in Turkish in a public square in Copenhagen that would speak to passing members of the city's Turkish community (*Turkish Jokes*, 1994). Bourriaud suggests these forms problematise the relational sphere by working within it. Dorothea von Hantelmann, in a book that explicitly asks "[h]ow does art become politically or socially significant..?" (2010, p.9), focuses on the exhibition as creating a "specific nexus" (2010, p.10) between the individual and the material object as part of a historical process of establishing evolutive time and valorising the individual who differentiates herself

according to physical articles. For Hantelmann, the exhibition space dignifies objects as sources for positive subjective development in a manner that sustains Western market societies. She focuses on artists whose works interrogate the exhibition rituals that uphold these processes by working with them. Amongst the artists she considers (not all of whom use sociality) are Daniel Buren who incorporates frameworks and sites of presentation into his pieces, and Tino Sehgal, mentioned in the previous chapter, whose constructed situations replace material objects with people. In a development of Rancière's ninth thesis on politics, Hantelmann writes that "the artwork does not *gain* a societal impact by rupturing these conventions; it is via these conventions that there already *is* societal impact" (2010, p.14).

Both Bourriaud and Hantelmann briefly reject theatre from their theses, Bourriaud because it presents "specific, unmistakable images" (1998, p.16) that cannot be discussed until after the event of viewing and Hantelmann because it "addresses the individual as part of a collective audience" whereas the museum addresses and singles out the individual with "visual artwork [...] conceived as being a one-on-one experience" (2010, p.11). Bourriaud's exhibition space, then, carries political force by housing the immediate display of viewers' responses, which is amplified by works that create convivial scenes of interaction and "tighten[s the] space of social relations" (1998, p.15). This rhetoric of value is close to that of Chris Smith and François Mattarasso, and is built on a similar dismissal of the internal, invisible and unique acts of spectatorial translation that ensure no image presented in theatre could be experienced univocally. Hantelmann's belief in re-appropriating the conventions of the gallery in order to affect change in the impact of those conventions, make it something of an inevitability that she should not consider theatre in her project; it is a different subject. Like Bourriaud, Hantelmann is dealing with visual art's relationship with the construction of the public individual as she operates within wider public matrices. For Bourriaud these are everyday moments of sociality and for Hantelmann market forces. Her dismissal of theatre is based on the intimacy of the exhibition visitor's exchange with the exhibit, in part defined by her choice to arrive at the gallery and work her way through it at a time and pace she chooses (within the opening hours of the exhibition). At the gallery, she encounters works whose authors are in some way reflected in those

exhibits, so her experience is, also partially, on her terms between herself and the artwork/author. However, I suggest that in spite of this, her visibility to others is an essential part of her individualisation, because whether she visits the gallery with friends or alone, the promise of another visitor appearing around a corner is always present. Therefore the “collective audience” of the exhibition does exist, it is simply dispersed through space and time carrying the perpetual promise of seeing and being seen by another in that crowd. (This experience is not completely removed from that of immersive theatre).

It's not visual arts theorists alone who resist theatre's reach. Seminal performance artist Marina Abramović's oft quoted statement that “[t]heatre was an absolute enemy. It was something bad... It was artificial,” is indicative of a number of artists' understanding of theatre's operations (cited in Ridout, 2007). However, as Nicholas Ridout has pointed out, from Austrian playwright Peter Handke's 1966 play *Offending the Audience*, through to a range of practitioners today, theatre has interrogated its own means of production. Further, that *Offending the Audience* demonstrates how theatre's form is used

not to facilitate fictional representations, but rather to stage mediated and compromised encounters between human beings. The prime purpose of theatre is thus not to produce illustrations for an audience, but rather to produce audiences out of a special kind of encounter, an encounter in which error and misrecognition seem more likely than truth.

Ridout continues “theatre is always already relational, long before Nicolas Bourriaud proclaimed the arrival of relational aesthetics” (2007).

If theatre deals in producing audiences then it is pertinent to Hantelmann's concern with the museum's part in creating the modern subject. Hantelmann historically locates the exhibition's part in establishing and sustaining values fundamental to modern Western societies as beginning around two hundred years ago. Theatre's “collective address” and its association with the ancient Athenian polis might suggest a

form too old to usefully interrogate those values, but its derivative term “theatricality” is much younger, as discussed by scholar Tracy C. Davis in an essay which examines its etymology (2004). Importantly for Davis its initial use in Carlyle’s writing on the French Revolution is a time in which democracy is being discovered and shaped, and refers to a person’s recognition of the production and formation of phenomena. She notes its character of ‘inauthenticity’, its admission of fiction, as enabling a kind of internal distancing that would reveal the gap between signifier and signified. Departing from the OED’s definition of theatricality as related exclusively to ‘theatrical’, Davis suggests its alternative definition to be “[a] spectator’s *dédoublement* resulting from a sympathetic breach (active dissociation, alienation, self-reflexivity) effecting a critical stance toward an episode in the public sphere, including but not limited to theatre” (2004, p.145). Here, Davis is drawing on Adam Smith’s depiction of sympathy as involving a process of imagining how one appears to another in order to adapt one’s behaviour to elicit sympathy. Clearly Davis’ definition of theatricality emphasises the division that occurs within the individual who sees and judges her own behaviour whilst performing it. This introduction of distance as a perspective on the self leads Davis (in words that echo Rancière’s “[h]uman animals are distant animals” (2009b, p.10)) to argue for “the self-possession of a critical stance,” because “[i]t is not solely in intersubjectivity that civil society is maintained, but in what separates us” (2004, pp.153–154). Davis adds criticality to the qualities of potential already identified in relational distances.

In his essay “Performance and democracy” Nicholas Ridout expounds upon Richard Sennett’s descriptions of a shift in the formation of individual identity from that of public behaviour (typified in the sociality of eighteenth century London) to the modern private person (in Davis 2008, pp.17–19). In Sennett’s terms the premodern public domain allowed a person’s public manifestation to be taken at face value and constitute her public identity without demanding the validation of her private, more authentic, self. “Theatrical appearing emerges in Sennett’s work as a means to preserve certain distances... between people that permit, even facilitate, vital socialities” (2008, p.18). These socialities might include political disagreement and debate that need not jeopardise a person’s sense of self, whereas models of

conviviality based on sharing inner selves “tend to encourage political consensus” as a means of self-protection (2008, p.18). Where Davis’ distance permits self-possession by enabling critical perspectives, Sennett’s ensures self-preservation by sustaining politics. Locating Sennett’s ideas in relation to Rancière’s term “postdemocracy” that describes consensus as the abolition of the political (or disagreement), Ridout presents the task of current political theatre, mentioned in the introduction, as one of making politics appear (2008, p.19).

Sennett’s ideas as presented by Ridout further broaden the political function of the private self in public as afforded by the auditorium’s darkness. This darkness participates with theatre’s distances to provide critical perspective and preservation of self, for actors who present a public ‘other’ and for spectators who cannot be seen. But just as Davis’ theatricality is not confined to an auditorium, neither are theatre and the theatrical (as descriptions of mediated social exchange) built on these distances and the potentials they hold. As Ridout proposes, “the event of theatre might constitute a temporary space of public appearance, representation, and participation which, while failing to restore the mythic community of the Athenian *polis*, might articulate some measure of democratic resistance to the threat of a postdemocratic future” (2008, p.19). A gathered assembly is not required for theatre or theatricality to transpire, it might occur in a gallery, yet both Bourriaud and Hantelmann seem distracted by this image of theatre and its association with a pre-modern idea of democracy. At the end of this chapter I draw on Ridout again to suggest Tino Sehgal’s *This Progress* as a work that discusses theatricality through the experiences of spectatorship and distances it creates.

In recent years a number of major galleries in the UK have hosted shows that discuss and feature choreography, including Hayward Gallery’s *Move: Choreographing You* in 2010, the Barbican Art Gallery’s *Laurie Anderson, Trisha Brown, Gordon Matta-Clark: Pioneers of the Downtown Scene, New York 1970s* in 2011 and Tate Modern’s presentation of works by choreographers including Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, Michael Clark and Boris Charmatz in 2011 and 2012. Exhibitions of a similar scale and subject have occurred in a range of cities including Paris and New York. These

programmes indicate the increasing presence in galleries of live and theatrical works and therefore of theatricality's distances. Yet these exhibitions host choreography and dance specifically. André Lepecki has suggested these events are an intensification of a movement that was consolidated in the mid-1960s and has seen a correlation between developments and concerns in both dance and the plastic arts (2012).

If, as Hantelmann suggests, the presence of material objects in galleries and museums participates in a process of subject development imbricated with Western market economies, then the ephemerality of dance, like the dematerialisation of Tino Sehgal's works, suggests alternative systems. Indeed, ephemerality is one of five qualities Lepecki has identified as constitutive of dance that enable a critical engagement with politics and aesthetics essential to the contemporary art scene, and that go some way to explaining its increased presence. The other essential qualities he recognises are corporeality which, in dance, makes tangible forms of embodiment beyond those of the everyday, and therefore propose "improbable subjectivities" (2012, p.15); the precariousness of dance's work with forces, which convey and underline the precarisation of life in current late capitalist society; choreographing, or scoring, as a form of "commanding and imperative forces" which "displays disciplined bodies operating in a regime of obedience" for the sake of art, extending critiques of the compliant body already well established amongst visual arts practices (2012, p.15); finally, Lepecki offers dance's performativity, as a non-metaphoric implementation whose citationality is characterised by returning with difference, and that "this ethics of persisting while facing the demands of absence, constitutes dance's particular affective-political force within the broader field of contemporary art" (2012, p.16).

The works of artists such as Tiravanija, Haaning and Sehgal, developed in the same period as immersive performance and post-show discussions in theatres, suggest that, to some degree, Western visual arts were affected by similar incentives to invite more visible forms of exchange with viewers. At the same time, but particularly over the last ten years, visual arts galleries have increasingly invited performance works, especially from dance, into their exhibitions. In spite of this, there continues to be resistance to the histories of theatre and dance in many of the discussions that surround these

works, of which Bourriaud and Hantelmann are testament. Indeed, Lepecki quotes French choreographer Boris Charmatz as stating that “we might read in a contemporary art magazine a whole essay on falling bodies without a single mention of this fundamental concept’s history in modern dance” (2012, p.14). Further, there seems to have been little interrogation about why such histories have been excluded from thinking around visual arts. In his 1981 book Jonas Barish identified a history of antitheatrical prejudice that traces a suspicion of mimesis from Plato to Nietzsche, and notes the negative connotations of terms taken from theatre such as “theatrical... melodramatic, stagey” (1981, p.1). More recently Laura Cull, Alice Lagaay and Freddie Rokem have noted that in universities across the globe, Philosophy Departments have focused on the analytic traditions “to the virtual total exclusion of those equally well-founded phenomenological and hermeneutic strands of philosophical enquiry for which the body, corporeality and materiality are of central relevance” (2014, p.x). Conversely, the visual arts have historically shared a mutually supportive relationship with philosophical and critical thought, meaning their discussions might feel more critically robust if they avoid addressing theatre and dance.

André Lepecki’s useful list of dance’s constitutive qualities does not address theatricality as I have discussed it here, but the criticality of theatricality’s distances are necessarily present in live encounters with dance. Whilst anti-theatrical prejudice might have fed the ideas of people from Bourriaud to Abramovic, the critical needs of our time have forced a re-assessment of the potentials of theatre arts, inviting them back into the gallery. My own gallery based work in this thesis, *Assembly*, sought to interweave the viewing conventions of the gallery with theatricality and the activity of dance, in order to create conditions that would invite a particular attention to being present with others. It’s a piece that draws on the viewing conventions of both the theatre and art gallery in order to function (which is another reason I move between using the terms ‘spectator’, ‘audience’ and ‘viewers’). This work, like many (but not all) dance works recently included in gallery exhibitions, unsettles the nature of viewing in a gallery, not for the sake of disruption, but to allow other experiences of exchange between those bodies viewing and performing. In turn, such works invite new possibilities for conceiving the person as subject.

The image we might have of theatre, and of dance as a theatre art, before we engage with it, our own imaginings of its function, can easily outweigh whatever else it might be doing, including its modern civic capacities. As Simon Bayly says, it is precisely this process of re-cognising the form of theatre that has made it such a useful apparatus for thinkers like Rancière to articulate the problem of thinking a 'public', or making one appear (2009, p.22.). I will address Rancière's thought in the following section.

Disruption, Re-Distribution and Play: Jacques Rancière and the Politics of Aesthetics

Jacques Rancière's ideas of radical democracy have interrogated the intersection of politics and aesthetics in recent years. In this section I outline key aspects of his thinking in some detail for its use in defining aesthetic operations within political practices and the politics of artistic forms. A principal concept for Rancière is the 'distribution of the sensible' which describes those conditions that precede and enable certain expressions and appearances to function as political and publicly legible or not. He proposes that "aesthetics can be understood... as the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience" (Rancière 2006, p.12) and "[p]olitics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak" (2006, p.13). The distribution of the sensible describes "a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience" (2006, p.13). This demarcation precedes visible forms of social organisation or public discussion as it determines which people, expressions or subjects can constitute those forms. For this reason the disruptive act that demands structural reconfiguration is vital to Rancière, and it is an operation shared by arts and politics. He describes artistic practice as "'ways of doing and making' that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility" (2006, p.13). Artworks interrupt the networks of association that determine how a thing is perceived and for Rancière, as we will see, true acts of politics involve a similar operation of dislocation

and rearrangement, affirming the centrality of sense perception to aesthetics, art and politics.

Rancière's critique of pedagogy is fundamental to these ideas. In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1987) he details the teaching experiment of eighteenth century French educationalist Joseph Jacotot, who successfully guided students to develop expertise he had not mastered. For Rancière these ideas expose the inequality on which predominant teaching practices are based, dependent as they are on a relationship in which a student's incapacity is declared in relation to the teacher's knowledge that the former must seek to acquire. This relationship stultifies the student yet must be constantly reiterated for the teaching dynamic to persist. Jacotot's experiments seemed to confirm the extent to which the intellectual and imaginative capacities of students, and other socially stultified groups, were underestimated and undervalued. Rancière explored these concerns further in his research into worker-aesthetes and intellectuals amongst labourers, in *The Nights of Labour: The Worker's Dream in Nineteenth Century France* (1991). Jacotot's commitment to teach from a position of presupposed equality with students led him to reject practices of explanation - a method that transfers one person's knowledge to another - and instead guide students' learning by questioning their application to certain tasks. If varied levels of expertise were produced this was not attributed to different levels of intelligence but rather to the disparity in the students' application to tasks and their expressions of thought (because thought precedes its expression in language). His students were intellectually emancipated from knowledge of their incapacities by a process that began by acknowledging their equal intelligence and ability to know. Equality is deployed as a starting point rather than the end result of a process, a property that became a fundamental structural principle for Rancière.

Rancière's redefinition of the terms 'politics' and 'police' are indicative of this primary placement of equality. He explains that "what is normally understood as politics [can] be thought of as 'the police'. This includes the institutions and processes governing the organisation and representation of communities, the exercise of power, the way social roles are distributed and the way that distribution is legitimated" (Rancière 1999,

p.28). The police order states that each person and object has a place in society and their behaviour is determined by their position in that place, leaving no space for supplementary activity (Ranciere 2009b, p.38). In Rancière's terms, politics, whose "essence is *dissensus*" (2009b, p.38), occurs when that order is disrupted and reconfigured. It is a moment of equality in which those whose place cannot be seen within the current distribution of places, (Rancière calls them the 'sans-part'), create a space in which they will be seen and heard, and so reveal the police order as arbitrary. Politics, then, is an event of manifestation and redistribution of the sensible, as opposed to a confrontation between opinions, because "politics cannot be identified with the model of communicative action," which "presupposes partners that are already pre-constituted as such," (2009b, p.38). Peter Hallward notes that this politics, this moment of making manifest, involves the creation of a stage from which to be seen and heard, as part of Rancière's "theatrocracy" which I return to below (Hallward 2006). Rancière's disruptive politics of equality does not designate an image of social organisation that must be fulfilled but suggests that such moments of interruption will move towards as yet unknown social forms. This disordered equality marks an essential opposition to the ordered inequality espoused by the likes of Plato and Rousseau.

The centrality of what can be perceived in the logistics of social order asserts the "'aesthetics' at the core of politics" (2006, p.13). Rancière's writing on aesthetics questions critical traditions that seek to define historical movements or genres in art and instead identifies three basically ahistorical regimes. The "ethical regime of images" is concerned with what an image depicts, the social appropriateness of its depiction and the use it is put to. Rancière writes that "[t]he entire Platonic polemic against the simulacra of painting, poems, and the stage falls within this regime" as imitations that were assessed by their impact on spectators in accordance with "the distribution of the city's occupations" (Ranciere 2006, p.21). New Labour's concern with artworks that eased social exclusion belongs here. The 'representational' regime draws on Aristotle's concern with how mimesis permits imitations to be regarded as art rather than products of ordinary use. It is "a regime in which art does not exist as the name of a specific domain, but in which there exist specific criteria of

identification, concerning what it is that the arts make and the appreciation of how it is done..." (2009a, p.65). This leads to the aesthetic regime in which any object or activity can be considered art according to its "mode of being" (2006, p.22). This mode cannot be determined by a set of rules but results from an investment of thought that has become foreign to its typical relationships, and has thus grown into a "heterogeneous power" (2006, p.23). Rancière says that the aesthetic "is given in a specific experience, which suspends the ordinary connections not only between appearance and reality, but also between form and matter, activity and passivity, understanding and sensibility," (2009a, p.30) creating the "the absolute singularity of art" (2006, p.23). Clearly this event of recalibration evokes the disruptive function of politics described above. As Suhail Malik and Andrea Phillips have identified in an article that questions the potential of Rancière's aesthetic regime to impact political order, it is "art's indefiniteness *and* identifiability" that establishes art's political specificity for Rancière (Bowman et al. 2011, p.111).

It is through this dissociation from recognisable networks of relation, the interruption of the "logic binding bodies to places and times" (Tanke 2011, p.85), that the aesthetic regime carries egalitarian, political potential. Further, its non-specific forms, of art or outcome, pertain to play as a condition or actions whose uncertain forms respond to its situation of occurrence. Rancière draws on Kant and Schiller in his identification of play in encounters with artworks, describing it as "any activity that has no end other than itself," and "that is equal to inactivity" (2009a, p.30). Politics is invoked because of "its adherence to a sensorium different to that of domination" (2009a, p.30). Play offers a distribution of the sensible that refutes the opposition between intelligent form and sensible matter which, via Schiller, Rancière sees as the opposition between two humanities - "the power of the class of intelligence over the class of sensation, of men of culture over men of nature" (2009a, pp.30–31). Qualities of play, as non-specific and responsive, underlie his re-examination of theatre spectatorship in which he identifies the egalitarian promise of aesthetics.

In *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009) Rancière traces a line of philosophical thought from Plato through Rousseau that affirms that looking is the opposite of knowing or

acting. It's a path that leads to "the paradox of the spectator", which states that theatre doesn't exist without spectators, but that being a spectator is unhealthy: spectators are in a state of not knowing because they are enthralled by an appearance whose production is unknown to them, and because they are immobile and therefore passive (2009b, p.2). According to this tradition "[t]o be a spectator is to be separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act," (2009b, p.2) a concern we encountered in Rousseau. Rancière identifies two strands of response to this problem, the first being to transform the spectator into the "scientific investigator" of Brecht's epic theatre and the second to revitalise her through an immersive experience typical of Artaud's theatre of cruelty (2009b, pp.4-5). Helen Freshwater has pointed out the limited scope of Rancière's references to Brecht and Artaud, noting that "a plethora of theatrical work now foregrounds the need for active interpretation on the part of the spectator," including the likes of Punchdrunk and dreamthinkspeak already discussed (Freshwater, 2009a, p.17).

Rancière counters the idea of looking as passive by asserting that watching is an activity through which the spectator

observes, selects, compares, interprets... She composes her own poem with the elements of the poem before her... spectators see, feel and understand something in as much as they compose their own poem, as, in their way, do actors or playwrights, directors, dancers or performers (2006, p.13).

Not only is the spectator active but she is equally creative as the makers or performers of the work she encounters.¹⁴ As scholar Joseph J. Tanke has described, this reasoning draws on Jacotot's belief that thought precedes language, making writing and speaking poetic processes, and therefore communication itself "an activity of translating immaterial thought into material signs," which is "premised upon a desire to be understood that posits an equality between those so engaged" (2011, p.88). (Yet again, Adam Smith's writing on the imaginative process of sympathy comes to mind).

¹⁴ Clearly this definition counters Arts Council England's separation of the categories 'audience' and 'participants' on its Grants for the Arts funding application form.

On this basis the processes of interpretation that define Rancière's spectatorship are everyday acts in a society of spectatorial relations. He writes that "[b]eing a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into activity. It is our normal situation. We also learn and teach, act and know, as spectators who all the time link what we see to what we have seen and said, done and dreamed" (2006, p.17). At the end of this chapter I briefly discuss *The Show Must Go On* (2001), a seminal piece by French choreographer Jérôme Bel in which I noticed my spectatorial practice of unique translation quite forcefully.

Peter Hallward has described the dimensions of Rancière's concept of equality that relate to theatre as its most fundamental and illuminating (2006). He notes theatre's creation of stages whose contents are constantly reconfigured and whose performers occupy multiple places and identities: it is an apparatus serving the moment of political disruption in which place is reconstructed and people's roles changed (This acknowledgement of the role of the apparatus of theatre in Rancière's thought is not unlike Bayly's). Hallward says that "[b]y refusing to speak in their own name, by acting at a distance from themselves or imitating the action of another, actors and poets threaten the very foundations of authority itself" (2006, p.113). This is not simply an affront to the Platonic ideal, but an act that demonstrates a becoming 'other'. Part of the path to political subjectivation, the name Rancière gives to the process of the sans-part becoming manifest, is a period in which they will behave as if they are already participant in the dominant order, but not yet recognised or addressed as politically participant. Actors prove this level of pretence can be achieved.

Perhaps this goes some way to explain the question of why, given that in Rancière's terms spectatorship is our "normal situation", we go to theatre at all. In extension to the idea that theatre spectatorship involves practicing (both rehearsing and putting into practice) our perception of things, it carries the potential for us to recognise the impact of investing our attention in something we know to be constructed. Even though I know a theatre performance has been built to engage my attention, I am often affected when I watch it (this is often called 'believing in' a performance). This impact co-exists with my knowledge, which may not always be my most dominant

thought, that as a construction it must be possible to deconstruct, or interrupt the performance and its effect. Probably the simplest way for me to do this is to withdraw or redirect my attention. Yet if I can experience 'belief' so powerfully in theatre which I know to be constructed, perhaps things I believe in or accept as 'given' outside of theatre are also constructed, but I don't know how or have been discouraged from seeing this. These could include the operations of the police order. If I and others comprehend these systems as constructed, and if like the emancipated spectator in the theatre I can see myself as equal to them, perhaps we will be better placed to see the potential to interrupt them, which might even begin with a simple redirection of attention. The main difference, then, between the "normal situation" of spectatorship I exercise every day, and the one I exercise in a theatre, is that alongside my emotional and intellectual engagement in the latter, I always know it to be fabricated. In this sense theatre might be the most honest place I go to, because it declares its construction from the start. And theatre, in its conventional form, only asks me to engage with it because I choose to, making its status as a constructed space all the more apparent. So, the way I give attention to the people, spaces and subjects I am able to perceive outside theatre, and the way I give it to those I perceive in theatre, including its mechanics of spectatorship, is distinguished by how I regard each of these sets of circumstances prior to the moments in which I encounter them. And essentially, the experience I choose to enter is a social one, meaning that as I practice my engagement with theatre's construction, so do the people around me.

Importantly, however, the social nature of the theatre event is not equivalent to creating community. Nicholas Ridout has noted that in *The Emancipated Spectator* Rancière depicts the relationship between theatre and community as one of 'presupposition' as it gathers people who can remain "separate from one another" in what might be considered "an emancipation from, rather than in or through, community" (2013, p.19). Instead, a shared experience of performance offers an opportunity to redirect our attention to what else is present in those distances it creates. Freed from the concerns of community and participation, this might include an exploration of the potentials of confusion and the criticality of separation already mentioned, but also a simple opportunity to attend to what is present, to how these

bodies in space and in relation affect each other. Further, it is a chance to redirect attention to such possibilities with the openness and responsiveness permitted by play.

Practising Theatre Spectatorship

It is via the various distances triggered by his experience of Tino Sehgal's *This Progress* that Ridout articulates this gallery-based work as theatrical (2008, p.20). In it, visitors are guided through a gallery (in my case, the Institute of Contemporary Art in London) whilst engaging in a series of conversations on the subject of progress with individual performers of increasing age (Sehgal calls them interpreters). In fact all the conversations can be traced back to the question asked of the visitor upon entering the gallery by the first interpreter, a child of nine or ten, who calmly and confidently enquires what you think progress is. In Ridout's recollection his response to this moment revealed a series of distances between his thoughts and his representations of them. These distances are uncomfortably felt, something I also experienced when I struggled to answer the girl who questioned me in the gallery of the ICA; my desire to respond sincerely was conditioned by wanting to be kind because she was a child, whilst feeling acutely exposed by the place of the gallery as if I needed to represent myself 'well' to her and others (who I couldn't see, but it was a gallery; they must have been around the corner). Consequently I think I said something both confused and clichéd. The realisation at this moment, as Ridout says of his experience, is that "[w]e appear only by means of representation, and at a distance. We appear always, that is, as spectators" (2007). He extends this in a later article, to suggest that one might understand this moment of recognising and occupying a gap between oneself and one's representation in Rancièrian terms: as part of a process of becoming other than oneself, and as a precondition of democratic politics. (2008, p.21)

As I falteringly responded to the young girl who asked me what I thought progress was, I was aware not only of the gap between my sense of who I was and the contrived soundbites I presented of myself publicly, but of the distance between the words she

spoke and who she might be. By adapting my response for a child, whilst attempting to answer the obviously scripted question accurately, I was able, as a spectator, to see the construction of the situation yet be affected by it (which is where I locate some of the political force of theatre in an earlier section). Researcher Caroline Bem, writing about her repeated visits to the work on a single day (which itself reads like a process of rehearsing possible representations of herself), describes the occasion on which she deliberately resisted the direction of conversations offered by the performers and found herself rejected by the piece when one of them, following another of several acts of verbal resistance by Bem, stepped away and thereby disengaged from her before she'd completed the full journey of the piece (2010). Although Bem presents this as revealing the limits of the work's structure, I would suggest that she disengaged from the work long before it disengaged her, and that like any work of art that is immediately resisted by its spectator it was consequently limited in the experience it could provide. Bem locates the work's theatricality in the inequality of a relationship in which interpreters know the rules of this structure and follow some kind of script whilst visitors must improvise, yet I would say these are two equal and co-dependent roles (2010, p.100). I had the opportunity, through some level of discomfort, to observe how restricted I might feel when presenting excerpts of my thoughts to a stranger, and how instinctively I reach for hackneyed expressions, whereas the performers were repeatedly providing a service that might allow visitors to experience this; they were unlikely to experience a similar kind of revelation. Essentially, when Bem enacted a power struggle with the performers, she was attempting to transform the work, and on that basis, by having a limit at which a visitor could be rejected, the work was treating her as equal to it when it dismissed her.¹⁵

¹⁵ Even though I agree with Bem's assessment that Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics provides inadequate terms for examining Sehgal's work, I disagree that this is in part because the works Bourriaud considers offer participation on reduced terms. For example, she suggests that the choice to take a piece of candy or not in Felix González-Torres' *Untitled (Placebo)* is the sum of the experience for the visitor, whereas I would suggest that the substance of the viewer's encounter is the process of deliberation involved in choosing whether or not to take a candy, and of how that might represent her to the other people present. By Bem's rationale one could say *This Progress* is reduced to the simple choice of whether to have a conversation or not (2010, p.91).

Indeed, Bem later quotes Claire Bishop's statement that Sehgal's works "give you back as much as you're willing to put in," (2010, p.110) and notes that her dismissal was related to her unwillingness to take the risk of participating in the work on its terms. French choreographer Jérôme Bel, in a conversation that occurs during his work *Pichet Klunchun and Myself*, describes risk as what people pay for when they go to see contemporary art of any kind, because they buy a ticket on the basis that they don't know what they will encounter. Bel's works occur in theatres and rarely feature formal dance techniques, which is the main reason that in 2002 an audience member to his piece *Jérôme Bel* later took legal action against its presenter, the *International Dance Festival of Ireland*, for breach of contract. The case was ultimately dismissed but only after proceedings had been heard suggesting that the Festival had misled audience members by terming the work as dance.¹⁶ Here, the public institution of legal process met artistic practice and the private act of reception in its form as economic consumption. (I won't explore the implications of consumer rights and economic exchange, nor the language of contract in relation to spectatorship in this writing). Certainly, the risk involved in watching Bel's work has nothing to do with representing oneself: it is about engaging with his interrogation of dance as a theatre art, and its part in exploring processes of representation and meaning making in wider spectatorial relations. It asks spectators to do no more than watch. We might say the risk involved in Bel's and Sehgal's works, and in other live artworks, is like that of any mediated social situation in which a person makes her attention and presence available to be affected by another, according to her understanding of the situation and its conventions, but with limited foreknowledge of its details or how its affective impact might feel.

Numerous strategies within Bel's choreographic practice serve to enable spectators to feel participant in the performances and to recognise how they might individually attribute significance to what they see without diminishing the distance between them and the work. Several of his works investigate the singularity of the author in relation

¹⁶ Una Bauer provides a concise overview of this case in her 2008 article "The Movement of Embodied Thought: The Representational game of the Stage Zero of Signification in Jérôme Bel"

to choreography. *Nom donné par l'auteur* (Name given by the author) is the title for a work in which Bel and another performer present a series of household objects in different states of relation to each other and the performers: firstly as pairs, then as larger collections, then in a sequence of interactions, each object being re-placed in relation to others. Each act of placement and re-placement playfully creates a new moment of significance for the viewer and, as André Lepecki describes, "it is precisely the mechanisms of the author-function that are revealed, pulled apart and recombined" (2006, p.51). The work's title reminds us what a title or a name is, whilst signalling a work which shows how the named can function outside of its label. Its viewers are party to processes of constructing and reconstructing meanings and characteristics for the different elements on the stage. Dorothea von Hantelmann has noted that Sehgal's naming of works with *This is...* (such as *This is Exchange*, or *This is Good*) create a performative function: "Sehgal uses '*This is*' as a kind of mimetic trick to communicate the situation and transport the questions of content and meaning into the here and now" (Hantelmann 2010, p.161). Another example is *This is So Contemporary* in which three performers dressed as gallery attendants danced and sang 'oh this is so contemporary, contemporary, contemporary' at the 2005 Venice Biennale. Here, the title of the work names the process of status attribution that comes as a result of work being shown at that festival, as well as co-constituting it.

Another recurring characteristic in Bel's work is his deployment of universal points of reference. In *Nom donné par l'auteur* the points of the compass are placed onstage, in *Jérôme Bel* performers writes factual details such as their weight, height and bank balance on the wall, in *Veronique Doisneau* a dancer reveals similar such details about herself including how many children she has and the highs and lows of her career. These are common references since all people can relate to a version of them, meaning viewers are able to locate themselves (including geographically in the case of *Nom donné par l'auteur*) in relation to the performers, and simultaneously to note the global economic and social structures of signification we exist within. Correspondingly these acts have something of an egalitarian impact. Without removing the physical distance between spectators and performers in the theatre, the equivalence these moments generate reduces any sense of unequal status.

Performances of Bel's seminal 2001 piece *The Show Must Go On* often produce a sizeable sense of liberation on the part of its audience members. The piece has twenty performers including one DJ who plays eighteen pop songs, one by one, at full length. It becomes quickly apparent that Bel uses the lyrics from each song to describe or instruct an event in the theatre - *Let the Sun Shine In* plays as the lights onstage slowly rise, *Come Together* plays and the performers walk on stage. Whilst the piece allows us to quickly recognise the connection between the lyrics and the events in the theatre, these moments don't follow each other at speed; the duration of *Let the Sun Shine In* is six minutes and six seconds, a long time to watch lights become brighter. Each track brings the pleasure of figuring out its connection to events in the theatre and the frustration of having to sit out the whole song. As I waited for songs to finish and realised there was nothing else to see on stage, I looked around me, at the auditorium, at the other spectators. I began to look beyond that room too; Simon and Garfunkel's *The Sound of Silence* played and, after enjoying the short moments of silence it introduced, I recalled sitting on the floor of the house I grew up in, recording my parents' vinyl collection onto cassette tape; I was touched as performers' embraced to Nick Cave's *Into My Arms* and remembered buying the CD with a friend in Tower Records. In these moments I felt an acute sense of my role as a unique interpreter. By playing these songs in full Bel gave time for my associations with them to surface so that they could be present to my attention as the people and architecture I saw around me and the activities I saw onstage. The conditions of the piece enabled me to experience my memories, the physical situation and the performers' actions as equally present.

In *The Show Must Go On* Bel appears to present very little, but by giving us access to the rules of the performance, the time to recognise our role within it and for that role to be acknowledged, he creates a deep sense of participation. In this and other of Bel's works the performers' actions are not virtuosic and could be performed by most people which, when combined with the exposed structure and rules of the piece, minimise any sense of mystery. These factors combined to cause a kind of intoxicated liberation in the audience on the evening I saw *The Show Must Go On*, as people danced in the aisles and called out, generating interventionist reactions of a kind the

piece has received to varying degrees in many countries even though it doesn't explicitly request these. Certainly Bel doesn't want the work to be disrupted: in an interview with Tim Etchells he spoke of a desire to create a work that "was not stronger than the public," but after performances such as at the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris in which there were stage invasions and slow hand claps, he said it seemed the audience would rather be dominated (Etchells 2004 p.19).

The behaviour of Bel's audience in Paris would seem to be one of over-writing the piece with public demonstrations of the qualities of participation they were experiencing. Perhaps such behaviour is not unusual given a context for performance across dance, theatre and visual arts that invites the public to interact physically and vocally with an artwork; a context informed by discourses about social value and the arts that says such interaction is good for people. On the occasion of her ejection from Sehgal's *This Progress*, Caroline Bem's interaction with it constituted a form of disengagement rather than over-writing, one that was in place before she had entered the piece. Bem arrived in the artwork demanding it answer her interest, but her interest did not respond to its gesture for exchange. It is easy to see how these expressions of interaction, of over-writing and disengagement, share form with types of audience participation declared socially valuable by Matarasso and Smith. Yet Bel's and Sehgal's works have aesthetic integrity which differs from the notional performance of sociality, by inviting spectators into an exchange with the artwork on terms that draw on the work's form and social conventions with which the spectator is familiar. The point of ejection in *This Progress* and the suffocation of *The Show Must Go On* in the face of slow hand claps and stage invasions, delimit the powers of interaction in relation to these works.

Indeed, where Sehgal's work ejected the already disengaged Bem, *The Show Must Go On* contains some late sections that reiterate the parameters of spectatorial interaction that enable the piece to function. One of these sections involves a group of performers wearing headphones and personal music devices, apparently listening and dancing to different songs, occasionally singing a chorus line out loud like "we are the world" and "I'm too sexy." This public performance of privacy indicates the ways in

which we each carry such shared references into our private experiences. It's a section of the piece that would seem to offer disincentive for publicly demonstrative expressions of participation with its reminder that privacy is an essential part of this theatrical exchange. The final song in the piece, and the work's namesake, *The Show Must Go On* by Queen, sees the performers bow, receive applause and leave the stage only to return, bow, depart and return again and again. The convention of the performers' behaviour moves the audience to an equally familiar behaviour of appreciation through applause, again demarking the conventions of interaction on which this piece is built (even if it has expanded many people's understanding of their experience of those conventions). Sehgal's piece requires a point of ejection for disengaged spectators because its form blends aesthetics from performance and visual arts, whereas Bel's piece draws on theatricality specifically and its structural incorporation of those conventions enables the piece to reign spectators into its desired manner of interaction through its dramaturgical arc. (None of this discussion is to forgo the spectator who rejects an artwork by literally departing from it).

The ethos of my practice in this thesis similarly responds to the nature of convention for spectatorial relation that each piece addresses through its form, structure and location. Both *Count Two* and *Practice* occur in theatres and invite no other form of participation than sitting and giving attention to the staged performances. *Assembly*, a performance that blends the aesthetics and conventions of theatre and the visual arts, and occurs in an art gallery, established the parameters of interaction more directly. In this work spectators are admitted to the event one at a time. Each time a spectator enters the gallery a performer enters through another door, and the two share an affiliation, which is not overt, throughout the performance. The performer will leave the piece when the spectator chooses to depart. The controlled entrance of spectators to this work is practically necessary in order for performers to see clearly who their affiliated spectator is when that spectator enters. However, this rule also served to prevent the piece from being experienced as a power play, or a game in which spectators could control performers. If multiple spectators were to be admitted at one time they could cause the piece to collapse by making it impossible for individual performers to connect with specific spectators. In a piece that does not seek to offer

experiences of control, but instead to create conditions in which to attend to gatherings of bodies, its resilient structure served to delimit the nature of interaction the piece wished to host. Further, the gallery delimits a performance area and a spectator area using a line of tape on the floor. This division is policed no more than through the presence of the tape that states that spectators' interaction with the piece does not extend so far as moving amidst performers. The presence of these parameters support the service the choreography offers its public audience, which is the integrity of the work's form.

The work of Bel and Sehgal is indicative of recent performance practices, the experiments of which involve recalibrating spectatorial attention and relationships. In different ways Bel's and Sehgal's works discuss active spectatorship, and the distances inherent to it. Contrary to Freshwater's position that declaring spectatorship as active leads to empty assumptions of political emancipation, like other practitioners' works, this project asks what might occur if we root around in the different experiences of activity that the idea of active spectatorship might hold.¹⁷ It sets up a series of different conditions through which to explore the uncertain productivity of bodies in exchange with the uncertain productivity of looking. In the following chapters I discuss how my choreographic practice sought to recognise, enable and explore different grades of spectatorial experience through a range of uncertain encounters. These pieces trade on theatre as a simple exchange, whilst working with its liminal condition of being part of everyday life yet regularly reaching outside dominant networks of association. They are works that play with the exchange of theatre as a bracketed moment in which performativity is acknowledged.

The 'totalising violence' that Ridout identified in Schiller's image of English dancing as a metaphor for social organisation, names the aggression inherent to a vision that denies difference. This lays grounds for Rancière's commitment to the politics of

¹⁷ Freshwater's advocacy for spectatorial participation that informs programming decisions seems to fall into the very mode of representative politics that seeks to produce a specific image of a public as has been discussed earlier in this chapter.

disagreement, but this is a mechanism that does not embrace the many ways in which bodies produce and relate. Whilst Sehgal's and Bel's works begin to explore the possibilities of spectatorial relations as dealing in varied perceptions, and operations, of appearing and relating, my practice in this project seeks to move beyond the binary of consensus / disagreement and into a more expansive consideration of the potentials of bodies sharing time and space.

Part Two

2. Count Two

Count Two is a staged dance piece that was presented to a public audience at Laban Theatre in London 2010.¹⁸ It is intended that the reader view the enclosed DVD recording of the performance as part of this chapter. Appendix 1 contains an email flier distributed in advance of the performance, and programme notes from the information sheet distributed to the audience on the evening of performance. The writing that follows is a largely descriptive and retrospective consideration of *Count Two* as the performance outcome of studio research. I write about *Count Two* as a maker-spectator, moving between intention and claim for spectatorial experience without seeking to suggest these reflections are other than my own.

In making this piece the role I performed as choreographer was one of facilitating an environment in which the creation of a performance could occur. In this regard the participation of collaborators who worked in that setting is part of the fabric of the piece.¹⁹ The creation of *Count Two* was an attempt to extend, through practice, the discussion about spectatorship opened up in the preceding chapter. Drawing on Rancière's description of an emancipated spectator and the interrelation of distance, imagination and representation in the practice of spectatorial relations, I entered the development of *Count Two* with a basic research question of two parts: how might the content and structure of a performance onstage acknowledge spectators' watching as activity? How might elements of theatricality function within that project? The development of the piece involved a large amount of experimentation and exploration, but ultimately the work attempts to answer these questions via a gestural proposition. Its main choreographic operations are indicative and citational, meaning it

¹⁸ *Count Two* was funded by Arts Council England.

¹⁹ The full creative team for *Count Two* is Gerard Bell, Stella Dimitrakopoulou, Taylan Halici, Antje Hildebrandt, Mamoru Iriguchi, Tim Jeeves, Helka Kaski, Elena Koukoli and Steffi Sachsenmaier.

discusses itself as it is being performed: *Count Two*'s operations are the subject and content of the work. On this foundation it playfully deploys elements including the framing mechanics of modern theatre, recognisable actions and images, and strategies of replication and repetition, all of which contribute to a general effect of destabilisation.

Ultimately, through my discussions here I suggest that *Count Two* explores the ways in which distances and foundations of movement characterise signifying structures. Following performance theorist Peggy Phelan, movement becomes available as a philosophical principle which underlies how bodies might organise and appear to each other in states which are unstable (Phelan, 2011, p.22). The flexible nature of movement as a structural rule (as opposed to a description of bodies' animation) makes other conditions of being or modes of reading always simultaneously available. Building on an understanding of gesture as a movement toward a not yet complete definition, I eventually propose a gestural character of performance.

In writing about *Count Two* I am in part attempting to describe and explore its form as its own kind of performance. Recognising the page as a stage on which the practice of academic writing is exerted throughout this manuscript, I briefly echo a basic structural component of the live performance in an effort to evoke something of its character, before moving onto the discussions introduced above.

Seeing Double

Count Two is a 35minute stage piece for six performers. It is replicated next to itself for most of its duration meaning three performers occupy one half of the stage, and the remaining performers inhabit the other, each group of three performing the same material simultaneously. Importantly this does not generate an effect of mirroring but of almost direct replication, as can currently be experienced on this page.

Approximately halfway upstage a white line marks the floor stretching from side to side. Each time a performer steps over the line (remembering each performer's actions are replicated by their equivalent on the other side of the stage, meaning there is never just one performer stepping over the line, but two), a change is triggered in one of three framing mechanisms of theatre; lighting, sound or projection. When the performers are downstage of the line these elements are reduced, meaning the lights are stark, there is silence and no projection, and when upstage of the line dramatic side

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lighting is engaged, one of a series of pieces of music is played and one of a collection of images is projected onto the otherwise white cyclorama. The same pair of performers trigger the same element throughout the work, for example, Elena Koukoli and Steffi Sachsenmaier always cause a lighting change when they cross the line.

The performers present two basic forms of material throughout the piece. Firstly, they enact movements which are recognisable as signifying particular actions or reactions. For example, a performer will walk onstage waving and smiling in an act of arrival, or at another moment will gasp, drawing her hands to her face as if in a state of surprise. Secondly, they recreate specific images that, due to their iconic status, will be recognisable to some spectators. These include such images as Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* or the logo for TV show and film *Charlie's Angels*. The contents of each type of material – recognisable actions and recognisable images – are repeated according to different methods of organisation (which I explain below). These various means of arrangement require that the actions and images

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appear in changing contexts and on different sides of the white line, meaning that sometimes they are encountered with spectacular framing and sometimes without.

The decision to replicate the piece next to itself sought to introduce a fundamental sense of destabilisation to the experience of watching in two ways, firstly by presenting two equally demanding points of focus, and secondly by immediately revealing that different bodies can infuse the same actions with dissimilar associations. Audience members later described how they either regularly shifted their gaze between the two groups of performers, or decided to focus on one. In each case they told of how they remained aware that when they looked at a particular trio they were missing the detail of the other performers, although peripheral vision assured them those other performers were presenting the same material. The resulting sense of unsettledness permeated the work until the moment at which this basic replication is broken. Of course, since Cunningham, many dance pieces have presented

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multiple points of focus at one time, leading spectators to make choices about where to look; yet in *Count Two*, other than the last ten minutes of the piece, the two sources of action are necessarily equal and sustained, drawing the spectator's attention to the choices she makes when looking. Significantly, this structure also required the centre of the stage, an area often engaged for its forceful pull of attention, to exist at the edge of each nucleus of activity, furthering my, and reportedly others', sense of instability when watching. (This presented a difficulty in filming the piece as editorial decisions to focus on particular details obscured other activity which was equally present onstage, and was necessarily a decision made by the film's editor and not its spectator).

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Systems of Uncertainty & Exhausted Icons

Of course, the replication is inexact.²⁰ The performers' aim is for each group to do the same actions at the same time and they are admirably successful in this. However, slip-ups occur. For example, on the video at 03.41-42, you will see Tim Jeeves push Helka Kaski noticeably, if only by a second, before Antje Hildebrandt pushes Gerard Bell. Similarly, performers enact the detail of replicated actions with idiosyncratic differences, in this case not due to inaccuracy but because the choreography encompasses such variations. For example, the act of waving was given a fixed duration but the specific actions of the hands and arms were defined by each performer. Further, and as noted above, the nature of the communication of each action was also affected by other aspects of the performers' bodies such as age, gender or height. The image of the young woman Helka Kaski appearing to cry conjures different connotations to those that Gerard Bell, a man noticeably older than

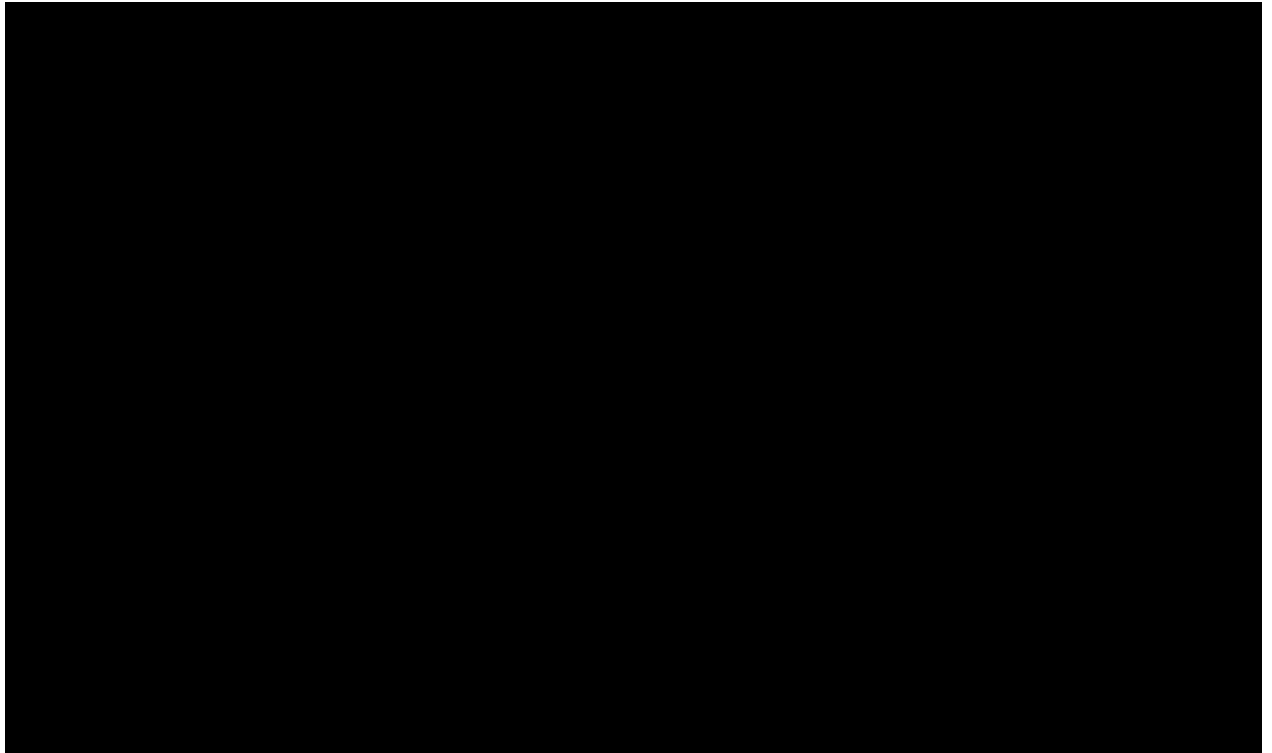


Fig 1: l-r: Antje Hildebrandt, Gerard Bell and Elena Koukoli in an act of contemplation downstage in *Count Two*. Photo by Guy Bell.

²⁰ Whilst my research has not revealed another choreographer who has worked with the structural form of replicating a piece next to itself, *Electric Midwife* (2011) by American choreographer Beth Gill, consists of direct symmetry – the operation of precise mirroring – for its duration.

her, brings to mind when he performs the same action. If, as suggested above, a spectator notices that she has chosen to focus on a particular group, perhaps she will also consider what aspect of those performing bodies she is drawn to, and what differences they bring to the actions performed. This is to note that any meanings drawn from those actions are affected by the cultural matrices in which the mode of delivery (people's bodies) operate, as well as the local context of the theatre's framing. So what I previously referred to as replication might best be described as only approximately so, partly because of the slight differences in how each action is presented, but also because the meaning of each gesture will be informed by the social and cultural associations each spectator brings to the body performing it.

In seeking to extend this project of destabilisation we chose to present the performed material according to recognisably systematic methods of organisation, and then re-contextualise it according to differently ordered sequences. In the first section of the piece the performers present three actions, each within a series of eight categories: for example, they perform three actions that constitute acts of 'arrival'. The initial order of categories is as follows:

- Arrival
- Surprise
- Celebration
- Contemplation
- Violence
- Sorrow
- Death
- Departure

These actions are initially presented downstage of the white line and then upstage [00:21 – 06:40 and 08:07 – 11:07], meaning the same actions are repeated within oppositional theatrical frames.

Later in the piece the performers' enactments of iconic images are introduced through a similarly methodical form of categorisation, initially upstage of the white line, again with three examples of each of the following types:

- European Renaissance and Romantic Paintings
- Photo reportage
- Hollywood

[18:50 – 22:39]

In these two (non-consecutive) sections the shift from the spectacular framing upstage to its bare opposite downstage created the possibility for spectators to notice how changed conditions of appearance can affect how they relate to the same action or image. This is not to suggest that spectators are wholly unaware of how their emotions might be manipulated by such mechanics in other works, but to draw attention to our capacities to be fully aware of such devices (I see the performer walk over the line and know the music will change) and to feel a change in affect anyway. It affirms the theatricality of the event and proposes that any meanings associated with an action are informed by all the elements of the context in which it occurs. As you might see from the DVD, throughout the piece some of these changes seem inelegant or insensitive to apparent interactions onstage; however, as well as seeking to draw attention to the event of each shift of frame, I hoped spectators might also notice how quickly they adapt to, and are affected in turn, by what might initially be felt as a jolting change of scenario. In addition, that knowledge of when and why a shift in framing occurs might enable spectators to feel participant in the workings as well as the affective operations of the piece; this increased attention to how and why the frame changes, like the spectators' awareness of the choices made in relation to which of the two groups to watch at any one time, might more readily enable viewers to identify themselves as co-creators of any meaning they experience.²¹ This contrasts

²¹ In Chapter One, in similar terms, I described the easily perceived connection between song lyrics and onstage actions in Jérôme Bel's *The Show Must Go On* as allowing audiences to feel a greater level of participation in the piece.

the participation offered by post-show discussions that typically seek to enhance spectators' experience by explaining the *artist's* choices in articulating the framing or content of image. Another exposed layer of *Count Two's* construction is available in the performers' transitional movements of walking or standing in wait between actions or images, which I consider in more detail in later sections.

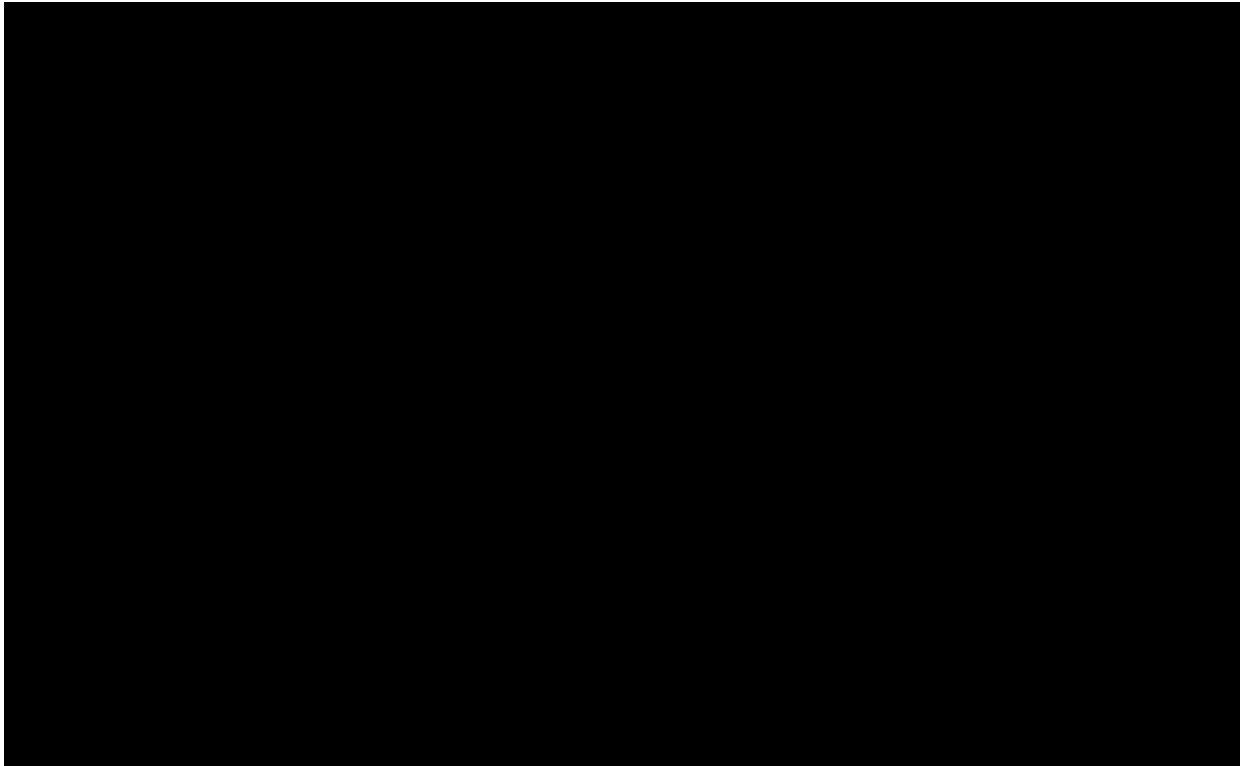


Fig 2: l-r: Helka Kaski, Tim Jeeves and Steffi Sachsenmaier recreating the logo for *Charlie's Angels* upstage in *Count Two*. Photo by Guy Bell.

The combinations of framing elements are at their most varied during the section that sees the performers frequently cross the white line as they follow a structure of what we called 'suggested narratives' (a term that emphasised the multiple possible narratives that the actions might serve, and therefore a character of indefiniteness in the narratives themselves). This first occurs after the initial categories of actions have been presented both downstage and upstage, and sees the performers repeat and reorganise those actions according to a series that implies stories and relationships. Each short combination is repeated with one or two actions substituted for others to

transforming effect. For example, on the video at 13.29-14.34 we see the performers enact the following consecutive sequences:

- | | |
|------------|---------------|
| • Death | • Death |
| • Surprise | • Surprise |
| • Sorrow | • Celebration |

Again, the intention is that spectators' attention might be drawn to *how* they watch when the same actions imply different meaning, and create different affective impact, according to changed context.

As stated earlier, the use of actions and iconic images sought to stimulate different grades of recognition in spectators. The actions are generically recognisable whereas iconic images are specifically so, carrying strong associations of time and place. Consequently, in addition to invoking their location of origin, iconic images might also call to mind a range of historical and cultural narratives in which they participate. For example, the image of athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos raising their fists at the 1968 Olympic Games may conjure chronicles not only of racial politics in the US but anything from a history of photo reportage to the relationship between the Olympic Games and political issues. A given iconic image can function to different effect within various contexts, just as the actions within the 'suggested narratives' do.

Additionally, a more specific experience of recognition might occur for a spectator who has had direct experience of one of these images or its correlations. If a viewer has visited the Sistine Chapel, or has detailed knowledge of one or more of the discourses in which it participates, she may recall personal associations when encountering its recreation. The nature of such particular recollections furthers the possibility of a spectator recognising the unique nature of her individual spectatorship. If *Count Two* enables people to recognise their active role of discovering meaning in response to images, and if it exposes the shifting meanings that images carry according to the narratives in which they are encountered, it also seems to suggest that a spectator's capacity to locate and comprehend an image according to its particular associations is

as valid as any dominant discourse it participates in. That is to say that the spectator's recognition of her act of interpretation is itself an act with the potential to provoke a question of responsibility about how she might place that image within a range of possible sequential narratives. If an image might serve many messages, then I carry some responsibility for choosing the terms through which I wish to understand it.

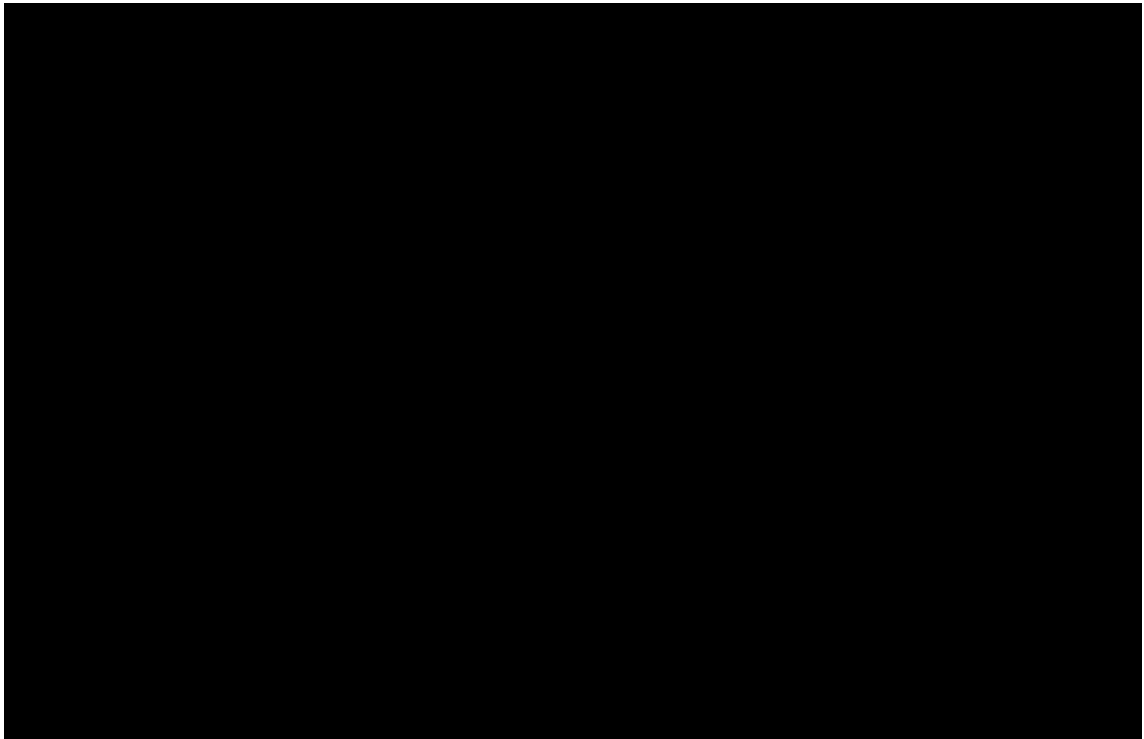


Fig 3: l-r: Gerard Bell, Elena Koukoli, Antje Hildebrandt, Helka Kaski, Steffi Sachsenmaier and Tim Jeeves recreate a detail from the Sistine Chapel ceiling. Photo by Guy Bell.

In recognising the sources of our staged depictions as iconic we also, to an extent, recognise them as exhausted. Having attained iconic status as a result of being so widely circulated within cultural discourses as to appear saturated with meanings, in many cases what one sees in these images is acquired rhetoric rather than content. When I see Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* I recognise the image and the Renaissance ideal it has come to represent (ongoing discussions of its specific significance in art history circles aside). In this case iconicity might be seen to override the detail or subject of the image and determine its reception; the images operate as signifying gestures in a similar way to the actions from the first section of the piece. Such ideas might be seen as a result of the images' participation in an Adornian culture industry. Even though the Renaissance images and those of reportage have been

appropriated by that industry (whilst those of Hollywood were born into it), their kitsch reproduction and controlled dissemination towards pre-ordained responses, via media ranging from books and TV programmes to T-shirts and mugs, fulfils Adorno's depiction of an industry of unchanging production towards prescribed consumption (Adorno, 1991). This is to suggest that iconic images' rhetoric exists in excess of their current affective potential; we see their desire to make us believe in their acquired meaning. So the treatment of *Count Two*, which hopes to enable the recognition that the performance does not deliver singular meaning to its audiences, works in this case with material whose meaning has to some degree already been evacuated and overridden by its rhetoric. Within the piece reproduction works with the images' iconographic excesses as a means to unsettle rather than perpetuate prescribed consumption. The piece neither works to further evacuate nor infuse the images with meaning, and it doesn't suggest equivalence between them. Rather, by working with their immediate replication, the distance of the performers' appearances from the figures in the original and the basic inaccuracies of its recreations, *Count Two* renders the images uncertain and states their freedom to invoke multiple narratives and discourses in which they might operate.

Count Two ends with a section in which the structural replication of the piece shifts slightly. Following the presentation of iconic images a number of performers begin to move to the opposite side of the stage, positioning themselves directly next to their corresponding performer. This creates an immediate doubling as the two performers continue to perform the same material simultaneously, only now they do so next to each other (see Fig. 4 above). As a result each side of the stage hosts absences as well as doublings. As a spectator, I see the gap where Elena should be placed to complete the image Antje and Gerard enact, *and* I see the shape she would create in it. My mind fills the blanks with what should be present by actively reading across the stage.

Eventually all of the affiliated performers come to perform immediately next to each other; one side of the stage contains two doublings and one point of absence, and the other side hosts one doubling and two places of absence. From these new positions,

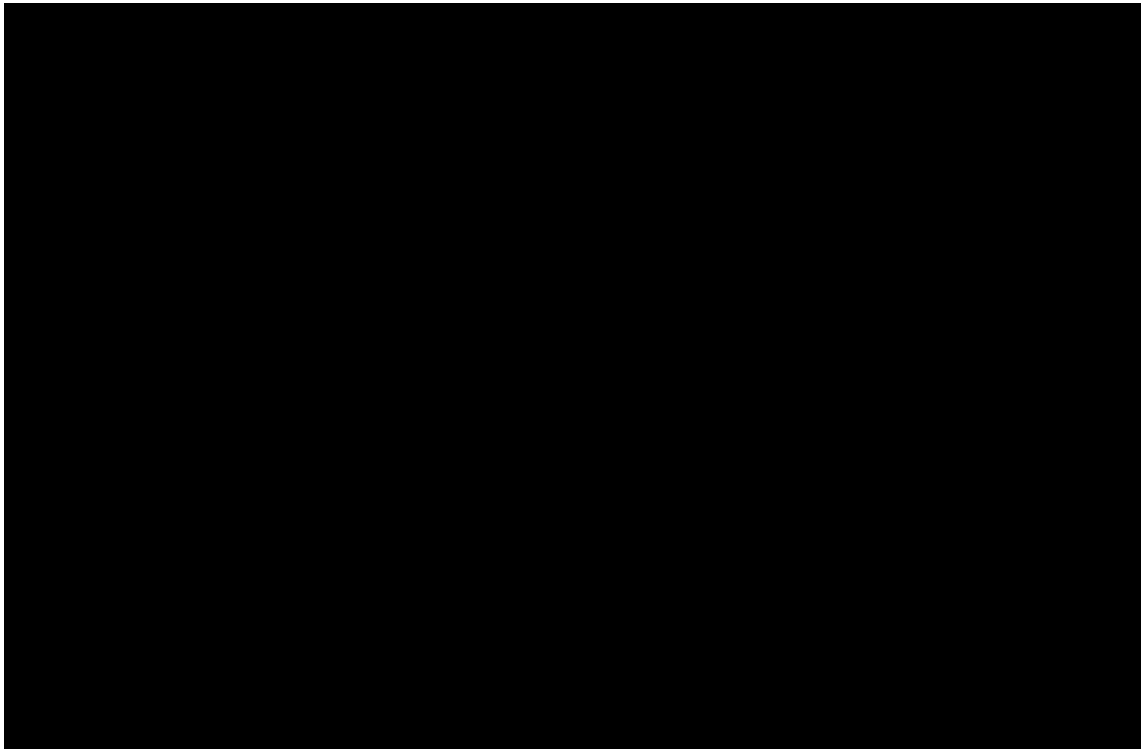


Fig. 4: l-r Tim Jeeves, Helka Kaski, Elena Koukoli and Steffi Sachsenmaier recreating a detail from *The Raft of the Medusa*, in which Koukoli and Sachsenmaier replicate their roles in close proximity. Photo by Guy Bell.

and leading towards the close of the piece, the structure of the first suggested narrative is recalled to host a combination of actions and components from the iconic images [29:26 – 34:50]. The sequence is repeated, each occasion presenting the same actions, but changing elements from the images. The performers begin to leave their positions, re-locating to the other side of the stage, or exiting completely. The piece reaches points at which both performers of a particular role have departed, yet the framing element they triggered when crossing the white line within this sequence, continues to change as if they were still present. The process continues until one performer, Elena Koukoli, remains onstage reacting to the actions of absent others, within a changing theatrical frame that suggests their ghostly presence and a sequence so familiar to spectators they might picture, and *feel*, those performers and actions in their absences.

Philosopher Brian Massumi has written about our experience of movement occurring *as* perception, rather than *via* perception. To illustrate his meaning he cites an experiment by experimental phenomenologist Albert Michotte who depicts an image

of a circle towards which a dot is moving. The dot disappears just before contacting the circle, but the claimed effect is that even though we no longer see the dot, we feel its penetration of the circle. This is to say we perceive its movement, “not *in* perception, but *as* perception” (Massumi 2011, p.106). The active absences at the end of *Count Two* provide the possibility for spectators to experience a similar movement, or presence, *as* perception. In Chapter Three I will return to Massumi in a discussion about affective potentials.

Distances and Gestures

Count Two closes with the presence of active absences having implied a range of gaps throughout its performance. In the previous chapter I traced the employment of cause and effect systems of signification in defining the appearance of the good citizen and community, from Rousseau through to New Labour, and how such reasoning operates by refusing distances or confusion between visible behaviours and their associated meanings. *Count Two* uses a comparable logic to organise recognisable signs (by grouping types together, then re-organising them into narratives), but then, through their replication and repetition, destabilises them by multiplying their potential meanings, suggesting such models of categorisation are contingent and built on their own series of gaps.

Explorations into the deployment of symbols within matrices of signification occur within the field of semiotics, and *Count Two* trades on the associative aspect of gestures as linguistic items whose value is determined by the context in which they feature. The piece might be seen to demonstrate the ways in which signs, organised through Charles Sanders Peirce’s triad of the iconic, indexical and symbolic, undergo transformation when the changing contexts in which they occur causes them to function across registers.²² Perhaps this points to the ways in which gaps are inherent to true structures. If, as Jean Piaget suggested, one of the fundamental characteristics of a structure is its potential to create new material according to its own internal rules

²² Terence Hawkes provides a useful overview of Peirce’s classification (1977, pp.103-105).

(Piaget, 1971, p.5), then gaps are created between signs' and signifiers' older and newer relationships - between those relationships the structure's rules *did* produce, what they *presently* produce and what they *will* produce in the future.

Within the structures of social organisation these gaps will be stumbled upon by certain individuals. Writing in relation to the crawling pieces of William Pope L., André Lepecki has suggested that attempts to freeze social structures and the logics they might produce, is to deny the cracks inherent to any structure.²³ Consequently, those people whose identities don't signify within the parameters of those fixed terms fall into the gaps and experience difficulty in the exercise of daily life. Lepecki states that these problems are a result of "ontology's alignment with the fantasy of temporal and geometrical stability of form and being" (Lepecki, 2006, p.88). *Count Two* sought to engage structures whose logic, as appropriated by figures such as Rousseau, appear to adhere to such a fantasy, yet enable perception of their inherent distances and movement.

Theories of semiotics and structuralism provide an opportunity to consider how distances might be at work in the piece. As described earlier another gap, a-void, was present at the centre of the stage in *Count Two*; this space rarely hosted notable activity, predominantly serving as a wing for those waiting to perform stage-right of centre. Peggy Phelan has suggested that "[a]s a philosophical and epistemological injunction 'movement' punctures the ideological assumption that the centre is permanent, stable, secure"(2011, p.22). She suggests that in canons of history the choice to focus on particular activities as 'central' has created shadows in which other activities go unnoticed, rendering them peripheral. Elena Koukoli, Gerard Bell and Antje Hildebrandt found the shadows of their staged stage wing undone by its location in the lights and focus of that stage's centre, whilst the same centre-stage was unsettled by the creation of alternative centres either side of it. By repeating and overlaying structures whose self-transforming potential marks their essential character

²³ William Pope.L is an American visual artist whose works include live interventions and explore social disenfranchisement.

of movement, the creation of several centres in *Count Two* suggests them to be temporary and transportable entities, no more than itinerant flickers within overlapping fields of logical structures.

The centrally staged wing also reminds us of the distances hosted by each of *Count Two*'s performers between their offstage and onstage existences, as well as between activities which appear as significant or incidental. Earlier I referred to the 'two basic types of material' in the piece as recognisable actions and iconic images, yet these were supported by a third form which appears and serves as transitions between those two, typically presented as walking or standing in wait. These support movements were as visible as the others, and though they didn't undergo treatments of categorisation, they were subject to rules designed to impart a quality of multiplicity throughout the choreography by ensuring modulations of personal expression. These included accommodating variation in the performance of actions within a given duration, allowing performers to acknowledge each other if they happened to make eye contact and to make no effort to mask a mistake if one occurred. In attempting to articulate this quality in rehearsals we spoke of performers representing, for example, an act of arrival, by presenting its representation onstage. So there was no attempt to remove the gap between the identity of the person performing and the difference brought to that identity by being placed onstage and realising the actions of the piece. At times this direction was experienced as a kind of containment. When Tim Jeeves places himself in the stance of *Venus*, even though committed to that positioning, he does not embody the image in too determinate a way. His necessary approximation of the stance depicted in the painting works with a consciously limited incarnation of its character such that the distance between him as signifier and the original painting as signified is sufficient for the audience to do some work to connect the two. It was partly with the hope that spectators might notice themselves executing this act of recognition that such parameters were set.

In other words the performance quality is such that performers seek to communicate a sense of their off-stage selves alongside rehearsed activities. They appear to gesture towards, rather than fully embody, the actions and images, so that space is left for a

spectator to see each of them exist beside his or her self, in a doubling which is itself doubled at the end of the piece when corresponding performers perform next to each other. The work's theatricality, as Davis' sympathetic breach, is present as much in this quality of performance as it is in the exposure of mechanisms that trigger changes in the lighting, sound and projection. It is a quality of coexistent states that infuses the work's spatial composition of balanced geometric design – a composition that does not look like it would comfortably absorb mistaken or unstable movements – with subtle uncertainty, and perhaps offers its own kind of interruption to the claim for ontological stability that Lepecki has challenged. Yet these qualities are also of theatre itself. As described in my opening chapter, spectators enter the theatre knowing they will see people pretending to be other people, and activity which has been rehearsed for them to watch. Theatre declares itself as unstable before it begins, and *Count Two* hoped to draw attention to this, not least through its performers' attempts to exist next to themselves.

As suggested above, the performers gesture towards the actions and images they present rather than fully embodying them; gesture functions as a movement towards a bodied definition which is not yet complete, and thereby marks a distance between its transitory state and the conclusive other towards which it journeys. This recalls philosopher Giorgio Agamben's assertion that gestures are the "communication of communicability," that the gesture has "nothing to say because what it shows is the being-in-language of human beings as pure mediality" (Agamben, 2000, p.59), as well as scholar Jenn Joy's more recent description of "gesture as a precondition of movement..." in her exploration of "the extreme gesture of the spasm..." (Joy, 2009, p.78). In *Count Two* we find the gestural at work in those events and behaviours that seek to affirm the distance to their possible referent, from the not-quite-fulfilled renderings of iconic images described above to the 'suggested narratives' (perhaps they could be called 'gestured narratives'). These events are marked by potentiality (of possible outcomes) which is unstable and therefore in movement. They are non-committal, unfixed and multiple; the action in the narrative could mean one thing *and* another, just as I could relate to a performer as the represented action *and* as the body who identifies outside of a theatrical frame. My use of 'and' rather than 'or'

extends the gestural in two ways here: firstly, following scholar Noémie Solomon, in recognising that “‘and’ acts as a connective gesture, an in-between, a site of multiplicity, that which brings into relation” (Solomon, 2009, p.162), and secondly as implying the overlaying and interplay of multiple structures or planes of comprehension as co-existent. *Count Two* does not spasm but it is full of holes which point to the gestural in theatre. And it is through performance as gestural expression that I understand a moment of completion, referred to in the introduction to this chapter, to have occurred when this piece was presented to an audience. In relation to the research queries raised in my first chapter and refined at the start of this one, *Count Two* clearly responds to a Rancièrian idea of emancipated spectatorship by inviting its audiences to recognise that they actively read meaning into what they see. I hoped to permit them experiences of multiple and possibly simultaneous meanings and identities in relation to the work’s contents and performers, via strategies that destabilise fixed political positioning. It sought to underpin those multiplicities with a greater sense of participation in the work through the exposure of its mechanics and the retention of distances between performers and spectators in an emphasis of theatricality. In doing so, *Count Two* invoked an extension of distance as a critical space by articulating it as a host of multiple and co-existent possibilities. The suggestion that this condition is essentially gestural and describes a basic quality of performance enhances the nature of what I previously cited as the confusion derived from the distance inherent to theatre.

But what else is achieved by acknowledging the act of spectatorship in an event of theatre, particularly given that Rancière describes spectatorship as our “normal situation” (Rancière, 2009b, p.17)? In my discussion of icons I suggest that the combination of enabling spectators to acknowledge their acts of translation and the multiple meanings that actions or images might carry could free them to regard the ways in which they comprehend an image as equally significant to, if sometimes different from, more dominant discourses it participates in, and therefore that both ability and responsibility are invoked. If this conjecture is accurate then spectators, rather than being directed towards homogenised ideas of what an artwork might mean via politics concerned with the appearance of social value, might instead be

respected and encouraged to notice their independent thoughts without concern for how they relate to other responses. Their imaginations (so central to how we relate and therefore organise socially) would be free to roam. In this scenario multiplicity becomes inevitable rather than stage-managed, and would in Schiller's terms free the "subjective and specific" characters of citizens - remembering that Schiller criticised reason driven societies for denying the multiplicity of their subjects (Schiller, 2004, p.32).

In Schillerian terms a free imagination would be one engaged in material play. Theatre scholar Peter M. Boenisch has described Schillerian play as a "condition of liberty" which, citing Kojin Karatani, intervenes in binaries as that which "calibrates form and matter... reflection and representation" (Boenisch, 2012, p.9). In Boenisch's terms the aesthetic autonomy arising from play is a structural and relational liberation (2012, p.10). Building on these expressions, if emancipated spectatorship is achieved through *Count Two* it is not with the intention of leading its audiences to particular behaviours, but rather of enabling them to attain a position of liberty of play. Such a position would be experienced on a perceptual level, as freedom from the dominant network of associations that bind things and people to times and places, through an active thought process that is multiple and in movement.²⁴

None of this is to claim that *Count Two* achieved such impacts in all of its viewers. My particular criticisms of the piece include what I believe was an overly didactic quality communicated by some of those elements designed to invite a sense of participation. The repetition of actions in different theatrical frames in particular seemed to operate too much as an explanation for viewers to find themselves in a liberated state. However, the last ten minutes of the piece allowed for an experience of reading absent bodies and so invited qualitative change for viewers. I also question the extent

²⁴ I'm not unaware that language of flexibility and individual affirmation is shared by many neo-liberal ideals in relation to post-Fordist labour practices. In this discussion I don't believe that affirmation of individual differences and responsibilities need be solipsistic nor precarious, but that flexibility's quality of responsiveness as play offers a route to disrupt stagnant social assumptions and render Rancièrian dissensus possible.

to which the oppositional nature of those framing elements serves the potential for experiences of multiplicity as discussed here. Nonetheless, if structural procedures are characterised by their inherent distances and shifting foundations, then the structural logics used to organise people politically and socially cannot fix bodies to certain roles, times and places. Multiplicity is inherent to such systems as well as generated through the body, as the performers' theatrical doubling suggests. The performers in *Count Two* were deployed in acts of representation with the hope of revealing an instability of representation, yet bodies act and relate through forms and experiences other than systems of language. The following chapter sees a shift in tone towards concerns with the affective impact of bodies generating uncertain occurrences of perception.

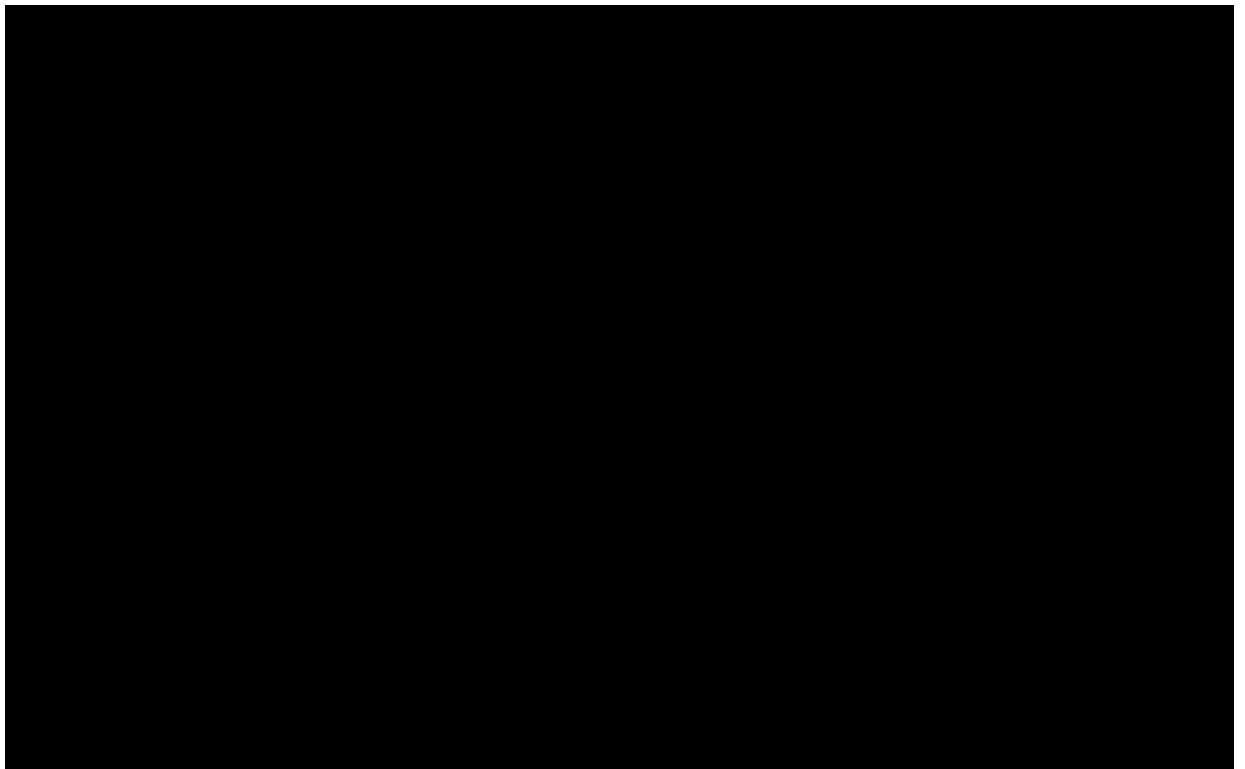


Fig 5: l-r: Elena Koukoli, Gerard Bell, Antje Hildebrandt, Steffi Sachsenmaier and Helka Kaski in an act of arrival in *Count Two*. Photo by Guy Bell.

3. Practice

“We are our *participation...*” – Brian Massumi (2002, p.11)

In this chapter I will discuss the choreographic work *Practice*. Repeating the form of the previous chapter, it is intended that the reader view the enclosed DVD of *Practice* as part of this chapter, which shows a public presentation of the piece recorded at Laban Theatre, London in April 2012. Appendix 2 contains an email flier distributed in advance of the performance, and programme notes from the information sheet distributed to the audience on the evening of performance. *Practice* is a staged dance piece of a little under one hour and, again, my writing here is a retrospective consideration of the piece as it was crafted for public performance from studio research. The conditions in which *Practice* was made are not dissimilar to those of *Count Two*, meaning that a number of the factors I acknowledged in Chapter Two are relevant here. It seems worth reiterating that my decision to focus on the work’s form as it was presented to a public audience coheres with this thesis’ discussion of public spectatorship, that its development engaged institutional support apparatuses²⁵ and that my role as choreographer was dependent on exchange with collaborators whose input to making the piece was essential to its final form.²⁶

Practice did not seek to work with the referentiality that was fundamental to *Count Two*. Instead, it asked what a body can do outside linguistic structures, and on the theoretical ground of affect, essentially seeking to create conditions that would support and explore aspects of its affective potential. The development of the piece began with two interconnected research questions: what do we practice when we go to see dance, and what can a body do for me to recognise that body as not recognisable? The first of these can be broken down into two parts, addressing both

²⁵ *Practice* was co-produced by Jardin d’Europe in partnership with Southbank Centre and Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, with the support of the Culture Programme of the European Union. Supported by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

²⁶ The full creative team for *Practice* is Lucille Acevedo-Jones, Neil Callaghan, Helka Kaski, Elena Koukoli, Mamoru Iriguchi, Duncan MacLeod and Nao Nagai.

what constitutes the practice, or the doing, of spectatorship, as well as what we are practising by repeating the act of watching performances each time we place ourselves in front of one. I offered this compartmentalisation of spectatorial practice in my first chapter in response to Rancière's proposition that active spectatorship is our normal condition. There I suggested that we 'do' theatre spectatorship to exercise our perception of things by investing attention in something we know to be constructed. In *Practice*, I wanted to discover what might be offered to this idea by a choreographic strategy in which the actions of bodies (as dancing) are not separated from the form of the choreography (as opposed to *Count Two*, in which the performers' actions could be isolated from a choreography that determined their organisation and re-organisation).

In the previous chapter about *Count Two* I described how the categories of content – the generic actions and specific images – stimulated different grades of recognition in spectators. Even though these gestures were shown to appear within structures that were inherently unstable, recognition occurred. Part of what enabled that recognition was the recognition of what the subject was not – I did not see Charlie's Angels when I saw the Sistine Chapel ceiling. The second research question for *Practice* addressed my desire to work with this negative aspect of recognition in connection with an enquiry into the nature of 'doing' spectatorship. That is to say, to explore how I recognise a person's behaviour and appearance as not recognisable, and to consider what this offers to the practice of spectatorship. Further, how do categories of the strange, or other grades of non-recognition, function in a society for which certain levels of recognition serve as gateways to a range of rights? I am thinking here of ideas touched on in my introduction where I made reference to Giorgio Agamben's concern with the homo sacer and Judith Butler's writing on those bodies which qualify for grief. In these cases legal and media frameworks determine that some bodies will be recognised as citizens or grievable humans whilst others will not (of course, in the case of the person deemed to exist outside legal frameworks, this determination is not made on appearance of the body).

However, *Practice* does employ recognisable characteristics of theatrical presentation including the auditorium and its mechanics, and the gendered duet that cites a history

of social and theatrical dance and social institutions. And, as we will see, there are a number of details within the piece that acknowledge these elements of its construction. Although it sought to use these established elements in order to disturb their familiarity and so propose a strangeness through the parameters that define them, the ways in which they are engaged in the piece presents bodies that *are* recognisable as bodies *and as appearances*. In addition these bodies sometimes present slightly unusual actions towards unclear meanings, yet which are poetically coherent with other components of their situation. Without referential form, the performers' actions 'made sense' through their participation within a wider field. It is through this Spinozan sense of affective means of connection that the dancing bodies and the choreography of the piece are not separated.²⁷

In revisiting the piece through this writing I looked for the possibility that theatre offers conditions in which bodies that would appear strange outside a theatre, to the degree that we dismiss their potential for legibility, would receive sufficient attention from a theatre audience to see their detail. In this scenario theatre spectatorship could offer a mode of viewing in which one can apprehend a person who is not recognisable without invoking a threat to her social existence (which mere apprehension outside an auditorium might, for example, if a person can not be recognised as a citizen). However, the bodies in *Practice* receive close attention as one of theatre's materialities – alongside time, costume, space and set; materials which seem to come together to create a moment in which to think, regard and endure materiality in general and how we apprehend it. Therefore its discussion doesn't offer a straightforward transferral from one mode of appearing and seeing to another, but opens a vessel in which the uncertain relationship between feeling, thought and matter might be given attention. In this context the appearance of bodies is not reduced to the expression of feelings or thought, but as participant in and therefore co-constitutive of the whole situation. Where *Count Two* considered how dance and choreography communicate through textuality, *Practice* considers the field of sensorial

²⁷ André Lepecki provides a discussion and brief history of Spinoza's question of what a body can do, in his book *Exhausting Dance* (2006, p.6)

relations which dance permits through its choreographic arrangement. The form of this experience as a live performance practice was essential to the particular qualities of attention it permitted. As a result I suggest that the piece attempts to open up fields of appearance – not the appearance of the performers, but experiences of operations of appearance as thought, felt and physically enmeshed intensities. My use of the term ‘made sense’ in the previous paragraph refers to a degree of cognitive uncertainty within a context of relational coherence, the latter being a result of an activated and somewhat open ended ‘making’ from sensorial experience.²⁸

My description of *Practice* in this chapter mostly refers to my experience of watching the piece with a public audience at Laban Theatre. It is, of course, informed by my detailed knowledge of the work’s content and interspersed with recollections of intention and discoveries in its development, as well as questions raised in the moment of watching and in critical reflection through this writing.

Swathes of black fabric...

As the audience found their seats to watch *Practice*, the stage was visibly empty. The piece began with a blackout from which swiftly raised lights revealed two performers on stage. Each was dressed in swathes of folded and knotted black fabric that looked like a strange hybrid of martial arts robes and Elizabethan skirts and collars. This man and woman momentarily looked out at the audience, briefly scanning the auditorium as if to check or simply notice people were present. This quick series of events - blackout, raised lights, presence of performers, female and male duet, extravagant costumes, acknowledgement of spectators’ gaze - are all recognisable features of theatre. By using these, we sought to acknowledge an event of theatre and our entry

²⁸ This is in opposition to colloquial terms of sense making which tend to signal something as clear or not clear; generally something makes sense when I comprehend clarity. Conversely when something doesn’t make sense it typically indicates that I am still seeking clarity within a state of confusion, and therefore my state could be described as one of activated ‘making’ insofar as I am seeking to comprehend the relationship of things in a way that is clear to me. I would venture to say that *Practice* sits somewhere between the two because its scenes did not provide a clear, single meaning, but communicated coherence.

into its fields of attention. It took a second, this first moment, before the performers moved from the readiness of starting positions into postures held with unchanging focus. It is like an inhalation. It is a moment I choreographed and that I have watched repeatedly on documentation and every time it is like an inhalation, the first part of a breath towards and into performance. [00:00-00:07].

Helka Kaski and Neil Callaghan took turns to place themselves in a series of poses. He sat looking at her as she stood looking somewhere else. He walked to stand next to her and after a moment returned to sit. She placed herself on the floor in front of him in an odd position, chest down with her hands and feet in the air, as if presenting herself for a sexual encounter. They continued to move one position at a time, placing themselves in physically close proximity, at some point reversing the sequence until, again, Neil sat looking at Helka²⁹ and she stood looking somewhere else. When making the piece we discussed the return to this pose as a second beginning, and the short section preceding it as a false start, as if the performers mistakenly followed a path that was somehow dissatisfying, leading them to return to its opening moment. Its contents, to my mind, are contrived examples of bodies placed creatively in relation. For example, when Helka presents raised hips to Neil he responds by lying on his front with his head under her waist. The level of incongruity is obvious and therefore, to my eyes, uninteresting because its incompatibility doesn't reveal much about the image or its conditions. This brief series, then, was almost like a warm up to the main event, using bad choreography to establish these as the bodies the audience will be looking at, and the kinds of actions they might see. In this case it operates in extension to the opening moment of inhalation that announced our place in theatre and, as I will suggest later, signals a characteristic of the performers as 'trying out' forms of appearance and relation that runs throughout the work. [00:14 – 01:47].

They remained in place for two long minutes before establishing a similar pattern to the false start (one would position herself or himself, and the other adapt to that new

²⁹ From this point I will refer to the performers by their first names as a gesture towards the quality of performance they offered in this piece.

position) remaining for a few - long - minutes in each new state of relation. But the performers' stillnesses were living; Helka or Neil might shift weight from one hip to another or briefly alter focus whilst in position, as if they were comfortably waiting for something. Nonetheless their positions were held and the room was quiet. My mind wandered in this silence and what felt like the concentrated focus of the auditorium. I gazed at the two of them as Neil lay on the floor, facing away from the audience, his robes spilling onto the floor and Helka crouched behind him, resting her arms on his side. It was a position I had seen many times before. As she looked across the stage I watched Helka specifically, mildly curious about her thoughts, of whether she was counting. I saw only her, the mounds of fabric underneath her like a huge skirt, and her soft poise captured by the lights and stage frame. I gazed. And then Neil moved his foot. I had forgotten he was there. Not only had I seen him place himself, I had also co-created this moment; yet my concentration had shifted such that superficial elements of the image had fused allowing him briefly to fall away from my foremost thoughts. I had drifted from certain facts and pondered other possibilities.³⁰ I re-discovered an operation in my own watching that I had hoped to trigger in others. [01:49 – 13.03][Helka crouching 06:19 – 08.32].

Neil sat facing the wing and Helka upstage, the side of her torso leaning against his back. After a minute or so she shifted her weight into him causing his chest to arc forward, both returning to their original positions. After ten seconds or so she did it again, and again, until she was regularly pulsing into him and his shape constantly adapting to her rhythmic movement. Eventually they stopped, stood and took a different position in which they again transferred weight back and forth across their bodies. A little later Helka positioned herself in a small lunge. Having observed this, Neil walked over to her and took the same position immediately behind such that his right knee nestled into the back of her right knee, his chest against her back. Again

³⁰ This recalls my reference to Jérôme Bel's *The Show Must Go On* in Chapter One, in which I suggested that the speed with which spectators figure out the rules of onstage activity contrasts with the duration given to each song, such that they are given time to allow their minds to wander and notice what other associations and thoughts might arise. I stated that this exemplified Jacques Rancière's emancipated spectator.

they began pulsing, his knee pushing into hers, hers softening in response before sending weight back causing their hips and torsos to shift to and fro at the same time.³¹ In rehearsal and on stage this interaction had always been an incredibly intimate looking exchange; it had appeared sexual, functional and strange. And after a few minutes they moved to the next pulsing position. Like the series of positions that preceded it, this sequence described no narrative development whilst invoking, for me, a range of adjectives that circled the event; intimate, strange, functional, sexual, comfortable, committed. [13.03 – 21.54].

They stepped out of position and smiled at each other. Helka sat on the floor and gathered up the fabric she had left trailing across the stage. Neil joined her and they negotiated their way into wrapping around each other, hindered by the abundant folds of fabric. They clung, shunted and wobbled as they tried to roll themselves across the stage. Eventually their mass of black fabric, pink limbs and the odd shock of blonde hair tipped into travelling. The progress of their ball was awkward and constantly prey to a loss of propulsion which in turn saw legs flailing or arms yanking to find movement. As they rolled I flitted, without warning, between recognising two people clinging to each other and some weird mixture of elements that didn't seem to make sense. Helka's and Neil's inelegant efforts frequently appeared ridiculous and constantly transformed the nature of their combined shape. Now and again a face red from exertion and apparent lack of control would rear into view, pulled by the momentum they had created only to be yanked over or under, replaced by a seemingly impossible combination of limbs. [22:00 – 27.06].

Careful Functionality

The regular duration and repetition of types of positions and interactions in the scenes preceding the rolling affirms a characteristic of sequential process and denotes an

³¹ It is only at the time of editing this chapter that I notice the resonance between the descriptive language I use for this physical interaction between Helka and Neil, and Friedrich Schiller's description of material play as constituted by the sense and form drives mutually softening for and reinvigorating each other.

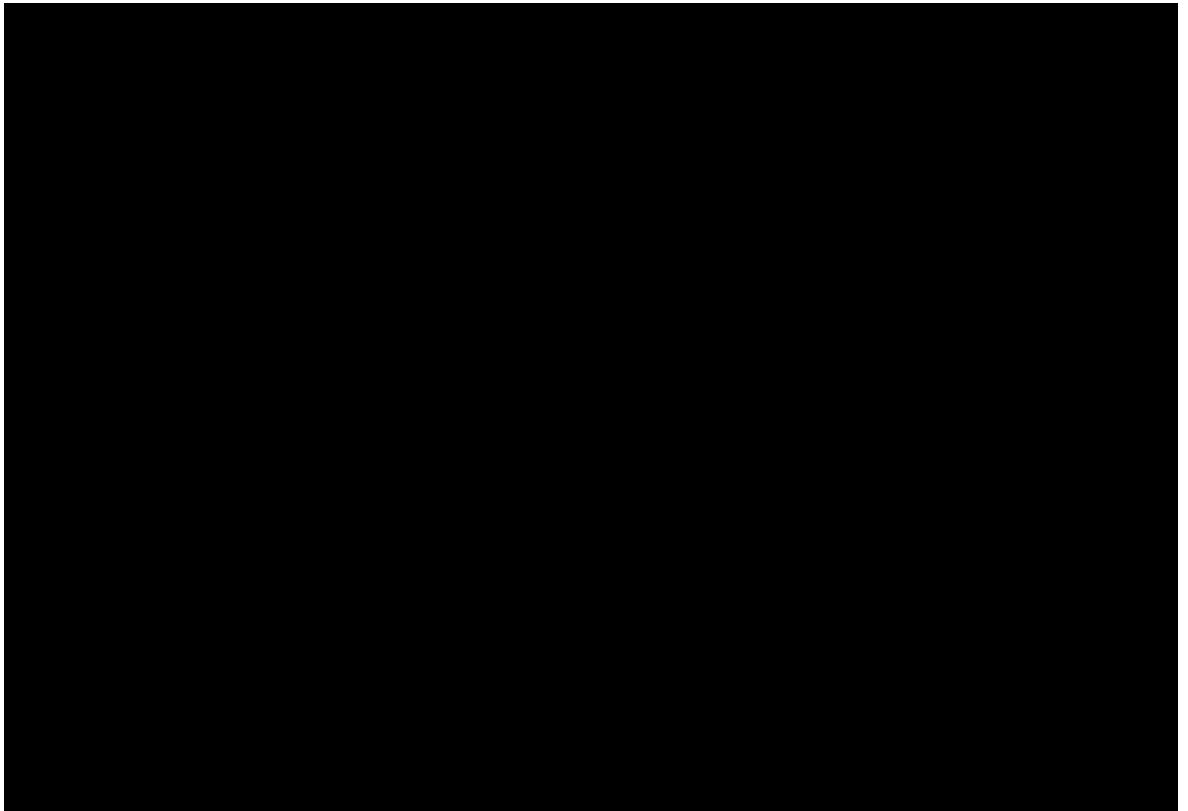


Fig 6: Helka Kaski and Neil Callaghan in a ball in *Practice*. Photo by Manuel Vason.

overarching structure. The performers repeat a category of action several times before moving to a different kind - a series of still positions are tried out before a number of pulsing interactions - suggesting each form is attempted in multiple variations before the performers move on. They enact each placement for a regular amount of time contributing to the impression they are committed to a procedure. However, the poses and interactions sought to evoke a range of associations, and the time given to them offered the opportunity for spectators' minds to wander (as mine did).

Consequently it was not the intention that procedure, and any mechanical qualities that term might invoke, would come to dominate spectators' experience of the work but mingle with other implied or discovered qualities. Nonetheless the presence of a sequential process was enhanced by the overall trajectory of these opening scenes which observe gradually increasing levels of physical contact and dynamism that culminate in the performers' physically enmeshed and agitated rolling on the floor.

Retrospectively, the presence of this systematic character seems to both create and be emphasised by a sense that the performers were trying out each pose or interaction they moved through. In the description above I suggest that Helka and Neil performed

the early sections of *Practice* with comfortable patience. Their calm facial expressions and bodies that gently moved with their breaths indicated two people easily taking the time required to complete a task free from frustration. When Neil briefly looked down to see Helka whilst leaning over her [10:23] it was as if he was checking on a sleeping child. There is a similar careful functionality to their transitions between positions. When Neil stops pulsing into the back of Helka's knee there is no gradual deceleration of movement, and when she stands watching him take the next position there is no attempt to craft her waiting into the flow of rhythmic motion; each of them appears satisfied with having completed one action and therefore to move unceremoniously to the next [17:36 – 17:39]. Their attitude in what I call the opening inhalation is similar: Helka and Neil briefly looked at the audience and moved into their opening positions, as if they had been comfortably waiting then activated by the collected gaze. Theirs was a cool and efficient response to a prompt to take action. The performance of these details, as if they were trying these actions on, or couldn't find the positions that made them relate to each other or appear to us appropriately, suggests that the performers are being moved by something like an un-troubling duty that also signals the work's choreography. As a quality of performance this characteristic is part of the work's choreography, and it also gestures to the outside author, to my role as choreographer, in deciding that this series of forms would be presented. Yet it also indicates outside authors in general - that sensorial engagement with another person occurs through conditions that are more or less consciously determined by people and ideas external to that situation. Whatever the performed or actual source of instruction, Helka and Neil appeared as bodies adhering to forms.

However, if careful functionality defines the performers' delivery of these sections it is not the only quality evoked by their behaviour. The different states of relation of their still poses and the time I was given to look at them brought a range of relationships to mind, from the possibly curious stranger of Neil sitting and gazing at Helka to an almost familial presumption of her laying her hands on his resting body. Indeed, time 'given' worked with quality of behaviour to invite spectatorial attention. The tone of possible relationships changed as they moved into the pulsing actions. When Helka and Neil faced each other and rubbed their right ankles and knees together the

exchange appeared intimate, even erotic. These impressions met with the careful functionality described above to create a typically incongruous range of relational qualities. The term 'careful functionality' is important here as it implies a distance between the mechanics of carrying out the action and the possible effects of achieving it. For example the erotic is, of course, functional, but a carefully functional delivery of an erotic looking action suggests a focus on the mechanics necessary to its achievement as opposed to, say, losing focus of those mechanics once erotic pleasure is achieved. Therefore the purpose of performing these actions as they appear in *Practice* seems to be of fulfilling the function of functionality (additionally, of course, the pulsing actions are not clearly erotic, but the erotic is implied by continued rhythmic physical contact). This contributes to sustaining the impression that the performers are simply following a sequence. The implication of the erotic, like that of the familial and curious as noted here, circles the functional in an incongruous and distant assembly of relational qualities.³²

Some of the processes used to develop material for *Practice* involved strategies of proximity to socially recognisable actions. This partly involved identifying common physical interactions and transforming them to a non-recognisable state. It is possible that echoes of these original sources remain in what Helka and Neil perform, contributing to the evocation of implied but not fully realised qualities of being and relation. For example, the pulsing actions are mostly based on a handshake, an action which, when isolated, involves a single point of physical contact between two people and the rhythmic movement of that connection. We developed this dynamic through improvisations in which one performer would offer a body part to the other who would meet it with their own, and together discover a rhythmic action. In this case transformation occurs when qualities other than a social greeting are implied by the contact of alternative body parts for durations longer than a typical handshake. The

³² In Chapter Two I referred to Noémie Solomon's acknowledgement of 'and' as a connective gesture and site of multiplicity that implies an interplay of co-existent planes of comprehension. In *Count Two* this was pertinent to performers who represented actions, whilst gesturing towards their bodies' appearances outside of the theatrical frame. Solomon's definition is relevant again to 'and' as it operates in *Practice* to connect qualities of appearance and existence that aren't usually connected.

structural echo of this everyday exchange might work with the performers' calm composure, the commitment to sequencing and the implications of the erotic, to conjure a range of disparate names for an activity that remains not quite identifiable to spectators. For me, in rehearsal and in performance, this range of implied qualities generated ambiguity, which might be rooted in fundamental familiarity.

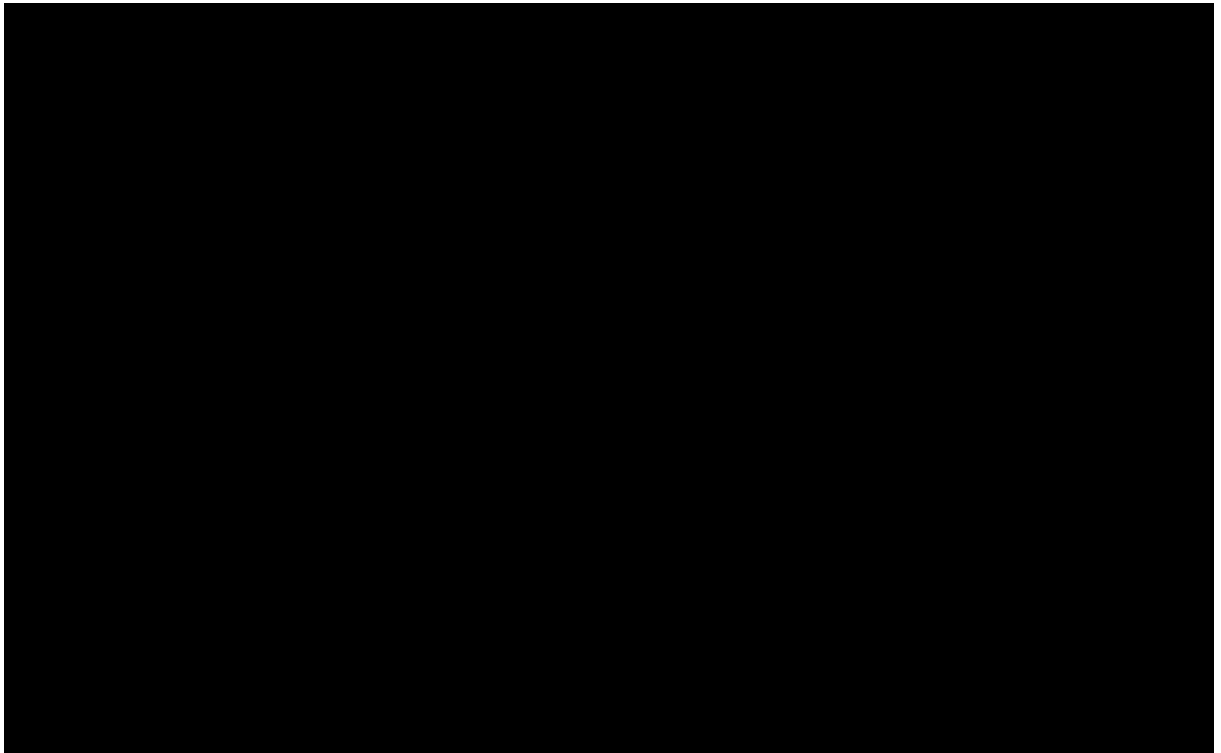


Fig 7: Neil Callaghan and Helka Kaski undressing and hanging the black box in *Practice*. Photo by Manuel Vason.

Unravelling, Reframing

Having followed the initial series of sequences, as if having reached the endpoint of that logic by rolling together in a ball, the performers turned to a more fundamental shift in their processes of appearing. Helka and Neil began to unravel the reams of fabric that clothed them. Using a pulley they lowered a bar suspended above their heads, onto which they tied the black material thus far removed in a necessarily measured process. The act of raising the bar caused the material to unfurl so that it hung flat, creating a wall of black fabric. As the bar was raised the sound of white noise seeped into the auditorium, increasing in volume as the bar lifted. This process continued. Once the wall was hung they continued to undress, helping each other to

untie knots, to un-knit and de-drape. Two more bars were clearly in view so the audience could, to a degree, see the time it would take the performers to complete the task that was now clear. The second bar was lowered, the fabric was tied and with its raising more white noise poured into the space, resonating at different frequencies. Helka's and Neil's costumes were radically diminished and their figures left looking a little scrawny with the depletion of such volume. They continued to lower, to tie and tie and tie, and raise. The room was flooded with noise. The three walls had been raised to create a black box, a theatre within the theatre. A theatre centre stage. In the middle of this stage, in the middle of this piece, we were at the top of the show. Helka and Neil were naked. They entered this new space. The black fabric that had framed their bodies as costume now framed them as set. [27:28 – 43:40].

Helka and Neil were naked because their costumes had been used to build a theatre. This theatre called on other elements typical of its form with the introduction of music, lighting changes and dancing. Both performers followed repeated floor patterns to dance steps we derived from techniques including Charleston, jazz and modern dance. Even if spectators couldn't name these sources the activities as dance steps were obvious. They looked a bit ridiculous doing these actions naked as their various bits of flesh wobbled and bounced around. The two of them laughed with and at each other. The lights changed from white to a deep reddish-orange marking their bodies with the colour of danger and sex and seediness before morphing to a cool blue which flattened them out to the degree I might have been watching them on film. Each lighting change was fast and smooth, its effect on their bodies' appearances was significant yet it didn't seem to change in response to them; perhaps as though the theatre was trying lights on them in the same way they tried on the movements in the first half of the piece. Something similar was at work in the music; Helka and Neil began to dance as music began to play, but the sound was of three different genres of dance music simultaneously creating a cacophonous mixture of rhythms, sounds and melodies. Periodically their dancing would coincide with a musical rhythm but frequently not. The ingredients of a dance spectacle were all there; black box theatre, lights, music, floor patterns and dancing bodies. [44:16 – 50:30].

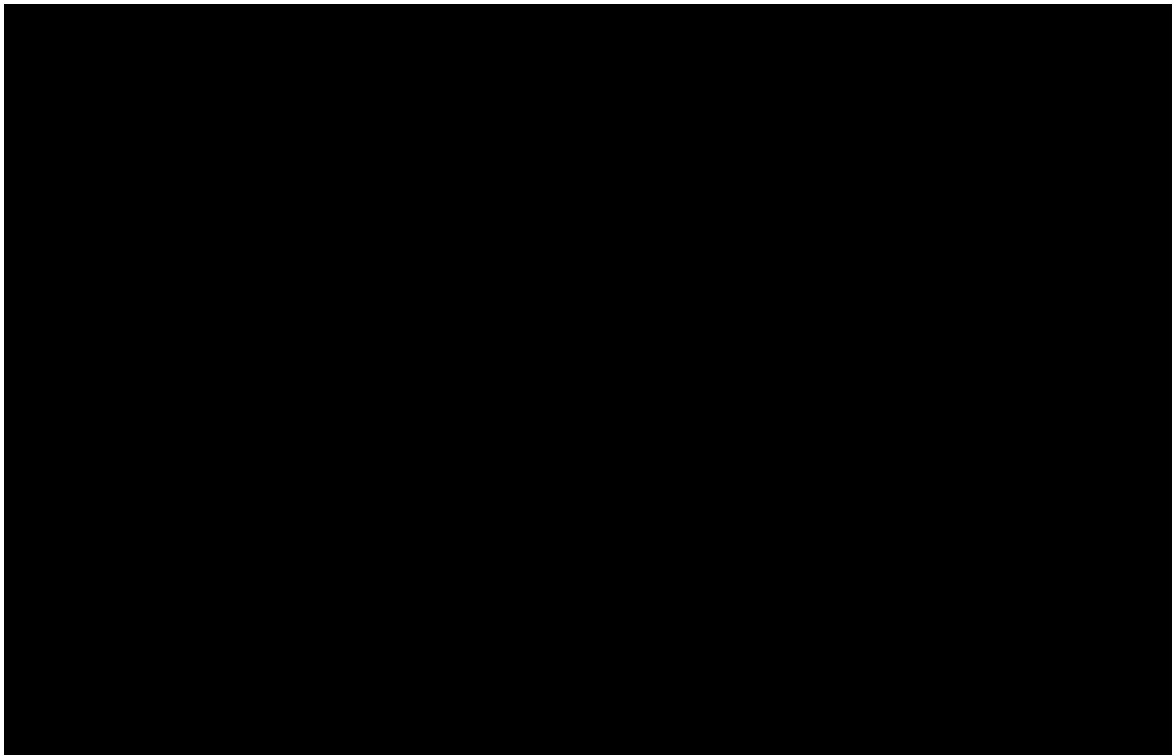


Fig 8: Neil Callaghan in *Practice*. Photo by Manuel Vason.

Helka's and Neil's dancing diminished with the music and they each presented a series of held postures. Their poses were elegant yet composed of rounded shoulders, twisted ankles, distended stomachs with their arms typically in a gesture of display. They looked a bit like slightly skewed renaissance sculptures or ballet figures; the curves and sweeps of their forms were beautiful but rather than indicating athleticism or clean lines were often slightly camp. They repeated these poses in different sections of the black box until Neil quietly slipped away through the fabric at the back. Helka continued until her last pose recalled the bow of a curtain call, her head dropped forward and open hands held to one side as if in gesture to the show that had just been. She too gently parted the black curtain and exited as the stage was softly consumed by darkness. [50:34 – 54:37].

Towards Affect

The costumes and black box theatre were crafted from the same fabric, and the theatricality of each form marked Helka and Neil as bodies on display. The constricting effects of the fabric's bulk and weight only added to the apparent refinement and

elegance of the early still poses, yet was plainly impractical and incongruent for two people rolling around in a ball; throughout the first half its elaborate and lavish folds were an invitation for the performers to be looked at. The black box appeared as an opportunity to see them afresh, framing them from a greater distance and noting theatre as a place that permits bodies to appear repeatedly in different forms. Indeed, a tonal shift occurred. Helka's arrival in the black box saw her smile self-consciously at the audience and Neil, as if laughing at their exposure, and both frequently laughed together as they danced. A sense of sequential process remained as each performer repeatedly followed a floor pattern, but their previously careful and patient performance now appeared buoyant and carefree. Where earlier scenes had presented strange and different grades of intimacy, here the potential intimacies of two naked people was bypassed with the cheerful freedom of their smiles and wobbling flesh.

Practice deals in the elaboration of the visibility of the body. If in the first half of the piece the performers are trying out ways of appearing and being in relation, then the act of restructuring the fabric is a fundamental shift that intersects with what had been a relatively linear process. Having rebuilt this frame they appear differently and perform actions that differ in quality from the preceding ones. So, the nature of appearing changes but the materials stay the same: a regulated series of actions presented by the bodies, the black fabric and theatre's tools. It is a pivotal shift that points to the material conditions through which people appear to each other. This is to suggest that the means of appearing are always present, and there is always an opportunity to regard things differently, at least partly, through the re-distribution, re-presentation and re-cognition of these materials. Such modes of repetition are the business of theatre, and they are why we end up at what appears as the start of a show in the middle of the current one.

Theatre's function as a place of appearance is partly why my interest in presenting bodies as unrecognisable, through the particular strategies I chose, did not really occur. Certainly the performers' 'trying out' of forms of relation and appearance seems to have invoked an incongruous range of associations, suggesting *Practice* plays with

ambiguity. But where I thought ambiguity might generate non-recognition, it doesn't seem to have done so for two main reasons; firstly because the work creates spheres of appearance that are poetically coherent, meaning its atmosphere and contents seemed to support each other through their affective relations, and in how they appeared to spectators; secondly, and in extension of the first point, because theatre is a place that deals in how things appear *as appearance*. The fact that theatre is what made these actions and forms appear to me is what stopped them from being non-recognisable; in a theatre, if a combination of materials appears as strange, what is revealed is strangeness as a matter of appearance (and an appearance of matter).³³ I comprehend what appears to me as the outcome of the mechanisms of appearance at work. If I don't recognise something specifically, if I don't name it because it doesn't conform to languages I know, its affective potential is not diminished (in fact it might be heightened). In those moments at which Helka and Neil, rolling around in a ball, suddenly did not correspond with my understanding of how two people can appear to me, the strangeness of those brief seconds marked a particular confluence of the materials of appearance in relation to how I have learned to see.

The reconstruction of costume into the black box made *Practice's* spectators party to those frames as constructed, and signalled the constructed nature of the larger theatre in which this piece and those spectators were located. This acknowledgement of framing and construction operates differently to that of *Count Two*. Where the latter engaged matrices of signification to constantly remind viewers of how affect was being created, *Practice's* theatricality acknowledges its means of construction whilst spectators remain immersed in the poetics of the piece. Nonetheless, *Practice* shares a number of choreographic strategies with *Count Two*, including the repetition of types of action, clear spatial pathways (often repeated), operations of reframing and systematic procedures. These are all deployed to different effect: for example, *Count*

³³ I'm indebted here to Theron Schmidt who discusses the appearance of disability in relation to notions of the real in performance, in the work of Back to Back Theatre, in similar terms: "the relevance of this performance to issues of disability is not in the way that it might bring 'reality' onto stage, puncturing the theatre's representational operations, but the way in which it reveals that sense of reality to always be an apprehension, a matter of perspective, a matter of 'the way we see' disability" (2011, p.142)

Two engaged repetition with the hope that audiences would learn its rules and anticipate reformulations, whereas *Practice* repeated to invoke the procedural and operations of redistribution from within established parameters and materials. As a result *Practice* avoided the didacticism of *Count Two* whilst revisiting these strategies. To this degree the open-ended potentials (the multiple uncertain possibilities) of such creative strategies are revealed: a systematic approach to choreography is not limited to outcomes that discuss intertextuality.

The creation of the black box defines a new space. It is a theatre frame within the frame of theatre, created from its materials of appearance, and delimiting a place of appearance. This reframing rethinks the space that was, allowing the possible images it might produce to be reconceived. Here, reframing operates as a form of theorisation in a way that recalls Rancière's discussion of politics coming from within police distribution. He notes "there are conflicting ways of doing things with the 'places' that [the police] allocates: of relocating, reshaping or redoubling them" (in Bowman et al, 2011, p.6), terms with obvious similarity to the business of theatre I mention above.³⁴ He discusses democracy in spatial terms, including the delimitation of the demos as "at once a material and a symbolical matter", an example being the delimiting of aristocratic space as one of material privilege and the symbolic power of tradition (2011, p.6).³⁵ The various shifts in the deployment of the limited palette of materials in *Practice* – bodies, fabric, time, space, light – invited different qualities of attention to them and their capacities for appearing. However, the piece also seemed to open a space for thinking, feeling and enduring materiality, and to apprehend that materiality and its relations inside and outside theatres. So, the material and symbolic dichotomy that Rancière identified in the delimitation of the demos is somewhat echoed in the relationship between the material and perceived dichotomy produced by the

³⁴ This recalls Dorothea von Hanelmann's development of Rancière's ninth thesis on politics, discussed in Chapter One, as artwork's capacity for societal impact via established conventions

³⁵ The role of the symbolic as Rancière presents it here echoes the imaginative hold of narratives of theatre and democracy, particularly the idea that the crowd it gathers must be connected to an image of democratic process. Looking forward this leads to questions about the possibility of a gathering that doesn't specifically signify in the current order, or which at most marks histories of gatherings that generate rescaling, either on the streets or in situations of dance, all of which are pertinent to the piece *Assembly*.

operations of *Practice*. However, I think Brian Massumi writing offers a useful expansion to these ideas.

In a 2002 interview Brian Massumi offers a definition of affective potentials within that which is present seems useful for considering what *Practice* offered to experiences of the thought and felt. Massumi describes affect as the margin of manoeuvrability that every present situation carries (2002, p.3). This suggestion of a space of possibilities and uncertainties recalls the gestural doubling of bodies in *Count Two*, as well as the many and incongruous associations evoked by *Practice*'s shifting apparatuses. However, the affective uncertainty of Massumi's terms precede the named subjects of these examples, and carry qualities of freedom. Indeed, he notes that the "wriggle room" of affective potential brings liberation and empowerment because it opens the possibility for experiment within what is present (rather than aspiring for a distant utopian image) (2002, p.5). Our bodies constantly pass through a series of present situations, each loaded with affective potential, and our journey through our changing capacities to affect and be affected by given situations is experienced as an intensity. *Practice*'s resistance to presenting complete signs, whilst containing recognisable components whose combination and meanings fell outside clear terms of reference, seems to have created opportunity to give attention to such potentials-experienced-as-intensities.

Indeed, my attention to and endurance of *time* throughout the section in which Helka and Neil undressed and hung fabric, as well as in their early stillnesses, made it seem almost as tangible as the fabric itself. Time's presence as material meant it participated in my affective exchange with the performance and its many components, to contribute to my attention to what was present. This then extended to other material forms, from the quality of the wood at the sides of the proscenium arch, to how the flesh in my throat felt as I breathed. This is to say the live event of *Practice* seems to have carried an offer for the relationship between what was felt, thought and materially present for spectators to become palpable. This attention to what is present in the live event of performance would also seem to be what is at stake in practice-based research in general.

Attention to what is present carries potential for freedom from pre-existing associations; the recognisable gendered duet of *Practice* is not deployed to perpetuate the cultural norms of that form, but rather to reveal that the appearance of a man and a woman can generate other experiences of relation than historical narrative, from within a scenario that seeks to generate potential relations. As such, the bodies in *Practice* are not referential but exist within a *dispositif* that is coherent; they are congruent with the form of appearing that theatre's conditions created in this piece. Nonetheless, they affect my state of relation as part of the entire situation in which that *dispositif* occurs; their affective impact operates within and through those conditions. *Practice* addresses what can be generated here and now, an experience substantiated by the event of performance and the affective nature of exchange within that event.³⁶

Practice's many transformations did not achieve resolution by arriving at a clear message, but offered a series of evolutions towards the next unclear appearance. If we consider clarity as described earlier, named as the thing that 'makes sense' because I recognise and understand its situation, then it offers an identifiable use value within dominant discourse, such as the representative value Schiller conferred upon English court dance as a model for social organisation. *Practice's* lack of narrative or metaphorical signification means it was not telling me about spectatorship (like *Count Two* did, at least partly), but offered a particular experience of it. The piece's transformations always led to the next opportunity to experience the unformed potential of a present situation, presented by the same reconstituted materials. When developing the performed content of the piece we often spoke of trying to achieve a 'weird virtuosity' as opposed to the athletic virtuosity of other forms of dance. In

³⁶ We might ask who has the privilege to undergo affective exchange without the hindrance of prejudice? However, experiences of affect precede the imposition of identity, and concerns with affective exchange respond to the possibility that there are ways of relating outside the terms of identity and aspiration as we currently understand them. The bodies and images in *Practice* have been recognised as result of their place in a theatre event, but nonetheless permit an affective experience which is supported by the place of theatre; theatre as accessible through everyday life, but with the capacity to offer experiences of relation different from those typically named in public discourse. Attention to affective potentials suggests we all carry capacities to perceive and relate to each other in ways we might not commonly practice, and which might affect how we live.

retrospect I wonder if we achieved a form of non-productive virtuosity in which performers worked, with great skill and towards unclear signification, with the materials through which spectators would encounter them (including their own bodies). If clear signs, meanings and narratives are engaged to produce certain outcomes within the networks of association and linguistic logics that dominate everyday life, the virtuosic creation of intensities of relation that can't be channelled into achieving aspirations outside the experience of that moment could be considered unproductive or useless within those terms. *Practice's* value, then, is in its uselessness to those discourses, because it invites us to attend to what is present. Specifically, this attention to what is being experienced has been made possible through an event of theatre.

Count Two and *Practice* each consider what a body can do, or how a body can come to mean to, and with, others who encounter it as spectators. Where the pleasure for spectators of *Count Two* was to a degree in the experience of shared referentiality, in *Practice* each spectator's active translation is not so clearly communal. Rather than enforcing notions of community, *Practice* asks: what else can happen when we gather in a situation of spectatorship before bodies that appear to us? This question has largely been answered by identifying the piece's capacity to invite attention to affective potentials, but might also be considered as a form of pleasure. The performers' actions focus on different ways of appearing and relating to the audience and each other in that moment, even if they can't help but signify in discourses external to it. As such, they appear to me as being for others, as opening themselves up for possible affect. This is fundamentally different from representing affective exchange, or placing themselves in front of an audience as non-performers in a state of vulnerability. Rather, Helka and Neil appear as professional performers presenting actions within situations that have been crafted; by moving within those situations they generate the possibility for the kinds of spectatorial attention and affective exchange already described. As an event that offers engagement with affective potential, on one level *Practice* seems to ask 'what is the pleasure of assembling to see what a body can do?' One of the freedoms permitted by not seeking to fulfil a past or future identity is in noticing a shared condition of vulnerability in people opening up to

the affective impact of others. This is a possibility I explore in greater depth in the final choreographic work of this project, *Assembly*, which I discuss in the next chapter.

At the start of this chapter I wondered what *Practice*, as a choreographic work, might offer to the notion that we do theatre spectatorship in order to practice watching things we know are constructed. Perhaps it is the space it opens to attend to our affective potentials as being in relation with others. Massumi suggests that how we live our material being has an ethics that resides in what is brought out in a situation. This is different to imposing moral judgement from a pre-existing code, claiming instead that ethics is present in what we make together. In a quotation from which the epigraph to this chapter was taken, Massumi writes “[w]e *are* our situations, we *are* our moving through them. We are our *participation* – not some abstract entity that is somehow outside looking in at it all” (2002, p.11).

4. Assembly

Unlike the previous two live works in this project, *Assembly* occurred in an art gallery and involved the participation of numerous non-professional, voluntary performers. It was presented as a free performance at Nottingham Contemporary in March 2013 as part of dance agency Dance4's Nottdance Festival 2013, and received financial and production support.³⁷ The decision to invite non-professional performers into the project answered creative and practical questions, whilst raising ethical considerations specific to the idea of opening a project up to the public.³⁸ These concerns relate directly to notions of what constitutes both a public and participation as discussed in earlier chapters. Ultimately these were issues addressed through the practical conditions of making the work as well as its contents.

Assembly was devised as a gallery work. In ideal circumstances it would run for the hours a gallery is open in order that spectators may enter and exit the piece as they would other works in the building. However, *Assembly* is a project that requires many performers and despite the support it received, it presented sufficient practical constraints to limit the piece to a single performance of three hours in Nottingham. The enclosed documentation includes an edited trailer of approximately five minutes consisting of footage taken from throughout the work, as well as one hour of largely real-time footage (including the close of the piece), and it is intended that the reader watch the DVD to accompany this chapter.³⁹ Appendix 3 contains an email flier distributed in advance of the performance, and wall text displayed by its entrance.

³⁷ *Assembly* was produced by Dance4. It was supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

³⁸ *Assembly* was performed by Rebecca Anderson, Tara Baker, Stacey Bedwell, Nicola Carter, Katye Coe, Seraina Dejacó, Francesa Feeley, Emma Fell, Ania Kuklewicz, Yvonne Lake, Emma Lloyd, Greg Manderson, Joop Oonk, Abigail Parsons, Don Rowe, Lauren Sharp, Lizzie Sells, Kalila Storey, Robert Suchy & Hannah Whitlow

³⁹ It might be useful to watch the short trailer after reading this introduction, and to allow the longer footage to run whilst reading the rest of the chapter.

Assembly continues this project's question of what happens when people gather to see what other bodies can do, with a particular focus on experiences of individual exchange and collectivity. As we have seen in previous chapters, the historical idea of theatre's congregation as connected to the assembly of the demos, and the gathering of a public, continues to have currency. The main research question for this work was 'what can an assembly of bodies do other than serve established ideas of publicness or community? What else happens when people gather?' In addition to seeking to discover how bodies produce outside normative narratives this question sought to extend an understanding of multiplicity as it has been set up in previous chapters; from the bodies of *Count Two* whose gestures towards images, narratives and their own identities invoked uncertain and multiple potential, to the numerous and open-ended associations suggested by the actions of performers in *Practice*. *Assembly* sought to further explore spectatorial potential for perceiving multiplicity through viewers' capacities to simultaneously comprehend a range of peopled forms and states of relation, such as the individual and the crowd of which she is a part. In addition it asked how theatre might employ viewing conventions outside of the auditorium in extension of this project. As a result it moved to the gallery to work with a structure that enables the form of the piece to be affected by the entrances and exits of spectators, whilst adhering to a typically theatrical divide of performers and audience.

The title, *Assembly*, carries overtones of civic duty. It recalls Rousseau's 'social contract' and theatre's history with democracy as much as it does images of town halls, schools and parliaments. *Assembly* calls on the peopled form of those institutions – it calls on choreography – to discover what bodies gathering and appearing in relation, might produce. To this degree it built on the affective potentials explored in *Practice* by inviting attention to what was present, but also included a return to the more explicit theatricality of *Count Two* with its exposed spectator per performer rule. Choreography emerges from within the work's theatricality via a flow of qualitative transformations of bodies in movement. The piece is characterised by an ambivalence towards its spectators and performers that resists politics of representation, but invites attention to the qualities of exchange between people.

Ultimately *Assembly* creates an opportunity to experience and consider the politics of gathering as an impulse towards vulnerability.

In preceding chapters I have contextualised my descriptions of each work through the recollections of a maker-spectator, moving between memories of seeing those works as they were presented in public performance and moments of rehearsal. This chapter about *Assembly* is slightly different because I largely draw on my experiences of watching its dress runs with 'practice audiences'⁴⁰ and only watched the public performance from a private mezzanine because there was a large queue waiting to enter. Therefore my perspective of the public performance was detached from that of other spectators. Nonetheless, *Assembly's* format as different from *Count Two* and *Practice* provides opportunity to compare the nature and characteristics of how I recall performance memories. Where typical spectators of *Count Two* and *Practice* sat through the same presentations, each viewer in *Assembly* saw a different series of performance components. Perhaps what is striking about my writing here is that this fact does not seem to make much difference to how I recall its impact upon me, nor that which I observed in others. Partly this is because *Assembly* does not trade on the fact that each spectator experiences a unique performance, but also because in recalling an encounter with people performing I will always be navigating and exploring the flurry of images and feelings my mind conjures. These, of course, are in Rancièrian terms a result of the unique translations I make as a spectator in any situation. As a result, whether those associations originated in a piece built on a clear narrative arc or a series of chance strategies does not change my experience of recalling them.

⁴⁰ Practice audiences were made up of invited members of the public such as groups affiliated to Dance4 and friends of participants. These events were not open to a general public. It is an interesting characteristic of the piece that it was essential to rehearse it, at least a couple of times, with a significantly sized audience.

I look, and you appear

Assembly was presented in a closed gallery within the several rooms of Nottingham Contemporary. Spectators were required to enter the gallery through a door that was otherwise closed. They were permitted to enter the space one at a time (except for children with a parent) but could leave when they wished. Each time a spectator entered the gallery a performer would enter through another door on the opposite side of the space; the spectator would enter the viewing area and the performer would join the performance, a division marked only by a single line of tape on the floor. The same performer would only perform for as long as that spectator watched, meaning that when the spectator left the gallery, the same performer would leave the performance, exiting through the door she had entered. (This information was available on a notice outside the gallery - it was not intended as a puzzle for spectators to figure out). Even though visitors entered one by one, many people could watch the performance at any one time, as long as there was a sufficient number of performers available. This points to a structural limit of the piece; for example, in Nottingham there were twenty-three performers in total, meaning we could not have more than twenty-three viewers at one time.⁴¹ Obviously, then, this rule ensured there was always the same number of spectators as performers. When the first spectator entered the piece she encountered a solo performance until another spectator entered; if there were twelve spectators there must be twelve performers; if twenty-three watching then twenty-three performed and so on. Even though the piece draws on the viewing conventions of art galleries and theatres, this numerical equivalence is not typical of either. [The performer per spectator rule is particularly clear at the start of the DVD documentation].

Each performer who appeared in the piece did so at the time she did, and for the duration she did, because a specific spectator was present at that time and for that

⁴¹ Due to the limited three-hour duration of Nottingham's performance, the piece was consistently busy with a constant queue for entry. As a result a large degree of my discussion in this chapter pertains to its relationship with the crowd. It is worth noting that if the piece ran for the hours a gallery is open over a period of days it is likely it would offer more sparse experiences.

duration. As a result, the form of the work was directly affected by each spectator's individual presence. Like *Count Two*, the piece seeks to acknowledge the unique and active presence of each spectator without asking them to do more than watch. Importantly, spectators to *Assembly* cannot determine its contents meaning the work does not offer an experience of control or an opportunity for self-expression. This characteristic seeks to work with the equivalent number of people viewing and performing to enhance spectators' attention to qualities of exchange, relation and potentials for appearing present in that room. Each spectator's experience of the piece, is built on her fundamental relationship with a performer; she experiences it from a perspective of being directly in relation.

The performers in *Assembly* present a range of simple actions or positions, each enacting the same form at the same time. There are fourteen options in this physical vocabulary, including forms such as sitting on the floor, standing and swaying and walking from one side of the room to the other. Some of these options cause the performer to travel, some involve movement in one place and others are relatively still. Across these categories are a number of actions or positions that might be easily relocated to everyday life, such as standing, walking or dancing. Of those, sitting and standing were likely to be echoed by spectators during the performance.

Other actions, like standing and swinging one's arms back and forth, or sitting and rocking side to side, do not invoke a specific reference but are simple actions that could be easily described. They are neither spectacular nor involve extraordinary abilities on the part of performers. As a whole, the actions/positions are of a nature that evokes characteristics of the organic and mechanical.

Ebb and Flow

As I watch the documentation of *Assembly* I am immediately alerted to those elements that struck me as I entered its performance – the silence, clean light and bare space that caused me to feel a little exposed. This sensation was increased by the fact that several people, performers and spectators, turned to look at me as I entered. I felt

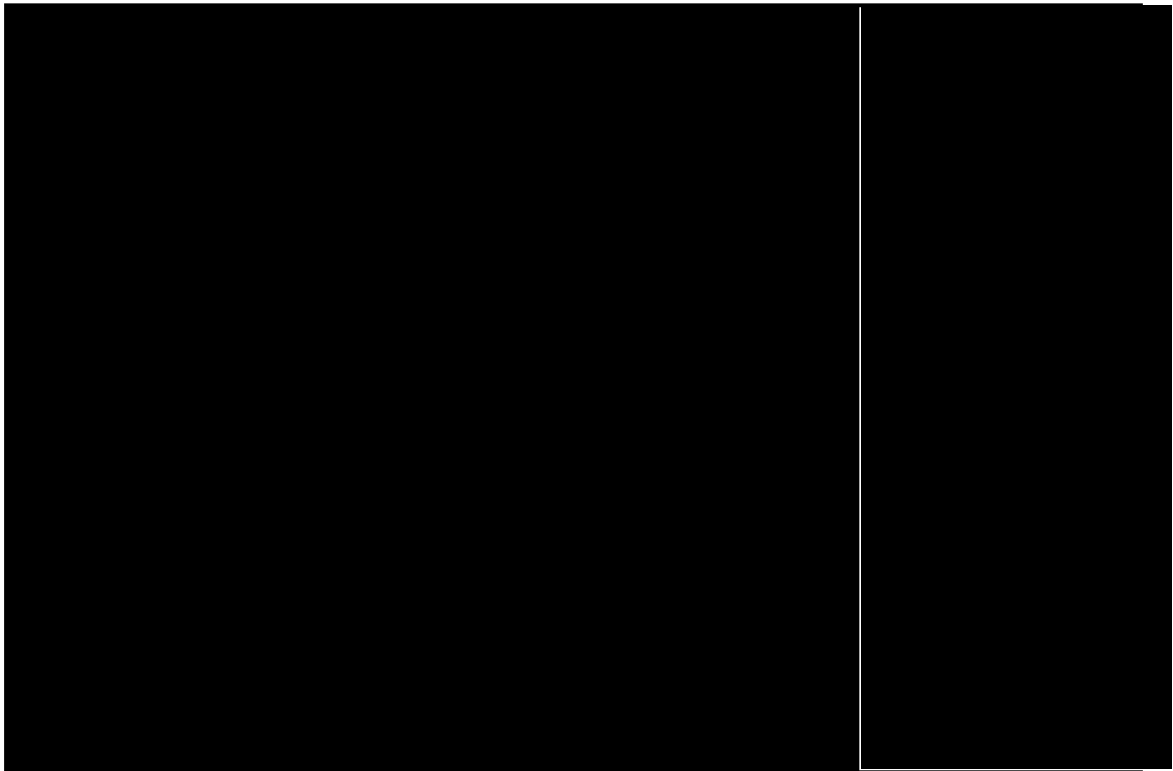


Fig 9: Spectators watching performers in *Assembly*. Photo by Christian Kipp.

slightly self-conscious and aware of my body, and how I might steer it into the room. These sensations were surprising considering my comprehensive knowledge of the event, but I had not previously known my appearance to *those* people who contributed to those particular conditions of appearing. Consequently my self-awareness returned me to my body afresh.

Nonetheless I knew the nature of the performance well and quickly found myself looking and smiling at Emma who turned out to be the performer who would be present for the duration of my visit. The order in which performers enter the piece is not predetermined and is something they decide amongst themselves.⁴² Each time a performer enters she introduces an action/position of her own choosing from the fourteen options, and which is different to that currently in play. Before entering, she writes her choice on a list backstage in order that the following performer will know which action/position is current. (This tool partly existed so a performer could not

⁴² In certain conditions the identity of the next performer can be predicted. For example, if the piece is full, with a queue of spectators waiting to enter the piece (as happened in Nottingham), when one spectator leaves then their corresponding performer is the only performer available when the next spectator enters.

enter with the intention of doing an action/position that was already being presented, and in turn so that she could feel prepared for her intervention. As the backstage list of actions grew throughout the work it also allowed for performers to make choices about the texture of the whole piece, deciding whether or not to repeat something recently presented, or an action less featured). As a result, those performers already performing do not know which action/position will be introduced next, and must look at the new entrant in order to copy what she presents. The newly arrived performer can place herself anywhere in the performance area that is in keeping with the current spatial distribution (which I explain below), meaning those performers already present may need to look around or behind them in order to see which action/position she introduces. The absence of a fixed order for the performers, or the action they might present, means that from within the performance its performers do not know who or what will be introduced next. Thus the performers must be alert to that entry when it occurs, and the piece is structured according to arbitrary choices regarding the order of its contents and who presents them.

As I settled into sitting cross-legged on the floor I saw the group of eight or so performers stop walking from side to side, and sit in roughly three small groups. Most of them, like me, sat cross-legged. That Emma happened to have introduced this position at the moment I enacted it was a chance occurrence that felt like an affirmation of my arrival (of course she could not have responded to me because she would have recorded the action backstage). The room felt quite still, but the small fidgets and shifts of weight made by performers, and the relaxed manner with which they looked around at spectators, created a sense of calm. I felt that they were with me. There was something like reassurance in how we were present to each other. I looked at them sitting cross-legged and was reminded specifically of school assemblies; I was pleased with the work's title. Having met the eyes of a few performers I began to notice the curious detail created by the ankle of one. In turn I saw the shapes made with and between bodies. I saw folded legs and arms being leaned on. I was struck for the first time by the fact that their small, quiet gatherings, in which they rarely look at each other or clearly interact, nonetheless betray a level of trust, ease and security that comes from familiarity. When the noise of the door

opening causes me, and others, to look away from this scene it feels too soon, as if I was easing my way into a welcome meditative encounter. Instead, a new spectator arrives and I instinctively look to see which performer has entered the piece then watch her walk towards the front of the performance area, sit down, and begin to shunt herself backwards along the floor. The other performers see this and make the easy transition from sitting on the ground to shunting across it. The movement brings some degree of relief to the stillness and quiet, even though I had been comfortably relaxing into it. Now, there is sound and movement. It's a striking shift of tone to which I quickly adapt. I hear material sliding and feet repeatedly pushing into the floor. The constant rhythm of these sounds and movements fills the room. I look at a couple of performers specifically and see the mechanics at work in their bodies – pivoting their weight on their hands and heels, bending and straightening arms and legs – whilst my peripheral vision catches the continuous flow. When performers reach the back wall they stand and walk through the shifting bodies to the front of the performance area, only to re-join the shunting action. There is a cyclical flow at work, bodies in a continuum of shunting backwards and walking forwards. The room hosts a stream of energy, but it is a peopled form, and now and again those people smile at me, relaxing the impact of those mechanics and that force of energy. I notice the door opening from the corner of my eye but in the same moment I am caught by Frankie's direct and beaming smile so I smile back as she pushes herself along the ground. I miss the entry of the new performer but notice those already present heaving themselves off the floor to stand and look from side to side. The noise dissipates quickly but the rhythmic motion of moving parts seems to have tipped from one form into another. I look at the performers, am briefly held by Robert's knowing eyes, then return to the combined effect of a flickering form. I am reminded of candles and flip clocks. When I look at Kalila she is softly looking around her, but when I regard the performers' moving heads as a collection, complex patterning emerges. Moments of coincidence occur across the collective form when two or three heads accidentally turn to one side in unison, but their coordination is quickly lost. The door opens and, echoing the performers, I looked right to see a new spectator enter, and then left to watch Abigail walk into the midst of a small group of performers and lie down. [Looking side to side; 25:10 – 25:50].

And so it went on. Whilst the physical vocabulary involves some still forms and the performers consistently appear relaxed and open to those watching, the piece is never entirely at rest. It ebbs and flows through forms and rhythms, accepting the performers' obvious tiredness in more physically demanding actions towards its end. Spatial variations occurred in a number of ways. Static actions could be presented either on a diagonal or facing the front, and the direction would change every fifth action excluding travelling actions (the performers marked a tally backstage to keep track of these changes). In addition, the group worked with three forms of general spacing: a single cluster, dispersed groups and even distribution, and spacing would change every seventh action (again, a tally was kept back stage to guide this). Whereas the performer who introduced a given action for others to copy could simply enact a change in direction (diagonal or front), a variation in collective spatial distribution would be signalled by a performer who would create sound as she entered. A single toned hum indicated transition from a single cluster to small groups, singing a song to oneself marked the transition from small groups to evenly dispersed and an extended 'sh' marked the change from dispersed to a single cluster. When a performer introduced a sound to the space, the others would join her in making that sound for half a minute or so when it would gradually dissipate into silence. However, changes in spatial distribution would happen gradually depending on the actions in play: for example, it might take a couple of changes in action/position for the performers to evolve from even distribution to a single cluster. As such, the rules as described here were not evident to spectators who would instead experience the gentle flux of bodies in space. [Performers sing to themselves; 36:09 – 36:50].

Naturally, these spatial variations were also affected by the departures of viewers, who would cause their corresponding performer to exit the piece. Depending on the number of performers in play, the departure of one could create quite a transformation in the collective whole, particularly if there were only two or three performing. Further, spectators often departed in multiples, perhaps because people had visited the gallery together or because one person's departure seemed to give others permission to leave. Consequently it was not unusual for several performers to leave the piece at one time creating a significant change in collective form, for

example, all of the performers might be standing in a single cluster when a number of spectators exited, causing the corresponding departure of performers to leave the remaining performers in fragmented groupings. These events disrupted the possibility for spectators to read the system of spatial distribution, making their anticipation of spatial changes unlikely. Instead, variations in the performers' spacing offered an opportunity to attend to shifts in the character of a given action/position. If several performers depart at a point when many of them are lying on the ground, this transforms the landscape made by their bodies, whereas if they are walking side to side the performers' exits will be experienced as the depletion of a collective body in flow. Nonetheless, viewers will have understood that beneath these constant undulations there was an order at work, but not in such a way that serves to communicate systematisation, as was experienced in *Count Two*.

The performers' simultaneous presentation of these forms was not directed towards unison and so avoided uniformity. Instead, each person moved and interpreted each action/position in an idiosyncratic, if similar, manner. Likewise, unison was avoided in transitions between actions/positions because their order was not predetermined, and each performer enacted the change when she had independently seen which new action had been introduced. In spite of this, the collective presentation of each action/position came to appear as a coherent, organic whole, perhaps because organic forms host discrepancies. Building on the sense of an underlying order guiding shifts in spatial variation, these collectively coherent differences contributed to a spectatorial experience of sustained impulse underlying oscillating shifts in shape and energy.

Intimacy, Eye Contact, Embarrassment

Aspects of *Assembly*'s order were exposed from the moment spectators began waiting outside the door to enter. The performer per spectator rule underlined a relationship of intimacy - of 'I'm here because you are' - at the core of any performance situation. Some spectators experienced *Assembly* as a one to one performance, even if only for a few minutes, whereas others only encountered it as a large group piece. Intimacy is

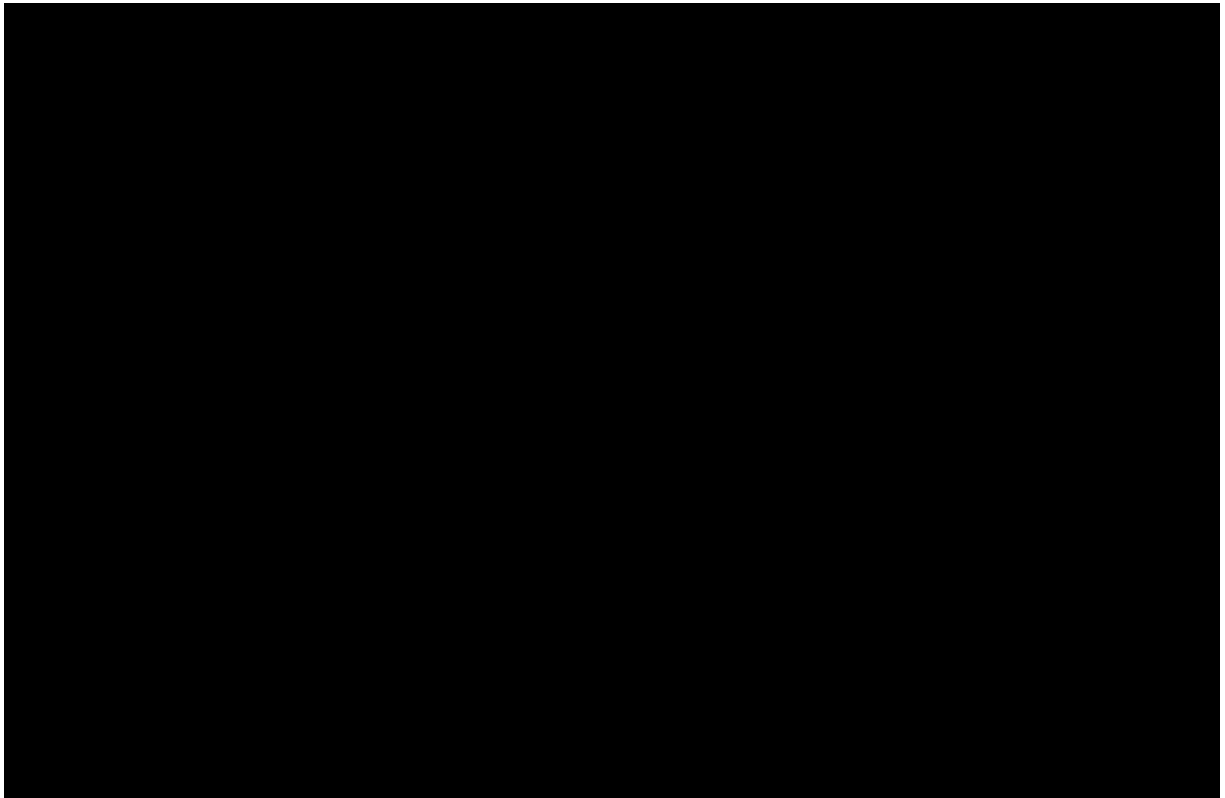


Fig 10: Performers rolling on the ground in *Assembly*. Photo by Christian Kipp.

present in both situations; where the first spectator might experience an intense exchange with an individual performer, the spectator to the crowd might feel a connection to her affiliated performer through the collective forms to which that performer contributes. These intimacies do not fit with what Lauren Berlant has called expressive relations of normative ideologies such as community or love (as I discuss in more detail below, the piece hopes to resist historical narrative and representation). Rather, they function as the relationally produced spaces and connections that impact on people and on which they often depend (1998, p.284). In either case given above, the bright lights of the gallery ensured everyone in the room was clearly visible and that experiences of intimacy at least partly were determined by their public nature. Indeed, the impactful, relational spaces created by *Assembly* were signalled by some unanticipated expressions of connection on the part of spectators in Nottingham, many of whom directed a bow, called 'thank you' or clasped hands in gratitude towards their affiliated performers as they departed. Such acts articulate the qualities of individual exchange experienced within the typically crowded room.

The quality of exchange between performers and spectators was affected by the degree and nature of eye contact they shared. Performers needed to look regularly at spectators in order to see when the viewer to whom they were affiliated would depart. However, even though each performer would make a point of watching her corresponding spectator, she would exchange eye contact with many, if not all the viewers throughout the performance. These meetings of the gaze were intended to act as invitations, for all spectators to be present and for them to look at the performers in turn. Whilst this invitation, for one person to look at another, is an intimate one, nothing in the piece claimed, nor gave the effect of, identifying with spectators through anything other than their physical presences. It did not respond to socially symbolic factors like race or gender. Rather, the constant acknowledgement of being personally seen by performers hoped to enhance spectators' implication in the piece's form, and to trigger recognition of their presence in that time and place. In workshops preceding the performance, performers explored a range of exercises designed to enable them to feel comfortable in seeking out and holding eye contact longer than socially typical, and in how their gaze might be welcoming. They were free to use facial responses from within the physical actions or positions they performed; if a spectator smiled at them they were free to smile back. Likewise performers weren't discouraged from seeing and responding to each other so long as the forms and structure of the piece were intact. This level of responsiveness, of seeing and inviting to be seen, again emphasises the simple interaction central to any performance: some people create something to be looked at, and others respond by giving their attention. *Assembly* seeks to enhance the potentials of the affective impacts inherent to this exchange. This is not to claim that *Assembly* enabled spectators, or performers, to forget about social structures of appearing. At one moment, as a large group rolled across the floor, a performer's t-shirt rode up, exposing her belly, and I recall feeling a degree of empathic self-consciousness whilst she blushed and sought to cover her flesh. Occurrences of embarrassment on both sides of the line indicate that the attention given to the forms evolving in the room, was not intended to deny the external associations each performer might provoke, nor the matrices within which they might otherwise exist. Nicholas Ridout has written about embarrassment as a bodily realisation of one's appearance to others, describing "the awareness of one's self as

flesh and blood, being as body, the predicament of being physically here and now in a historical sense” (2006, p.76). At a specific moment, approximately forty-five minutes into watching the piece, a performer called Lizzie carefully and deliberately looked into my eyes. Our gazes didn’t meet for long but she held my focus, with softness, before gently and purposefully moving it to someone else. I felt a little undone by this moment which couldn’t have lasted more than three or four seconds. Until then, I had been watching with lulled attention, drifting through the ebb and flow of the piece with periodic smiles of encouragement at performers. Lizzie’s gaze, at that moment, seemed to reach beyond *my* facial expression to the intentions behind, to my nerves, pleasures and doubts in relation to this event and possibly beyond. It *felt* like she saw aspects of me that were private and that I might not want to appear. Following Ridout’s terms, in this moment I was rendered aware of my being, always, in a state of appearance, and my often limited input to how that appearance might be read. My experiences of eye contact in *Assembly*, whilst generally inviting my presence and my gaze, peppered the event with a few surprising moments of self-consciousness within otherwise absorbing shifts of form. My self-awareness ebbed and flowed like the shapes of the piece. They were moments of intimately attending to my own presence, through my body in that time and place, in the midst of attending to others.

Through the softness and brevity of her gaze, Lizzie looked at me with kindness. She seemed to recognise me and I experienced some pleasure in being seen by her. As stated above, part of the performers’ preparation involved exploring how direct eye contact might be offered as an invitation. This served to foreclose the possibility of the gaze as a challenge and focus instead on the pleasures of being seen as recognition of one’s contribution to what is present. The challenge for *Assembly* was to exercise recognition within what was immediate. A performer’s eye contact did not want to suggest that the spectator is not just a face in the crowd but rather its opposite: that she *is* just a face in the crowd, and a face that belongs to a body which is materially affecting the present moment. In and of itself that moment has no narrative historical significance, but neither does it dismiss the spectator’s being. So in addition to operating as an invitation, these connections of the gaze sought to enable attention to what was present and to prevent the piece’s ambivalence about who enters from

being experienced as dismissal (it could not dismiss them, they are implicated in its form). Instead, it hoped to offer an invitation to experience co-existence and co-appearing in conditions different to those we practice everyday.

The qualities of attention I experienced throughout *Assembly* developed over time. The longer I spent being lulled by the never stable collection of performers, the more I noticed a range of formal coincidences, from the chance unison of heads looking sideways described above, to the accidental sub-category of performers wearing horizontal striped tops. Patterns emerged within patterns. Eventually the performers began to repeat actions and positions I had already seen, but presented with a different number and arrangement of people. Aspects of form were familiar but the details had changed, and all existed within the constant flow of the piece. I reached a state veering between tranquillity and boredom. There would be no resolution to these shifting forms. I realise I have forgotten about my affiliated performer, Emma, that somehow her presence has been levelled with those of others; ours is clearly not a bond that demands my foremost thoughts. Yet as soon as I think about leaving I look for her, and as I stand and walk towards the door she heads for her exit and I understand my connection to her was the bedrock to my whole experience. She was there the whole time. My connection to her is reinvigorated as I reach for the door.

Just as I did not consciously think about my relationship with my affiliated performer for much of the piece, so my awareness of my place in connection with other viewers did not dominate. Aside from sometimes looking at a new arrival, talking to someone I knew or changing my position, I did not pay much attention to the spectators around me. Nonetheless, I was aware of their physical presence, partly through my own, and certainly felt a degree of security in that. Consequently I did not ponder the fact of there being the same number of 'us' as 'them', though that knowledge was foundational to my comprehension of the event.

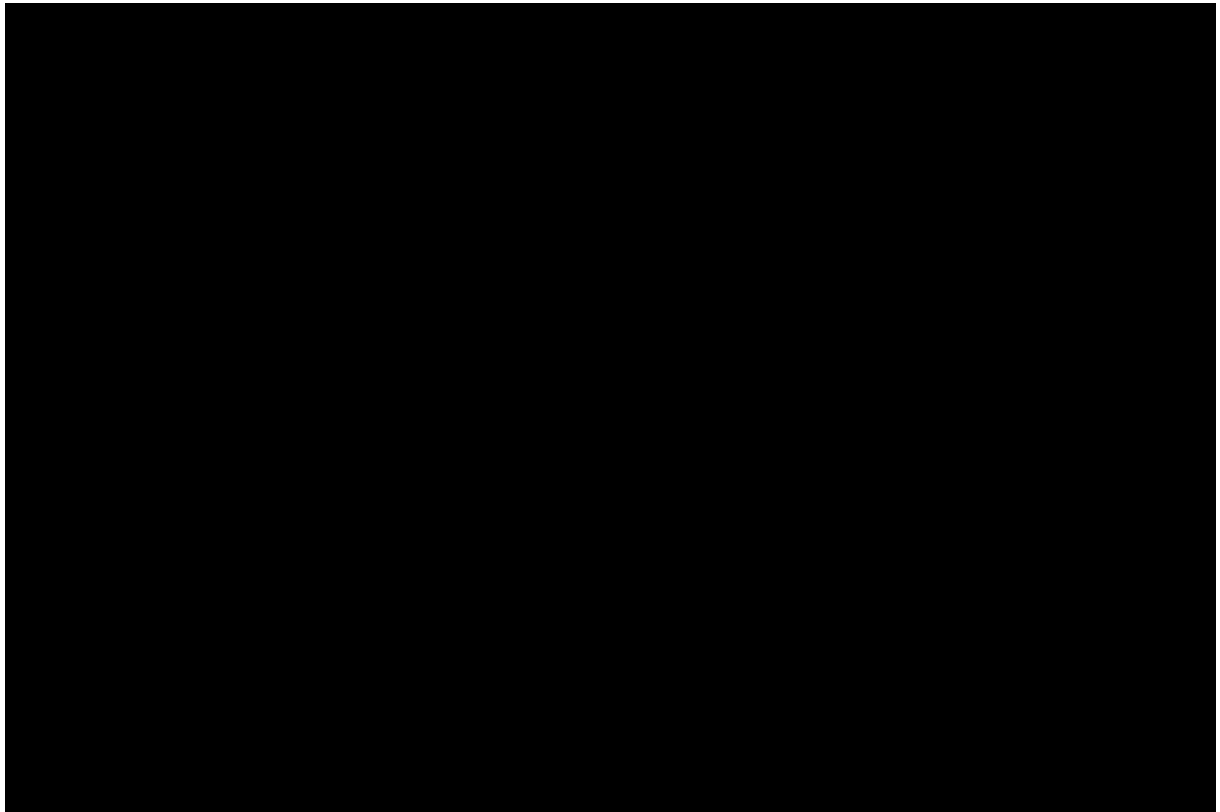


Fig 11: Performers looking side to side in *Assembly*. Photo by Christian Kipp.

The Appearance of Harmony & Emergence of Choreography

Some of the descriptions above, of a collective body of people appearing as a coherent and organic whole, enacting coordinated forms and transitions between forms, seeing and smiling at each other, sounds a bit like Friedrich Schiller's description of harmonious English dancing. Sections of the video documentation might support this association, such as the sight of people shunting along the ground whilst others navigate between them without collision. At numerous points we see *Assembly's* non-professional, voluntary performers present harmonious actions with a degree of conviviality that might also meet ACE's criteria for socially valuable participatory practices. The fact is that *Assembly* does satisfy many of the criteria for participation I criticise in Chapter One; in Nottingham it provided a fulfilling and enlightening experience for many participants who reported new friendships and changed thoughts as a result of their experience. [Shunting; 08:18 – 10.50].

However, the piece resists operations of representation in a number of ways. Firstly, it does not trade on participatory claims in its relationship with a public audience; information about the performers' status as non-professional is not promoted in descriptions of the work. As such it avoids art critic Claire Bishop's concern with what she terms "delegated performance" in visual arts practices, deployed as a route to authenticity through participants' proximity to a social reality "conventionally denied to the artist who deals merely in representations" (Bishop, 2012, p.237). Indeed, *Assembly* does not represent social groups nor portray ideal social forms. Secondly, it is ambivalent about its spectators and performers. The piece does not care who enters the gallery to view it, responding simply to the fact that *somebody* does. Nothing in the piece makes a claim to identify with the socially symbolic aspects of the individual spectator, and neither does the performance make any kind of representative assertion to spectators as a group (which a performance strategy like mirroring their form might hold). Furthermore, the piece does not identify with performers as individuals through self-expression; the actions and forms that they present were determined before they became involved in the project and so do not constitute a gesture of giving voice to participants. That the performers do not know which action or performer will enter next, nor when exactly that will happen, means they must attend to the present. Amidst its intimacies and invitations, *Assembly's* channels of ambivalence and arbitrariness are constant. If it meets criteria for participation in policy terms outlined in Chapter One, it appropriates those mechanisms into its task of exploring the ways in which gathering bodies generate relations other than representation.⁴³

Not unlike *Count Two* the performers of *Assembly*, through eye contact and smiles on the first encounter, appear to state their presence as people performing theatricality. This is distinct from the immediately stylised appearance of performers in *Practice*. *Assembly* also initially appears to share *Count Two's* explicit self-reflexivity and

⁴³ In Chapter One I mention French choreographer Xavier le Roy's work *Low Pieces* (2011) that includes two instances of conversation between the audience and performers. Whilst these events meet ACE criteria for participation, their conscious lack of direction led to difficulty and confusion, terms that exist outside the vocabulary of participation and community building outlined elsewhere in that chapter.

concern with theatre's mechanisms of appearance through its exposure of structural rules. However, its conditions required performers and encouraged spectators to attend to those actions and relationships that were present in the room. As we have seen, strategies such as implicating spectators in the form of the piece, eye contact and a constant flow of unresolved formal evolutions contributed to enabling attention to what was immediate. Having exposed its basic structural rule from the start *Assembly* reveals no spectacular or unexpected developments – it has no tricks up its sleeves – only bodies sharing time and space. These conditions allow for the emergence of choreography.

The work's concern with what choreography might produce is evident in the arbitrariness of the performers' choices about who would next enter the performance and what they might perform; it does not matter who or what, but it does matter that bodies are present to each other. Likewise, the spectators' entries only mattered to the piece in so much as they were bodies whose presence would affect other bodies. As already stated, this is not to claim the body as a site of truth (the modernist claim to pure presence), or choreography as isolated from bodily relations in established historical, political and social networks. *Practice* allowed attention to affective experience, both in the impactful relations between materials on the stage *and* between spectators and the whole situation. *Assembly*, to a degree, makes a return to the literal by creating a structure in which the spectator/performer exchange is explicitly articulated. Yet it also offers an opportunity to attend to the affective impacts of the event through this filter. We might understand the piece as working with the particular intimacies of choreography as being in and producing states of relation with bodies. Indeed, *Assembly's* experiment was to explore what assemblies of bodies might generate other than the symbolism of participation and community. By enabling freedom to attend to choreography, the piece seemed to refocus spectators' scope to engage in a given moment and, particularly in its very busy presentation in Nottingham, to explore through felt perception the impulses at work when people gather. I will consider the qualities of experience offered by this refocusing before discussing the nature of an impulse to congregate.

My attention to what was present in the performance of *Assembly* generated various textures of felt experience simultaneously. Whilst co-existent, given types of felt perception would move between being more and less dominant to my experience: from a comfortable receptiveness to quiet eruptions of self-awareness and the many detailed calibrations of encounter in between. The movement between textures of underlying and specific attention echo the evolution of forms in the piece, and in the moment of perceiving them felt like forms of knowledge; these were not experiences of contemplation, but forms of understanding the given moment by being present to it. However, I want to resist the static implication of the term 'given moment' by returning to Petra Sabisch's embrace of qualitative transformations and their effects through the term contamination, which allows for "alliances, and relations of all kinds... as *the power to assemble*" (italics in original) (2013, p.123). Sabisch notes that having articulated its method through the particular conditions it creates, choreography permits qualitative transformations that affect relations with an audience as a commitment to the experiences of participation that choreography can generate. My writing in this chapter, about attending to what was present and to given moments, falls into a methodological problem that Sabisch identifies in relation to Massumi, of thinking movement and transformational experience in static terms that deny movement its qualitative transformation (2013, p.113). The textures of experience that *Assembly* permitted are 'of movement' to the degree that transitions between them were. Where *Count Two* asked performers to notice specific characteristics about how they watch, *Assembly* invited them to attend to attention as it opened to the forms of the piece.

Towards the end of the workshops with the performers, my most repeated phrase was to 'take time', not for them to enact slowness, but to take as much time as was needed to see each other, to receive what information was needed from each other and the spectators, and to respond appropriately within the parameters of the piece. By inviting performers to take the time needed to orient themselves in relation to each other, I was hoping to instil comfort in their mutual vulnerability. By being required to attend to the details of a given moment in order to support fellow performers, participants experienced freedom from temporal projections towards particular

images or pathways. Participant Katie Coe described how “[t]he experience of performing inside the *Assembly* score and its lengthy duration, meant that I experienced a communal responsibility to and from other performers throughout. Its (the performing group’s) diverse experience also called for listening on every level and a letting go of expectation as every member found their place uniquely inside its structure.”⁴⁴ Here, freedom recalls Massumi’s “margin of manoeuvrability” that notes the potentials of a given moment (2002, p.3). The performers’ experiences of freedom in this case were based on being responsive and available to other people with whom they shared the space. Freedom was in vulnerability to others. Yet *Assembly* also provided liberty to look at other people, including strangers, in conditions that made looking non-threatening and so extended beyond what is socially typical. This would seem to be a freedom true of most theatre events, which provide conditions that permit us to look at other people. Yet we might also consider that something of the performers’ communal responsibility was experienced by spectators who knew that their presence affected the form of the piece, and that this knowledge evolved from the explanation at the piece’s entrance, to mingle with degrees of attention and relations that grew with the changing volumes of bodies sharing space.

Being Vulnerable

In *Assembly*, choreography permits the freedom to attend to affective experience in its intensities. This freedom, which is conjured by people being vulnerable to each other’s presences, must at least partly participate in the impulse to congregate across forms of theatre, social dance and public gathering. Andrew Hewitt uses the term ‘social choreography’ to denote the aesthetic as it operates at the base of social experience, describing choreography as grounded in social and political intersubjectivity (2005, pp.2-3). Hewitt is responding to a history of thinking social order that derives its ideal from the aesthetic, evident in Schiller’s view of English dance and Rousseau’s imagined winter balls. As Hewitt points out, these models engage a mimetic approach – the

⁴⁴ This quotation is taken from a feedback form all participants were invited to complete. These forms contributed to the project’s self-evaluation as part of ACE funding criteria.

dancers do not collide therefore represent harmonious social relations – with the inevitable effect of negating the spectator who can view the entire image, and denying individual dancers from knowing the totality of which they are part. The depicted integrative character is “nostalgically imagined” rather than experienced, a nostalgia that *Assembly*’s strategies of directing attention away from the mechanisms of representation seek to resist (2005, p.24). Hewitt’s interest in choreography as a practice that produces ideology through its performative potential, rather than simply provide its image, is a useful perspective through which to think *Assembly*’s operations. I am not claiming that *Assembly* produces a new social order in the way that Hewitt claims performative aesthetics are able, but that we might consider the ways in which it invites attention to immediate spaces of relation and affective impacts as indicating how our social bodies produce together in ways other than representation.

Such procedures are already at work in the gatherings of bodies in protest, a subject with a long history that has seen changed models of expression and organisation in recent years in movements like *Occupy* and the revolts included in the banner of ‘The Arab Spring’.⁴⁵ In response to these events Judith Butler has stated that the “the body “speaks” politically” in action and gesture, as action and claim, within social contexts that determine certain bodies’ voices cannot be heard (2013, p.4). She considers how assembly (and speech) reconfigure the materiality of public space and the public character of such environments (2013, p.1). Insofar as *Assembly* exercises bodies’ capacities to affect other bodies, by generating impactful relations that transform experiences of being in space, it offers an interesting filter through which to consider wider impulses to collectivity. In enclosed, institutionally supported, and temporally specific conditions, *Assembly* offers an experience of the undecidability of collective action as something that cannot translate into clear representation because it cannot

⁴⁵ The ‘Occupy Movement’ protests against economic and social inequalities. The first protest in its name began in Zucotti Park in New York City in September 2011, following which similar protests occurred in hundreds of cities globally. The protests share the characteristic of occupying public space by setting up camps.

‘The Arab Spring’ refers to a wave of civil uprisings in several Arab League countries including Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Yemen, that began in late 2010.

represent a single individual. This is counter to the criticisms levelled against the *Occupy* movement, which include its lack of formally articulated aims, intentions and strategies.⁴⁶ *Assembly* suggests that a gathering of bodies provides an experience of sharing space and time with others, and of being supported and affected by them. An impulse to gather is also an impulse to be vulnerable to each other.

I introduced the relationship between the individual and the crowd in the opening of this chapter in relation to a person's capacity for multiplicity in seeing both the individual and the collective whole to which she contributes. The difference between addressing the individual and the crowd is the distinction Dorothea von Hantelmann ascribes to the gallery and theatre respectively (discussed in Chapter One), and in response to which I articulated the gallery as hosting a dispersed crowd. *Assembly* seeks to address the individual who is part of the gallery's dispersed gathering, however, not as part of Hantelmann's agglomeration of forces that sculpt the identity of the modern subject, but as an individual, material body. Therefore, like other works Hantelmann discusses, *Assembly* uses those same conventions of the gallery to permit a different kind of engagement with the individual, less as a symbolic identity and more as affective material entity. One of the ways in which it uses those conventions of the gallery is to combine them with conventions of theatre; the division of areas for performing and watching, a separate and closed environment and elements of theatricality. The work's form determines that the individual spectator's body is always in relation with other bodies, whether a single performer or many other people watching and performing. The individual spectator is acknowledged but the piece responds to her as one of many, recalling Ridout's reading that part of the emancipation of Rancière's spectator is emancipation from community. In *Assembly*, the spectator is encouraged to temporarily disregard her symbolic identity and representative images of community, and enter into an experience of the energy and impacts generated by bodies as separate but in relation; separated yet relatable through those distances described throughout these pages as hosting criticality and

⁴⁶ Journalist John Harris, writing a largely sympathetic piece in *The Guardian* about the Occupy London Stock Exchange camp at St. Paul's Cathedral, noted "the absence of a clever exit strategy" (2012).

potential. Through her separation the individual undergoes undulating experiences of her material presence in relation to others.

Judith Butler has stated, like Rancière, that some people's bodies cannot claim a space of appearance in public life, and therefore are disabled from being seen and heard (2013). *Assembly* does not reconfigure the institutional space of the gallery, but offers choreography's ability to produce experiences of relation that privilege affective impacts within the visual appearance of its performers, via their shared, physical occupation of space and time. Its peopled gatherings do not represent protest movements, and it does not make a claim for the multitude. Rather, it is an offer for people to be vulnerable to each other, in a minor way, that generates multiple perceived experiences of relation.

In Chapter One I suggested that the risk of encountering a live performance is like that of any mediated social exchange; it's about entering an interaction with the possibility of being affected by it. The possibility of being affected by evolving forms of exchange with other people is the stuff of *Assembly*. In the introduction to this chapter I stated that the decision to invite voluntary performers into the project raised ethical considerations specific to the idea of a public and notions of participation. The piece avoids the criticisms I levelled at certain forms of participatory practice in Chapter One, by resisting operations of representation; the performers' non-professional status was not publicly announced. In extension, *Assembly's* ambivalence to everyone in the room hoped to ensure a specific image of public-ness was not communicated, but that an experience of the undecidability of a gathering *would* be generated. The perceived knowledge of these constantly shifting bodies in relation, defined any notion of a public the piece might provoke. Perhaps this is why we return to situations of performance; to experience each other as relations and appearances – to experience the potentials we generate.



Fig 12: Performers dancing in *Assembly*. Photo by Christian Kipp.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this thesis I introduced theatre spectatorship as a social experience, the operations of which are not disconnected from spectatorial relations outside of performances. I suggested that an understanding of the politics and potentials of spectatorship can be enhanced by considering what it shares with two other areas of study; the politics of appearance inherent to mechanisms of modern theatre and (and in relation with) theorisations of the relational productivity of choreography. Each of these fields has drawn on ideas from political and practical philosophy, and in this vein I considered a number of terms inherited from a line of Western philosophical thought that discuss spectatorship as connected with ideas of public value. In order to examine and expand the possibilities for understanding spectatorial exchange, I created three original choreographic works, each of which implemented different conditions for spectatorship. The respective pieces offered practice as an opportunity to research the experiences of attention involved in the live encounter (as opposed to practice as examining processes of making).

The live presentations of *Count Two*, *Practice* and *Assembly*, and my subsequent discussions of them, suggest a re-thinking and re-contextualisation of terms including 'distance', 'participation' and 'community', which widen the scope of spectatorial relations and choreography. These three terms are interrelated through the ways in relation conceptions of public value, in the strands of philosophical and political thought outlined in Chapter One, and whilst this thesis continues to work with their interweaving, it does so through propositions that their definitions might respond to, rather than prescribe, types of experience. Those elements of thought of which Rousseau is indicative in Chapter One, identify distance as space for interference between an appearance, form of behaviour or item, and its respective meaning. Distance marks separation from the knowledge of what constitutes that appearance. Rousseau's desire for a society running on cause and effect vocabularies of social behaviour sought to ensure stability, and it was a vocabulary that extended to include ideas, and images, of participation and experiences of community. However, Tracy C. Davis and Jacques Rancière are amongst thinkers writing in different fields who

identify distance as a space for critical consideration, active translation and association in relation to the entity being encountered. They name types of activity that occur in the distances Rousseau, and others, have sought to remove. The commitment of this thesis to explore what was missing from discourses about participation in particular, led to a rethinking of the notion of this conceptual distance, to which the writing of Davis and Rancière is foundational. *Count Two* chose to stage and juxtapose modes of categorisation in order to reveal that such logocentric structures of order are inherently unstable. By organising and re-organising recognisable signs, those signs garnered multiple potential meanings and consequently rendered such models of organisation as contingent. The piece highlighted the distances, or gaps, between an image and the many factors that affect how an individual interprets that image. *Count Two* engaged structures whose logic, as appropriated by figures such as Rousseau, appear to adhere to a fantasy of stability, yet enabled perception of their inherent distances and instability. The notion of gesture became significant in relation to distance, as the movement toward a not yet complete definition: the image gestures towards a meaning, but any meanings it compels are contingent on numerous contextual factors, from the series of events in which it occurs, to the associations made by the individual who encounters it. Therefore, distance hosts multiplicity. Drawing on Massumi's suggestion that our experience of movement occurs *as* perception rather than as a condition we perceive, our encounters with the fertile distances inherent to structures of organisation are experiences of knowledge.

Participation, as activity or interaction with an artwork, occurs through the experiences of knowledge and translation to which an artwork gives rise, and might involve a range of forms of behaviour. Petra Sabisch's definition of individual works of contemporary choreography as offering 'singular offers of participation' remains useful because it allows for different forms and experiences of interaction, but also permits that we might not be able to anticipate how some of those offers will be experienced. Indeed, the nature of an artwork might delimit the nature of interaction its spectators will undergo through its formal or dramaturgical elements, as outlined in relation to works by Tino Seghal and Jérôme Bel in Chapter One. The three pieces in this thesis sought to move beyond the idea of active spectatorship as demonstrative interaction.

Practice and *Assembly* in particular offered conditions through which to bypass the binary of active versus passive spectatorship, to reach a more expansive understanding of how the affective conditions of a single performance might communicate. In place of fulfilling prescribed images of participation and community, they opened spaces in which a spectator might attend to her state of being as one which is affected by being in relation with other people, other materials and other conditions of existence such as time and space. As such, and following Massumi, these works recognise how we exercise our 'being' as a condition of participation (2002). This would suggest that when we participate with artworks via distances in which we translate – distances that host multiplicity and are of movement - those distances are inherent to the event itself, rather than create a bridge to an external perspective.

By creating conditions in which spectators might attend to how they are their participation with other elements, these works constituted situations in which spectators might *discover* experiences of participation, and perhaps of community, rather than fulfil their prescribed images. *Practice* enhanced spectators' experiences of affective potentials, but also highlighted the performers' activities as a being for others. By creating conditions that encouraged a temporary disregard for past or future means of identifying self and others, it heightened the exercise of a shared vulnerability inherent to experiences of affect. These ideas were explored further in *Assembly*, which asked what an assembly of bodies can do other than serve established ideas of publicness or community. Its ambivalence towards its spectators and performers resisted operations of representation and instead created an opportunity to experience the politics of gathering as an impulse towards vulnerability. It is a proposal for community that doesn't seek to realise a prescribed ideal, but to respond to what happens when people gather. To that degree it doesn't seek to homogenise its assembly of spectators and performers in a specific image, but embraces the uncertainty with which they will be vulnerable to each other's presence. These characteristics offer an experience of community that is polyvocal and undecided, it is community as an event of participation, whose qualities of form and experience will be discovered by those who create them in the moment of their enactment.

Whilst I don't claim my reflections determine the impact these works made with and upon the people who encountered them, I do articulate the possibilities for thinking spectatorship that they open up. To this degree, through the repeated categorisations of its recognisable components, *Count Two* claimed multiplicity and distances were inherent to structural logics, and therefore embedded in those structures that seek to organise us socially. By way of *Practice*, the notion of participation was extended beyond acts of unique translation or physical involvement, and into knowledge as the perception of the thought, felt and materially entwined, inside and outside of theatres. And it was via *Assembly's* original structural relationship between performers and spectators – the merging of viewing conventions from the gallery and theatre – that ambivalence and separation became foundations for an experience of gathering as vulnerability.

In Chapter One I stated that theatre's declaration of its status as constructed, and its purpose as constructing relations, make it the most honest social place I go; something that the critical distances of theatricality permit. Our understanding of the contexts and conditions through which other people appear to us, informs how we will undergo the experience of their appearing, and theatre offers opportunities to exercise our capacities in this regard. The terms I identify as commonly used in discussions of spectatorship, and as developed from a particular path of philosophical and political thought, led me to consider the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Friedrich Schiller in relation to recent and current arts policy in the UK. All of these sources dictate a vocabulary for social relations based in representational operations and I called on Jacques Rancière's ideas of radical equality as a counterpoint. What is at stake here is the processes through which the terms listed above are employed, and ends to which they are directed. Rousseau attempts to establish definitive representational operations to achieve stability, and Rancière seeks to introduce terms of principle that will guarantee particular dynamics within formally unspecified processes. Whilst theatre spectatorship was used to facilitate aspects of both arguments, indicating its entanglement with definitions of publics, it is also a place that houses experiments with the processual systems that affect how people appear and relate. Responding to Rancière's writing, the practical works of this project developed

new experiments to explore what choreographic practice reveals about the proposition of active spectatorship, not necessarily as political emancipation, but as the production of situations of relating.

The formal innovation of *Count Two*'s replication of a trio beside itself allowed for an understanding of distances as hosting the instability of movement, leading to the proposal that theatre be understood as a gestural proposition. This was to claim that the event of performance gestures towards something not yet complete so hosts multiple and co-existent possibilities in the distance between. In extension it signalled the futility of attempts to fix individual identity to bodies, and meanings to social behaviours, when multiplicity and movement are inherent to all structures. Gaps appeared in *Count Two* in several ways; in older and newer relationships between signs and signifiers as the choreography re-organised the performed content; in the centrally staged wing; between the performers and the images they depicted; and in the differences between the details created by each trio. These distances occurred as fertile sites that hosted potential and therefore an instability of outcome. Following Peggy Phelan, they invited movement as a fundamental principle.

The active absences with which the piece ended indicated perceptive capacities beyond our named sensory limits, as spectators saw movement and bodies that were no longer present. These moments motioned forward to *Practice* and Brian Massumi's writing about our knowledge of movement *as* perception rather than through perception. Whilst these discussions extended an idea of active spectatorship beyond subjective translation and towards more fundamental principles of instability, *Count Two* was limited by its own over-explanatory nature. The didacticism of its earlier sections impeded conditions for discovery, and potential difficulty, creating some of the problems I criticised in Chapter One. Nonetheless, I argued that via its assertions of instability, *Count Two*'s spectators might have found themselves in a 'condition of liberty of play' that resists representational operations and terms of domination.

Practice created conditions that invited spectators to experience perceived knowledge of affective materiality. It answered *Count Two*'s didacticism by presenting the non-

productive virtuosity of performers working with skill towards unclear images. (Non-productivity, here, serving as the fertile uselessness that avoids clear aspiration or representation). Whilst the piece is unequivocally of theatre and theatricality, it conjures affective attention through its form as choreography. The performers' bodies did not appear as signs, but as co-constitutive of a whole situation that balanced the poetic interactions of time, space and materials (including spectators). The reframing of the performers and redistribution of the fabric, invited different qualities of attention to those materials and their capacities for appearing whilst declaring the untold potentials of what is present to a given moment.

For this reason I introduced Brian Massumi's writing about affect as hosting a margin of manoeuvrability and the felt intensity of potentials (developing my less refined identification of distances as hosting potential in *Count Two*). Attention to what was present was at least partly conjured by the fact that performers' actions did not signify beyond the event of performance. Following *Count Two*'s multiplicities and instabilities, I argue that the affective relations explored through *Practice* are an opportunity to attend to the ways we might experience spectatorial exchange within structures that are inherently unstable. Were this research to continue I would like to consider how the operation of choreography within *Practice*, as performers' bodies in relation with the entire situation, and as signifying only within the event of performance – bodies in their pure being-for-others – might be discussed in terms of pleasure. *Practice* also left scope for exploring how inviting attention to what is present might be focused into spectatorial exchange specifically, which I answer with *Assembly*.

Assembly included a structural innovation that implicated each spectator's presence in the form of the piece, and which merges aspects of theatre and gallery viewing conventions in an original form. The performer-per-spectator rule provided a relational foundation to the ebb and flow of bodies in motion. The work's ambivalence towards the identities of its performers and spectators focused viewers' attention towards the qualities of affective relation in the room, and resisted representational operations. Consequently, spectatorial experience of choreography emerged gradually through the

intimacies and affective experiences generated by bodies in relation. These relations were mostly those of a collective, and another outcome of the work's resistance to representation was the undecidability of collective action that cannot clearly translate into singular meaning. Where *Count Two* identified that bodies cannot signify singular meanings, *Assembly* discovered the same about the crowd and the spaces it can generate. Instead, assemblies of bodies provide an experience of sharing space and time with others, via an impulse to be affected by, or vulnerable to, each other. Following the opportunity that *Practice* provided to attend to the affective exchanges that can occur within inherently unstable structures, I argued that *Assembly* was a chance to consider what these means of exchange might offer to the idea of collective gathering (particularly given the notion of the civic assembly, addressed for its historical relationship to theatre in Chapter One).

Whilst I have addressed possible routes of development in relation to each piece, this project as a whole raises other questions that would be valuable for developing its findings. Encounters with materiality developed throughout the three works, particularly attention to its affective potentials in *Practice* and *Assembly*. Judith Butler reminds us that public spaces are also material, and materially claimed and delineated by crowds who gather. What could the effects of these experiments in attention to materiality be on the performativity of social choreography that Andrew Hewitt identifies? Perhaps the answer lies in the hopefulness that Massumi locates in affective potential, perhaps public bodies' attention to their affective exchanges will impart hope. If this research were to continue, this relationship between the potentials of affective relations and performativity of public gatherings would be an interesting path to pursue. Additionally, within the chapter about *Practice* I refer to the work's poetic coherence and choreography as offering fields of appearance as thought, felt and physically enmeshed intensities. It would be interesting to pursue such expressions in the field of poetics as acts of giving form to the interplay of material and immaterial content.

Following my summary of Rancière's 'emancipated spectator' in Chapter One I asked: if spectatorship is our normal condition why do we go to theatre? The choreographic

works of this project answer with the 'singular offers of participation' they extended to spectators. The uncertainties born of *Count Two's* replications and repetitions marked the instability inherent to all structures, signalling the futility of forms of social organisation that seek to prescribe meanings to spectatorial exchange. The affective relations investigated through *Practice's* embrace of the thought, felt and materially endured, provided an opportunity to attend to the ways we might experience spectatorial exchange within unstable structures, as attention to what is present. In turn, *Assembly* explored what those qualities of exchange might reveal about the notion of the collective, to suggest an impulse for shared vulnerability that transforms the image of the civic assembly. These pieces provided a chance to explore *how* relations are experienced, *as* unstable relations, *through* our many perceptive capacities. They reach beyond the binary of the active and passive to permit spectatorial experiences of choreography as a 'being-for-others'. What choreography offers to discourses about spectatorship, is the production of situations of generative relating.

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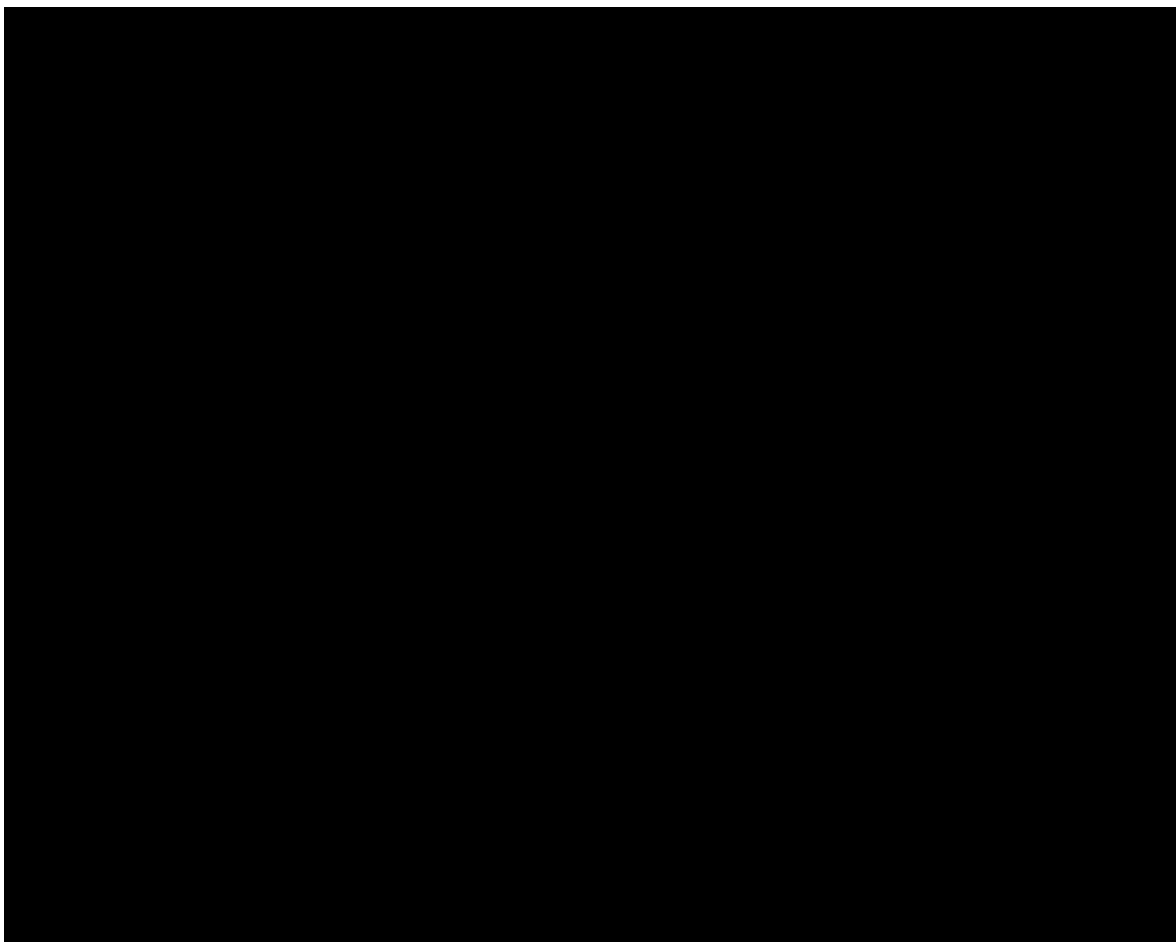
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Appendix 1

Email flier for *Count Two*:



Programme notes distributed to audience members for *Count Two*:

Count Two

By Nicola Conibere

Co-created with, and performed by: Gerard Bell, Antje Hildebrandt, Tim Jeeves, Helka Kaski, Elena Koukoli and Steffi Sachsenmaier.

Design by Mamoru Iriguchi

In ***Count Two*** six performers playfully depict a series of recognisable actions and images within a shifting spectacular framework. Through replication, repetition and re-categorisation, the values we might associate with these moments are unsettled in a lively process of evoking and shifting meaning.

Appendix 2

Email flier for *Practice*:

practice

Thursday 26 April
7.30pm

Laban Theatre
Creekside
London
SE8 3DZ

Booking
+44 (0)20 8463 0100
www.trinitylaban.ac.uk/labanthatre

Tickets
£12 (£8 concessions)

Travel
Bus
47 53 89 177 188 225 453
Rail
Deptford, Greenwich
DLR
Cutty Sark, Greenwich
Parking available

by Nicola Conibere
Lucille Acevedo-Jones, Neil Callaghan, Mamoru Iriguchi,
Helka Kaski, Elena Koukoli

Practice is an intimate exploration into what makes bodies look familiar or strange. Through elaborate costume, peculiar interactions and useless dance two performers create states spanning the quiet, curious and carefree.

As they perform, the fabric that dresses them is reconstructed into a set that surrounds them in a striking transformation of theatrical frame. Practice playfully confuses the forms of display that tell us who a body is.

Practice is co-produced by Jardin d'Europe in partnership with Southbank Centre and Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, with the support of the Culture Programme of the European Union. Supported by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

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Education and Culture DG
Culture Programme



LOTTERY FUNDED

Programme notes distributed to audience members for *Practice*:

Practice is an intimate exploration into what makes bodies look familiar or strange. Through elaborate costume, peculiar interactions and useless dance two performers create states spanning the quiet, curious and carefree. As they perform, the fabric that dresses them is reconstructed into a set that surrounds them in a striking transformation of theatrical frame. *Practice* playfully confuses the forms of display that tell us who a body is.

Concept/Choreography: Nicola Conibere

Performers/Choreography: Neil Callaghan, Helka Kaski

Choreography Assistant: Elena Koukoli

Lighting Design/Production: Mamoru Iriguchi

Technician / Stage Manager: Nao Nagai


Costume: Lucille Acevedo-Jones

Sound Design: Duncan MacLeod

Appendix 3

Email flier for *Assembly*:

assembly





Premiere
Saturday 16 March
2-5pm

Nottingham
Contemporary
Weekday Cross
Nottingham
NG1 2GB

Booking
No booking required
Limited capacity

Tickets
FREE

Presented as part of
Nottdance Festival 2013
www.dance4.co.uk


 **ARTS COUNCIL**
ENGLAND

By Nicola Conibere

Assembly is a live gallery work exploring shifts in relation between individual and collective bodies. Its configurations respond to the presence of spectators in a quiet investigation of how other people can appear to us.

Assembly acknowledges each spectator's unique presence without asking them to do more than watch; each time a spectator enters the gallery a performer will join the performance, leaving it when the same spectator departs the room. These groupings of constant variation ensure there are always as many people presenting as viewing.

Performers appear in a range of simple, sometimes strange formations as the work explores how our regard for others can be practised.

Produced by Dance4. Supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

Photo by Lucy Cash and Ole Birkeland.

www.nicolaconibere.com

Gallery wall text for *Assembly*:

Assembly is a live gallery work exploring shifts in relation between individual and collective bodies. Its changing configurations respond to those who come to see it; each time a spectator enters the gallery a performer will join the performance, leaving it when the same spectator departs the room, creating groupings of constant variation. For this reason, the performance has limited capacity, and you may need to wait for a short while before entering.

DVD Documentation

