

The Politics of Participatory Performance:

Capitalism and Identity

Volume 1 of 1

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Abstract

This thesis is located within the discourse of contemporary, participatory performance. It explores the relationship between neoliberal capitalism and identity, and its adjunct community, to consider the extent to which participatory performance might challenge the individualistic aspects of the neoliberal ideology. The thesis questions what it means to participate in capitalist democracy in the contemporary moment, interrogates how one might exercise participatory agency both within and outside the theatre space and contemplates the function of participatory performance in a period of democratic discontent. I argue that the case-studies contribute to creating communities of individuals thinking about how to develop capitalist democracy in a more egalitarian direction.

The thesis primarily employs close performance analysis of nine case-studies that all occurred in the period 2013-2014. These analyses occur across three chapters that each address a differing form of participation. Chapter One considers the significance of the re-presentation of performer acts of participation within demarcated theatre spaces, challenging the concept of the successfully, aspiring neoliberal identity. Chapter Two focuses on acts of audience participation invited within conventional theatre auditoriums to defamiliarise one's motivations for acting or not. And Chapter Three centres on immersive performance experiences in which the audience member becomes the art object, inviting them to recognise their indebtedness to others. The thread that coheres this broad cross-section of participatory performance practices is their desire to use the act of participation and the platform of performance to reconceive of what it means to do politics by using artistic and cultural means.

Collectively, the case-studies advocate the need for continued co-operation with others and the on-going co-creation of meaning, which eliminates knowing, outcome and end-result, to challenge instrumental understandings of political progress. The thesis conclusion asserts this point by considering the shared theatrical techniques employed across the case-studies that destabilise binary modes of thinking to enhance their ethico-political potential. It also reflects on this argument in light of the election of a majority Conservative (neoliberal) government in 2015.

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Introduction

This thesis offers a cultural materialist reading of three types of participatory theatre and performance practices that took place in 2013 and 2014, focusing on the question of what it means to participate in capitalist democracy. The case-studies all share the ideological function of problematizing and renegotiating the relationship between neoliberal individualism, democracy, identity and community, despite divergent differences in form and content. The thesis explores the significance of this shared project in light of broader, cynical critical commentary in the field of participatory performance that suggests that such works serve only to bolster the inequalities of neoliberal capitalism and promote its individualistic socio-cultural narrative. The case-studies that follow trouble this dominant interpretation of participatory performance by challenging the individualistic hegemony and acting as rehearsal grounds for conceiving of alternative, more egalitarian ways of living that recognise one's indebtedness to others. Collectively, I argue that the case-studies highlight how leftist, participatory theatre artists are using their professions to contribute to the creation of political communities of individuals capable of recognising their mutual responsibility for enhancing the freedoms of all citizens and ability to become producers and problem-solvers of our shared history.

The participatory focus of the thesis is centred on performances that involve people and their actions as material in the creation and/or completion of the work, offering three chapters containing three case-studies each. In the case-studies included in Chapter One, audience members watch performances by artists who used acts of participation in their research processes and then re-presented their acts of participation in the theatre space – one artist plays an alternative pop star role model in the music industry, one participated in a beauty pageant competition

and one entered into a dialogue with a political extremist. In Chapter Two, audience members join in with the performances and assist in their progression. And, in Chapter Three, audience members participate to such a degree that the performances would exist only as inactivated, artistic frameworks in their absence. In other words, the audience members are the performance, participating in the absence of other performers and/or improvising along with the performer[s] throughout.

The thesis primarily employs close and detailed performance analysis, whilst also making reference to qualitative interviews with the theatre-makers of the performances, where possible, to ascertain the intentions behind the work. This approach is employed to provide the reader with a firm grasp of the performances owing to the lack of published and/or recorded versions of the work and in recognition of how the improvisatory and participatory aspects of the performances can produce differing outcomes and follow differing trajectories. The introductions to each of the chapters offer in-depth literature reviews on the varying forms of participatory performance discussed. These reviews draw on different writers and theorists as a consequence of the range of debates that characterise the field and the array of types of participation it addresses. In the case-study analyses I also draw on expertise from a range of disciplines as a consequence of their variances in theme and content. The theoretical debates and perspectives considered are united by two disciplines: sociology, and its understanding that human action is shaped by social relationships, institutions and cultural practices; and psychology and its study of motivation, emotion and social behaviour. The use of these perspectives facilitates the in-depth analysis and helps to expand upon and place the argument of each chapter in distinction to current debates around participatory performance.

Chapter summaries are provided at the close of this introduction. However, each chapter begins with a fuller mapping of the theoretical debates that inform its argument. To reiterate, my central thesis is that there is a body of participatory performance using the form to reconceive of what it means to do politics and problematize how a more accountable and socially responsible version of capitalist democracy might be advanced within the limitations of the present moment.

The thesis engages with the performances discussed from within the period that they were produced and performed, rather than offering retrospective reflection and assessment of the issues contained therein. As will become apparent, endeavouring to think through, and theorise within, the contemporary moment is a precarious and volatile process that often eludes definitive conclusions. However, the value of this approach is that it provides an up-to-date account of participatory performance practices and allows for a contemporary engagement with the impetuses fuelling the performances as they grapple with, and respond to, issues within the present moment. The openness of this approach is also designed to share echoes with the way the performances promote contingent co-created meanings and collaboration, rather than aspiring towards a problematically fixed sense of what a 'better' and more 'equal' future might look like. The case-studies do offer an interim interpretation of a more egalitarian future. However, they also acknowledge that political communities can never be fully inclusive. This means that the pursuit of a 'better' and more 'equal' future must be open to dialogue, change and development. As Chantal Mouffe states, 'forms of agreement can be reached, but they are always partial and provisional since consensus is by necessity based upon acts of exclusion' (1991: 70). The openness of the methodological approach that characterises the thesis is therefore intended to avoid limiting the on-going

processes of interpretation, dialogue and development advocated by the performances.

It is also worth noting that in the chapters that follow the reader may discern a somewhat reckless optimism. Throughout the thesis I recognise and celebrate the wilful endeavour of the performances to enliven and inspire audience members to reorient their relationship to others and the world, think about how we might live alternatively within capitalist democracy and, consequently, contribute to reshaping the characteristics of that socio-political order from within. This approach identifies with Jill Dolan's concept of utopian performatives, which she refers to as profound, hopeful moments in performance that contain the potential to invite audience members to consider their obligations to "humankind" (2005: 2). Dolan states that this process persuades audience members that beyond the "now" of material oppression and unequal power relations lives a future that might be different, one whose potential we can feel as we're seared by the promise of a present that gestures toward a better later' (2005: 7). I am not ignorant of the naïve and idealistic aspects of this standpoint, nor am I suggesting that the performances act as a panacea for neoliberal individualism. However, in similarity to Dolan, I believe in the capability of theatre and performance to expand frontiers of perception and unsettle hegemonic beliefs. Thus, in what follows, I pursue the hopeful project of thinking about how participatory performance might contribute to developing the political consciousness of its audience members and, thereby, facilitate their potential to instigate change. I argue that this socio-political prospect resides in the collective synergy of the performances and the stance they occupy within a wider network of alterity and resistance.

The case-studies across the thesis re-conceive of how politics might be done and one's civic duty exercised through one's daily actions, choices, narratives and lived experience of the world. The performances use the act of being together, and their participatory endeavours, to establish and rethink the idea of political community. Chapter One evidences performers engaging politically through their professions as they advertise their assumption of their social responsibility and advocate that audience members assume a similar stance. Chapter Two enhances the democratic freedoms of audience members for rethinking the neoliberal, individualistic stance by defamiliarising the societal structures that deceptively shape and direct citizen acts of participation. And Chapter Three posits audience members within participatory acts that confront them with their personal politics through their engagement with arts and culture asking what their actions deny or grant others. Collectively, the chapters aim to identify a 'richer' mode of existence that recognises and embraces the social ties and societal obligations we already share to consider how we might conceive of alternative futures in a period of discontent (Taylor, 1991: 74). As Kenneth Gergen states, 'if we can come to appreciate the reality of relationship, we will be in a position to transform society' (2009: 27).

Key Terms

Before embarking on the introduction proper, I here offer a brief discussion of the key terms used throughout the thesis clarifying their varying interpretations and summarising their relationship to the core aspects of the study. The central concern of this thesis is how the neoliberal version of capitalist democracy might be rebalanced. In this thesis democracy refers to a system of government where representatives elected by the populace make decisions on the latter's behalf. In turn, it is intended that the public will hold their electives accountable. This

understanding of democracy is explicitly considered in Chapter Two since one of the case-studies analysed deals with political choice and the electoral voting system and another questions the morals of current governmental policy. However, the term democracy also evokes a range of principles and ideal conditions associated with a democratic version of society. These include equality, radical inclusivity, tolerance and the need for the on-going definition of, and debate regarding, issues of common concern. This usage of the term dominates in what follows underlying the thesis' consideration about how a more accountable version of capitalist democracy might be developed and democratic modes of thought and action implemented. As Mohamed Rabie states, democracy 'is not a stable state of political affairs; it is rather an evolving socio-political process that affects and is affected by the dominant values and attitudes of people and their worldviews, as well as by the prevailing economic conditions in society' (2013: 77).

Capitalist democracy refers to the relationship between the democratic political system and the capitalist economic system that characterises the socio-political milieu. As will be discussed in relation to Rabie's political theories, the need to rebalance the relationship between these two forms of resource allocation arises since they are based on conflicting values; the latter focuses on production for profit and productivity and the former social need (Streeck, 2013: 265). The issue is particularly salient as a consequence of the political and economic practice of neoliberalism that has characterised and dominated capitalist democracy since 1980s. Neoliberalism takes the capitalist emphasis on production for profit to the extreme in the interests of ensuring the conditions for capital accumulation continue to grow. Neoliberalism produces desire, as opposed to satisfying need, and is characterised by the increasing liberation of individual entrepreneurial freedoms,

personal responsibility, deregulation, privatisation, free markets and free trade. Colin Crouch states that the dominant theme in neoliberalism is an understanding that

free markets in which individuals maximize their material interests provide the best means for satisfying human aspirations, and that markets are in particular to be preferred over states and politics, which are at best inefficient and at worse threats to freedom.

(2011: vii)

Crouch here emphasises how neoliberalism is ostensibly designed to more effectively spread wealth to all than institutional politics and allow for the democratic allocation of goods and services. However, it has conversely contributed to the creation of a society that promotes inequality and exclusivity through an individualistic outlook that is neglectful of issues of common concern. David Harvey even goes so far as to suggest that 'neoliberal theorists are [...] profoundly suspicious of democracy. Governance by majority rule is seen as a potential threat to individual rights and constitutional liberties. [...] Neoliberals therefore tend to favour governance by experts and elites' (2007: 66). When the authorial discourse in the field uses the term capitalist democracy it generally refers to this concept of neoliberal capitalism indicating how its tenets have become hegemonic, represent the common sense way to view the world and dominate over state political power, the issue of social need and democratic values and actions. In other words, neoliberalism is a political project and ideology not just an economic system. The focus throughout the thesis is on considering the impact of the ideology of neoliberal capitalism on identity, behaviour, citizenship and the afore-discussed democratic principles.

Citizenship is also a core focus in what follows, specifically social citizenship and one's ethical obligation to involve oneself in public debate about the ideological constitution of society, as will be discussed in relation to Thomas Marshall and Mouffe below. The thesis conceives of citizenship as a process of acting and thinking premised upon making self-aware and critical choices in the public realm. The case-studies in Chapter One address the extent to which citizenship has become a superficial, disempowered status tied to consumerism and in Chapter Two the issues of citizenship, political rights and institutions and the specularity of society come to the fore in case-studies that address governmental politics and the mediated image. However, the shared emphasis throughout all of the case-studies, foregrounded in Chapter Three, is on recognising the sociological aspects of citizenship and the political significance of allowing performers and audience members to conflict and/or identify with divergent subject positions through participatory acts. As Helen Nicholson states, the 'construction of an active, participant citizenship lies in experiencing moral dilemmas, inhabiting different narratives and examining life from a range of perspectives' (2005: 36). Overall, the case-studies focus on citizenship as a mode of public activity related to social responsibility exploring the potential civil society has to take over state competencies.

The above points bring to the fore the issue of community. The use of the term throughout the thesis does not refer to a totalizing and homogenizing version of the concept that subordinates the individual to the collective. Rather, the thesis conceives of community as a common bond located in the public sphere and shared between a diverse range of individuals, as will be theorised in relation to Mouffe's understanding of radical democratic citizenship. The concept of community in this

thesis is, therefore, based on an understanding that the individual and the community are in a dialectical relationship whereby each is a condition for the other (Young, 1986: 8). The term is also used to refer to those who share in a common activity. Chapter One addresses the communities that participatory performance artists are entering into and why, Chapter Two looks at how the theatre space can problematize notions of community and Chapter Three considers how the theatre space might create a shared sense of community between self and others. The emphasis across the case-studies is on using the theatre space to create diverse communities of individuals all thinking about their citizenship obligations and whether and how to do politics in day to day life.

Participation is the final term necessary to discuss and is the issue that unites the considerations of democracy, neoliberalism, citizenship and community throughout the thesis. As indicated at the beginning of the introduction the participatory focus of the thesis is centred on performances that involve human action in the creation and/or completion of the work. This includes the participation of performers in projects occurring outside the theatre space and the physical actions and dialogue of audience members invited to become aesthetic material in the creation of the work. Spectatorial participation is also considered in what follows. The focus across the case-studies is on opening up a dialogue between participation in the theatre space and participatory citizenship, with an emphasis on what it means to participate politically and socially. Throughout, I also conceive of participation as integrally related to issues of consequence and as a state of being, not just, or always, a form of action. I argue that the case-studies use the act of participation to contribute to evolving understandings of identity, citizenship and community in the hope of impacting on the relationship between neoliberal capitalism and democracy.

Theoretical framework: Re-balancing capitalist democracy

The body of discourse in which this thesis is embedded recognises that the individualistic and inequitable aspects of the neoliberal version of capitalist democracy constitute the common sense way to perceive self and society. This stance promotes a self-serving, succeed on your own terms mentality that eradicates an understanding of one's citizenship obligations to others and the public sphere, resulting in social inequalities. In other words, neoliberal society promotes a privatised, egocentric concept of identity that only advances the interests of those with economic and social capital, dissolves one's social responsibility to others and corrodes any common bond that might lead to the development of society in the interests of all by all. There is, therefore, a significant need to counteract the excesses of the individualistic perspective to advance a more equitable socio-political order. The case-studies that follow engage with this process by using the participatory form to consider how the individualistic concept of identity might be re-conceived.

The political framework and argument that the thesis offers is grounded within a body of discourse that argues for the possibility of transforming the inequitable aspects of neoliberal capitalism from the inside out. Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history thesis' highlights the necessity of considerations regarding the re-balancing of the relationship between capitalism and democracy. Fukuyama's essay announces the triumph of 'an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism' and the arrival of a 'post-ideological' world (1989: 1). Fukuyama expands on this initial point in his book-length publication *The End of History and the Last Man*, arguing that liberal democracy and its relationship with capitalism will be the culmination of the 'greater part of humanity' (1992: xii). Fukuyama therefore suggests that capitalist

democracy marks an end point in socio-political organisation from which there is no need for change. However, his publication also makes the strong assumption that the world has reached, or will reach, a point of universal equal recognition when the reality of this idea is far from full implementation, even within long-standing liberal democratic countries in the West. *Freedom House*, a U.S. based NGO dedicated to 'the expansion of freedom around the world' emphasises this point in their 2015 report. The study, which considers the condition of global political rights and civil liberties, states 'acceptance of democracy as the world's dominant form of government – and of an international system built on democratic ideals – is under greater threat than at any point in the last 25 years' (Puddington, 2015: 1). This is a reductive overview but serves to evidence global discontent with capitalist democracy and the need to consider how the system functions, in whose interests and whether and how it might be nuanced and developed if it is to be the dominant socio-political order. My reading of the case-studies that follow situates them as part of this discontent and developmental exploration.

Explorations regarding the inequalities that neoliberal capitalism fosters are common place in the field of political science. This thesis situates itself alongside this body of work sharing resonance with Rabie's analysis in *Saving Capitalism and Democracy*. Rabie's concern is specifically with the neoliberal aspects of capitalist democracy, not capitalist democracy per se. Rabie traces the historical development of the capitalist regime from the post-war period through the neoliberalism of the 1980s and beyond, highlighting how this particular configuration of the markets results in individualistic behaviour with human interests subordinated to economic imperatives. Rabie offers persuasive analysis to argue that the increasing deregulation of the market economy and lack of intervention by the state has

created, and continues to create, the conditions for growing inequalities, oligarch rule, mass exploitation, unequal opportunity, increasing income and wealth gaps and a lack of social solidarity. His intention is not to make claims for radical alternatives to capitalist democracy but emphasise how capitalism and democracy represent two conflicting socio-political orders, one based on production for private profit and the other social provision, in the interests of conceiving of a more socially responsible version of capitalist democracy that could prevail with positive effects for the common good. Rabie advocates that the free market system be abandoned, state intervention implemented and global communication widened by 'thinking globally and acting locally' (2013: 126). He states, 'with state involvement capitalism can be an efficient and socially responsible institution – creating jobs and wealth and caring for workers and communities' (Rabie, 2013: 46). In sum, Rabie articulates how the financial crisis has resulted in a social crisis, hypothesises how violence and revolution might be avoided in such circumstances and the relationship between the individualistic aspects of neoliberal capitalism and the egalitarian ethos of democracy rebalanced.

The necessity of taking critical action from within the present political context is recognised by the case-studies that follow since they work within a neoliberal framework to critique and subvert it. The case-studies recognise the impossibility of absencing oneself from one's ideological environment and so invite individuated acts of participation. However, they do so in the interests of advancing its inequitable aspects and performing a socially responsible concept of identity into being. As Terry Eagleton states, 'a radically different future must not only be desirable but feasible; and to be feasible, it has to be anchored in the realities of the present. It cannot just be dropped into the present from some political outer space' (2011: 69).

The performances that follow make strategic use of the individualistic standpoint to advance the possibility of re-shaping the individualistic aspects of the neoliberal ideology from within and introduce alternative conceptions of identity that recognise one's social obligations to others and the public sphere. This focus also recognises how reconceiving of social relationships and the actions of individual citizens might be a necessary precursor to the rebalancing of capitalist democracy; a preliminary step that political theorists such as Rabie fail to recognise in their focus on economic and policy changes.

Crouch's publication *The Strange Non-Death of Neoliberalism* affirms the necessity that the transformation of capitalist democracy must begin at a citizen level. Crouch takes an historical overview of capitalist democracy to argue that governments can only honour either the regime of capitalism or the regime of democracy at any one time, with the balance shifting back and forth when discontent arises. Crouch identifies that the balance between these two conflicting orders of social provision currently sides with the neoliberal concept of capitalism, to the detriment of democracy and the political power of citizens. However, contra Rabie, Crouch argues that increased state intervention will not address the social inequalities of the free market economy since corporations exert growing political power and authority over the government to create monetary and environmental policies that ensure conditions that allow privatised wealth to grow. Crouch, therefore, contends that redressing the inequalities of the free market economy and influencing the development of society resides largely with citizens who have the ability to directly target, expose and influence large corporations to exert corporate social responsibility. He states:

Civil society will be stronger the more the state and the giant firm are challenged by churches, voluntary organizations, professions and other participants in the fragmented world of values – and required to participate in a pluralist dialogue that escapes their control.

(Crouch, 2011: 175)

Crouch also argues that civic action taken in the public realm of daily life has the potential to effect greater change than actions taken intermittently within the governmental political system since the ‘energy and dynamism’ of the political system and its ‘innovative capacity has moved to other spheres’ (Crouch in *thebalancebeam*, 2011). This post-democratic stance is dealt with quite specifically in Chapter Two in an analysis of Ontroerend Goed’s *Fight Night*, with reference to the presumed apathy of the electorate and the system of representational democracy. But, Crouch’s perspective has resonance across the thesis since the case-studies that follow highlight the possibility of doing politics in alternative spheres by emphasising the potential for arts and culture to contribute to the development of citizens’ political consciousness. However, since this focus emphasises how indirect and individual actions, centred on the assumption of one’s social responsibility, have a significant role to play in the bottom up transformation of society, the case-studies also advance Crouch’s focus on the necessity of direct, corporate-based acts of group activism for regulating neoliberalism’s excesses.

The focus so far in this discussion has been on the extent to which the case-studies can be situated alongside those theorists who occupy a fairly moderate central-leftist stance. However, in their considerations about how the excesses of the neoliberal version of capitalist democracy might be rebalanced, the authorial

discourse discussed has absorbed many of the tenets regarding what a socialist future might look like. Harvey's definition of socialism in *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism* references the regulation of capitalism that Rabie's *Saving Capitalism and Democracy* discusses. Harvey states:

Socialism aims to democratically manage and regulate capitalism in ways that claim its excesses and redistribute its benefits for the common good. It is about spreading the wealth around through progressive taxation arrangements while basic needs –such as education, health care and even housing – are provided by the state out of reach of market forces.

(2011: 224)

Socialist perspectives also act as a useful yardstick for measuring the extent to which steps being taken within the present moment move towards a leftist evolution of capitalist democracy that emphasises the common good over private interest. In *The Enigma of Capital and the Crisis of Capitalism* Harvey also makes the salient point that the question of what kind of society we want cannot be divorced from the social relations we pursue, the life we desire and lead and how we behave (2011, 282). It is this point that the case-studies acknowledge in their focus on the potential for social relations to advance the inequitable and individualistic aspects of neoliberal capitalism. The performances provide the opportunity for participants to act out alternative identities, problematize alternative modes of behaviour, make a moral commitment to exercise their social responsibility and recognise how one's significance is rooted within the wider culture that surrounds them. Thus, although the case-studies that follow offer a critique that does not break with the existing state

of affairs they share resonance with, and draw on, socialist perspectives in their considerations regarding how capitalist democracy might be rebalanced.

Performance, citizenship and identity

The thinkers discussed so far in this introduction mainly offer economic and structural hypotheses about how capitalist democracy might be developed or overturned. I, therefore, turn now to those publications that deal more directly with issues of identity and citizenship. Marshall offers the first point of reference for thinkers engaging with the debates surrounding citizenship. Marshall divides citizenship into three parts – civil, political and social. Civil citizenship refers to the right to individual freedoms, such as liberty, the right to own property and the right to justice. His concept of political citizenship refers to the right to participate in ‘the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political authority or as an elector of the members of such a body’ (Marshall, 1950: 149). And his concept of social citizenship refers to the right to economic welfare and security and the right to share in one’s social and cultural heritage and live a ‘civilised’ existence ‘according to the standards prevailing in society’ (Marshall, 1950: 149). For Marshall, writing in 1950 post World War Two and the implementation of the welfare system, social citizenship was the pinnacle of citizenship rights and marked a final stage of development that saw the inequalities of the capitalist system subordinated to social justice.

Marshall’s perspective has its limitations since he conceives of civil, political and social citizenship in a problematically fixed developmental trajectory. This approach fails to recognise the instability of capitalist democracy, as discussed by Crouch, and the likelihood for the ethically-minded practice of social citizenship to

wax and wane. His understanding of citizenship is also limited in its scope, considering the growing array of citizenships that have developed with globalisation, and he has been criticised for his failure to account for issues of gender and race.¹ Nonetheless, Marshall's taxonomy is of significance to this thesis since it emphasises the extent to which citizenship is an evolving and historically contingent concept and highlights the extent to which civil citizenship dominates in neoliberal society.

Marshall argues that civic citizenship grew with capitalism through the development of rights that conferred 'the legal capacity to strive for the things one would like to possess but do[es] not guarantee the possession of any of them' (1950: 151). This understanding of civil citizenship is redolent of the current state of neoliberal capitalism and the inequalities that the relationship between democracy and a privatised, free market economy promotes. This was apparent, during the period researched, with the coalition government's promotion of the 'Aspiration Nation' and introduction of the Big Society.² This agenda allowed individuals to effect change in their local and regional areas stating that it aimed 'to put more power and opportunity into people's hands' and achieve 'fairness and opportunity for all' (Government, n.d.: 1). However, the governmental cuts to the public sector put public services and jobs under threat and privatised facilities that ensured equal access to education, welfare and culture. Consequently, the Big Society asked volunteers to do governmental work without the necessary support widening the

¹ More recent concepts of citizenship range from ecological citizenship to European and global citizenship, many of which are explored in Van Steenberg, B. (ed.) (1994) *The Condition of Citizenship*. Los Angeles: Sage.

² I appreciate that the recent election has resulted in a majority Conservative government. However, the case-studies discussed throughout this thesis were created and performed ahead of the election and, I argue, responded to the individualistic aspects of identity endorsed by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition.

economic and educational gulf between rich and poor as it continued to focus on the accumulation of capital. Claire Bishop states:

The social inclusion agenda is therefore less about repairing the social bond than a mission to enable all members of society to be self-administering fully functioning consumers who do not rely on the Welfare state and who can cope with a deregulated, privatised world.

(2012: 14)

Marshall's taxonomy of citizenship, thus, acts as a useful point of reference for highlighting the extent to which the Conservative led coalition government was defined by a socially negligent concept of citizenship that focused on profit over people. And this is a stance likely to proliferate with the recent election of a majority Conservative government emphasising the need for catalysts that might reassert the democratic principles of social equality.

The case-studies assume this task by defamiliarising and counteracting the self-perpetuating structures within capitalist democracy that limit the participatory freedoms of individuals to affect change and contribute to the development of the shared political community. Nikolas Rose articulates this need in his publication *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood*, expanding on Crouch's earlier argument that liberal democracy is enmeshed in the enterprising aspects of the neoliberal capitalist ideology to such a degree that citizen autonomy is limited by the free market. Rose states:

Citizens now are no longer thought to need instruction by "political" authorities as to how to conduct themselves and regulate their everyday existence. We

can now be governed through the choices that we will ourselves make, under the guidance of culture and cognitive authorities, in the space of regulated freedom, in our individual search for happiness, self-esteem, and self-actualization, for the fulfilment of our autonomous selves.

(1998: 166)

Rose here highlights that neoliberalism endures since its political agenda correlates with an individualistic regime of the self, which citizens pursue through consumer choice as a necessary precursor to affirm the significance of their being. In other words, citizen participation is being directed into disempowering, self-serving and superficial pursuits. This process, therefore, limits citizens' capabilities for asserting their agency to change the conditions of their existence. The case-studies demonstrate this understanding in both form and content to advance a concept of citizenship as a collective undertaking premised upon the contribution individual citizens make to public life. In this conception of citizenship individual rights are not dominant but nor is the individual sacrificed to a uniform collective. Rather, these two perspectives sit in a relationship with each other with individual idiosyncrasies and political agency supported by and founded in the contribution one makes to the shared, collective constitution of society.

Mouffe's theory of radical democratic citizenship usefully articulates this possibility. Mouffe conceives of citizenship as a balance between the individualistic and private interests of the libertarian concept of selfhood and the homogenising communitarian view of citizenship which sacrifices the rights of the individual. Mouffe's radical democratic citizen occupies a middle ground in which the individual makes private choices tempered by a shared democratic discourse that promotes

liberty and equality for all. In other words, Mouffe conceives of citizenship as an act founded between public and private and based on a shared, common language of civil intercourse that influences the codes of conduct individuals choose for themselves. She states that the language of civil intercourse

prescribes norms of conduct to be subscribed to in seeking self-chosen satisfactions and in performing self-chosen actions. The identification with those rules of civil intercourse creates a common political identity among persons otherwise engaged in many different enterprises. This modern form of political community is held together not by a substantive idea of common good but by a common bond, a public concern.

(Mouffe, 1991: 77)

Mouffe's concept of citizenship, therefore, rebalances the dominance of the liberal, instrumental promotion of self-interest by conceiving of an ethical bond between citizens founded on public-spiritedness, civic activity and political participation. For Mouffe, citizenship is not just about legal status but is a continually evolving political identity that extends into all aspects of social life and makes a commitment to 'struggle for the deepening of the democratic revolution' and the creation of a more equitable society (1991: 81). The significance of Mouffe's perspective to the thesis is that it recognises and affirms the possibility of acting in the interests of self and other, the extent to which political citizenship can be conceived of in social activity and the possibility that the case-studies that follow are expressing, responding and contributing to a process of global democratic discontent.

Nationally and globally, social inequalities have been prompting displays of democratic discontent. The Arab Spring in 2010 inspired pro-democracy advocates

worldwide, in countries already considered as democratic, in those attempting to transition to democracy and in others wanting to overthrow the political power of the ruling elite. In 2011 the Syrian civil war, student fees protests and the Occupy Movement, which took hold in countries across the world, all began. And 2014 marked the beginning of conflicts in Hungary and Ukraine, as well Hong Kong's campaign for a democratic government not limited by China's screening of candidates. The full outcome of the protests, conflicts and uprisings has yet to emerge.³ Nevertheless, they demonstrate citizen discontent, the active participation of citizens in political (with a small p) matters, how citizens are amassing to express their personal political standpoints through varying means, often outside sanctioned modes of political participation, and the possibility of ongoing change. As Alain Badiou states, the revolts in the 'Arab countries are opening a sequence, by leaving their own context undecided. They are stirring up and altering historical possibilities [...] the meaning which their initial victories will retrospectively assume will in large part determine the meaning of our future' (2012: 38). I argue that the case-studies that follow are discrete, arts-based manifestations of these overt acts of protest offering an alternative and complementary platform for broadening the communities of individuals reflecting on the concepts of citizenship, community and democracy in light of the current democratic discontent.⁴

³ The student fees protest resulted in a cap on tuition fees in Northern Ireland and Wales, whilst they still rose in England. And there has been mixed opinion about the impact of the Occupy Movement. As Tom Watson states, 'a year ago, Occupy seemed to rise up out of nowhere. A year later, the impact of that action still echoes – even if the lasting change envisioned by some of those who marched has become a footnote' (Watson, 2012). By the end of 2014 Tunisia demonstrated the possibility of achieving its democratic aims via a non-violent revolution that resulted in the creation of a constituent assembly, a new collation and the election of Beji Caid Essebsi (Sèbe, 2014). However, this is in stark contrast with the violence and mounting death toll that has characterised the Syrian war. How the Arab Spring as a whole remains to unfold is yet to be established (Bonino, 2013).

⁴ Discrete in the sense that they are primarily aesthetically engaged practices contained to a certain degree by the theatrical framework, whereas the protests referred to are publically foregrounded and widely reported on mass acts.

It is, however, questionable as to whether the framed reality of the performance experience limits the opportunity for audience members to act as radical democratic citizens by failing to provide space for a conflict of opinions to arise. Dissonance and conflict are integral aspects of Mouffe's concept of radical democratic citizenship since the creation of a shared political community, comprised of differing groups of individuals wanting different things, can never be fully inclusive. Mouffe emphasises how liberty and equality will always be open to competing interpretations necessitating a lack of reconciliation that can prevent moral relativism and ensure on-going debate about the development of the shared political community. Chapter One's case-studies do not invite audience acts of participation, verbal or physical. Chapter Two's consciously limit the participatory agency of their audience members in the interests of mirroring and exposing the ideological limitations to audience acts of participation that occur outside the theatre space. And Chapter Three's case-studies each play on the expectation that audience members will go along with the ethos of their performances and their participatory requirements, even if they hold conflicting viewpoints or desires. These approaches are a significant aspect of how the performances offer perspectives dissonant to the status quo, raise questions about democratic politics and challenge the individualistic hegemony. However, they rely on audience members playing along with the premise of the performances, and conforming to the roles that have been created for them, potentially limiting the opportunity for conflict to arise and be positively channelled within the performances themselves. Thus, questioning the efficacy of each performance's participatory acts through the politics of form and considering the extent to which they might be capable of contributing to the creation of radical democratic citizens is an important consideration in what follows.

The case-studies that follow do, however, make strategic use of the theatre space to contribute to understandings about how a radical democratic concept of citizenship might be nurtured and developed. This occurs through the corporeal aspects of affectivity. Thompson cites Chris Healy to argue that affect refers to “a certain intensity of sensual, emotional and embodied experience” that contains the potential to position ‘people in relation to their wider social and sensory context’ (2009: 119 & 8). This understanding of affect emphasises the enhanced potential for participatory performance to invite audience members into a felt process of emotional bonding that might motivate them to assume their citizenship obligations (2006: 231). This process is magnified to a greater extent in the case-studies discussed in Chapter Three since they engage much more with the sensory aspects of affect that Healy mentions. However, all of the performances that follow invite their audience members and participants into contained experiences that unfix or affirm one’s sense of self as a consequence of their participatory acts. The result is an emotional and ethical confrontation with the contribution they make to the egalitarian development of capitalist democracy, or not. As John Shotter states, ‘joint action can create feelings in which one’s obligations can be rooted and the re-imagination of the shared circumstances of humankind located’ (1993: 131). Thus, the heightened affective capabilities of participatory performance have a core role to play in fostering the ‘common bond’, defining issues of ‘common concern’ and highlighting the necessity that citizens assume their social responsibility and contribute to the continued development of civil society.

Contributing to the field of participatory performance

Bishop’s (2012) publication *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, Gareth White’s (2013) publication *Audience Participation in Theatre:*

Aesthetics of the Invitation and Josephine Machon's (2013) publication *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance* are key contributors to the field of participatory performance. Bishop focuses on socially engaged participatory art through the avant-garde of the twentieth century, discussing the hierarchical tensions over authorship and the emancipatory, aesthetic and political limitations of the work. White focuses on the procedures through which the act of participation is invited in varying participatory theatre practices ranging from contemporary new writing to TIE projects. White isolates and examines what becomes aesthetic material when audience members take action and the kind of outcomes expected, conceiving of audience participation as an act of performance and as material to be manipulated by the artist. And Machon charts the rise of the immersive theatre phenomenon, discusses its varying forms and details their common characteristics, as well as offering a range of interviews with theatre makers on the subject. This thesis is indebted to, and expands on, the arguments in these publications but offers a unique contribution in its focus on what it means to participate in the current neoliberal version of capitalist democracy, consideration of how one might exercise citizen empowerment through the act of participation and exploration of the ways in which participatory performance might be contributing and responding to the current democratic crisis. This thesis also makes a conscious choice to compile the examples that follow to address artists who are infrequently, if at all, discussed in the emergent body of literature on participatory performance, and Chapter One offers a unique contribution to the field in its discussion of performer acts of participation. Each chapter also provides an insight into performances, as

yet, unfeatured in the literature on contemporary, participatory performance practice.⁵

Chapter overviews

Chapter One predominantly focuses on performer acts of participation and their uses of the demarcated theatre space for sharing their research processes. The form of participation discussed has yet to be theorised in the body of published work in the field of contemporary theatre and performance. There is, therefore, no directly established body of theatre scholarship to form the basis of this chapter. The acts of participation discussed do, however, share resonance with, and are framed by, Thompson's conception of Action Research, as related to the participatory processes of the applied theatre realm and the potential theatre provides to explore personal and group narratives. Thompson conceives of theatre as a research process based on 'interactions on the ground' stating that 'theatre can become a serious research method that allows a community to analyse, present and actively set their own agenda for change' (2003: 148 & 168). Thompson's concept offers a useful framework for considering how the performers in Chapter One use their bodies to identify the impact of the individualistic mentality on identity and use their participatory research processes, and the act of performance, to critically examine and rewrite their personal narratives demonstrating how one might self-realise in the interests of others.

⁵ At the beginning of May 2015, and since writing, a new special edition of *CTR* on Electoral Theatre has been published. In an article entitled 'Beyond the Zero-Sum Game: Participation and the Optics of Opting' James Frieze offers an engaging and excellently apt analysis of *Fight Night*, which shares strong resonance with the discussion of the performance offered in Chapter Two of this thesis. While the special issue is not focused on participatory theatre, it is necessary to acknowledge this exception to the lack of critical attention the remainder of the following case-studies have received.

The three case-studies discussed in Chapter One are Bryony Kimmings' (2013b) *Credible Likeable Superstar Role Model (CLSRM)*, Victoria Melody's (2013) *Major Tom*, and Chris Thorpe's (2014b) *Confirmation*. The analysis of *CLSRM* draws on the discourse of psychology, specifically the work of Gergen, and Hans-Thies Lehmann's postdramatic theory. The argument in *Major Tom* draws on feminist theory and Rose's debates on citizenship and consumerism and in *Confirmation* I draw on communications theory. The distinct bodies of theory and debate employed across the case-studies are united by a central concern with social relations and the discipline of sociology. This framework allows for an investigation into the way in which the case-studies explore how one might remake self *and* other and challenge the hegemony of the individualistic neoliberal perspective. I argue that the case-studies focus on the act of endeavour, presenting in progress identities, to invite audience members into new ways of seeing, acting and thinking.

Chapter Two considers audience acts of participation occurring in demarcated theatre spaces that offer a more equal equation of participation between performers and audience members. The performance scholars drawn on in Chapter Two focus on the relationship between audience member and theatre maker to critique the extent to which the egalitarian claims of participatory performance are realised in practice. These include Christina Deloglu, Helen Freshwater, Adrian Kear, Bishop and White. I contribute to the development of the arguments offered by these theorists by highlighting how the case-studies that follow consciously exert varying degrees of control over audience members to replicate, expose and challenge the structural and ideological limitations imposed on citizen acts of participation outside the theatre space. The three case-studies discussed are Ontroerend Goed's (2013) *Fight Night*, Made in China's (2013) *Gym Party* and Gob Squad's (2013) *Gob*

Squad's Kitchen (You've Never Had it So Good). The analysis of *Fight Night* draws on the field of political science and the analysis of *Gym Party* draws on Lehmann's postdramatic politics of perception, alongside the discipline of psychology. The analysis of *Gob Squad's Kitchen (You've Never Had it So Good)* shares in a consideration of Lehmann's postdramatic theory but also leans on Charles Guignon's theories regarding existential philosophy. These differing analytical positions relate to each other through their shared focus on group behaviour, emotions and the psychology of being. The significance of this framework is that it allows for an investigation into how theatre-based participatory acts can question what it means to act both within and outside the theatre space and contribute to a process of consciousness raising that might enhance audience members participatory freedoms for effecting change. I argue that the case-studies consciously rely on theatrical convention to evaluate the efficacy of the relationship between activity and participation and passivity and non-participation, whilst also exploring the role of the individual within the collective.

Chapter Three focuses on performances in which the audience members constitute the art object.⁶ The participatory focus of Chapter Three is on challenging the current debates surrounding immersive performance, which argue that the form primarily bolsters the narcissistic pursuit of experience. The theatre scholars engaged with include Adam Alston, Josephine Machon, Wouter Hillaert, Maria Chatzichristodoulou, Rachel Zerihan and White. The case-studies discussed are Analogue's (2014) *Re-Enactments*, Rosana Cade's (2013c) *Walking: Holding* and

⁶ I acknowledge that the performance-makers maintain a greater knowledge about how the performances will unfold throughout each of the chapters. This is actually a core aspect of Chapter Two, which purposefully seeks to exert control over audience members. However, I refer here to the increase in audience participation from one case-study to the next and across the chapters, resulting in decreasing levels of knowledge by the performance-makers about what will unfold in these moments of participation.

Adrian Howells' (2013) *Unburden (Saying the Unsaid)*. In *Re-Enactments* I draw on post-structural thinkers such as Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard as well as trauma studies. The analysis of *Walking: Holding* draws on queer theory and the analysis of *Unburden (Saying the Unsaid)* employs the anthropology of Victor Turner alongside Guignon's existential philosophy, as mentioned above. The disciplines of developmental psychology and psychotherapy unite the differing theoretical approaches considered across the case-studies and allow for an investigation into how the case-studies perform a relational and socially response-able concept of identity into being and, with it, a more egalitarian socio-political order.⁷ As Fred Newman and Lois Holzman state, we 'perform our way into cultural and societal adaption' (1997: 129). I argue that the performances blur the boundary between art and life inviting audience members into 'as if', embodied performance experiences. The process confronts audience members with the consequences of their personal choices and actions and allows them to dialogically and/or kinaesthetically work through their ethical obligations to others. The emphasis throughout is on recognising the co-constitution of identity and co-creation of meaning and knowledge.

Alternative politics

To reiterate, the original contribution of this thesis is located in its consideration about how participatory performance is responding to the current democratic crisis. I argue that the case-studies are exploring what it means to participate in capitalist democracy and are questioning how a bottom-up

⁷ The term response-able here refers to Hans-Thies Lehmann's '*aesthetic of responsibility (or response-ability)*', which refers to the idea that theatre contains the potential to counter the apathy inducing aspects of the mediated image, as well as Guy Debord's (1983) concept of the *Society of the Spectacle*, by mutually implicating audience members in the production and reception of the work (2006: 185 emphasis in the original). This point is returned to in more detail throughout the main body of the thesis.

transformation of capitalist democracy might be effected, in some small measure, through cultural means demonstrating and offering alternative ways to do politics outside of the electoral system. This possibility lies in the contribution the performances make to a network of social, political and cultural activities all working towards social change, and the idea that contributing to the development of the political consciousness of increasing numbers of individuals might gradually alter the social identity of capitalist democracy as a whole, from the inside out.

Chapter One: Sharing and Caring

There must be a way of scanning or X-raying the present which shows up a certain future as a potential within it. Otherwise, you will simply succeed in making people desire fruitlessly.

(Eagleton, 2011: 69)

This chapter focuses on acts of participation carried out by performers. In the three case-studies discussed, I analyse how the performers are using their professions to advertise the possibility of self-actualising in the interests of others thereby contributing to the development of our shared socio-cultural narrative. The analyses of these acts of participation are framed by James Thompson's concept of action research and sociological understandings regarding selfhood and the relationship between citizenship and the marketplace. The three case-studies discussed are Bryony Kimmings' (2013b) *Credible Likeable Superstar Role Model (CLSRM)*, Victoria Melody's (2013) *Major Tom*, and Chris Thorpe's (2014b) *Confirmation*.

In each of the performances the performers participate in an activity in the world outside the theatre space, either in the interests of making a performance (*Major Tom* and *Confirmation*) or utilising performance as an accompaniment to a wider social project (*Credible Likeable Superstar Role Model*). In each case-study the performers begin with a discussion about why they chose to participate in the activities that characterised their research processes. The performances then progress through a chronological discussion of each performer's experiences as they participated, and conclude with a discussion about the outcomes of the performers' acts of participation to date. In *CLSRM*, audiences learn that Kimmings is using her profession as an artist to embody an alternative pop star role model for young

people; one who counters the commodification and sexualisation of the music industry. In *Major Tom*, Melody entered into the Mrs Galaxy UK Beauty Pageant experiencing how competition and consumer culture construct, impose and endorse the concept of beauty, ubiquitously objectifying all. And, in *Confirmation*, Thorpe entered into a dialogue with a political extremist allowing him to experience the difficulties of challenging one's confirmation bias and the problematic realities of acknowledging controversial, political viewpoints.⁸ I argue that the performers across the case-studies all employ the neoliberal concept of personal responsibility and utilise the platform of performance to showcase the possibility of remaking one's sense of self and other and the contradictory socio-political order of capitalist democracy from within.

Thompson's concept of Action Research offers a useful way to frame the acts of participation this chapter is centred on, which have yet to be considered in the discourse on participatory performance. Thompson's concept advocates the use of body and speech for critically examining a range of social conditions through 'living, breathing and moving action' that 'occup[ies] the ground' (2003: 161 & 148).

Thompson argues that the concept of Action Research has the potential to raise awareness about how personal and group narratives are created and, in turn, the possibilities we have open to us for determining their shape. He states, theatre as research demonstrates how our 'lives are constructed from raw action material but also how we have the power to use that material in the positive recreation of new actions and narratives' (2003: 163). The performers in the case-studies that follow evidence this point since they explore the production of identity in capitalist democracy through the recreation of their personal narratives. They then,

⁸ Confirmation bias refers to a process whereby one biasedly focuses on evidence that only affirms the viewpoints one already holds. The concept is explained in the analysis of *Confirmation*.

subsequently, re-present their acts of participation in demarcated theatre spaces, commenting on their experiences to invite wider considerations about how the inequalities propagated by neoliberal capitalism might be recreated. As Thompson states, 'recreated action inevitably exists as a new activity that reworks and provides a particular commentary on that which it seeks to represent' (2003: 152).

The relationship between the participatory acts of the performers and the theatre space invites a consideration about the political efficacy of the performances and the relationship between the framed reality of the theatre space and the world outside it. Thompson's concept of action research conceives of theatre as a mode of action and political doing, a perspective influenced by his focus on the applied theatre realm and the opportunity it provides for participants to problematize and work through issues of personal and community concern. The creations of the performances that follow are premised on a similar mode of political doing.

CLSRM's social campaign positions an alternative role model in the mainstream music industry. In the research process for *Major Tom*, Melody entered into a beauty pageant and dog show competitions allowing her to deconstruct the relationship between competition, success and the marketplace. And the research process for *Confirmation* saw Thorpe engage in an act of political doing by conversing with a political extremist and challenging his political perspective. The significance of bringing these acts of political doing into the theatre space is that they disturb presumed boundaries between the categories of applied theatre, and its engagement with the 'real life' narratives of participants in 'real world' spaces, and 'traditional' theatre practices occurring in demarcated theatre auditoriums, associated with aesthetic enjoyment and representational pretence. This blurring of the boundaries in the performances between the 'real world' and the framed reality of

the theatre space prevents the issues and concerns the performances raise from being easily dismissed as fictional hypotheses. Put differently, the case-studies evidence that at least one young person desires an alternative role model to the sexualised and commodified role models currently available in the mediatised music industry, that citizens are being objectified by the cult of self-presentation and that capitalist democracy is defined by political intolerance. The significance of this approach is that the case-studies varyingly declare 'look what I did about the role models offered for young people, the objectification of women, the demonization of political extremists and the creation of an inclusive and radical political community', thereby, insinuating the question 'what are you doing?' of their audience members. Thus, by 'occupying the ground', the case-studies that follow present audience members with acts of participation that exceed the framed reality of the theatre space, evidence the possibility for individuals to effect change through their lived experience of the world and confront audience members with contemplating the contribution they are making to social change.

At the forefront of *CLSRM* and *Major Tom* are questions surrounding gender politics and *Confirmation* focuses on the issue of consensus politics. However, they each share a central concern about how identity is formed, lived and understood in the current neoliberal conception of capitalist democracy. As discussed in the introduction to the thesis, neoliberalism advocates the market-place over political institutions for promoting equal opportunities and the advancement of all. Consequently, the practice of citizenship is defined by an individualistic focus narrowing the concept of social or civic responsibility. David Prior, John Stewart and Kieron Walsh explain how the marketplace has transformed the concept of citizenship as follows:

There is no place for the specification of necessary obligations towards fellow citizens, either as individuals or collectively. Individuals only owe obligations to the community if they choose to place themselves under such obligations. Indeed, the logic of this approach is that, far from being obliged to support or assist each other, citizens compete with each other in their various consumer identities for high quality services and limited public resources. Despite the apparent equity of the market process, in which all participate as free and equal individuals, citizens bring to the market very unequal resources of money, skills, and knowledge. Inevitably, some succeed in realising their choices while others fail.

(1995: 16)

Prior, Stewart and Walsh here emphasise how the correlation between what citizens pay in the marketplace and the instantaneous and direct benefits they achieve as a result diminishes citizen desire to contribute to issues of common concern and the advancement of liberty and equality amongst all individuals. Put differently, neoliberalism has transformed the citizen into a self-gratifying consumer uninterested in acts of participation that offer only gradual and indirect benefits to the self.

This focus refers back to Nikolas Rose's points, included in the introduction to the thesis, regarding how consumer choice is an integral aspect of how citizens are self-governed by the individualistic mentality of the neoliberal ideology. Rose states that 'consumer choice can be aligned with macroeconomic objectives and business advantage: economic life can be governed and entrepreneurial aspirations realized, through the choices consumers make in their quest to fulfil themselves' (1998: 162). Rose here argues that consumer choice is an integral aspect of how citizens are

self-governed by the neoliberal ideology acting upon themselves to self-improve, achieve their personal goals and the way of life they desire. Rose's understanding of the mode of citizenship advanced by the 'neoliberal vocabulary of enterprise' then is that it offers only a regulated form of autonomy, lacks political agency and allows the governing body to absolve itself of its social responsibility to the public who no longer hold the actions of their governing representatives accountable. The case-studies that follow harness the neoliberal focus on self-actualisation and personal self-improvement to showcase the potential for individuals to become socially responsible and find their sense of significance outside the marketplace and in the contribution they make to issues of shared public concern. To a certain degree this stance aligns with the economic and political objectives of the neoliberal ideology but does so in the interests of countering the duplicitous freedoms it offers, creating new choices for self-definition, promoting tolerance and empowering citizens to engage in direct acts of political doing in the absence of a socially responsible governing body. The actions of the performers in the case-studies, thus, offer a mode of citizenship alternative to the individualistic hegemony enhancing the possibility for democratic debate to occur. As Chantal Mouffe states, 'a democratic system requires the availability of [...] contending forms of citizenship identification. They provide the terrain in which passions can be mobilized around democratic objectives' (2000: 104).

This understanding comes to the fore in the performers' discussions regarding the development of their personal narratives. Initially the performers highlight how their personal narratives were defined by a self-interested focus prior to the production of the performances. They then share how they chose to place themselves under obligation to others in the interests of addressing issues of shared

public concern and contributing to the development of the political community. In *CLSRM*, Kimmings initially details how she was defined by her narcissistic self-obsession. However, she then evidences how she assumed a sense of social responsibility by choosing to embody the role-model her niece desired and create a performance that invites audience members to consider their social responsibility to the future of the next generation. In *Major Tom*, Melody offers narrative and footage that indicates how she initially conformed to a superficial, consumption based model of citizenship throughout her research process. However, during the performance she critically comments on filmed footage of this process performing an act of social responsibility by providing alternative ways for audience members to self-identify. And, in *Confirmation*, Thorpe assumes a sense of social responsibility by recognising the need to problematize how political equality might be negotiated after sharing how his dialogue with Glen exposed the pious superiority he granted his political perspective. The performances that follow, thus, challenge the individualistic concept of the citizen as consumer by demonstrating and promoting a sense of social responsibility that thinks outside the self and enhances the conditions of equality for all. If as Colin Crouch, Klaus Eder and Damian Tambini state, the 'new triumph of the market over citizenship has become the most important feature of social politics at the *fin de siècle*' (2001: 11), this is a necessary and vital step in the transformation of capitalist democracy.

The case-studies also challenge the neoliberal failure to assume responsibility for the common condition through a process of doubling. In *CLSRM*, audience members are introduced to both Houchen and Kimmings who echo each other's younger and older selves. This idea is primarily produced through the use of costumes. Across the performance both Kimmings and Houchen wear the same

outfits, including breeches, knight's armour and fairy-tale dresses. This use of costume invites varying interpretations ranging from the idea that Houchen will become like Kimmings, that Kimmings is tutoring a younger version of herself and widening the opportunities for her development, or that Houchen is being tutored by an older version of herself with similar intents. The opening of the performance foregrounds this developmental narrative when Kimmings and Houchen both perform the same sexualised dance routine. Houchen's gauche, awkward movements contrast with Kimmings' practiced presentation creating the idea that Houchen's movements will become similarly conditioned over time to act out the sexualised and objectified female identity if no alternatives are offered. However it is interpreted, the doubled identity here functions to defamiliarise the overt sexualisation and commodification of female identities in the music industry setting up a relationship between Kimmings and Houchen that foreshadows multiple possibilities about what could come to pass for the future of the next generation. It therefore invites audience members to consider the possibilities that ought to be available for female identities, the role they can choose to play in the creation of alternative futures for the next generation and how these potentials might be implemented.

The doubled identity in *Major Tom* is created through Melody's use of the theatre space to construct an 'ordinary' self who talks directly to the audience about her married life and the absurdity of beauty pageants and competitive dog shows. This 'ordinary' self contrasts with her poised, beauty queen perversion of self who has a competitive drive to win the Mrs Galaxy UK Beauty Pageant competition. The doubled identity in this instance is focused on the present moment and the different conceptions of the self open to Melody and others caught up in the cult of self-

presentation. Melody shows how the correlation between image, success and self-worth supports the concept of citizen as consumer since purchasing goods and services to improve her image invited positive and affirming responses that seduced her to want to spend more and be a better, prettier, winning version of herself. Simultaneously, Melody also details the personal idiosyncrasies and imperfections associated with her 'ordinary' self that limited her beauty queen potential acting out an open, good-natured and humorous self-identity premised on the celebration of failure. The process of doubling in *Major Tom*, therefore, defamiliarises how the values of neoliberalism and the behaviours characteristic of the marketplace play a core role in the formation of selfhood, whilst also highlighting how one might define oneself alternatively and opening up a dialogue about the extent to which one can reclaim one's subjectivity from the cult of self-presentation.

In *Confirmation* the process of doubling comes to the fore with the introduction of Thorpe's version of Glen to audience members. Glen acts as Thorpe's political alter ego, destabilising Thorpe's political identity through an exploration of the biases that affirm the stability of one's worldview. Thorpe's act of giving voice to an ostracised, political identity defamiliarises the intolerance of the moderate liberal perspective by detailing how Thorpe initially believed his political beliefs to be more valid than Glen's, dialoguing with him only to convince him to change his perspective. However, as the performance progresses, Thorpe shares how he realised the piousness of his stance since it refused to allow a multiplicity of perspectives to co-exist and contrasted with his proclaimed liberal beliefs. As Mohamed Rabie states, for people to be 'tolerant and democratic, they have to accept the right of others to be different [...] [and] realize that their own beliefs and values are an expression of their own choices, not of a universal ideology that others

must follow' (2013: 96). Thorpe also highlights how Glen's interest in the dialogue was initially premised on a similar goal and outcome, but spanned a similar trajectory. And throughout the performance Thorpe plays Glen meaning it is often unclear as to whether Thorpe is speaking as Glen or as himself. The ambiguity created by Thorpe and Glen's similarities and the double role Thorpe plays also poses a challenge to each audience member's confirmation bias inviting them to reconcile if, and how, they might incorporate the "other" into their individualised, personal worldviews and re-define their sense of self through inclusive, tolerant and democratic ways of thinking. Overall, if, as Cornelius Castoriadis states, 'for people to participate, they must have the conviction, constantly corroborated, that their participation or their abstention will make a difference' (1991: 167), the acts of doubling in the case-studies offer an insight into the relationship between what is and what could be that plays a core role in exposing the inequalities that the neoliberal ideology imposes on identity and citizenship, whilst also evidencing that the self is not a coherent, fixed entity and change is possible, however infinitesimal. The significance of this understanding is that each case-study's act of doubling invites audience members to engage in thoughtful reflection about the issues raised and think about whether and how they might define themselves alternatively to the individualistic tradition and assume their social citizenship obligations.

Another technique employed by the case-studies to challenge the neoliberal hegemony and its focus on personal gain is their failure to conform to its preoccupation with competition, aspiration and success. As Sara Jane Bailes states, the capitalist ideology's preferred aspiration is 'to achieve, succeed, or win' (2011: 2). Kimmings created *CLSRM* even though she acknowledges that the social campaign it is part of will not change the landscape of the music industry overnight. Melody

acknowledges that *Major Tom* cannot eradicate the correlation of the relationship between image, success and self-worth, only subvert it. And, in *Confirmation*, Thorpe admits that his dialogue with a political extremist could not counter his confirmation bias and ensure political tolerance and the inclusion of extremists within capitalist democracy. Each of the performers, therefore, highlights how immediate and certain success was not a pre-requisite for their participation in their research processes, endeavouring despite knowing that their ambitions to affect the successful, comprehensive transformation of the socio-political order would fail. However, if, as Bailes states, 'the failure of a task opens that which once appeared coherent and secure to the hazardous ruminations of unpredictability and incomprehensibility', the case-studies' emphases on the process of endeavour over result plays a core role in challenging the perpetuation of neoliberal capitalism's individualistic futurity (2011: 23).

This process does, however, evoke a problematic heroic rhetoric that correlates with the sense of personal responsibility propounded by the Big Society and the idea of the 'aspiration nation'. These policies make the case that the power to create change is in the hands of individuals who refuse to be victims of their social circumstances and recognise their unlimited potentials to achieve and succeed if willing to work long and hard enough. The performers' acts of endeavouring in the face of adversity conform to this premise creating a sense of virtuousness and moral superiority about their actions.⁹ And although their actions highlight how assuming one's personal responsibility has the potential to abate the negative influence of the neoliberal ideology on identity, citizenship and inequality, such interventions also

⁹ This occurs more in *CLSRM* than *Major Tom* and *Confirmation* since the latter place a greater emphasis on their failings and deconstructing their piousness; but, the premise still underlies each performance.

limit the necessity for structural change at an institutional level. As Thomas Marshall succinctly stated as early as 1950 'statutory and voluntary effort [...] abate[s] the nuisance of poverty without disturbing the pattern of inequality' (1950: 153). In other words, if citizens deal successfully with the symptomatic inequalities imposed by the neoliberal ideology there is less imperative for their eradication. In one sense then the performances' emphases on process, the personal narratives of the performers and the possibility open to individuals to create change politically empowers. But in another they bolster the inequalities of the socio-political order that they endeavour to critique. The case-studies, thus, inhabit a catch-22 that foregrounds the difficult realities of challenging the neoliberal hegemony despite hoping to subvert its tenets, undermine the individualistic concept of identity and invite audience members to consider who and what is denied by the individualist tradition.

CLSRM is the first of the case-studies to be analysed, followed by *Major Tom* and *Confirmation*. Although each of the performances shares a central common concern, they also offer differing contributions to the chapter. Kimmings' acts of participation in *CLSRM* endeavour to challenge the commodification and the sexualisation of female role models in the music industry from within, thereby, exploring the potential for activist, interventionist performance to target the inequalities of neoliberal capitalism at their root cause. *Major Tom* complements *CLSRM* by considering how performance might function to subvert the consequences of the internalisation of the relationship between image, success and self-worth if attempts to address the issue at root cause fail. *Confirmation* shifts focus in its more explicit consideration of the relationship between identity and the conflict of interests between neoliberal capitalism and democracy. *Confirmation* acknowledges the controversial reality that if society is to progress in a more

politically egalitarian direction there is a need for those on opposite ends of the political spectrum to adjust to each other's seemingly irreconcilable perspectives. Thorpe's dialogue with a political extremist is an experiment that explores this possibility, latterly using the platform of performance to invite audience members into the process; albeit, at a step removed.

Before embarking on the analyses, it is also necessary to note that while the emphasis in this chapter is on the performers' acts of participation and the implications of their activities for audience engagement, audience acts of participation also feature. *CLSRM* invites audience members to perform the dance routine to one of Bennett's songs, from within their seats in the theatre auditorium. *Major Tom* contains no such element of participation.¹⁰ And *Confirmation* invites audience members to vocally contribute their own thoughts in one section of the performance and, on several occasions, read from cue cards. The acts of participation that occur are also considered in what follows. To reiterate, I argue that, in varying guises, Melody, Kimmings and Thorpe co-opt the neoliberal concept of personal responsibility to demonstrate and subvert the individualistic aspects of the neoliberal ideology and contribute to the development of a socially responsible mode of citizenship that might shift capitalist democracy in a more democratic direction.

¹⁰ The reversed order of *CLSRM* and *Major Tom* deviates from the incremental increase of audience participation as the thesis progresses but is justified according to *CLSRM*'s desire to challenge varying influences of the neoliberal ideology on identity at root cause and *Major Tom*'s deconstruction of the aftereffects and consequences its influences can have.

Credible Likeable Superstar Role Model

Credible Likeable Superstar Role Model (2013b) is a performance created and performed by artist Bryony Kimmings and her nine-year old niece Taylor Houchen.¹¹ The performance is one part of a wider social campaign that also involves an educational programme of school-based workshops with tweenagers (7-12 year olds), a performance called *That Catherine Bennett Show* for children and the creation of a documentary. The premise of the social campaign is to inspire self-belief in adults and children alike about the possibility of changing their experiences of the world through acts of activism.¹² I, therefore, situate the performance in the wider network of feminist performance activities that are being referred to as fourth wave feminism. Kira Cochrane of *The Guardian* stated that in 2013 ‘a new swell [of feminist activities] built up and broke through’ (2013), citing numerous movements, campaigns and publications to evidence her point. These include, but are not limited to, the *Everyday Sexism Project*, Girlguiding UK’s introduction of a campaigning and activism badge, the campaign for promoting women’s representation on bank notes and the *No More Page 3* campaign, to name but a few. I would also add to her list the 2012 creation of the online magazine *The Vagenda* and the 2011 publication of Caitlin Moran’s award winning book, *How to be a Woman*. Each of these projects endeavour to promote equality between the sexes, raising awareness through humour, public demonstration and the publication of online and print materials. There is, thus, a sense that *CLSRM* is part of a growing movement of practices

¹¹ Artist is the term Kimmings uses to refer to her varied art practice, which includes elements of performance, dance, spoken word and video.

¹² And change is happening. With significance to *CLSRM*, it is interesting to note that in 2014 LEGO introduced an all-female scientist range of characters. The 2018 LEGO movie has also publicised its intentions to include more female characters. See: <http://uk.ign.com/articles/2014/11/17/more-female-characters-to-be-included-in-the-lego-movie-2> for more details.

dedicated to advancing the visibility and celebration of women through cultural and media avenues.

Credible Likeable Superstar Role Model (CLSRM) is a performance primarily directed at adults, which takes place within a demarcated theatre setting. The performance explains the hows and whys of the project as a whole and introduces Catherine Bennett. Bennett is an alternative pop star role model who fronts the social campaign that occurs outside the theatre space. Bennett was envisioned by Houchen, produced by various music industry professionals who volunteered their services, and is performed by Kimmings. The emphasis of the project overall is to offer, and encourage the creation of, alternative role models to the sexualised and commoditised role models currently on offer for the tween age bracket in the media, with a particular focus on the role-models offered by the music industry.

As indicated in the introduction to the chapter, this focus challenges the individualism that characterises the neoliberal mentality by conceiving of a socially responsible concept of identity premised on care for the other and not care of the self. *CLSRM* foregrounds this idea in the commitment Kimmings makes to her niece and, consequently, the future possibilities offered for defining one's individual identity in, and the identity of, capitalist democracy. In other words, by offering an alternative influence for young people *CLSRM* provides the possibility for new concepts of identity to unfold, potentially contributing to the development of the social identity of capitalist democracy in the present and into the future; albeit, on an infinitesimal scale but with the potential to create a ripple effect. While the social campaign, of which *CLSRM* is only a part, deserves due attention as a whole, this analysis limits

its scope to a consideration of *CLSRM* and the role that the performance plays within the wider social campaign.¹³

The blurb for *CLSRM* describes the performance as follows:

Credible Likeable Superstar Role Model is set in a fantasy land far from our own, where lines are drawn in the sand, girls become knights, eyeballs are gouged, wars are waged and people sell their souls. In typically screwball and humorous fashion, Bryony begs the question: what does it really take to be a Credible Likeable Superstar Role Model for a child of the 21st century?

(Kimmings, 2013a: Introduction)

The set of the performance is designed to look like a magical, fairy-tale forest, commenting on the idealism of happily ever afters. The backdrop offers two sparkly trees, the tops of which spread across the stage space, with other trees painted in the background. The set never changes but the mood of the performance alters through an exaggerated use of lighting.¹⁴ Costume changes also play a role in the fairy-tale imagery that the performance employs. At first Kimmings and Houchen wear what look like childlike pant suits, as Kimmings discusses the innocence and naïveté that characterises childhood in fairytales. They later change into suits of armour during Kimmings' discussion of how she might equip her niece to fight against the potentially negative aspects of the media and the inequality of the world. And at the end of the performance they don princess dresses at Houchen's request. At this point in the performance Kimmings relinquishes control, takes a literal step back in the stage space, and a metaphorical step back from her involvement in

¹³ The specific performance here referred to occurred 24th August 2013 in the Pleasance Dome at Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

¹⁴ The exception to this rule is when Catherine Bennett is introduced to the audience since the lights come up in the auditorium to match the natural lighting depicted onstage.

Houchen's development, allowing Houchen to exit the auditorium and venture into the world outside the theatre space by herself. The lighting cuts to a blackout and the performance ends.

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Figures 1 & 2: Above, Kimmings and Houchen in princess dresses. Right, Houchen and Kimmings costumed in armour (Lowe, 2013 & Soho Theatre, 2013).

CLSRM demonstrates that the aim of the social campaign, of which it is a part, is to critique the neoliberal ideology via consumer capitalism and the influences tweenagers are invited to buy into through the media. Consumer capitalism is a core aspect of the neoliberal ideology's interlocking systems of domination since the free market has replaced democratic institutions as the space for citizens to participate, maximise their self-interest and satisfy human aspiration, as outlined earlier with reference to Rose. The result is a lack of citizen interest in public affairs and growing inequalities as a consequence of the unequal resources individuals bring to the market place. I, therefore, argue that *CLSRM*'s critique of consumer culture endeavours to challenge the competitive and self-serving aspects of the neoliberal ideology as a whole. This comes to the fore in how the alternative role model (Catherine Bennett) that *CLSRM* introduces audience members to distributes her

music for free and encourages her followers to make their own merchandise.

CLSRM also allows a child to seize the forces of production from the bottom up since Bennett was created, and is managed by, Kimmings' niece. This process challenges the neoliberal shift towards oligarch rule. There is, thus, a sense within the performance that intervening in the dynamics of consumer culture might have the potential to challenge, or at least highlight, the inequalities of the free market economy.

The performance variously focuses on the commodity culture that the media endorses and advertises, its overt sexualisation and the stereotypical gendered identities it offers demonstrating how the ideology that the media promotes is one 'inflected by the economic dominance of consumerism and its inescapable subjugations' (Kershaw, 2003: 605). Kimmings states in the performance, 'as a tween your top-selling products for 2012 were Bratz thongs, peelable nail varnish, the music and merchandise of the Pussy Cat Dolls and Stardoll, an online avatar game where you can teach your doll how to cook, clean and care' (Kimmings, 2013a: Scene 8). The popularity of the products and merchandise Kimmings discusses highlights the role consumer capitalism and popular culture play in producing an objectified, sexualised concept of what it means to be a woman, which acts as a model for female aspiration, as well as proffering limited and antiquated ideas that about the roles ascribed to the female domain.¹⁵

As a self-proclaimed feminist, the sexual objectification of women in the mediatised, music industry is Kimmings' core concern. Kimmings' concern is not

¹⁵ I acknowledge that gender inequality predates neoliberalism and issues surrounding cultural representation. I also acknowledge that women's social roles were, and are, created and sustained in multiple ways and through interlocking systems of domination. These include religion, biology, gender socialisation, educational opportunities, economics, legal rights and work place policies, to name but a few. The specificity of my focus in this instance is simply defined by *CLSRM's* approach to the issue.

unfounded since the pervasiveness of the sexual objectification of females in the music industry is affirmed by Victor Strasburger and Barbara Wilson in their discussion of music videos and MTV. They cite several studies to state:

Content analysis of 100 videos on MTV found that women are often portrayed as “bimbos” (Gow, 1993). Men are portrayed nearly twice as often but women are engaged in more sexual and subservient behaviours. [...] Music videos separate women into body parts (Jhally, 1995), just as mainstream advertising often does (Kilbourne, 1999). Consequently, the viewer sees erotic images, but not a whole person: sex without the humanity.

(Strasburger & Wilson, 2002: 293)

The implication in the breadth of studies that Strasburger and Wilson cite is that female role-models in the media offer only vacuous and limited examples of what a woman is and can be. In other words, the ‘economic dominance of consumerism’ offers only limited, ‘inescapable’, gendered concepts of identity (Kershaw, 2003: 605). The studies Strasburger and Wilson discuss are over a decade old; however, they offer the most up-to-date material of relevance to *CLSRM*’s focus on the music industry. Their points are also salient considering that the same criticisms are present in the pop stars Houchen emulates in *CLSRM*, such as Jessie J and Katy Perry. In other words, the pervasive media presence of these artists plays a dominant role in defining the successful, female identity as one who uses ‘sex to sell’.¹⁶ Thus, if, as Strasburger and Wilson state, ‘music videos seem capable of

¹⁶ The same criticisms are also exemplified by the controversy surrounding Miley Cyrus and her appearance at the MTV music awards when she ‘twerked’ onstage with teddy bears and Robin Thicke, alongside her choice to pose naked in her music video for *Wrecking Ball*. The video, consequently, received a record breaking 19.3 million views in 24 hours (Gilman, 2013). (This figure has since been beaten by Nicki Minaj’s video for *Anaconda*. Minaj received 19.6 million views on VEVO for a performance that is highly sexualised and involves twerking in a G-string (Johnson,

influencing teenagers' ideas about adult behaviour and, potentially, even modifying their own behavior' (2002: 289), Kimmings' point that tweenagers need alternative role-models and media education to challenge the sexualised and commoditised identities the mediatised image advertises is of paramount importance. This process could contribute to shaping the values of future generations and, consequently, some of the defining features of capitalist democracy as a whole.

The introduction to *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political: International Perspectives on Contemporary Performance* refers to the idea that the political potential of performance resides in formic innovations, as opposed to content and a didactic process of telling. Jerome Carroll, Karen Jürs-Munby and Steve Giles quote Hans-Thies Lehmann as follows: "The truly political dimension of theatre has its place not so much in the thematising of politically burning subject matters [...] as in the situation, the relation, the social moment which theatre as such is able to constitute" (2013: 7). The 'relation' in Lehmann's concept of political performance is relevant to the network of performance activities *CLSRM* is a part of, and the creation of a 'situation' comes into play between audience members and Kimmings and Houchen according to Gergen's concept of enchantment. Gergen defines enchantment as a process whereby one becomes bonded to another transforming the individuality of the "I" with "we", which becomes the 'major protagonist in the narrative of life, the central character to whom everything is related' (2009: 177). This mode of enchantment is evidenced in Kimmings' discussion of process when she highlights how the development of her relationship with Houchen changed her

2014).) A further point of interest in relation to Cyrus's blatant sexuality in her music performances is how she has attempted to rebrand herself through sexualised actions in a move away from her wholesome, Disney, child star image. The point of significance here is that childhood is considered a state of innocence that must be preserved, with the transition to adulthood being marked by sexual explicitness.

outlook on life. A process of enchantment is also fostered between stage and auditorium through Houchen's inclusion in the performance and its use of direct audience address. If, as Thompson states, 'seeing the face of a homeless person asks me to campaign against homelessness and a personal connection to an asylum seeker fuels a commitment to resisting the injustices of the UK's immigration laws' (2009: 165), it is possible to infer that these aspects of *CLSRM* use personal connection to create a 'situation' that invites audience members to assume a sense of ethical and social responsibility for countering the sexualised and commodified role models offered by the music industry in the interests of the next generation.

It is crucial to note that *CLSRM* is, however, also heavily didactic, speaking directly to audience members about its premise as well as engaging them with visual metaphors, which Lehmann argued above fails to contribute to the political potential of performance. *CLSRM*'s thematising of its political subject matter is designed to add credence to its message about why the social campaign was developed and the difference it is making beyond the theatre space. I argue that this process aims to motivate audience members' ethical engagements through visually striking metaphors, enjoyable entertainment and the provision of information about the possibilities open to all to challenge the limited concepts of identity endorsed by the neoliberal promotion of self-interest. This latter possibility is bolstered by the performance's discussion about the social campaign as a whole advertising how audience members can contribute to the dissemination of alternative role-models post-performance. Consequently, *CLSRM* advances a hybrid concept of political performance that combines formic innovation with a didactic process of showing and telling.

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Figure 3: The opening costumes of *Credible Likeable Superstar Role Model* (Frankovich, 2014).

In what follows, I argue that *CLSRM* utilises theatre performance as a platform for disseminating information about the social campaign of which it is a part, enchanting audience members into assuming a sense of responsibility for the future of the next generation and, thereby, countering the individualistic mentality of the neoliberal ideology. *CLSRM*'s political potential is premised upon the thematisation of its subject matter, the multiple activities of the social campaign the performance is only one part of and the social moment of the theatre space. The participatory focus of this analysis is centred on the sense of validation that Kimmings and Houchen's discussion of their research process, and participatory actions in the social campaign occurring outside the theatre space, contributes to the ethical call the performance makes. And, secondly, the way audience members are invited to participate in the wider aims and activities of the social campaign as a whole.

Sex and the media: Imagination and extremes of effect

The first half of *CLSRM* is designed to win support for the social campaign that the performance is part of by negatively portraying the sexualised female identity endorsed by media representations. This process is made apparent in *CLSRM*'s first scene when Houchen emulates the dance routine for Katy Perry's *Teenage Dreams*; used to sell Perry's music and promote her success.¹⁷ Houchen gauchely carries out the series of movements that constitute the dance, which, in itself, does not, at first, seem overtly sexualised. The realisation of how sexualised the dance actually is only comes to the fore when Kimmings moves to the back of the stage space, strips to her underwear and emulates the same dance routine that Houchen performs. The scene is disquieting to watch. Critic Daniel B. Yates states, 'Kimmings strips to her bra and begins writhing, slipping hands over legs and breasts, in a note-perfect rendition of the kind of thing that wouldn't garner a single Ofcom complaint on prime time, but here is powerful white-dot shock treatment' (Kimmings, 2013a: Future Fawns). It is in the contrast between the seemingly innocent and awkward movements of Houchen and the overtly sexual, languid movements performed by Kimmings that the performance produces the idea that the sexualised imagery of the music industry is inappropriate for tweenage viewers. If, as Judith Butler states, 'the reality of gender is itself produced as an effect of the performance' (2004: 218), this discomfort occurs since audience members watch as Houchen inscribes sexualised behaviours onto her body by copying and rehearsing the actions of others. In other words, as we watch Kimmings and Houchen dance we recognise how Houchen's sense of self is developing according to a narrow-

¹⁷ It is worth noting that the lyrics to the song refer to a ditsy female who gets the punchline of jokes incorrect and has found a man who she wants to 'go all the way' with because he thinks she's pretty without any make-up on.

minded concept of what it means to be a woman, with Kimmings demonstrating the trajectory that Houchen will follow. Consequently, it becomes apparent that the content of *CLSRM* employs extremes of affect to shock audience members into recognising the need to develop alternative female role models that do not participate in their own objectification to achieve success. As Lehmann states, 'in the age of rationalization of the ideal calculation and of the generalized rationality of the market, it falls to the theatre to deal with extremes of affect [...] offending by breaking taboos' and, consequently, provoking reaction (2006: 187).

In contemporary mediatised society there is growing concern about the theatricalisation of everyday life and its potential desensitizing effects, evidencing the need for shock tactics to highlight the limited concepts of identity endorsed by the self-serving neoliberal mentality. Baz Kershaw states:

The near ubiquitous mass media and then the new pleasure-zones of consumption theatricalize experience by turning the everyday into an immersive spectacle of increasing over-production, in which people become spectators of themselves as participants in an emergent cultural (dis)order.

(2003: 604)

Kershaw here acknowledges the emergence of the society of spectacle, attributing it to the degradation of lived experience into representation, but only in order to demonstrate how this aspect of the spectacle might be re-appropriated for activist and political use. He latterly states that 'if spectacle is everywhere in the performative society, so much so that we are constituted through it, then spectacle [...] has become a fabulously flexible force for change' (Kershaw, 2003: 593).

Kimmings employs this concept of spectacle, defamiliarising audience members'

conditioned engagements with the media, through the shock provoking images discussed, but also by discursively drawing on audience members' imaginations. In other words, contra Lehmann, *CLSRM* also marshals support for countering the fetishisation of female objectification by thematising its 'politically burning subject matter' (Carroll, Jürs-Munby & Giles, 2013: 7).

The discursive information Kimmings provides, throughout the first half of *CLSRM*, fails to recognise any positive, empowering influences in the media. Kimmings invites audience members to imagine images of ultra-thin body types, sexualised and misogynistic portrayals of women, and alcohol and drug abuse. Scene ten begins with the assertion 'today I saw' (Kimmings, 2013a: Scene 10) before Kimmings lists statements such as 'hipbone sticking out over white briefs', 'a rapper throwing dollar bills at the crotch of a young woman / And a video game character slamming a prostitute's head in the door over and over and over and over and over again' (Kimmings, 2013a: Scene 10). The lack of images in this scene functioned to recall images that I had previously viewed with little consciousness of the behaviours that they endorsed, highlighting the extent of their ubiquity and familiarity. And even if I was concerned by them I viewed them as part of a '*separate pseudoworld* that can only be looked at' (Debord, n.d.: 1), rather than giving any serious consideration to the idea that I might be able to play a role in challenging their root cause. In contrast, by imaginatively engaging with the same images, within the context of the performance, I questioned my ready ability to find examples and reconsidered my initial acquiescence to their acceptability. I was reminded of the controversy surrounding underweight fashion models when Luisel Ramos suffered a heart attack and died in 2007 during a fashion show in Uruguay; Rhianna's music video *Pour it Up* where she pulls money out of the crotch of her bejewelled bikini,

smoking a cigar and gyrating on a gold throne; the possibility for players to shoot, abuse, and run over prostitutes in the video game *Grand Theft Auto* and the 2011 documentary film *Miss Representation* which brought the underrepresentation of positive, influential role-models for young women in mainstream media into sharp relief.¹⁸ Thus, contra Lehmann's dismissal of content as politically inept, this imaginative engagement, and didactic process of telling, played a core role in countering the ubiquitous passivity Kershaw discusses as characterising the media, inviting audience members to recognise the need to counteract the fetishisation of the marketable image and support the premise of *CLSRM*.

Personal development

CLSRM evidences the possibility of re-imagining one's identity by nuancing the concept of childhood vulnerability, and its implicit connotations about the meaning of adulthood. Patti M. Valkenburg (2004) argues that this longstanding concept of childhood can be traced to the development of eighteenth century enlightenment thought. Valkenburg explains how the Renaissance philosophers believed that 'man' begins life in a good and pure state but develops according to his social and environmental influences, whether good or bad. This resulted in the classification of children as 'vulnerable creatures' who must be shielded from the ills of the world in the interests of their development and the moral integrity of the future of society (Valkenburg, 2004: 3). And this concept of childhood is still in evidence

¹⁸ More details on the documentary can be found here: <http://therepresentationproject.org/films/miss-representation/>. It is also worth noting that the film sparked the creation of *The Representation Project*, which aims to use film 'as a catalyst for cultural transformation' to inspire 'individuals and communities [not limited to women] to challenge and overcome limiting stereotypes' (The Representation Project, 2015). The project has since produced a second film called *The Mask You Live In*, which explores the issues boys and young men face as they negotiate narrow definitions of American masculinity. For more information see <http://therepresentationproject.org/films/the-mask-you-live-in/>. Ultimately, the project draws on Marian Wright Edelman's argument that 'you can't be what you can't see', quoting this very point on their website (The Representation Project, n.d.).

today if one considers Beth Bailey's point that a 2004 survey in Britain 'found that ten and eleven-year-old children rarely ventured outside, whether to play or even walk to school because both they and their parents feared that they would be kidnapped by a stranger or sexually abused' (2013: 205). The explicit suggestion here is that childhood is characterised by unadulterated innocence and is in a process of becoming, hence children's developmental vulnerability. The implicit suggestion is that in adulthood one's character is considered fully developed, with little chance of adapting or changing one's sense of self. The result is the development of a hierarchy between adults and children; the former responsible for protecting the latter by shielding them from 'adult' concerns and maintaining their ignorance for as long as possible.

The concept of the 'vulnerable child' is brought into stark relief by Operation Yew Tree, ongoing during *CLSRM's* tour. Between 2012 and 2014 information was continuously being brought forward incriminating Jimmy Saville with the sexual abuse of approximately 450 people, mainly children and vulnerable adults (Gray & Watt, 2013: 4). The extent of the abuse that Saville, who died in 2011 prior to the investigation, carried out acts to affirm fears that Beth Bailey argues have abounded since the 1980s about adult-child contact. Bailey states that 'discussions about whether children's "natural" sexual curiosity should determine the boundaries of experience were supplanted by an extraordinary suspicion of adult-child contact' (2013: 204). This point suggests that the desire to protect children from sex and adult sexuality is still paramount, with Operation Yew Tree further reinforcing this need. However, the extent of the abuse that Saville carried out also raises questions about the usefulness of educating children about sex and issues deemed 'adult', recognising their agency as individuals and protecting them through knowledge

rather than ignorance. *CLSRM* advances this understanding of childhood by conceiving of children as self-determining individuals capable of contributing to the development of society, whilst also advancing the idea that adults are capable of effecting and embodying change. As Alan Prout states, 'we live in the era of "reconstituted families", "lifelong education" and "reskilling" requiring that 'both children and adults should be seen through a multiplicity of becoming in which all are incomplete and dependent' (Prout, 2005: 67).

Kimmings discusses the development of her adult identity in the second half of *CLSRM*. Prior to the creation of *CLSRM* Kimmings' performance art had been defined by various critics as 'self-involved', conforming to the narcissistic concept of identity characteristic of neoliberal individualism (Yates, 2013: *Future Fawns*). The claims to Kimmings's initial self obsession are apparent in *Sex Idiot* (2010) and *Seven Day Drunk* (2011), the two artworks by Kimmings preceding *CLSRM*. *Sex Idiot* offers a consideration of female sexuality in the twenty-first century through Kimmings' discussion of her sex life. This exploration was prompted by the results of Kimmings' first STI test, which proved positive for sexual disease. *Sex Idiot*, therefore, has a strong autobiographical and self-referential element. *Seven Day Drunk* offers a performance made out of a laboratory research process in which Kimmings was kept in various states of drunkenness, and filmed, throughout a seven day period. The research process was born out of a niggling concern Kimmings had with regards to her alcohol consumption, which she describes as 'problematic' (Gardner, 2011). The choice to then embark on a carefully monitored scientific experiment offered the opportunity for Kimmings to consider the relationship between her drinking habits and her creative practice, as well as create material for inclusion in the performance. Lyn Gardner refers to the scientific experiment as the

most interesting aspect of the performance, which, in itself, she describes as ‘not very meaningful’ or ‘illuminating’ (Gardner, 2011). This critique and the premise of the performance again emphasises how Kimmings’ work has been interpreted as self-centred.

Kimmings acknowledges the potentially narcissistic aspect of her previous work in a witty comment during *CLSRM* when she states, ‘so, I, Bryony Kimmings, make very self-referential, autobiographical, some might say (*she puts her hand over the mic to hide her mouth.*) self-indulgent... Performance Art’ (Kimmings, 2013a: Scene 20 original emphasis). However, after making this point Kimmings continues to detail how her relationship with her niece drastically changed her priorities so that Houchen’s story, future and the development of her identity became more important than Kimmings’ self-involvement. Kimmings states during the performance, ‘this project knocked me for six because suddenly someone else’s story suddenly became more important than mine [...] She made me want to be a better citizen of the world’ (Kimmings, 2013a: Scene 20). This information emphasises how Kimmings’ identity developed through the creation of *CLSRM*, and the shared time she spent with her niece, resulting in a transformation of narrative that replaced her sense of self as an “I” with the bonded unit “we” (Gergen, 2009: 177). In other words, her identity shifted from an individualistic notion of subjecthood, characteristic of the neoliberal identity, to become defined by a sense of concern that stemmed from beyond the self. Moreover, her development was not premised on the neoliberal idea that each individual ought to seek fulfilment via the marketplace and introspection. Rather, it was premised upon discerning what was worth pursuing in the social context in which she was situated, in the interests of fostering greater freedoms for all. As Taylor states, in order to maintain, and I would suggest

advance, one's freedoms in a 'society/culture of a certain kind' one 'has to be concerned about the shape of this society/culture as a whole [...] because freedom and individual diversity can only flourish in society where there is a general recognition of their worth' (1992: 47). Kimmings, therefore, re-defined her identity through her collaboration with Houchen and an act of social responsibility. The significance of the discussion of this process in *CLSRM* is that it demonstrates how adults are in a constant state of becoming capable of contributing to the evolution of neoliberal capitalism's inequalities, and subsequently the socio-political identity of capitalist democracy as a whole, in the interests of the next generation and regardless of their actions to date.

If we now turn to a consideration of Houchen it becomes apparent that *CLSRM* also contributes to the historical development of childhood by recognising Houchen's agency as an individual. This point is foregrounded in the performance when audience members learn about Kimmings and Houchen's collaboration, and how Houchen played the integral role of creating and managing Bennett, which she continues to do. This information highlights how the social campaign that *CLSRM* is a part of recognised the validity of Houchen's opinions and ability to assume responsibility for the development of her own future. Houchen's involvement in the social campaign, therefore, challenges the notion of the 'vulnerable' child conceiving of young people as active agents of change desirous and capable of contributing to the development of society and entering into acts of collaboration to do so. *CLSRM*, thus, advances the idea that human well-being is best served by democratic acts of collaboration that validate the needs and ideas of all members of society. As Don Romesburg states, in the neoliberal world of 'tough love and austerity measures, aren't most of us ceaselessly emerging? As we chart a course through our

precarious present, our challenge is to find new ways to appreciate young people, not as victims, projects, or threats, but as collaborators' (2013: 244).

It is necessary, however, to revisit Kimmings' endorsement of the idea that her performance art was self-indulgent prior to her project with Houchen since it returns to the issue of female subjugation within the current socio-political milieu. Deirdre Heddon states that 'given the historical link between women and autobiographical performance, it might not be too cynical to suggest that the predominantly negative responses to the autobiographical form belie deeper prejudices' (2008: 4). Heddon refers here to the dominance of the patriarchy and the expectation that women lead marginalised and objectified lives, rather than demonstrating agency as speaking subjects (2008: 3). The concern this point raises, in relation to *CLSRM*, is whether Kimmings is praised, instead of criticised, for 'talk[ing] out, talk[ing] back, talk[ing] otherwise' only because she takes centre stage in the interests of another (Heddon, 2008: 3). In other words, Kimmings' agency to speak-out only has significance when conforming to the gender stereotype that women fulfil nurturing and care-giving roles. Considering this, one must question whether Kimmings critiques or propagates the subjugation of women. I would argue that Kimmings co-opts the female care-giving role with the wider purpose of encouraging the evolution of gender expectations for future generations. Certainly, Kimmings does not limit the concept of social responsibility to females since she addresses all audience members with the task of assuming this role, regardless of gender or familial relationship. She states, 'the parents among you will [...] say "Bry! The real test of selflessness, strength and nerve will come when you push out your own"/ [...] [But] I'm not sure that just parents looking out for kids is good enough anymore' (Kimmings, 2013a: Scene 20). Thus, it is not *CLSRM*'s aim to propagate

problematic gender stereotypes. Rather, Kimmings uses the skills that she has available to her, as a female performance artist, to subvert the narcissistic, capitalist identity, defined as ‘to live for yourself, not for your predecessors or posterity’ (Lasch, 1979: 5), with the intention of developing long-term, ideological change that recognises one’s historical continuity: ‘the sense of belonging to a succession of generations originating in the past and stretching into the future’ (Lasch, 1979: 5).

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this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 4: Bryony Kimmings as Catherine Bennett (SouthBank Centre, 2014).

Kimmings demonstrates her commitment to Houchen, and the social campaign that *CLSRM* is a part of, in the second half of the performance, tangibly evidencing the possibility of positing alternative identities within the self-interested neoliberal hegemony. In this section of the performance, audience members are introduced to Bennett and learn that she is performed by Kimmings. Before she appears onstage, Houchen provides a comprehensive description and biography

about Bennett.¹⁹ The details Houchen offers highlight Bennett's alternative qualities, ranging from her creation and management by Houchen, to her 'knee length skirts and [...] polo necks', description as 'a normal lady' who makes it 'OK to be silly' and the detail that she sings songs about 'animals, funny-shaped vegetables, friendship, getting out of bed and what life is like in the future' (in Kimmings, 2013a: Scene 16). This information contrasts heavily with the discussion of the fetishized, sexualised and commodity endorsing images discussed in the first half of the performance highlighting the alternative that Bennett offers to the commodified, capitalist identity.

Houchen's description is then affirmed with Kimmings' appearance on stage as Bennett. Bennett addresses the audience as if children within a school assembly and teaches them the dance to her song *Animal Kingdom*.²⁰ Kimmings then removes Bennett's wig and delivers information about the school-based workshops that the social campaign delivers, putting the audience's participatory actions in context, details the successes that the social campaign has achieved and shares her hope that more alternative role models 'crop up and culture shifts slightly in a new and more positive and diverse direction' (2013a: Scene 19). She states:

Catherine Bennett is doing alright, out in the real world, for adults. She has tens of thousands of hits on YouTube, she has been played on Radio 1, she has been on *Woman's Hour* with Taylor, she was invited to speak on the activism stage by Yoko Ono for the Meltdown festival, she has even been to

¹⁹ Kimmings has disappeared behind the set to dress as Bennett during Houchen's description. This is the first occasion that Houchen is left on stage alone.

²⁰ The actions involve a series of hand movements that create animal shapes, as well as movements one might perform when mimicking certain animals, such as a monkey. The range of animals includes a crab, deer, horse, duck, monkey, snake, giraffe and a bird. This section of the performance was delightfully fun and prompted chatter, laughs and enjoyment from the audience at the performance I attended.

parliament with Taylor to talk about why we felt we needed to create a new role model for kids Taylor's age.

(Kimmings, 2013a: Scene 19)

The significance of Bennett's presence, coupled with the didactic information offered in this section of *CLSRM*, is that it highlights that grass roots change is possible in a media-dominated age, offering a manifest example of how the dominant ideology might be destabilised. This might seem like an obvious point; but, in the absence of being introduced to Bennett *CLSRM* would offer no viable evidence to buoy audience members to the possibility of effecting change, only impotently problematizing the sexualisation of the music industry.²¹ Moreover, since Bennett's influence is reliant upon collaboration between Kimmings and Houchen, *CLSRM* promotes the idea that change will only occur through inclusive and collaborative processes that can facilitate the idea of relational being and challenge neoliberal individualism; a point that will be returned to in greater detail in Chapter Three. As Gergen states, we 'have well-worn traditions for resisting each other and terminating the flow of meaning. However, we also have an enormous reservoir of collaborative potentials awaiting congenial circumstances of expression. The challenge is to discover [...] means for unleashing the flow' (2009: 371).

²¹ It is, however, worth noting that performances that defamiliarise the dominant ideology and offer no alternative are in evidence in this thesis, particularly in Chapter Two in the analyses of *Fight Night* and *Gym Party*. It is not my intention to suggest that these performances are of lesser value since they fail to take action, merely to highlight how *CLSRM* functions differently and offers a unique contribution to this thesis in its demonstration of its activism. In Chapter Three, *Walking: Holding and Unburden (Saying the Unsaid)* borrow aspects of this approach extending it out to include audience members by offering frameworks for them to begin to take action.

Communities of thought

It is crucial now to turn to a consideration of the network of performance practices that *CLSRM* is a part of. As noted in the introduction, this network increases *CLSRM*'s potential political impact by conforming to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the 'acentred', 'nonhierarchical' rhizome (1987: 18). Guattari and Deleuze argue that this quality allows the rhizome to '*produce the unconscious, and with it new statements, different desires*' (1987: 18 original emphasis). The potential to develop a new unconscious is brought to the fore in *CLSRM*'s advertisement to audience members of the various aspects of the social campaign as a whole, providing them with the possibility of engaging with the project further. As detailed above, audience members are informed about the radio interview Bennett and Houchen did on *Woman's Hour*, their performance at Yoko Ono's Meltdown festival, the educational assemblies Bennett delivers to schools and, throughout the performance, reference is made to Bennett's YouTube and Twitter presence.²² This provision of information also provides the opportunity for audience members to introduce its premise to others, whether adults or children, increasing the dissemination of information about the project and the potential for Bennett's alternative influence to spread. Engagement with the online material advertised in *CLSRM* post-performance also highlights further aspects of the project to be explored – the music festivals that Bennett attended throughout the summer following the tour of *CLSRM*, the documentary in development and the children's performance *That Catherine Bennett Show*. *CLSRM*, thus, contributes to a wider co-

²² With the exception of the school assemblies, each of these aspects of the social campaign is freely available to access via the internet allowing audience members to engage with them post-performance, should they wish. But even the mention of the school assemblies highlights that Bennett would be open to invitations to perform within schools by any teachers or Parent Teacher Association members in the audience.

creation of meaning enhancing the possibility of generating 'new statements' and 'different desires', other to the self-interested aspects of the neoliberal ideology, through its multiple modes of engagement (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 18).

CLSRM's potential to subvert the subjugating aspects of the neoliberal ideology from within is then further extended through the links the social campaign makes to other individuals and social campaigns exploring common concerns. Consider the following example: attendance at the performance may lead an audience member to introduce a child or another adult to Catherine Bennett via Twitter. If they were to do so they would be exposed to further information about the project but they would also be introduced to other projects and feminist activities that have similar aims. The most recent post on Bennett's Twitter account, at the time of writing, is a video about Tree Change Dolls.²³ This project makes-under recycled dolls, contributing to feminist debates surrounding the hyper-sexualisation of dolls and young people. It also challenges the limited identities consumer culture endorses and highlights the importance of environmentalism.²⁴ The parallels this project shares with *CLSRM*, therefore, demonstrates how the latter's rhizomatic structure unites those who are already acting alternatively, as well as producing networks of individuals who are thinking about acting alternatively, encouraging them to step outside the individualist tradition and enter into communities of thought and

²³ However, the account has recently been less active than it was throughout the tours of *CLSRM* and *That Catherine Bennett Show*.

²⁴ The video on Bennett's Twitter feed offers the story of Sonia Singh who collects dolls from tip shops in Tasmania and gives them a make under. While not intended, the project has contributed to the debate surrounding the hyper sexualisation of dolls and young people, with viral video postings and articles published about the project across major newspapers nationally and internationally. Since the beginning of the project Singh has begun a small business creating dolls for sale, but she creates only small numbers, still enjoys the activity only as a hobby and claims not to be a toy manufacturer but encourages people to make-under their own dolls, extolling the virtues of recycling. Consequently, the project, whether inadvertently or not, invites children and adults to play a role in changing the culture of society in relation to commodity culture, the sexualisation of females and environmental issues.

co-action. The point of significance here is that *CLSRM* conforms to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome as functioning as 'conjunction, "and...and...and..."' (1987: 25). Consequently, it escapes the concept of performance as a transient, cultural commodity and provides countless opportunities for varying social campaigns to explore their common concerns and affirm each other's intelligibility and validity. And this process is possible regardless of one's point of entry into the social campaign; whether via attendance at *CLSRM*, *That Catherine Bennett Show* or Yoko Ono's Meltdown Festival, for example. Thus, in form and content, *CLSRM* emphasises care of the relationship, or relational networks, as primary 'unleashing the flow' for 'collaborative potentials' to be recognised and democratic values to be implemented (Gergen, 2009: 371). This process contributes to the spreading of the feminist consciousness which, in turn, may evolve into a new 'unconscious' that might transform the socio-political milieu, one individual at a time.

It is, however, necessary to note that *CLSRM* also limits its rhizomatic, political potential by obsessing over its own achievements and premise, thereby, adhering to the self-seeking, individualistic aspects of the neoliberal ideology. The content of *CLSRM* fails to acknowledge any other alternative role models in the media or theatre, despite its correlation with a wider movement of performance activism. Similar aims are apparent amongst practitioners and organisations such as Reverend Billy, whose aim is to occupy public space and/or use performance to convey anti-consumerist messages; and *The Representation Project*, which aims to counter the 'injustices created by gender stereotypes [in film and media content] and to shift people's consciousness towards change' (TakePart, 2015).²⁵ *CLSRM's*

²⁵ See <http://www.revilly.com/> for more information on Reverend Billy and <http://therepresentationproject.org/about/mission/> for more information on *The Representation Project*, as well as footnote number 23.

failure to acknowledge such similar projects highlights how its aspiration for ‘different desires’ to take hold is heavily reliant upon audience members actively pursuing the social campaign and its themes post-performance to find possible further avenues for exploration (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 18). I make these criticisms with trepidation since the performance, and creation of Bennett, are welcome interventions to the competitive aspects of the neoliberal ideology and the limited role models the media offers. It is also clear that Kimmings has a genuine desire to ‘instigate change’ in this project and her subsequent project with her partner about mental health, touring in 2015 (Kimmings, 2013a: Introduction).²⁶ Nonetheless, the performance does limit its potential by failing to recognise that it participates in some of the behaviours it critiques. Thus, *CLSRM* sets itself in competition with the wider body of performance activism that associating with might have greater potential to impact upon the neoliberal hegemony and the commodification of self.

Enchanting audience members

Despite the above criticisms, the final aspect of *CLSRM* necessary to discuss is how the performance includes audience members in its collaborative focus and promotion of care for the other over care of the self. *CLSRM* invites audience members to assume a sense of ‘response-ability’ in relation to its themes and consider their own personal development (Lehmann, 2006: 185).²⁷ In *Relational Being* Gergen argues that bonding does not necessarily counter the premise of individualism since ‘the process of bonding creates yet a new form of bounded entity.

²⁶ Kimmings’ 2015 project is called *Fake it Until You Make it* and tells the story of her partner’s experience of clinical depression. Her partner, who is not an artist, features in the performance. For more information see <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/156400599/fake-it-til-you-make-it-a-show-in-the-uk-and-austr>.

²⁷ I refer here to Lehmann’s ideas surrounding the theatre’s ethico-political ability to reinstate a two-way process of communication between personal experience and perception, allowing for the recognition of the ability one has to effect change (2006: 185-186).

It is not “you” versus “me,” but “us” now separated from “them” (2009: 183-184).

Considering this in relation to the bonded relationship between Kimmings and Houchen, as earlier discussed and established by the second half of the performance, it is plausible to suggest that their bond could result in an “us” separated from the “them” of the audience, alienating the latter from the performance and preventing their assumption of response-ability. However, Kimmings avoids this possibility by employing the collective use of the term ‘we’ when referring to audience members. Kimmings states, I ‘hope that we ALL make the world a better place for her to exist in’ (Kimmings, 2013a: Scene 20), creating an audience community that ‘mobilize[s] a united awareness of a common cause’ (Schlossman, 2002: 219). As David Schlossman states, performances that speak in ‘a more inclusive “we,” welcome [...] all audience members who agree with a philosophy into a political vision of community’ (2002: 219). This technique creates the idea that *CLSRM* takes-for-granted its audiences’ commitments to challenge the subjugating aspects of the neoliberal ideology. However, since audience members will vary in their stance on this issue, the use of the term ‘we’ actually functions to coercively narrativise audience members into the performance, and the social campaign it is a part of, imposing the idea that they ought to assume a sense of responsibility for the future of the next generation and aspire to a less narcissistic mode of existence.

This bonding process is reinforced through *CLSRM*’s invitation for audience members to participate in the dance to Bennett’s *Animal Kingdom*, which provides an ‘as if’ experience of the social campaign. This section of the performance is charming and fun with all the audience members of the performance I attended playing along. This sense of fun and enjoyment pervades *CLSRM* with critics’ comments exemplified by *The Independent*’s review, which described Kimmings and

Houchen as 'laudably unabashed in their feminist aims. But this show is also dry and witty, warm and silly' (Williams, 2014).²⁸ The use of the word 'but' in this review epitomises the idea that political performance is not commonly thought of as entertaining. However, if, as Thompson states, 'delight [...] might temper despair at the size of the political task and, therefore, energetic commitment for tackling a problem can be propelled and sustained' (2009: 171), *CLSRM's* sense of fun is a core aspect of its politics, bonding audience members through joyous, emotional expression and motivating the uptake of responsibility that the performance imposes. This process is further enhanced through Lehmann's concept of the 'irruption of the real' since Bennett's inclusion in the performance allows audience members to experience the educational aspects of the social campaign that children engage with outside the theatre space (Lehmann, 2006: 99). If, as Lehmann states, 'theatre's treading of the borderline of the real unsettles [the] crucial predisposition of [...] spectators [...] in which they experience being spectators as an unproblematic social behaviour' (2006: 104), *CLSRM's* provision of a fun, 'as if' performance experience is a core aspect of its ability to invite audience members to consider the role they play, or not, outside the theatre space in shifting mainstream culture in a more positive and diverse direction.

CLSRM's political potential is also complemented through the use of confrontational performance techniques, exemplified by Houchen's inclusion within the performance and the effect that the act of looking creates within the shared, social moment of the theatre space. Nicholas Ridout refers to this idea in his publication *Stage Fright, Animals and Other Theatrical Problems*, with reference to

²⁸ The performance has also been described as 'hilarious, heartbreaking, troubling and inspirational', by *Time Out* magazine, and 'an entertaining hour that is cool, funny, heartwarming and infectiously optimistic too', in *The Guardian* (Walters, 2013 & Gardner, 2013).

the disjuncture that the look returned by the animal onstage prompts. He states that in the returned gaze 'what we experience is a form of shame [...] at being discovered in our own acts of domination, over animals and over ourselves' (Ridout, 2006: 127), arguing that the look offers a means of resistance to economies of exploitation in the entertainment industry (Gotman, 2008: 165). Considering Ridout's suggestion in relation to *CLSRM*, it is arguable that Houchen's presence onstage creates a similar effect since, like the animal, she too will have had little say in the conditions under which she is employed and, as a child, does not have any performance technique. Houchen's presence, therefore, has the potential to shame audience members into considering how to respond to her presence and her desire to see alternative role-models in the media that centre on her interests. Lehmann bolsters this point when he states that theatre 'realizes its modest political potential by creating ways of perception, of self-perception and implication of spectators in the theatrical process' (in Schmidt, 2013: 194). However, if we return to Thompson's concept of the political-aesthetic moment in the theatre as arising from '*an affection for others*', there is also a sense that Houchen's presence within the performance might stimulate sympathy, instead of shame, through her gauche, endearing presence (2009: 182 original emphasis). Either way, it is the affective qualities of being directly confronted with Houchen's presence, the person for whom the project matters, that *CLSRM* aims to facilitate the creation of a bonded relationship between audience members and performers, promoting the democratic value of care for the other and the uptake of social responsibility in the interests of countering the individualistic aspects of the neoliberal ideology. As Gergen states, 'in the West, emotional expressions go hand in hand with bonded relations' (2009: 181). And, as a consequence of the wider social campaign that *CLSRM* is a part of, this uptake of

social responsibility can simply be realised by introducing others to Bennett, potentially increasing the likelihood of its uptake.

Houchen's presence in *CLSRM* does, however, raise a concern about whether Kimmings fails in her ethical responsibility to her niece, in the interests of facilitating a greater good. There is little in *CLSRM* to suggest that Houchen played a central role in its creation. Kimmings has stated that she wrote the performance with Taylor but she also stated that 'a typical day is keeping her [Houchen] hydrated and occupied, and making sure she [Houchen] remembers stuff' (Barton, 2014). Moreover, since Kimmings spent a week writing *CLSRM* in Yorkshire to prove that she could 'write on the page' instead of devising, Houchen's contribution remains in doubt (Barton, 2014).²⁹ Houchen obviously does not participate in the performance against her will but this point does raise a concern about whether Kimmings merely uses her presence to affect a process of emotional self-implication in audience members, minimising their sense of choice and debate in relation to the themes of the performance. One must also question whether Kimmings exploited her familial ties to create material for *CLSRM*, and the social campaign it is part of, for free, promoting her own success according to the neoliberal agenda of using others for one's own benefit. As Gergen states, the individualistic concept of identity advances instrumental understandings of relationship: 'relations are all about seeking the greatest pleasure from others at minimal cost. Human love, on this view, is a matter of making a profit' (2008: 21). As earlier established in the discussion of Kimmings' personal development, I am not inclined to affirm this argument. Moreover, in a blog about the money artists make, Kimmings outlines her fee for *CLSRM* indicating that

²⁹ The latter scenario being one that Houchen could have played a part in.

both she and Houchen receive £150 per performance (Kimmings, 2013c).³⁰

However, this information does not detail whether Houchen receives any remuneration for rehearsal or developmental periods. This point is particularly pertinent considering the central role Houchen played in the development of the social campaign that *CLSRM* is a part of, as evidenced by her discussion in the performance about the role she played in the creation of Bennett, and continues to play in her management. Thus, ethically problematic questions about equality, which conflict with *CLSRM*'s focus on social responsibility and collaboration, remain pertinent.

Summary

In summary, *CLSRM* uses the intersection between art and the world outside it to advertise, and foster support for, the wider social campaign that it is a part of. The process challenges the individualistic, neoliberal identity by establishing a sense of meaning out of our relationality and inviting audience members to do the same. The emphasis in the performance is on utilising Houchen's presence to critique the sexualisation and commodification of consumer capitalism, subsequently contributing to the historical development of adulthood and childhood and advancing a hybrid concept of political performance. The performance discursively thematises its political subject matter, as well as implicating audience members within situations that impose the idea of the need for alternative role models. This dual focus is premised upon a process of confrontation as well as a sense of enjoyment, countering the idea of fun as anti-serious entertainment lacking any edifying qualities

³⁰ Kimmings has since more than doubled her day rate to £350 at the advice of those who read her blog. See <http://thebryonykimmings.tumblr.com/post/87979288517/hi-one-and-all-i-am-in-limerick-i-am-in-a> for more details. An on-going conversation has also been set up, called *I'll Show You Mine*, which hosts discussions between artists and organisations about finding a more equitable way of working. See <http://illshowyoumine.org/> for more details.

that might effect change. As Thompson states, 'no change is possible without enthusiasm, commitment and a passionate sense of the possibility of a better life' (2009: 128). This analysis also established that *CLSRM's* impact is not necessarily premised upon a cause and effect relationship between attendance at the performance and political action; rather, it is more likely that the performance contributes to the development of each audience member's political consciousness through its rhizomatic structure. As Schlossman states:

An individual's political engagement (i.e., her or his recognition of action regarding a problem that requires an organized response and systemic change) does not spring forth fully formed, but arises from the accumulation of experiences and thoughts.

(2002: 50)

The performance is not without its limitations. It fails to acknowledge any alternative role models in theatre, popular culture, or even the public realm other than Bennett, and Kimmings offers an alternative role model who is white, slim, able-bodied and attractive. I appreciate that commoditised and sexualised role models outweigh the alternatives in popular culture but there are also increasing numbers of parodies available for these role models. Take, for example, the Law Review Girls who parodied Robin Thicke's *Blurred Lines*. Whatever one's opinions on such parodies they provoke thought and open up conversations about what is, and is not, acceptable in popular culture. There is also a range of empowering female figures available throughout history and currently receiving attention in the public sphere. For example, Malala Yousifazi who survived an attempt on her life and continues to

campaign for female education.³¹ Nonetheless, despite Kimmings's failure to recognise and celebrate other projects with a shared political goal, I have argued that *CLSRM* endeavours to contribute to greater freedoms for all by planting and nurturing the seed of an idea about an alternative mode of existence whereby 'valuing of the self is replaced by the prizing of relationship[s]' (Gergen, 2009: 403).

³¹ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tC1XtnLRLPM> for more details regarding *Blurred Lines* and <http://www.malala.org/#main/home/> for more information on the activities of Yousifazi.

Major Tom

Major Tom is a production by British artist Victoria Melody. Melody's body of work ranges from filmed performances and installations to one-woman theatrical shows. Common themes considered throughout Melody's work include anger, gender and feminism, with humour always playing an integral role in the creation of her performances. For each performance Melody undertakes a prolonged period of research, referring to herself an 'active participant' in the process and emphasising how her performance projects take over her life. She states:

I make work about England's subculture. I'm not a documentary maker, I don't just comment on those groups but instead I join them as a participant and shine a light on them from the inside, from the inner sanctum. The projects take me a long time – about two years. They really take over my entire life.

(Melody in Mullins, 2014)

Melody here suggests that she seeks out varying communities and makes a commitment to joining in, in order to illuminate the politics and poetics of the subcultures she explores. This process is premised on her role as a temporary member of these communities, which allows her to participate in, and partially observe, their idiosyncrasies; even if this latter process only occurs retrospectively.

Major Tom is a one-woman, lecture-style theatrical performance in which Melody convivially retells the story of how she transformed herself, over the course of a year, into a championship dog handler and a beauty queen. Throughout the process she details how she wholeheartedly committed to winning Crufts and

becoming Mrs Galaxy UK of the 2013 Mrs Galaxy Beauty Pageant. Melody describes the performance as follows:

Major Tom is the story of how an average 34-year-old woman became a beauty queen and how her unruly pet basset hound, Major Tom, became a championship show dog.

Major Tom and Victoria increasingly immerse themselves in the obsessive and confusing realm of personal scrutiny as they participate as genuine contestants, determined to win.

Victoria, accompanied on stage by documentary film footage and her dog, tells this true story. It explores the British fascination with celebrity, beauty and winning.

(Melody, 2010)

Major Tom always takes place in a conventional demarcated theatre auditorium.³² The set is comprised of Major's bed, placed front and stage right. Beside Major's bed is his bowl of water, a plant stand and a plant. Dog treats are kept in the drawer of the plant stand and Major's dog leads hang off its side. A film screen extends across the back of the stage space, occupying a central position, and below it Major Tom's name is spelt out in lights.³³ To the rear of stage left there is a dressing screen, behind which Melody changes into various beauty pageant gowns and dog handling attire.

³² The specific performance referenced in this chapter occurred 14th August 2013 in Summerhall, Edinburgh, as part of the fringe festival.

³³ From henceforth I will refer to Major Tom as Major.

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this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 5: The set of *Major Tom* showing the use of documentary film footage. Missing from this image is the dressing screen, situated stage left (Soho Theatre, n.d.).

Audience members do not participate in the action of *Major Tom* (2013) in any physical way. Rather, the focus of this analysis is on Melody's participatory research process and the implications that its re-presentation within the theatre space has for its audiences' modes of spectatorship. At the forefront of *Major Tom* are questions centred on feminism, beauty, competition and gender. *Major Tom's* wider focus is, however, related to the commodification of the self and the idea that we can buy the body and identity we desire. This focus is made apparent through the parallel criteria imposed on both Melody's female identity and Major's canine identity, making a wider point about the objectification of all as a consequence of consumer

capitalism and commodity culture. It is this relationship that is explored in the following case-study, developing from a feminist analysis of Melody's participation in the beauty pageant competition. In what follows, I argue that Melody knowingly participates in the Mrs Galaxy UK beauty pageant competition in order to perform an objectified self into existence. The re-presentation of this material within the theatre space, subsequently, allows for its deconstruction exposing the self-regulating role that enterprise culture plays in the internalisation of the relationship between image, success and self-worth, inviting audience members into new ways of seeing.

Before beginning the analysis proper, it is necessary to recognise how *Major Tom* shares resonances with *CLSRM*. Both of the performances critique the limiting ways consumer capitalism influences the creation of the female identity and both offer alternatives. However, each performance differs in its focus. *Major Tom* focuses on the consequences of Melody's acts of participation, and the opportunity theatre affords for re-working her experience into a positive and empowering subversion of the relationship between image, success and self-worth. The focus in *CLSRM* is concerned with addressing the root cause of the circulation of sexualised and commoditised images. This is, however, a utopic aim emphasising how *Major Tom* complements *CLSRM* by variously considering what might be done to subvert the limited notions of identity that, in the main, consumer capitalism is likely to continue to produce until interventions such as *CLSRM* begin to amass. In combination both types of performance offer greater possibilities for effecting socio-political transformation.

“Choose” your way of life

The relationship between consumer culture and identity is brought to the fore in *Major Tom* through Melody’s knowing act of participation. Luce Irigaray refers to the idea of knowing participation, with reference to feminism, in her concept of mimicry as follows:

To play with mimesis is [...], for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself [...] to “ideas,” in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by masculine logic, but so as to make “visible,” by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible.

(Irigaray, 1985: 76)

Irigaray’s concept of mimesis is one of subversive imitation, which suggests that deliberately participating in behaviours used to reduce women to a point of objectification has the potential to subvert and thwart one’s subordination. While Irigaray’s focus is here centred on the female form, a similar process is at play in *Major Tom*, defamiliarising the omnipresent influence of consumer capitalism on identity regardless of gender.

The need to challenge the unlimited opportunities for superficial self-differentiation offered by consumer capitalism and the commodification of the self is salient, considering the spate of recent television documentaries about beauty pageants featuring countries across the world from the UK to Brazil. In early 2014 the BBC aired a documentary series on Brazil which followed the extreme lengths women go to in order to win beauty pageants and escape the poverty of the

favelas.³⁴ And, at the time of writing (2014), Channel Four is running a documentary series called *Beauty Queen or Bust* evidencing, and perhaps propagating, young women's attempts to win beauty pageants to escape poverty in the UK. In other words, beauty is being offered up as a social currency. As Alison Winch states, 'floating on the de-regulated market of a self-promotional and celebrified culture, women are encouraged to relate to their bodies as both product and brand, and in this system they are brand manager' (2013: 22). The concern in these examples is that the female body is effectively being prostituted through means-ends approaches that only reinforce female objectification and endorse the autonomy of the individual for escaping one's social circumstances; as opposed to improvements in social welfare, for example, providing such opportunities.

The relationship between consumer capitalism and one's sense of self-worth is also extended out to include males, as evidenced in *The Perfect Body* aired on BBC 3 in 2014. This documentary explored the extreme measures men take to achieve hard, sculpted bodies, including the purchase of illegal substances, and the increasing rates of body dysmorphia in males (BBC, 2015). Hence, the non-gender specific need to challenge the limited notion of identity proliferated by the privatised market-place and the affiliations it creates between image and success and 'better', affluent ways of life. As Castoriadis states:

Nowadays, individuals are in conformity to the system and the system to individuals. If this society is to change, a radical change is needed in the interests and attitudes of human beings. The passionate desire for consumer goods must be replaced by passionate care about community affairs.

³⁴ One particularly startlingly practice was the sewing of mesh onto the tongue to prevent women from being able to eat solid food and, thus, aid their weight loss.

(1992: 5)

Melody exposes this limited notion of identity through the process that she embarks on to transform her appearance for the Mrs Galaxy UK Beauty Pageant competition. Melody details how she made a 'project' of herself, pandering to the standards of the competitions she participated in and the subjective criteria espoused by various image-consultants, including a gym trainer, a beautician, a hairdresser and a pageant trainer. For the beauty pageant competition Melody details how she was required to dress glamorously, move with poise, wear fake-tan and make-up and have her hair coiffed. To be accepted as a dog handler in the competitive dog shows Melody details how she was discouraged from wearing make-up and encouraged not to draw attention to herself when 'an odious man' at one of the competitions who breeds dogs called her a 'clown' and told her it was the dog's catwalk, not hers. She states:

So that was nice of him. But I thought, "maybe he's got a point. Maybe the problem does lie with me. Not with Major. Maybe I'm too much like me in the show ring." So I learnt: Not to smile at the judges, not to make eye contact, not to wear any makeup, to wear my hair back and to start wearing country attire.

(Melody, 2013)

The criterion for the competitions is oppositional but, in either case, Melody was subservient to the proposed standards, transforming her identity through the purchase of suitable goods and services. Melody even creates a dramatic moment within the performance that suggests she seriously considered becoming the project of a plastic surgeon, all in the quest for 'beauty pageant perfection' (Melody, 2013).

The point that Melody foregrounds in the delivery of this information is that she felt obliged to buy into the professional services industry and work on herself to self-improve and be defined as successful.

Melody primarily elaborates on this process through repeated reference to the value for money of a personal training package she purchased to aid her transformation. Melody meticulously details that she received an exercise programme, nutritional advice and a heart rate monitoring watch worth £99. The cost was £200 but all those purchasing the package were entered into a fat loss competition with a prize of £100. Melody, therefore, justifies her purchase by highlighting how the whole experience would cost only £1 if she won. The significance of this section of the performance is that it emphasises the possibilities the free market economy provides for all consuming individuals to buy the body that they so desire and, with it, a sense of self-worth. As Don Slater states:

Many of our questions about what form we take as modern subjects, about how to understand the very relation between the everyday world and the public space, about our moral and social value, about our privacy and power of disposal over our lives, about “who we are” – many of these questions are taken up in relation to consumption and our social status as a rather new thing called a “consumer”.

(in Maher, Tanner & Fraser, 2013: 185)

Melody’s participation, therefore, exposes how consumer capitalism governs all individuals through a self-regulating process of objectification, premised upon consumer choice and ‘the hypervisible landscape of popular culture’ (Winch, 2013: 21).

The enterprising aspects of the neoliberal ideology, however, nuance the concept of objectification by specifically conceiving of the individual as a product to be invested in and manufactured according to the expertise of health and fitness experts. In his publication *Inventing Ourselves: Psychology, Power and Personhood*, mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Nikolas Rose discusses the influence of 'experts of subjectivity' with services to sell on individuals who have been brought to want to buy. He states, 'self-help, today, entails an alliance between professionals claiming to provide an objective, rational answer to the question of how one should conduct a life to ensure normality, contentment, and success, and individuals seeking to shape a "life-style"' (Rose, 1998: 156). The implication in Rose's publication is that experts of subjectivity "autonomize" and "responsibilize" individuals through a process of self-regulation, premised upon consumer choice and the promise of reward (1998: 167). Rose conceives of this point through a consideration of 'psy' disciplines and therapeutics, but the same point stands for the image experts attempting to transform Melody's appearance. In *Major Tom*, to be a winner is to conform to the regulations of life-style specialists who provide the opportunity for consumers to invest in themselves and literally maximise the worth of their existence. Social bonds and common action are paralysed by this process as the individual seeks self-fulfilment through the accumulation of goods and services, advertising their identity through their external appearance. In other words, identity becomes an image-producing act, in a consideration of the self as brand, and self-worth is defined by the measures one takes to aspire to, and succeed in creating, an image designed to advance and promote the self. As Roberto Álvarez del Blanco disturbingly declares in his publication *Personal Brands: Manage Your Life with Talent and Turn it into a Unique Experience*: 'the aim of one's personal brand is to

increase one's sphere of influence as a springboard for further progress. [...] people are commodities' (2010: 10).

The dehumanising effect the neoliberal mentality has on individual and social identity is brought to the fore via the contrasting discussion Melody provides in relation to the amateur dog shows and an affable dog handling group she attends. Melody details how these classes occur weekly in a village hall, echoing the footage she has shown audience members of amateur dog competitions taking place in similar venues as part of relaxed, jovial 'fun days' (2013).³⁵ The significant point in Melody's discussion of these classes is that they cost only £1, creating a correlation with her discussion of the personal training package. Melody states:

This is amazing. For £1 you get a two and a half hour class, a cuppa tea and a biscuit, and a raffle ticket. For £1! The raffle has become my high point of the evening. I have won prizes like a cooking apple. Some baby wipes. An out of date Christmas pudding. And once I won an old coffee mug with stains in it.

(2013)

This information is provided prior to Melody's discussion about the personal training package; but, since both are meticulously detailed in a similar format the performance later recalls this initial discussion, inviting audience members to consider how value is, and might be alternatively, defined.

The value for money of the dog handling group does not require those purchasing the service to achieve certain goals, as with the potential value for money

³⁵ Melody provides footage of her participation in competitions that were part of the South East Bassett Hounds' group fun day.

offered by the personal training package. Rather, the classes cost £1, regardless of one's performance and with no conditions of purchase. The services offered for the price also highlight the unlikelihood that the classes function for profit. The implicit suggestion then is that these classes are centred on facilitating the possibility for like-minded dog owners to meet, gain dog handling skills and enjoy each other's company over a cup of tea. The sense of value in this section of the performance is, therefore, premised upon the benevolent intentions of Brian, the dog handling tutor, to share his skills, help others who wish to progress within the dog competition world, foster a sense of community spirit and build friendships within the dog show community. Consequently, this section of the performance harkens to a concept of value premised upon generosity and relationship building, in stark contrast with the competitive individualism endorsed by the personal training package and the neoliberal mentality. The effect is to highlight Castoriadis' point that 'our culture is frantically driving individuals into privatization, leading them not only to lose interest in the affairs of the community but also to view others as objects or potential enemies', and remind audience members of an alternative way in which to define value (1991: 167).

The contrast between the cost of the personal training package and the competitive dog shows also defamiliarises the inequalities neoliberalism promotes. Harvey summarises neoliberalism as a 'theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and, free trade' (Harvey, 2005: 2). The theory of neoliberalism is, therefore, premised on the idea that all individuals are free to act and trade within the market place and are granted equal opportunity for

success; as highlighted in the introduction to the chapter. The reality of this theory in practice is that it proliferates growing inequalities according to the relationship between capital accumulation and power. The more capital one has the more opportunities one has socially, educationally, culturally and economically. It is this point that is made apparent in the contrasting examples discussed above in *Major Tom*. Although both might ostensibly cost £1 (if Melody were to win the personal training competition) the purchase of the personal training package is not a service that those with only £1 can avail of since it requires an initial investment of £200. Consequently, those lacking the initial investment are barred from the possibility of self-improvement and their freedoms as citizens are limited. In other words, freedom is dependent upon disposable capital resulting in growing inequalities between socio-economic groups and a move towards oligarch rule. *Major Tom*, therefore, highlights the need to foster greater freedoms for all by shifting the desire for over-consumption to a consideration of the interests of others. Ultimately, Melody uses her research process to knowingly enter into her own objectification and make visible an insight that allows for a recognition of, and reaction against, the influence of the neoliberal ideology on the creation of self and society.

New ways of seeing

Melody demonstrates a commitment to others through how *Major Tom* invites audience members to enter into new ways of seeing. This occurs according to Lehmann's '*politics of perception*' (2006: 185 original emphasis). In *Postdramatic Theatre* Lehmann states:

It is a fundamental fact of today's Western societies that all human experiences (life, eroticism, happiness, recognition) are tied to *commodities* or

more precisely their consumption and possession (and not to a discourse).

This corresponds exactly to the civilisation of images that can only ever refer to the next image and call up other images. The totality of the spectacle is the “theatricalization” of all areas of social life.

(2006: 183 original emphasis)

Lehmann argues that the theatricalization of social life is premised upon a ‘cult of self-presentation’ (2006: 183). This point has been established thus far in this analysis but what is significant in Lehmann’s discussion is his argument that the outward appearance that attests to inner significance has transformed the citizen into a spectator. For Lehmann, spectating is the *sine qua non* default of the individual in capitalist societies and the act of spectating is defined by an uncritical, disengaged recognition of the ideology functioning behind what we see. Lehmann refers to the idea that the citizen spectator lacks the ability to intervene in what they see and only ‘look[s] on’ in a de-politicised mode of perception (2006: 184 original emphasis).

Yet, he also argues that ‘through the implicit substance and critical value of its *modes of representation*’ theatre can invite spectators to see differently, by challenging the anaesthetised, rationalised viewing characteristic of the market-place (2006: 178 original emphasis). *Major Tom* affirms this possibility, inviting audience members to see beyond the cult of self-preservation through the oscillation between two modes of spectating.

Throughout *Major Tom*, audience members spectate on a performance occurring within the present and filmed footage of an experience that occurred in the past. And, as indicated throughout this analysis, these two artistic modes offer differing interpretations of identity. Predominantly, when the filmed footage is shown,

Melody turns her back on the audience and watches the footage along with them. The literal consequence of this choice is that audience members see Melody looking at her to-be-looked-at-ness. John Berger's (1972) *Ways of Seeing* articulates this concept through an exploration of oil painting and photography. Berger exposes the dominant representational tradition as one characterised by the authority of the male gaze, which objectifies the female form. He states, 'the "ideal" spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him', arguing that as a consequence of the cultural entrenchment of this perspective women subconsciously survey themselves from a male vantage point (Berger, 1972: 64). The significance of this point to a discussion of the objectifying potential of consumer capitalism is that Melody's process of transformation was premised upon the enviable desirousness of the person she would become, as judged by the male gaze, if she purchased certain goods and services. As Berger states, 'the spectator-buyer is meant [...] to imagine herself transformed by the product into an object of envy for others' (1972: 134). However, the doubling of Melody's filmed presence, with her embodied presence within the theatre space, externalises and exorcizes this process of self-surveillance.

Elin Diamond's discussion of the Brechtian feminist body offers a useful indication of how the oscillation between two modes of spectating in *Major Tom* exposes the cult of self-presentation. She states:

The female performer, unlike her filmic counterpart, connotes not "to-be-looked-at-ness" – the perfect fetish – but rather "looking-at-being-looked-at-ness" or even just "looking-ness". [...] This Brechtian-feminist body is paradoxically available for *both* analysis and identification.

(Diamond, 1997: 52)

In seeing Melody looking at herself, audience members are invited into a relationship between Melody's present and critically engaged self and her past self in which she participated in her own objectification. Diamond refers to this process as one of Brechtian historicization, which preserves the "distinguishing marks" of the past and acknowledg[es], even foreground[s] the audience's present perspective' (1997: 49). In this process, the spectator is invited to consider how Melody creates her image, according to whose criteria and ascertain how her onscreen self differs from her stance within the theatre space. Consequently, the audience's gaze is split between Melody's objectification and its deconstruction, making palpable the differences between past and present in a contradictory space that demystifies the representational images on display (Diamond, 1997). If, as Diamond states, 'the appearance, words, gestures, ideas, attitudes that constitute the gender lexicon become illusionistic trappings that are *nevertheless* inseparable from, embedded in the body's habitus' (1997: 47), this contradiction needfully invites audience members to analyse the objectifying qualities of consumer capitalism for themselves prompting their critical ability to defamiliarise its subjugating aspects and assert their subjectivity.

A second technique employed in *Major Tom* to encourage audience members to gain a critical insight into the commodification of the self, and confront their self-identity, occurs through the act of witnessing and Melody's act of looking back at the audience. Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson and Katie Normington state that witnessing is a core aspect of performances utilising autobiographical material. Govan, Nicholson and Normington acknowledge that the concept is borrowed from trauma theory, and is often identified as a response to catastrophe. However, they

also emphasise how the act of witnessing allows audience members and performers to engage in a two-way process of communication that invites each to 'discover the capacity to respond' (Phelan in Govan, Nicholson & Normington, 2007: 70).

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Figure 6: The dress Melody wears at the end of *Major Tom* when she mimes along with filmed footage of the ball gown round in the Mrs Galaxy UK Beauty Pageant competition (Mullins, 2014).

This concept of witnessing is at play in *Major Tom* in the moments when, instead of looking at the filmed footage along with audience members, Melody looks out into the auditorium and mimes along with the filmed footage. This technique is employed at brief moments through the duration of the performance, but is magnified toward the end of *Major Tom* when Melody changes into a ball gown and performs precisely as she did within the pageant competition. Melody moves from one side of the stage to the other and performs a series of turns in between. The movement is performed to the sound of the filmed footage, which is characterised by hoots and clapping from the beauty pageant audience. There is no dialogue in this section of

the performance, it is much longer than the previous occasions when Melody employs the same technique and it is the only occasion when Melody is also dressed and styled in tandem with the footage on display. This voiceless act of looking back draws on the communicative process of witnessing, inviting audience members into a process that counters the inability of the citizen spectator to defamiliarise what they see and critically act upon it, if so desired.

The transplanting of Melody's performance from the beauty pageant competition into the theatre space invites a contrast of responses between the two contexts, confronting audience members with Melody's objectification. In the filmed footage the audience members clearly enjoyed the beauty pageant parade vocally expressing their approval, whilst camera flashes indicated their desire to capture the spectacle that they were watching. This response is indicative of the context of the beauty pageant competition since the audience was in attendance to support the contestants and the evaluations of their worth. In the theatre space, Melody's detailed representation of her beauty pageant actions, accompanied by a lowering of the lights in the theatre auditorium, created the idea that she was performing the identity she conformed to in the beauty pageant competition, thereby, fictionalizing the audience as playing a role in her objectification. However, since audience members are conscious by this section of the performance of Melody's desire to critique the commodification of the individual her actions were met with silence. If, as Tim Etchells states, 'to witness an event is to be present at it in some fundamentally ethical way, to feel the weight of things and one's place in them' (in Govan, Nicholson & Normington, 2007: 69), this occurred since Melody's performance and act of looking back implicated audience members in her objectification inviting them to consider what it means to endorse the relationship

between image, success and self-worth. This section of the performance, thus, acted to challenge the rationalised, emotionally lacking qualities that Lehmann argued are predominant in the enterprising individual, inviting audience members to assume a sense of social responsibility and consider whether, and how, they might attend to seeing differently. As Melody hopes:

Those moments where I'm wearing those ridiculous dresses smiling at the audience and looking at them like "is this okay for you? is this, am I okay?".
[...] When it's actually put in front of you [...] well I hope it makes people think.

(2014)

A socially responsible alternative

Melody's desire for audience members to enter into a critical engagement with the neoliberal ideology's influence on identity demonstrates how she uses her occupation as a theatre maker to perform an act of personal responsibility with positive social implications. Rose's argument, that the free market economy aligns the workplace with the desires of the enterprising subject to conceive of work as a way to find meaning and self-fulfilment, is salient here. He states that 'work has become an essential element in the path to self-realisation, and the strivings of the autonomous self have become essential allies in the path to economic success' (Rose, 1998: 161). Considering this in relation to Melody's occupation as a performer and theatre-maker, one could argue that she uses her profession, and status as a white, slim, attractive, able-bodied female, to realise an identity that conforms to the neoliberal ideology and its associations with aspiration, success and individualism. However, such an interpretation would fail to recognise how Melody's commitment to participate in, and adhere to the expectations of, the beauty pageant

and dog show competitions, is designed as a deliberate and interim strategy for latterly exposing and subverting the relationship between labour, consumer capitalism and identity from within.

Throughout *Major Tom*, Melody references the idea that her ability to perform an act of social responsibility, and advance an alternative concept of identity in the interests of herself and others, was premised upon her societal status. While Major was required to work his way through a series of qualifying competitions in order to attend Crufts, he was only able to do so since he is a pedigree dog.³⁶ Equally, Melody's access to the Mrs Galaxy UK Beauty Pageant competition was premised upon her status as an *attractive* female who met the qualifying criteria of the competition. Melody foregrounds this point at the opening of the performance when she discusses the criteria required for entry and the acceptance letter she received from the pageant organisers. Melody details how the entry criteria stipulated that she was required to be over the age of 23, a British citizen and married to a 'genetically born man' (2013). And her sharing of her acceptance letter details how the judges chose Melody from 'hundreds' of entrants based on her 'gorgeous long blonde hair, pretty eyes, big beautiful smile and natural good looks' (Melody, 2013). Melody's inclusion of this information, therefore, demonstrates to audience members how Melody and Major were only able to perform deliberate and interim acts of participation to be subverted as a consequence of their privileged status, where others would be denied the same opportunity for empowerment. *Major Tom* thus implicitly defamiliarises how the opportunity to determine to succeed and achieve self-fulfilment in the neoliberal capitalist regime is premised upon limiting criteria that

³⁶ Major's pedigree is not explicitly stated, but Crufts is widely recognised as a pedigree dog competition. Melody also details how she and her partner Mic bought Major and were paid to breed him, providing them with enough money to pay for the marquee at their wedding. Both of these practices are usually reserved for pedigree animals.

only serves to promote privilege, further evidencing the social responsibility Melody assumes by showcasing an alternative concept of identity for herself and others.

Parody and humour are core techniques that Melody employs to deconstruct the identity she conforms to in the filmed footage of her participation. These techniques are exemplified by two sections of filmed footage. In one, Melody wears huge, humorously unsexual pants, which encompass most of her torso, as she takes her measurements after an enjoyable Christmas of indulgence. And in another Melody offers a slow motion video of her unconditioned, sweaty body running on a treadmill, accompanied by a shot of Major running in slow motion in the street with his ears flopping from side to side. Both of these sequences of footage challenge the fetishization of the female body, 'coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*' (Mulvey, 2009: 19 original emphasis), whilst also satirizing the neoliberal ideal of the successful, healthy, conditioned subject 'working' on all areas of their life in a bid to self-improve. The point of significance here is that by re-presenting her research process within the theatre space Melody offers a perspective on the past, within the present, that allows her to present the audience with alternative images to those endorsed by the positive model of neoliberal subject hood and its internalisation of the relationship between image, success and self-worth. It thus becomes apparent that although Melody's participation in the beauty pageant competition required that she make an enterprise of her life, project-managing it to conform to the standards of the competitions she participated in, she did not seek to reap individualistic, personal, profitable gain. Rather, Melody maximises her human capital to 'interrogate what we have become, as subjects, in our individuality, and the nature of that present in which we are' (Rose, 1998: 167). In other words, her participation and subsequent performance

defamiliarised the nature of our present, documenting the categories and norms by which we judge and act upon ourselves and others. As Taylor states, 'coming to understand the moral sources of our civilization can make a difference, in so far as it can contribute to a new common understanding' (1991: 101)

Melody then embodies an alternative identity to that of the empowered, enterprising individual by celebrating failure. Melody and Major are both losers. At the end of the performance audience members learn that neither won their respective competitions. Major came last and Melody was not placed but won a series of conciliatory prizes including 'Best Publicity', 'Best Smile' and 'Most pageant Potential' (Melody, 2013). Gergen discusses how failure challenges the self-worth that characterises the development of one's identity, according to the neoliberal capitalist ethos, when he highlights the unrelenting evaluation that it endorses. He states, 'all insufficiencies in behaviour are potentially expressions of an internal lack. To explain, "it wasn't my fault," "my parents neglected me," or "I had no knowledge of the consequences," is to defend against the dreaded accusation: you are inferior!" (Gergen, 2009: 8). Gergen here highlights that failure poses a threat to one's sense of self-worth in the individualist tradition. To fail is to be inadequate and the fear of inadequacy is what propels individuals to pursue success and, in the case of failure, learn from their mistakes in the interests of avoiding its repetition. In contrast, *Major Tom* celebrates the failings of Melody and Major, via Melody's unashamed sharing of their experiences within the competitions, as discussed, but also through more widely relevant autobiographical material. If, as Bailes observes, 'a discourse of failure in art practice has mapped a vibrant counter-cultural space of alternative and often critical articulation, in which conventional standards of virtuosity are challenged and methods of practice scrutinized and re-worked', this process allows Melody to

challenge the stability of the neoliberal ideology's focus on aspiration and success (2011: 2).

An example of Melody's autobiographical discussion of her failings as a woman is brought to the fore when she states that she attempted to pick up a scotch egg with her buttocks on her hen night, shocking all her hens because she had pubic hair. She states:

My friends laughed and clapped and I thought they were reacting at my buttock ability but then I realised it was because I had a hairy bush. Because they were chanting "disco bush" over and over again. I said, "well what do yours look like then?". And they showed me. And then I found out that some other women wax in that area. I didn't know. I thought women only got brazilians in pornos.

(Melody, 2013)

Melody's reference to her naivety about pubic hair overshares, highlighting the extent to which appearance is prescribed by the service industry. In other words, Melody's lack of grooming and conformity to the expectation that women must avail of waxing services was wrong, despite any clear lack of concern it caused. This sense of failing is exemplified by the taunting of her friends, which also raises a point about censorship. While playful, their use of the term 'disco bush' depreciated the credibility of her intimate grooming practices, and her self-worth, subsequently producing a form of self-censorship about the idea that she ought to wax, or at least not openly showcase that she does not. The chanting of Melody's friends, therefore, produced and bolstered the idea that a lack of pubic hair is the socially acceptable choice for any self-respecting woman of worth. However, by sharing her story and

using it to entertain a wider public, Melody embraced and celebrated her apparent failings as a woman, flouting the idea that pubic hair should be attended to and not discussed.³⁷ The importance of Melody's choice to deliver such autobiographical information is that she humanly exonerates failure and imperfection, with the act of performance highlighting the possibilities for embodying an alternative to the successful, neoliberal individual. As Diamond states, performance 'is the site in which performativity materializes in concentrated form, where the "concealed or dissimulated conventions" of which acts are mere repetitions might be investigated and reimagined' (1997: 47).

Melody's exoneration of failure has acted as an inspiration to others. Performance attendees have contacted Melody post-performance to say it uplifted their spirits and increased their confidence and sense of self-worth. Melody quoted one female audience member as stating 'your show made me realise I can be who I want to be and don't have to be anyone else' (Melody, 2014). Such audience comments highlight how welcome the performance of an alternative concept of self-hood is since it offers an example of how, and gives audience members faith to, define themselves differently. As Charles Guignon states, to be a self is to be 'buoyed up and carried along by social forces one can never objectify and master, but it is also to be a respondent, capable of saying "no" to some of those forces in deciding one's own life course' (2004: 122). It, therefore, becomes apparent that Melody put aside the neoliberal preoccupation with self-aggrandisement in the interests of herself and others. In other words, through her choice of project and the creation of *Major Tom*, Melody countered the narcissistic attitude of enterprise

³⁷ Melody and her friends had clearly not discussed the topic until it was unavoidable or Melody would not have been in a state of ignorance.

culture by focusing not on what she could get out of her participation, but on what she could contribute, as a performer, to challenging the cult of self-presentation.

Exit through the gift shop

In the middle of *Major Tom*, Melody advertises an exclusive post-show sale of an annual calendar she created with Major as publicity for her role within the beauty pageant competition, providing the opportunity for audience members to continue to celebrate the subversion and playfulness of the performance. Typically, the sale of merchandise facilitates an individualistic, narcissistic pursuit of experience in audience members by acting as an advertisement for the purchasing audience member's cultural consumption and co-opting them as advertisers of the performance; points that are considered in further detail in Chapter Three in relation to audience participation in immersive performance experiences. However, the tongue-and-cheek playfulness of the images of Melody and her dog in *Major Tom's* calendar offer a comically unusual pairing that successfully parodies sexualised, female pin-up calendars. Each month's image is also shown to audience members during the performance placing the calendar within the context of *Major Tom's* deconstruction of the enterprising, neoliberal identity. The point of significance here is that the production and sale of calendars in *Major Tom* allows audience members to 'buy into' the alternative concept of identity that Melody advocates throughout the performance and support artists who are challenging the limited modes of self-definition validated by the neoliberal mentality. The purchase of a calendar also creates the opportunity for audience members to play a role in this process by acting as a talking point for discussing *Major Tom's* themes with others who did not attend the performance, thereby, multiplying its resonance. Consequently, it becomes apparent that Melody's choice to produce and sell post-show merchandise is

designed to subvert the principles of enterprise culture and maximise the potential for the performance's themes to continue to percolate beyond, and post, the performance proper.

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Figure 7: An image from the publicity calendar Melody produced as part of her participation within the Mrs Galaxy UK Beauty Pageant competition (Wales Millennium Centre, 2014).

Before concluding, it is worth noting that despite Melody's good intentions in *Major Tom*, the performance is not without its problematic, irreconcilable elements. To a certain degree, Melody reductively creates, rather than reflects, the idea that beauty pageants objectify the female form. Her deliberate assumption of the feminine posture also problematically essentialises her fellow contestants as females who endorse their own objectification and proliferate limited notions of what it means to be a woman. This process occurs since Melody fails to provide the opportunity for her fellow contestants to voice their motivations for participating in the beauty pageant competition, with the consequence that Melody's assumption of the

objectified female role stands in for their experience. The only consolation to this point of critique is that her participation is ultimately designed to challenge limited ideas of freedom imposed by the free market economy in the interests of allowing all individuals to change the constraints that govern their choices and define themselves differently if they so choose.

Summary

In summary, Melody's participation within the Mrs Galaxy UK Beauty Pageant is an act of knowing participation, designed as a temporary strategy for exposing the dominance of the cult of self-presentation. Through her participatory research process, Melody performs an objectified self into existence in order to deconstruct it, inviting audience members to do the same and engage in new ways of seeing. *Major Tom* facilitates this process for audience members by inviting them to identify with Melody and, subsequently, interrogate the role they play as an onlooker within the performance, in relation to women and others more widely. A core aspect of this process is Melody's defamiliarisation of the role that enterprise culture plays in the internalisation of the relationship between image, success and self-worth, challenging objectifying modes of perception through the transformation of her own identity. Melody leads by example in this process inviting audience members to recognise the potential there is for countering the narcissistic attitude of enterprise culture from within the dominant ideology, celebrate failure, reimagine one's sense of self and assume a sense of social responsibility for the development of a more egalitarian society.

Confirmation

Confirmation (2014b) is performed and written by Chris Thorpe. Thorpe's writing and performance spans a broad range of practice including both solo works and collaborations with other artists. Thorpe's work makes no attempt at theatrical mimesis. Rather, common aesthetics in Thorpe's performances include direct audience address and his use of a performance persona that is almost indistinguishable from his daily demeanour. Thorpe's work eradicates the fourth wall, even in conventional demarcated theatre spaces, by acting on the premise that the actors and audience members share the same space and both must be acknowledged in their presence. Simon Stephens refers to Thorpe's work as derived from 'an understanding of the complicated mess of what it is to be human' (2014). This theme is threaded throughout Thorpe's work, ranging from considerations of the relationship between communication and contact in a technologically tethered world – *I wish I was Lonely* (2013), to making mistakes – *The Oh Fuck Moment* (2011), and the choice between compromise and certainty when trying to get things right – *There Has Possibly Been an Accident* (2013).

Confirmation tells the story of Thorpe's decision to challenge his left-wing liberal views by entering into a process of dialogue with Glen, a right-wing National Socialist. The performance offers a timely contribution to this chapter since it directly and topically considers the relationship between Thorpe's participatory dialogue, the question of political polarity and the possibility of developing the social identity of capitalist democracy. *Confirmation*, thus, shifts from *CLSRM's* and *Major Tom's* differing foci on the inequalities and limited concepts of identity promoted by the

neoliberal marketplace to an appraisal of the relationship between Party Politics, political identification and social equality.³⁸

There is an inherent conflict in capitalist democracy since capitalism and democracy share different principles of social organisation. As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, the heart of democratic politics is equality of citizenship, whilst neoliberal capitalism promotes growing inequalities via privatisation, de-regulated markets and the promotion of individualistic, entrepreneurial freedoms. The resulting conflict of principles is exemplified by Michael Moran's statement that in capitalist democracy 'the divisions and inequalities created by the market economy permeate the political system and constantly inhibit[s] the egalitarian principles of democratic citizenship' (2011: 22). Moran further highlights that the deeply embedded conflict between capitalism and democracy is a consequence of the establishment of industrial capitalism in Britain in the nineteenth century, almost a century before the implementation of a democratic system of government in 1918, post-World War 1.³⁹ Moran's discussion, therefore, highlights how democracy is a relatively new and evolving ideal that must continually negotiate its relationship with capitalism and inequality. Badiou adds to this assessment of capitalist democracy when he states, 'the only valid thing on offer – is the natural harmony between unbridled capitalism and impotent democracy. Impotent because servile towards the

³⁸ *CLSRM* demonstrated the potential for activist performance to effect change, subverting the commodification and the sexualisation of female role models in the music industry from within and urging audience members to assume a sense of responsibility for the next generation. The analysis of *Major Tom*, then, primarily focused on a consideration of how consumer capitalism influences the internalisation of the relationship between image, success and self-worth to deconstruct the neoliberal capitalist notion of the aspirational, enterprising individual. I argued that the former aims to intervene at root cause to prevent the continued proliferation of the limited concepts of identity endorsed by the neoliberal hegemony, and the latter focuses on deconstructing the aftereffects of the neoliberal ideology on identity.

³⁹ I recognise that this system of government has evolved throughout the century with changes to the genders, social classes and age ranges that were permitted to participate. The last amendment was made in 1969 with the reduction of the voting age from 21 to 18. See Moran, M. (2011) *Politics and Governance in the UK*, 2nd Edition, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan for more details.

site of real power – Capital – and firmly “controlled” when it comes to working-class and popular aspirations’ (2012: 40). Badiou here suggests that capitalist democracy is a fascistic ideology that also limits democratic freedoms and the possibility of comprehending alternative ways of living. It is this understanding of capitalist democracy that is tested in *Confirmation*. Thorpe employs the concept of confirmation bias to challenge the reductive modes of thought that characterise capitalist democracy, and limit its egalitarian principles, exposing the effects the neoliberal capitalist ideology has on the principles of democracy. Overall, the performance raises questions about political recognition, the limits of tolerance and the difficult realities of effecting political change. As Rabie states, ‘ideologies, by their very nature, tend to claim that they and no one else knows the truth, they represent a formidable obstacle to sociocultural transformation and thus to both tolerance and democracy’ (2013: 96-97).

The performance

The play begins with the recreation of Thorpe’s attendance at a BNP meeting. Thorpe speaks as members of the BNP group, whilst also offering up his thoughts and feelings in relation to the meeting. Thorpe then explains the concept of confirmation bias to the audience through the use of a psychological numbers experiment that aims to demonstrate that we take notice of evidence that confirms the views we already hold. The performance also offers poetic information about the impossibility of maintaining an objective perspective on one’s self, which Thorpe states is as difficult as ‘trying to taste your own tongue’ (Thorpe & Chavkin, 2014: Section 3).⁴⁰ All this initial information is designed to set up the main content of the

⁴⁰ The sections that I refer to, in the references I include from *Confirmation*, are indicated by dotted lines in the playtext. The first section is the opening of the play with all subsequent sections

performance in which Thorpe shares aspects of his dialogue with Glen with audience members.⁴¹

Thorpe is the only performer in *Confirmation* and the performance is set in the round. In one corner of the square playing space there is a microphone and in the other a chair. Thorpe variously moves the chair in and out of the space, throws it around in moments of anger and places it in differing directions to suggest different arguments. Generally, the microphone is used for emphasis, when Thorpe is speaking as an other, and when he is speaking as himself but wants to convey a sense of unease, or formality, in his behaviour. Audience members sit on four sides of the playing space with Thorpe frantically moving around the space in a figurative demonstration of the battle that he had with his own beliefs during his research process. Audience members are invited to participate in the performance by offering answers to the psychological experiment Thorpe stages, reading questions from cue cards, speaking as various characters within the story and also becoming different audience bodies dependent on how Thorpe addresses them. For example, the audience become the members of the BNP group meeting that Thorpe recreates at the beginning of the performance. Thorpe refers to this acknowledgement and inclusion of audience members within the performance as integral to its creation and his aim to foster critical modes of engagement. He states, in relation to the subject matter of *Confirmation* and the process of spectating:

This is some stuff that we [Thorpe and the audience members] are engaged in thinking about now and we are all going to have to do a certain amount of

numbered consecutively. In the absence of scenes or page numbers in the kindle version of the text, this use of sections for reference offers the most efficient option for the reader seeking the original source material.

⁴¹ The specific performance here referred to occurred 6th October 2014 in the Battersea Arts Centre, London.

mental replacing of ourselves, reorganisation of who we are and what we are according [...] to what I am saying, and who I am saying we all are at this moment. And the destabilising effect of that is actually really useful in terms of (a) being analogous of the long-term destabilising effects of the process I went through, but also in terms of making us aware of these biases and these information processing structures that we have.

(Thorpe, 2014a)

Thorpe's suggestion that *Confirmation* invites a 'reorganisation of who we are and what we are' refers explicitly to the unfolding of the performance event and the roles that audience members are asked to play (Thorpe, 2014a). However, it also implicitly highlights the wider destabilisation of the self that the performance invites, in relation to how we define our individual and social identity in capitalist democracy.

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Figure 8: Thorpe speaking to audience members during *Confirmation* (China Plate, n.d.).

Participation and democratic deliberation

There are two forms of participation at play in *Confirmation*. The story of Thorpe's attempted participation in 'an honourable dialogue with political extremism' and the audience's cognitive and vocal acts of participation (Warwick Arts Centre & China Plate, 2014: *Confirmation* Programme). *Confirmation* interlinks Thorpe's re-presentation of his research process with the audience's acts of participation to invite them to engage in an internal-reflective dialogue about their own confirmation bias.

The internal-reflective dialogue is a concept advanced by Robert E. Goodwin (2003) in his discussion of voting and democratic deliberation in *Reflective Democracy*. Democratic deliberation is primarily associated with an external-collective standpoint, characterised by face-to-face encounters that promote 'a free and equal exchange among everyone who will be affected by them [the processes of deliberation]' (Goodwin, 2003: 170). However, Goodwin argues that face-to-face discussion would be impossible to conduct in large-scale societies from a practical perspective even if all those who the process of deliberation would affect could be identified. Considering this, Goodwin advances the idea of the internal-reflective dialogue, as an accompaniment to the external-collective approach, in the interests of promoting a society that is sensitive to the needs of all classes and creeds of individual. Goodwin's publication aims to consider how one might evoke more reflective inputs in political processes, such as voting, through more considered and informed reflections that take into account a wide remit of people, standpoints and interests. Goodwin's aim is to create a more democratic, politically engaged and ethically-minded electorate. He explains and justifies the approach as follows:

Even in face-to-face conversation, much of the work in making sense of what the other is saying to you goes on inside your own head. You have to imagine yourself in the place of the other in trying to decide what she seems to be trying to tell you. If this is what goes on in ordinary interpersonal discussion, then the same sort of mentally imagining oneself in the place of others might well occur in the absence of any actual other. A suitably informed imaginary might serve the same internal-discursive purpose.

(Goodwin, 2003: 7)

Goodwin here argues that since interpersonal communication requires an internal act of interpretation the same dialogic process may be invoked through the act of imagining, as long as it is premised on an 'informed' standpoint about 'some specific (fictitious but grounded) other' (2003: 182).

Goodwin's publication does, however, have its limitations. It does little to suggest how voters and policy makers involved in the process of democratic deliberation might become informed, who would do the informing and the ethics of being able to imagine an other's plight. One could also critique Goodwin's concept of internal-reflective dialogue based on the idea that voters and policy makers would be required to empathise with a wide range of individuals who they had only been provided with information about, rather than being exposed to personal experience and contact. Goodwin's ideas might even be viewed as somewhat archaic considering the opportunities that technological advances today provide for mass engagement.⁴² Nonetheless, there is merit in his recognition of the need to make the

⁴² See Dieter Fuchs chapter 'Participatory, liberal and electronic democracy' in Zittel, T. & Fuchs, D. (eds.) (2007) *Participatory Democracy and Political Participation: Can Participatory Engineering Bring Citizens Back In?*, Oxon: Routledge for more on the debates surrounding the possibilities that technology provides for increasing levels of democratic participation.

process of democratic deliberation in capitalist democracy more egalitarian, and his understanding that this requires enhanced education about citizens of all cultural, socio-economic groups and political persuasions. *Confirmation* goes some way towards fulfilling this educative role through the nuance and specificity of Thorpe's conversation with one person.

The participatory aspects of Thorpe's research process, and the internal-reflective dialogue that *Confirmation* prompts in audience members', challenges prejudiced thinking to demonstrate and cultivate egalitarian modes of exchange beyond the theatre space. These practices, subsequently, work towards countering the instrumentalism of capitalist democracy as a governing system of rule and ideology that promotes the individualist mentality. As Gergen states, 'with the glorification of *us*, there is an accompanying defamation of *them*. The invited result is mutual antipathy, physical avoidance, and the mutual creation of "the evil other"' (2009: 190). Admittedly Thorpe has superior knowledge about how the performance will unfold and also has a superior understanding of the dialogue he had with Glen. Audience members are, therefore, reliant on, and limited to, the information Thorpe provides about Glen and the cue card dialogue prompts he provides when audience members assume his role and he plays Glen. In other words, *Confirmation's* acts of participation do not provide audience members with free access to converse with Glen but ask that they act out aspects of Thorpe's dialogue with Glen. These points would seem to challenge the idea that *Confirmation* demonstrates and cultivates egalitarian modes of exchange. However, I stand by this point since, although the structure of the performance does not necessarily engage with egalitarian modes of participatory exchange, it demonstrates, and acts as a platform for encouraging, egalitarian modes of thinking outside the theatre space.

The questions that come to the fore within the performance are whether it is possible to tilt the balance between capitalism and democracy in favour of democracy, what such a process would require of citizens with conflicting political standpoints and the extent to which performance can play a role in facilitating this process. Consequently, where *Credible Likeable Superstar Role Model* and *Major Tom* considered how to advance a more egalitarian socio-political order by focusing on the relationship between identity, consumer capitalism and gender politics *Confirmation* takes a slightly different approach. The performance considers how one might counter the separatist, individualism promoted by capitalist democracy, as a consequence of the dominance of the neoliberal capitalist mentality over the principles and institutions of democracy, and counter binary modes of thinking characteristic of the political left and political right to create a new order of communication. In what follows, I will utilise Goodwin's concept of deliberative democracy to argue that *Confirmation* has the potential to generate new modes of thinking and meaning-making, amongst divergent political standpoints, to consider how we might live together more democratically within the paradox of capitalist democracy.

The idea that theatre can provide fresh insights and alternative perspectives is not new. The understanding that audience members enter into personal processes of meaning making when watching theatre, often imaging themselves in the place of fictitious others, is well established by a range of theatre scholars. These include Jacques Rancière in his publication *The Emancipated Spectator* and Bruce A. McConachie in his publication *Engaging Audiences: A Cognitive Approach to Spectating in the Theatre*, to name but two. My point is, therefore, not to suggest that *Confirmation* employs a radically new mode of audience engagement, but rather

to emphasise how the performance consciously acknowledges the active engagement of its audience members, thereby, magnifying their internal-reflective processes of dialogue. In other words, the activity of audiences has been recognised and established as a core aspect of theatre spectatorship, which occurs independently to the premise of the performance; however, *Confirmation* recognises and incorporates this understanding into its structural framing. *Confirmation* also assumes a unique perspective in relation to Goodwin's concept of internal-reflective dialogue since Thorpe's conversation with a political extremist shares parallels with Goodwin's desire to promote a more democratic, ethically minded and politically engaged society. Theatre performance and artistic forms do not as a general rule share this principle and so could not necessarily be theorised in relation to Goodwin's concept.

Limitations to citizen freedoms in capitalist democracy

The need to assess how we might live together more democratically came into stark relief at the time of writing, in relation to the Conservative Party's manifesto for the 2015 General Election; the outcomes of which remain to be seen with the election of a Conservative government. Home Secretary Theresa May announced, during a party conference in October 2014, that a future Conservative government would seek to police political extremism through Banning Orders limiting those with extremist values, views and opinions from public demonstration, positions of authority and broadcasting visibility. May stated that the intention is to limit those who "stay within the law but spread poisonous hatred" in order to prevent terrorist acts at the level of ideology (BBC News Politics, 2014). The concerning aspect of the powers that the Conservative Party seek, and are in a position to exert post-election, is that they would target those who have not committed an offence and/or

anyone deemed as anti-democratic.⁴³ So, while ostensibly designed to limit the activities of political extremists, the proposals would limit the free speech of all citizens and create sanctioned forms of identity that inhibit expressions of discontent about the governing system of rule. Rabie's argument, that 'at every turn in human history wealthy individuals, groups, and nations have resorted to sheer power to suppress the other and discriminate against them', is salient here highlighting how the proposals serve only to embed Conservative rule and affirm the hegemony of the current concept of capitalist democracy as the only viable socio-political order (2013: 72). In sum, the proposals promote an 'us versus them' mentality that ostracises political extremists, will likely increase the violence that May aims to dispel and control citizen freedoms through a climate of fear (Gergen, 2009: 190). As Lars Svendsen states, 'a government that promotes fear, by creating an exaggerated impression of everyone being in danger of exposure to a terrorist attack limits [...] the core concept of liberal democracies [...] respect of individual autonomy' (2008: 121).

A climate of fear is apparent in the societal unease surrounding extremism reflected in, and perhaps perpetuated by, the news. This unease is exemplified by the controversy that occurred throughout the summer of 2014 when 21 Birmingham schools were investigated by Ofsted and the Department of Education for potentially instilling extremist views. The investigation concluded that there was no 'evidence of terrorism, radicalisation or violent extremism in the schools of concern in Birmingham' (Clarke, 2004: 95). However, the report also ambiguously acknowledged that there were people in positions of influence who either

⁴³ One BBC News reporter made the salient point that this could result in a 'situation where communists, anarchists, monarchists, people who are in no sense a threat to society could face the same sort of curbs which are designed, presumably, for those much closer to terrorist acts' (BBC New Politics, 2014).

'espouse[d], endorse[d] or fail[ed] to challenge extremist views' and a very limited number who had worked together to introduce 'an intolerant and aggressive Islamist ethos into a few schools' (Clarke, 2014: 12 & 95). And this report was published amidst increasing information about the radicalisation of young people leaving the UK to join extremist forces in Syria. The ambiguity and prevalence of such reports creates the idea that radicalisation is prolific and occurring at an alarming rate, thereby, increasing the potential possibility of terrorist attacks. However, Svendsen cites figures from North America indicating that the probability of being killed in a terrorist attack is 'microscopic' (2008: 18). He details that 3,000 people were killed by terrorists in 2001 and, 'no matter how terrible that is, we ought also to remember that in the same year 700,000 North Americans died of heart-related illnesses, and 550,000 of cancer' (Svendsen, 2008: 121-122). It is not my intention to belittle the importance of recognising and countering the radicalisation of individuals but these examples, and Svendsen's figures, serve to demonstrate how the potential dangers of extremism are being advertised as actual dangers, overstating the threats of extremism and terrorism and, thereby, undermining the egalitarian principles of democracy.

Dialogue and confirmation bias

Confirmation addresses the pervasiveness of this outlook in the opening sections of the performance. Thorpe informs the audience that the aim of the research process for *Confirmation* was to enter into a conversation with someone who would challenge his 'self-defined liberalism': Glen (Thorpe & Chavkin, 2014: Section 6). Initially, Thorpe highlights the expectations that he had of Glen prior to meeting him. The information he provides is based on his knowledge gleaned from 'white supremacist literature' and 'those hidden camera documentaries where men

with tattoos sit around in pubs being racist' (Thorpe & Chavkin, 2014: Section 6).

Thorpe creates a dramatic picture that white supremacists are solely preoccupied with the belief that Jews wish to control the world, that all Muslims are terrorists, and that a plan must be put in place for a time when the UK will be lost to multiculturalism. The information depicts an exaggerated, one-dimensional stereotype of a white supremacist to add credence to the idea that Glen must be convinced out of his extremist beliefs. He states:

I want to be the correct sort of angel. The one who does not judge. Who simply says. This is how it is, and you will say – eventually – yes. Yes, I can see that, and I don't understand how I could ever have thought otherwise.

(Thorpe & Chavkin, 2014: Section 5)

The style of the delivery and choice of words here is contra the idea that Thorpe was willing to challenge his liberal stance since he conveys a pious superiority in his over-confident conviction in his own beliefs and ability to authoritatively impose those beliefs on others. Thus, by sharing his research process, Thorpe evidences the self-righteousness that capitalist democracy installs in the liberal individual who conforms to a sanctioned, moderate identity. He also further emphasises how competition and the pursuit of success that characterise the neoliberal capitalist individual, well documented throughout this chapter, even permeates communicative exchanges.

The problem with this concept of discussion is that it is manipulative in its agenda since it fails to participate in a process of exchange. Peter Senge argues that such modes of engagement result only in the proliferation of inflexible, socio-political systems and increased levels of conflict. He states, 'we do not know how to live together in a changing world. We only know how to live based on truths from the

past, which today inevitably results in one group attempting to impose their truths on another' (Senge, 2004: x). Such a concept of dialogue, therefore, does little to offer an inclusive and democratically progressive mode of engagement that can avoid violent, physical conflict and prevent the promotion of one school of thought over another.

The idea of how Thorpe imagined his conversation with Glen would unfold and how he demonstrates that it did unfold does, however, contrast heavily. Thorpe details that when he actually met Glen and entered into a dialogue they had more in common than he expected. Their commonalities included points about how national resources should not be owned by private corporations and an agreement that the white working class are demonised by the media. Thorpe states, 'I can see him in me and me in him. It's what allows me to like him, despite his views about racial purity and Jewish conspiracy and protecting the future of the white children' (Thorpe & Chavkin, 2014: Section 7). The point of significance here is that, despite Thorpe's initial desire to convert Glen to a liberal stance, his willingness to challenge himself opened up a dialogic, participatory exchange that allowed him to identify a sense of commonality with Glen and re-examine his assumptions. David Bohm defines this form of conversation as a specific mode of dialogue. He states that dialogue facilitates the possibility of making critical connections between one's assumptions, thoughts, feelings and bodily reactions and 'see what the assumptions and reactions mean – not only your own, but the other people's as well' (Bohm, 2004: 23). Bohm argues for this mode of dialogue to foster democratic communication since conversation is typically characterised by limited discussions 'or perhaps trade-offs or negotiations' creating 'all sorts of things which are held to be non-negotiable and not touchable' (2004: 8). Thus, by conversing according to Bohm's concept of

dialogue, *Confirmation* facilitated Thorpe's destabilisation, demonstrating an inclusive way in which to address the issue of political extremism, challenge the authoritarianism of one's own viewpoints, and contribute to the evolution of the fascistic aspects of capitalist democracy. As Badiou states, capitalist democracy 'imposes on everything outside it the dictatorship of its decisions *as if they were those of a general will*' (2012: 60 original emphasis).

Empathy and cultural recognition

Confirmation's political significance resides in its use of the theatre space to then extend this dialogic process out to include audience members in a participatory, internal-reflective dialogue, as discussed. Thorpe specifically sets up this internal discursive engagement at the beginning of the performance by demonstrating the concept of confirmation bias to his audience members. Thorpe uses a psychological numbers experiment, inviting audience members to create a rule for the sequence of numbers – 2, 4, 6 – he has lain out on the floor and then test that rule with a second series of numbers. Those audience members who wish are then invited to participate in the progression of the performance by vocally sharing their numbers and rules with Thorpe. Otherwise, since the experiment actively asks audience members to think and engage with an aspect of the performance, the invitation to participate occurs internally. This experiment is designed to show that the audience members choose numbers that confirm the rules that they invented. Thorpe states: 'We have evolved to be beings that see in the world evidence that supports the point of view we hold already. / This is called confirmation bias' (Thorpe & Chavkin, 2014: Section 2). By placing this psychological experiment at the beginning of *Confirmation* Thorpe deliberately invites audience members to test their assumptions in a participatory exchange, with the aim of encouraging their critical engagement

with their own confirmation bias from the outset of the performance. Audience members' critical engagements are further enhanced by Thorpe playing both himself and Glen throughout *Confirmation*, often without distinguishing role, lessening audience members' abilities to automatically align themselves with the individual who they think holds the 'right' view and best characterises their own political stance. *Confirmation* then latterly employs the technique of empathy to humanise Glen. This use of both critical and emotional modes of engagement invites audience members to assess their own assumptions, political stance and relationship with others, potentially contributing to the evolution of the calculating modes of individualistic thought, characteristic of the neoliberal version of capitalist democracy, to find a balanced middle ground. As Goodwin states, 'through the exercise of a suitably informed imagination, each of us might be able to conduct a wide-ranging debate within our own heads among all the contending perspectives' (2003: 184).

Confirmation invites an empathetic engagement from its audience members in the middle of the performance when Thorpe recreates his face-to-face dialogue with Glen. This section of the performance invites audience members to read the questions that Thorpe asked Glen from cue cards. In response, Thorpe sits directly in front of the speaking audience member, maintains an intense level of eye contact and answers as Glen. There are four questions in this section of the performance and with each question Thorpe moves to a different side of the square playing space. The questions included: 'what set you off on this path?', 'if you and me were sitting in a busy street in Britain, what do you think we'd see differently?', 'what do you regret?' and 'what do you think about Anders Breivik?' (Thorpe & Chavkin, 2003:

Section 9).⁴⁴ Glen's answer to the question of regret invited sympathetic response since he spoke of his wife's premature death. He stated, 'you have to make time for people because sometimes they're just gone and you didn't tell them every single day how much you loved them' (Thorpe & Chavkin, 2014: Section 9). In my case, the mention of this tragedy allowed the extremity of Glen's political viewpoints to momentarily recede and our shared humanity to come to the fore. And, regardless of one's views on Glen and his extremist politics, death is a shared fact of life. This suggests that Thorpe included this universal commonality within the performance to counter a one-dimensional concept of Glen for all audience members, provide reason for audience members to engage with Glen's values and beliefs and convey the nuances of his personality that arose in their dialogic exchanges. Consequently, *Confirmation* makes a point about cultural recognition and its associations with cultural difference.

In his article, 'Is "cultural recognition" a useful notion for leftist politics', Richard Rorty persuasively argues that highlighting commonalities between individuals may counter prejudice and inequality through the recognition of our common humanity. Rorty places this concept in contrast with the idea of cultural difference stating:

Another way [to eliminate prejudice] is to get the prejudiced to see the stigmatized as having the same tendency to bleed when pricked that they themselves possess; to worry about their children and parents [...] These ways of emphasizing commonality rather than difference have little to do with

⁴⁴ Earlier in the performance, Thorpe details that Anders Breivik 'set off a bomb at a government building in Oslo and then he went to an island, Utøya [...] where there was a socialist youth camp and he shot 69 young people dead. To save Norway from multiculturalism' (Thorpe & Chavkin, 2014: Section 6). Many audience members may be familiar with the event, but for those who are not this information ensures they have a point of reference for this section of the performance.

“cultural recognition.” They have to do with experiences shared by members of all cultures and all historical epochs, and which remain pretty much the same despite cultural change.

(2000: 11)

Rorty’s concept offers a way to think about equality via the idea that human diversity is premised upon self-creating individuals who share a common humanity, not reductive and separatist ideas about communities of individuals, such as the political left and the political right, and self and other. And if, as Svendsen states, ‘we often fear the *unfamiliar* more than the known. That can in itself be an indication that most things are basically not particularly dangerous once we become familiar with them’ (2008: 98 original emphasis), the dialogue in this section of the performance works to prevent difference-induced conflict through commonality, compassion and inclusion. *Confirmation*’s use of empathy, therefore, contributes to an internalisation of tolerance by inviting audience members into a relationship with Glen that promotes new democratic modes of meaning-making with the potential to contribute to the developing identity of capitalist democracy in a more equitable direction. As Gergen states, ‘softening the boundaries of meaning give[s] ways [*sic*] to the development of new realities, rationalities, values, and practices’ (2009: 193).

Ethics and engaging with extremists

Thorpe’s use of empathy raises an ethical concern about the information that *Confirmation* disseminates. Not only did Thorpe enter into a dialogue with Glen, he shares intolerant and racist viewpoints with audience members each time *Confirmation* is performed. This raises concerns about who is being given a forum to be heard and the consequences of the dissemination of that material at a time when

there has been much media attention focused around the radicalisation of UK citizens, as earlier discussed. However, if Thorpe had not shared the information that he had learnt about Glen in its entire nuance he would have acted as an arbitrator for the information he deemed audience members capable of coping with, limiting their capacity to enter into a dialogic exchange, silencing extremism in a similar vein to May's Banning Orders and reinforcing the separatist and individualistic attitude that limits the democratic aspects of capitalist democracy. Senge argues that such practices hinder the possibility of political progress. He states:

It is easy for us to see this in others [the act of imposing “truths”] – for example, in fanatical “terrorists”, radical fundamentalists aimed at overthrowing modern democratic societies. But, how is this different from “democratic fundamentalists” seeking to impose their truth as the one right way to live?

(Senge, 2004: x)

I acknowledge that the information that Glen and Thorpe shared has been cut and edited in the interests of creating a theatrical performance, and that the text also contains pieces of writing that are designed to assist audience understanding and create dramatic tension. However, the information offered does allow both sides of the conversation to be heard, and Thorpe's intention was to convey Glen's perspective with the intelligence that characterised their conversations. Thorpe states, 'I might have written those words, I might have shaped that text. This isn't about me being really good at that. That's not it at all. It's about me reflecting the subtlety and the finesse with which those opinions are actually held and expressed in the real world' (Thorpe, 2014a). Thus, *Confirmation* is not ethically negligent.

Rather, it opens up a process that allows us to debate the possibility of democratic equality from an informed perspective.

The issue at stake here is well illustrated by the 2006 debate in the popular media over the publication of a series of 12 Danish cartoons depicting images of the prophet Muhammad. The images ranged in their degree of provocation with the most potent depicting an image of Muhammad with a lit bomb on his head, hidden under a turban decorated with the Muslim declaration of faith. The publication of the cartoons sparked a debate between those arguing for free speech in a Western open society, and those who argued that the cartoons went beyond satire to demonise Muslims as crazed fanatics and followers of a terrorist. The publication led to a stalemate between the two perspectives that subsequently resulted in over 200 deaths world-wide amidst violent protests. If, as Senge states, referring to Bohm's concept of dialogue, 'friction between contrasting values is at the heart of dialogue. [...] Recognizing the power of these assumptions and attending to their "virus-like" nature may lead to a new understanding [...] defensive posturing can diminish and a quality of natural warmth and fellowship can infuse' (2004: xvii), there is a sense that dialogue might have played a useful role in preventing the ensuing conflict. In other words, a dialogic exchange may have facilitated an objective, open consideration of the issues at stake that highlighted our shared humanity and, thus, countered the elitist othering currently characteristic of capitalist democracy.

It is, however, imperative to make a note here in relation to the renewal of the freedom of speech controversy following the 2015 Paris terrorist attacks. In early 2015 Cherif and Said Kouachi entered the offices of the *Charlie Hebdo* satirical newspaper and killed the paper's editor and cartoonist Stephane Charbonnier. The cartoonist had been living under police protection after receiving death threats over

reprinting the Danish cartoons as well as others of the Prophet Muhammad. It has been reported that the gunmen shouted “We have avenged the Prophet Muhammad” in Arabic at the time of the shootings (BBC News Europe, 2015). The attack was also linked to further isolated shootings in Paris over the course of three days and a supermarket hostage situation. In total 17 people were killed. In the immediate wake of such a tragic event the conclusion discussed above is perhaps idealistic since the political ideas in *Confirmation*, despite their extremity or not, are the views of individuals who live as socially integrated members of society. This stance allows Bohm’s concept of dialogue to be put into play. However, one must question how Bohm’s theory can reach out to those who purposefully situate themselves outside ‘normative’ moral codes of conduct in society and may not wish to engage in dialogue. The recentness of the Paris events also makes me question the extent to which dialogue is even desired in such instances, by those directly and indirectly affected by the attacks, as well as those perpetrating the attacks. Perhaps the answer is to engage in dialogue before such a point of extremity is reached, but I am unsure. I still agree that dialogue holds great potential for the democratisation of society but question the idealism behind the idea that individuals with conflicting viewpoints, particularly during emotion riven circumstances, will choose to enter into a process of dialogue that requires the willing suspension of one’s beliefs. Thus, although the attacks mark a moment in history that has the potential to shift society in a freer, more cohesive and egalitarian direction, they also raise the question of how to include those who choose to exclude themselves. In the absence of an answer, society runs the risk of veering towards less trust, greater surveillance and limitations on the freedoms of all.

Holocaust denial and a difference of opinion

The potential for envisioning a more egalitarian concept of identity is, however, jeopardised at the end of *Confirmation* when Glen's Holocaust denial is brought to the fore. Glen's denial of the indisputable evidence that proves the Nazis' systematic attempt to exterminate the Jewish people goes to an extreme that warrants the dismissal of his political stance and refusal to engage with him in a dialogic exchange. Thorpe acknowledges this point when he states:

It's kind of unfortunate in a way that those things clustered around the denial of the holocaust [...] It's something that makes people immediately step back and go "that's, well that would be too far [...] That's obviously the workings of a deranged man".

(Thorpe, 2014a)

As the performance continues, Thorpe also portrays a hopeless stance about the possibility of comprehending another's perspective. In the final scenes he details an imaginary scenario whereby he and Glen would exchange their eyeballs in order to see from each other's perspectives. He states: 'Our sense of rightness is just as deeply rooted. / And the only way I can think of to shake that – / It would require us to mutilate ourselves' (Thorpe and Chavkin, 2014: Section 14). This scene occurs after the introduction of Glen's Holocaust denial suggesting that it is the extremity of Glen's perspective that hinders Thorpe's ability to empathise with him, leading to a dialogic stalemate between their political standpoints. Thorpe stated in interview, 'I would have loved to have been able to stand-up, at the end of the show, and say [...] "I've discovered a way for us all to live together"' (2014a), before detailing that this would not have been a true reflection of his experience.

Thorpe here suggests that he failed in his intentions for the performance. However, this idea of failure would require the process of democratic deliberation to be premised upon finding a point of agreement. Contrastingly, Goodwin argues that 'a person who has internalised the perspective of others, balancing them with their own, will [...] be "more democratic"' (2003: 10). Goodwin here explicitly emphasises that agreement is not a necessary factor in thinking about how to enhance the concept of deliberative democracy through equal recognition of all political perspectives. Rather, the point of significance lies in the process of entering into dialogue itself reflecting on the assertions of other viewpoints, and 'taking them and their claims seriously', before ascertaining how and if they impinge upon one's own views or not (Goodwin, 2003: 13). In other words, entering into dialogue with the range of voices that characterise one's political community, even if their views seem beyond recognition, democratises capitalist democracy more than refusing to engage with those voices at all. This is not a call to engage with consensus politics, in the sense of eradicating debate and conflicting viewpoints. Rather, it is an acknowledgement that the key to evolving the inherent contradiction in capitalist democracy, in favour of a more democratic worldview, is fostered upon sharing one's judgements and assumptions. This process allows seemingly polarised individuals and groups to find common points of departure for enquiry and debate the possibility of democratic equality with an open-mind and outside one's familiar standards (Taylor, n.d.: 70). As Taylor states:

The nature of a free society is that it will always be the locus of a struggle between higher and lower forms of freedom. Neither side can abolish the other, but the line can be moved, never definitively but at least for some people for some time, one way or the other. Through social action, political

change, and winning hearts and minds, the better forms can gain ground, at least for a while.

(1991: 78)

Additionally, this lack of a need for agreement also bolsters the claim that *Confirmation* is not ethically negligent since it does not aim to convert audience members to a radically other stance. Rather, it provides an informed perspective that they can enter into the dialogic process with.

Democratic identities and the socio-political potential of performance

Thorpe demonstrates his commitment to continually re-evaluate his assumptions and, consequently, the fixity of his identity in the final section of *Confirmation*. Despite his reservations, and the sense of hopelessness that characterises *Confirmation*'s final scenes, Thorpe draws upon Goodwin's concept of deliberative democracy by trying to turn himself 'into a Holocaust denier' and attempting to see from Glen's perspective (Thorpe & Chavkin, 2014: Section 13). Thorpe details how he engaged in a research process that involved reading and watching Holocaust denial materials. He shares how these materials detail inconsistencies in survivor testimonies, suggest that the gas chambers could be opened from the inside and offer calculations that imply it would have undermined the war effort to burn millions of bodies on an industrial scale. None of this material challenged Thorpe's beliefs since he saw this 'selective interpretation of records and bad mathematics' as 'a perfect example of how confirmation bias works in these people' (Thorpe & Chavkin, 2014: Section 13). However, Thorpe also details how his perspective was destabilised when he engaged with the range of literature that

supports the existence of the Holocaust, referring to this body of research as 'mainstream history' (Thorpe & Chavkin, 2014: Section 13).

Thorpe details how his stance was troubled by the revelation that 'mainstream historians' have estimated that the death toll from the Holocaust might be closer to four million than the oft cited six million figure.⁴⁵ He also states that the 'number killed in Auschwitz, which after the war was estimated at four million, might have been lower. One to one and a half million' (Thorpe & Chavkin, 2014: Section 13).⁴⁶ Thorpe details that he had always accepted that the death toll of six million was a fundamental fact so that when it becomes subject to revision, and closer to affirming the beliefs of a National Socialist, he is required to acknowledge the limits of his ability and desire to challenge his own assumptions. He states:

My mind, because it is more comfortable that way, sees any attempt to revise the figure I believe in as just as bad as saying the whole thing never happened. Because it did. But to admit a crack in six million, in my mind, is tantamount to agreeing with Glen.

⁴⁵ Thorpe does emphasise that four million is the lowest end of the scale. He states, 'those figures are very much the absolute lowest end of mainstream thinking, but still, they are accepted as a remote possibility by some experts who are definitely not Holocaust deniers in any form' (Thorpe & Chavkin, 2014: Section 13).

⁴⁶ Thorpe's point about the lower number of lives lost at Auschwitz is corroborated by the BBC History website. See http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/genocide/holocaust_overview_01.shtml for more details. The website does not indicate that the figure was originally 4 million but the University of Minnesota's Centre for Holocaust & Genocide Studies verifies this point. The Centre details that the figure was 4 million before the fall of communism since the Polish Communist Regime had used the number of Jewish deaths to demonize fascism. While the information sounds strikingly like the claims made in Holocaust denial materials, the Centre is a legitimate institution that takes a firm stand on Holocaust deniers and their use of this inaccuracy to support their perspective. See <http://www.chgs.umn.edu/museum/memorials/auschwitz/> for more details. I have been unable to access information suggesting that the death toll in total has been interpreted as low as 4 million but across the body of research I have found evidence of figures ranging from 5-6 million. This variance supports the premise of this section of the performance since Thorpe's aim is to highlight his failure to question the exact figure that he accepted as irrefutable fact. The accuracy of Thorpe's understanding of Auschwitz, and his angry criticism that diverging estimates are 'loved' by Holocaust deniers because 'they see the debate not as evidence of a striving for accuracy but evidence of a point to come where mainstream history is going to accept that very few people were deliberately killed at all', makes me confident that the 4 million figure he offers is not fabricated or designed to support or promote the ideas endorsed by Holocaust deniers (Thorpe & Chavkin, 2014: Section 13).

(Thorpe & Chavkin, 2014: Section 13)

Thorpe here highlights that his attempt to participate in Glen's world and see from his perspective did not provide a resolution to their differences, but did result in him questioning his own confirmation bias, recognising the instability of the "truths" that contribute to his world view and acknowledging the logic and consistency of Glen's perspective. As Thorpe states later in the performance, it's not a case of 'your right versus my right. Just both, self-evidently, right' (Thorpe & Chavkin, 2014: Section 14). The significance of Thorpe's recognition of this point is that he performs a democratic identity into existence since he refuses to censor Glen and validates the right for others to have alternative perspectives.

This democratic mode of engagement is also extended out to include audience members via Thorpe's insistence not to censor the course of his conversations with Glen. He states, 'If I'd just wanted to make a show exploring confirmation bias, I don't think I'd have touched the Holocaust. [...] But the Holocaust is part of him. So this is the way I have to go' (Thorpe & Chavkin, 2014: Section 13). Thorpe's choice to re-present this material to audience members, despite the controversial quality of its content, sustains their internal acts of reflection with Glen's worldview, as long as they remain within the theatre space. *Confirmation*, therefore, continually exposes audience members to Glen's perspective, regardless of whether they reach their limit of tolerance with the introduction of his Holocaust denial or not, democratising their thought processes. *Confirmation*, thus, uses the platform of performance to contribute, in part, to the creation of more viable, democratic, interdependent ways of thinking and living that might assist in contributing to the democratisation of capitalist democracy one audience at a time. As Castoriadis states 'the construction of a democratic individual, who has internalized the

democratic components of the institutions' protects the freedoms of all in present-day society (1986: 129).

Thorpe's use of the theatre space and act of performance to frame his dialogue with Glen may have even facilitated a greater possibility for dialogue to unfold. This point is made apparent if one considers the result of the October 2014 debate, which occurred at the time of writing, between The Mayor of Osaka, Toru Hashimoto, and anti-Korean right-winger Makoto Sakurai. The debate was held to address the rise of incidents in hate speech towards Korean residents of Japan. However, it made little progress since within two minutes it devolved into an argument as both speakers approached each other with aggressive intent, ending after a further, fraught, seven minutes (McCurry, 2014).⁴⁷ The point of significance here is that if the theatre can prompt an internal-reflective dialogue through thoughtful engagement and the fictitiousness of the encounter, it has the potential to facilitate a more objective and measured exchange that avoids the incapacitating, emotional engagement that verbal exchange in the face-to-face encounter can evoke.

No audience members walked out of the performance of *Confirmation* that I attended, substantiating the idea that their internal reflections with Glen's perspective were sustained. However, it is also possible to argue that the topic was tolerated because it occurred within the safe containment of the theatre space, amongst like-minded individuals. In the performance I attended, no audience members acted in response to the performance as if they inhabited a stance strongly oppositional to Thorpe's and, although an assumption, it is generally accepted that 'experimental'

⁴⁷ See <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/21/japan-hate-speech-debate-abandoned-toru-hashimoto-makoto-sakurai> for more information.

theatre-makers have a leftist following.⁴⁸ In other words, *Confirmation* is a left-wing liberal performance that addresses left-wing liberals. And since Thorpe explicitly outlines his left-wing, liberal political perspective at the beginning of the performance, post his encounters with Glen, he assuages any potential concern that he became a Holocaust denier as a consequence of his research process. As a left-wing individual I, therefore, felt assured that my political perspective would be affirmed and my confirmation bias would remain relatively intact. Put differently, *Confirmation* is never going to challenge its audience members as much as the same performance might if delivered from a minority, right-wing National Socialist perspective to an audience containing left-wing liberals and right-wing National Socialists, or vice-versa. Thus, there is a sense that the performance also offers a pseudo-validation of its audience members' 'liberal', 'tolerant' stances that limits the extent to which their confirmation biases can be challenged.

Before concluding, it is also important to acknowledge that the emphasis throughout *Confirmation* is on the effects that the dialogue between Thorpe and Glen has on Thorpe. While Glen's political perspective is given a hearing within the performance, audience members are not privy to the personal thoughts, feelings and understandings that characterised Glen's experience of the dialogic exchange. This raises a question about whether the process of dialogue equally affected Thorpe and Glen according to Bohm's argument that in dialogue 'there is no attempt to gain points or to make your particular view prevail' (2004: 7). In other words, did the dialogic exchange challenge Glen's thought processes as much as it did Thorpe's,

⁴⁸ I appreciate that the term 'experimental' theatre is used loosely in academia, literature and marketing materials to refer to a range of performance practices. It, thereby, functions with very little specificity of use. However, I here refer to theatre practices typified by the practitioners included in this thesis who make, or write, their own new work, perform at 'fringe' festivals and outside bourgeois theatre venues. When touring, such work often also performs in smaller auditoriums, if a venue has more than one, since the larger is reserved for well-known and established plays, or larger companies, guaranteed to draw a large audience.

inviting new modes of identification and ways of thinking for both parties, or did Glen more successfully impose on Thorpe? Thorpe provides an enigmatic answer to this point in the final few lines of the play. He states:

He's [Glen's] gone into mainstream politics [...]. It's a party you've heard of, and not, maybe, the one you're thinking. He's swallowed his beliefs. Not changed them. [...] He's trying to work within the overlap.

[...]

I don't know which of us moved most towards the other.

I don't even know if that happened.

(Thorpe & Chavkin, 2014: Section 16)

Thorpe here makes no claim for his or Glen's more nuanced standpoints to be attributed to their dialogue. However, by choosing to offer this information, *Confirmation* hints towards the idea that Thorpe's research process was a two-way dialogue that did find a shared, political middle ground to effect socio-political change, if only infinitesimally and between the identities of two people. Thus, even if the performance does not democratise the thought processes of its audience members, its creation was not in vain.

Summary

In summary, this case-study analysis has argued that *Confirmation* acts as a platform for inviting audience members to recognise their confirmation bias and enter into a participatory process of democratic deliberation. Through the sharing of his research process, Thorpe makes Glen imaginatively present to audience members,

allowing them to enter into an informed internal dialogue with, both, Thorpe and Glen's political viewpoints. Glen is ventriloquized throughout *Confirmation*, in the sense that he is not present within the performance to speak for himself. However, this choice provides audience members with a sense of distance that facilitates both critical and empathetic modes of engagement with an individual whose views they might not typically tolerate and/or encounter. The performance does not arbitrate over what information the audience should be given, nor does it dictate what their views ought to be. Audience members are free to agree or disagree with Thorpe and Glen's viewpoints since the democratic potential of the performance lies not in reaching a conclusion but entering in to a participatory, dialogic exchange that focuses on challenging the process of thought itself. If, as Lee Nichol states, 'dialogue – always a testing ground for the limits of assumed knowledge – offers the possibility of an entirely new order of communication and relationship with ourselves, our fellows, and the world we inhabit' (1995: xxvii), there is a sense that *Confirmation's* dialogic focus creates a new order of communication by increasing tolerance, recognising and validating alternative perspectives and acknowledging our shared humanity and commonalities. However, this analysis also established that since the performance is created by a left-wing liberal for audiences of a not dissimilar political stance it also restricts its socio-political potential. Nonetheless, I maintain that the performance does go some way towards evidencing and developing new ways of thinking that highlight and promote our inter-relatedness, playing a small part in democratising the social identity of capitalist democracy as a whole and the individualised, separatist identities it currently endorses. As Bohm states:

There may be no pat political answer to the world's problems. However, the important point is not the answer – just as in a dialogue, the important point is not the particular opinions – but rather the softening up, the opening up of the mind, and looking at all the opinions. If there is some sort of spread of that attitude, I think it can slow down the destruction.

(2004: 53)

It is worth noting that this internal-dialogic process was extended through the Dialogue Theatre Club, hosted by the Battersea Arts Centre. The club is led by theatre critics Maddy Costa and Jake Orr and provides the opportunity for audience members to participate in a discussion about specific performances, in this case *Confirmation*, over drinks and nibbles and in the absence of their artistic teams. The premise of the club is that all opinions are valid, and in the invitation to the event audience members were told that they could be 'as honest as you like' (BAC, 2014). The invitation was extended to all those who attended the run of *Confirmation* at the BAC, providing the opportunity for audience members to translate their internal, reflective engagements with the performance into external face-to-face dialogues. This process, thus, provided the opportunity for those audience members who attended to confer or challenge the legitimacy of the conclusions that they had reached internally, during the performance, through an external, dialogic process. In other words, the theatre club opened up a dialogue between audience members, potentially from varying political backgrounds, allowing them to engage further with the questions and provocations that they encountered during *Confirmation*. It would be going too far to suggest that this group could act as a microcosm for society – Bohm's aim in dialogue groups, considering that the invitation was extended only to those who attended the performance at the BAC. This narrow remit has limits in

terms of the demographic scope of the conversation. Nonetheless, the club still provided the opportunity for audience members to practice and test their confirmation bias in a relaxed and jovial atmosphere, perhaps, strengthening *Confirmation's* encouragement of how we might progress a new order of communication.

Chapter One: Conclusion

Chapter One has focused on a discussion of acts of participation carried out by performers, and the implications of the re-presentation of their research processes within theatre spaces for audience modes of engagement. The chapter has explored the concept of identity within, and the identity of, capitalist democracy, acknowledging the tension between these two principles of social organization. I have argued that the case-studies offered entertaining and inspiring artistic participatory endeavours that defamiliarised and subverted the dominance of the neoliberal individualistic mentality in capitalist democracy. This process evidenced the possibility of remaking the conditions of our socio-political order by highlighting more democratic and socially responsible alternatives. As Alexis de Tocqueville states, individualism 'saps the virtues of public life' and the individualist 'willingly leaves society at large to itself' (in Gergen, 2009: 12). In this sense the chapter aligns with Rabie's stance regarding the need to rebalance capitalist democracy and the case-studies offer an alternative mode of self-definition that challenges the existing hegemony, thereby, contributing to the production of democratic contestation. As Mouffe states, 'modern democracy's specificity lies in the recognition and legitimation of conflict' (2000: 103).

Neoliberal values played an integral role in advancing the political potential of the performances to effect socio-political change. In an article on participation and power, Majid Rahnema states that when micro-changes reach a critical mass they threaten the 'dominant knowledge/power centres at the top' resulting in their co-option in, usually successful, attempts to 'contain and redirect change' in their own interests (2009: 146). Rahnema here suggests that any attempt to oppose the dominance of the neoliberal ideology results in its co-option by vested interests

limiting the possibility for transgressive, political potential; a point that harkens back to Rose and Crouch's points regarding the dominance of the neoliberal hegemony and the power exerted by the marketplace. However, the case-studies included in this chapter offered a reversion of this process by employing the neoliberal principle of personal responsibility in their participatory endeavours, subverting its self-interested focus to one of self-actualising in the interests of others and encouraging audience members do the same. The case-studies, therefore, co-opted principles already endorsed by the neoliberal ideology recognising the impossibility of absenting oneself from one's ideological environment and using this understanding to their advantage, perhaps escaping its potential to counter the development of a more democratically accountable version of capitalist democracy. Accordingly, the possibility arises for each performance to act as a 'small social mobilization' which combined together, and considered alongside international projects and initiatives such as the Compassionate Listening Project, Seeds for Peace Camp and the Deep Democracy Project, may have a ripple effect on the development of our shared future narrative (Wallerstein, 2013: 33).⁴⁹ At the very least the performances invited a consideration about how, if and why one might re-define their sense of self, advocating a concept of citizenship that recognised how self-interest and self-sacrifice are not oppositional perspectives, potentially sparking the re-development of society as a whole, one individual at a time. As Immanuel Wallerstein et al. state, 'breakthroughs become possible when enough support and public attention go into thinking and arguing about alternative designs' (2013: 8).

⁴⁹ See <http://www.compassionatelisting.org/>, http://www.seedsofpeace.org/?page_id=770 and <http://www.deepdemocracyinstitute.org/deep-democracy-explained.html> for more information on these projects.

The personal endeavours of the theatre-makers bring Rabie's focus on thinking globally but acting locally to rebalance capitalist democracy to the fore. In each instance the performers began with the self to create performances out of their personal politics and concerns. Yet, the issues they raised have a much wider relevance in their desire to impact upon the individualistic aspects of the neoliberal ideology. For *CLSRM* Kimmings was inspired to create an alternative role model for her niece, yet the social campaign continues to have relevance for young people throughout the UK and possibly on a global scale considering Bennett's internet presence. Melody was inspired to engage with the competitive world of pageantry as a consequence of the negative relationship between image, success and self-worth that she encountered as a woman. However, by dealing with this issue through performance her personal concerns became relevant to the objectification of all citizens living in advanced neoliberal socio-political milieus and governed by the marketplace. And *Confirmation* began from Thorpe's personal desire to challenge his self-defined liberalism, yet the performance has relevance for all ostensibly democratic countries where the liberal stance is hegemonic. Thus, while the actions of each performer originated in the personal they think beyond this local perspective and into a wider, public realm through the act of performance. This process highlights the potential for participatory-based theatre to do politics, and contribute to the rebalancing of capitalist democracy, through an emphasis on social relationships.

Credible Likeable Superstar Role Model utilised the theatre space as a forum for delivering information about the social campaign that the performance is a part of. The performance demonstrated and promoted Kimmings' uptake of social responsibility to her niece, and by proxy the future of the next generation, through her creation of Bennett. It also challenged the self-interested organizing principle of

the neoliberal capitalist ideology through its rhizomatic structure, promotion of bonded being and enchantment of audience members. In *Major Tom Melody* participated within the Mrs Galaxy UK Beauty Pageant, exposing the commodification of identity in neoliberal society and inviting audience members into new ways of seeing. The emphasis was on defamiliarising the negative repercussions to one's sense of self-worth in a consumer-driven, individualistic society, which posits oneself as the primary site of evaluation and promotes an "all against all" mentality (Gergen, 2009: 25). *Confirmation* lacked such firm convictions, presenting audience members with the inner conflicts that Thorpe experienced during his conversations with Glen. The experiences that Thorpe shared aimed to stimulate an internal-reflective dialogue in audience members, provocatively challenging them to test the limits of their own confirmation bias and recognise the tyranny of the individualist mentality in capitalist democracy, to advance a new order of communication. Overall, the emphasis across the case-studies was premised on each performer's use of the theatre space to demonstrate their assumption of responsibility for issues of common concern evidencing how audience members might, and urging them to, play a role in renegotiating and redefining the limiting and inequitable aspects of capitalist democracy (Gorz in Harvey, 2014: 277).

The next chapter similarly considers three performances that occur within demarcated theatre spaces, but focuses on acts of participation carried out by audience members. The case-studies to be discussed make purposeful and pointed use of theatrical convention to render visible ideological structures that prevent the recognition of the need to intervene in the continued perpetuity of the capitalist hegemony. As Bailes states, capitalism 'prevents the possibility – the imagination and realization – of all other images of the world, and the potential worlds and

relationalities those images index' (2011: 36). The case-studies, therefore, extend beyond exemplifying how the relationship between neoliberal individualism and identity might be renegotiated, as considered in this chapter, to confront audience members with the limitations to, and consequences of, their participatory choices. This process facilitates the opportunity for audience members to problematize the constraints of working within the neoliberal ideology to create change from their personal perspectives and recognise the extent to which their participatory choices offer only regulated freedoms that serve to reinforce its hegemony. I argue that the case-studies challenge the relationship between participation as an active and empowered mode of engagement and non-participation as a passive and disempowered mode of engagement. This understanding invites audience members to question their motivations for acting or not, both within and outside the theatre space, allowing them to problematize how they might contribute to the development of the shared political community for themselves.

Chapter Two: Playing Along

Participation: 'At its worst, it's like rats in a laboratory that are told to run on a wheel and fulfil all these sorts of protocols' (Deloglu et. al., 2011: 22)

Chapter Two shifts the discussion from acts of participation carried out by performers to focus attention on acts of participation by audience members. The acts of audience participation within the analyses in this chapter are designed to occur within the traditionally demarcated theatre space. The chapter draws on Claire Bishop's understanding of the hierarchal tension between performer and audience member in participatory performance practices as well as psychology-based discourse on behaviour, motivation and emotion. The three performances to be analysed are Ontroerend Goed's (2013) *Fight Night*, Made in China's (2013) *Gym Party* and Gob Squad's (2013) *Gob Squad's Kitchen (You've never had it so good)*. The three performances have been chosen to demonstrate the varying degrees and nuances of audience participation that are occurring within theatre spaces and the potential the theatre space provides for exploring the depoliticisation of citizens and the limitations to their acts of participation in current democratic processes. *Fight Night* asks audience members to participate in the performance by privately voting using a small digital voting device in response to multiple choice questions asked by the performance's host. *Gym Party* invites audience participation through game play, visible voting and the opportunity for at least one audience member to move into the stage space alongside the performers. *Gob Squad's Kitchen* invites four audience members to stand-in for the performers on the stage and play out the latter's roles in the reconstruction of several of Andy Warhol's films. This process is supported through the use of headset technology but also includes moments of improvisation between performers and audience members. The case-studies, in

turn, focus on the use of audience participation in relation to electoral voting and governmental politics, game show mentality and popular entertainments, and the alienated intimacy of the mediatised image. Despite these participatory options each performance is highly scripted, suggesting that they are characteristic of Christina Deloglu's negative assessment of the worst kind of participatory performance, detailed at the beginning of this chapter. However, as I will argue, the act of limiting audience members to 'filling protocols' can allow them to self-consciously assess the structural limitations to citizen acts of participation and, perhaps, reconsider their daily modes of engagement in the interests of ascertaining if and how the imbalance between capitalism and democracy might be effected.

Directed participation's negative press

It is imperative to analyse directed forms of participation as a consequence of the predominantly negative critical framing of such practices within the academy. Helen Freshwater has stated that 'much of what now presents itself as participation in contemporary performance is really nothing of the sort', and during the 2011 *Participation and Relation* symposium at Aberystwyth University Adrian Kear stated, 'when I am in an artwork or a performance event which is asking me to do specific things under the guise of participation I feel it's almost the opposite of participation' (Freshwater, 2009: 75 & Payne & Kear, 2011). Kear's use of the word 'guise' in this instance indicates his belief that directed participation is a deceptive practice that claims to offer a democratic exchange but is, in fact, authorially corrupt and ought to be avoided. The implied suggestion in these critiques is that participation ought to allow audience members the freedom to follow their own trajectory in their encounter with the work, thereby, deeming the participatory practices of the case-studies discussed in this chapter as unworthy of mention and the classification of

participatory performance. However, if, as Bishop states, in conversation with Dušan Barok, 'it is still the singular artist as motivator and facilitator that provides the work's identity' and which 'differentiates collaborative projects in the sphere of contemporary art from the more anonymous tradition of community arts' (2009: 3), the authorial hierarchy of theatrical performance is necessary for artistic integrity and highlights how much of the discourse surrounding participatory performance idealises the democratic structure or exchange network assumed to empower audience members.

The popular conception of what participatory performance ought to amount to explains the various emphases on art, installations, workshops, new-media theatre and applied performance in publications discussing the topic of participation. These forms of engagement place emphasis on the relationality between the art object and audience member, and/or an emphasis on what the audience member brings to, or needs from, the encounter or project. Often these practices occur outside demarcated theatre spaces, in galleries, museums, community settings, rehearsal rooms and outdoor locales, by-passing the implicit hierarchies of the division that is created by the stage auditorium divide in theatre spaces. Bishop's (2012) timely publication, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, takes as it focus a range of contemporary artists and artworks to explore the perceived emancipatory social relations of participatory art. Publications such as Astrid Breel's (2011) 'Emancipating the Spectator: Participation in Performance', Anthony Jackson and Shulamith Lev-Aladgem's (2004) 'Rethinking Audience Participation: Audiences in Alternative and Educational Theatre' and Helen Nicholson's (2005) *Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre* focus on performances that specifically use participation outside the theatre space in educational, community and outdoor site-responsive

locations. The exploration of spatial environments was also the topic of conversation in 'an experimental' panel discussion that took place in 2010, on the subject of participation, at *Performing the Future* – a conference hosted by the interdisciplinary research centre *Performing Cultures* at the House of World Cultures in Berlin. In contrast, much of the discourse surrounding new-media performance focuses on work that occurs within the theatre space; however, the emphasis is often on the interactive capabilities of technology within participatory installations, as opposed to a consideration of the transgression of the demarcated stage space and the relationship between audience member and performance (see Machon & Broadhurst, 2011; Miller, 2012; Shani, 2004; Sheridan, Bryan-Kinss & Bayliss, 2007 for examples). The point here is not to discredit or dismiss these works, particularly when they offer critical considerations that are pursued throughout this thesis and two of the three case-studies to follow could be classified as new-media performance. Rather, my point is to demonstrate that a consideration of acts of participation within the demarcated theatre space, and their ability to problematize the issue of participatory citizenship, have been side-lined in favour of discussions based on alternative dramaturgies that can be more readily conceived of as facilitating 'good' and 'progressive' egalitarian modes of exchange. This chapter, thus, seeks to add to the current discussion.

Gareth White's (2013) publication, *Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation*, is one exception that addresses this gap. White offers a relatively balanced appraisal of participant agency in a varied range of performance practices, some of which include performances occurring in demarcated theatre spaces. As indicated in the introduction to this thesis, White focuses on the moment when audience members are invited to participate, and the ensuing process of call

and response, acknowledging that participatory performance can use participants as 'manipulable' material, whilst also emphasising that audience members are capable of exercising resistance (2013:195). The following performances play on this idea, manipulating audience agency in the interests of provoking resistance, to act as forums for problematizing citizen apathy and exploring and inciting democratic discontent.

The tension between artist and audience member in directed participatory performance is an integral factor for identifying its political capabilities, summarised by Bishop as follows:

The artist relies upon the participant's creative exploitation of the situation that he/she offers – just as participants require the artist's cue and direction. The relationship between artist/participant is a continual play of mutual tension, recognition and dependency [...] rather than a ladder of progressively more virtuous political forms.

(2012: 279)

Bishop does not deny the hierarchy of a directed relationship but understands that it can be premised on interplay between audience member and the performance. In the analyses that follow this hierarchy is more heavily weighted on the side of the performance makers. However, the authorial directedness of the participation is metatheatrically indicated to audience members, highlighting the constraints within which they are asked to act. This limitation invited me to seek ways to exert my agency within each performance, demonstrating my potential to shape the experiences I am part of rather than accepting imposed conditions as unsurmountable. The performances, thus, demonstrate the control they exert over

audience members, defamiliarising modes of engagement that disempower agency and unthinkingly support the status quo to, paradoxically, empower.

A view from the other side

This chapter considers how the case-studies that follow facilitate the possibility for audience members to enter into participatory acts that confront them with their motivations for acting and allow them to engage with the structural and ideological limitations to their participatory agency for effecting change. This approach shares similarities with Chapter One, which focused on the relationship between self and other and showcased the significance of personal, localised acts of political doing. However, the case-studies in this chapter use the theatre space to trouble the political agency of the individual situated within a wider collective body. *Fight Night* raises doubts about the possibility of effecting change via the democratic electoral system which imposes the tyranny of the majority; *Gym Party* troubles the issue of political consensus and the possibility of opting out of the behaviours endorsed by the current governing body; and *Gob Squad's Kitchen* invites audience members to negotiate their response-ability in a mediatised society that results in the alienation of citizens from each other and their political agency by separating the production of events from their reception. In contrast to the performances discussed so far, the case-studies offer more cynical appraisals about the possibility for socio-political development as a consequence of the extent to which choice is heavily conditioned by ideological limitations and challenge the idea that participation and acts of doing present the most empowered opportunity to exert one's political agency.

This investigation relies on the established conventions of the theatre space, whereby the audience is situated in one half of the theatre space and the performers are situated within the other half. It is typical of this theatre tradition, since the invention of electric light, for the audience to sit in darkness and conform to an expected etiquette of behaviour: one's behaviour should not draw attention to itself and should not impede the concentration and viewing capabilities of any other audience members. It is by exploiting and subverting these socially and culturally circumscribed rules that the analyses in this chapter invite, shape and control audience participation replicating the limitations to citizen freedoms outside the theatre space in the interests of inviting a plethora of creative responses about how, if and where citizens might assume their participatory agency. As Charles Taylor states, 'instead of dismissing this culture altogether, or just endorsing it as it is, we ought to attempt to raise its practice by making more palpable to its participants what the ethic they subscribe to really involves' (1991: 72).

Hans-Thies Lehmann argues that citizen answerability has waned in neoliberal society resulting in a lack of understanding about the need for socio-political transformation, as well as how such change might be achieved. He states that as a consequence of the commodification of society and the competitiveness of the neoliberal ideology 'the consciousness of being connected to others and thus being answerable and bound to them "in the language", in the medium of communication itself recedes' (2006: 184). The performances that follow purposefully limit the participatory agency of their audience members to defamiliarise their alienation from one another in the interests of reinstating a process of answerability. The containment of the theatre space is a core aspect of this process since it allows audience members to see the consequences of their choices, or the

choices others make in the absence of their own actions, play out and culminate. In other words, the reduced anonymity of acts of participation occurring in the theatre space confronts audience members with, and makes them directly answerable for, their participatory choices which impact upon the progression of the performances, the actions of other audience members and performers and contribute to defining the collective identity of the audience as a whole. The finitude of the theatre experience, thus, creates a connection between action and consequence that aims to counter the transformation of the subject into a passive observer indifferent to one's answerability to the other and unable to contribute to the historical evolution of the neoliberal hegemony (Lehmann, 2006: 183-187).

In Chapter One this sense of answerability was advanced through the transformations the performers undertook in relation to their personal narratives. The chapter highlighted the possibility of self-actualising in the interests of others and conceived of a socially responsible form of citizenship premised on modes of doing and self-definition. This chapter similarly conceives of a socially responsible mode of citizenship but consciously defamiliarises common modes of participation in an exploration of the tension between participation and non-participation, and the equation of the former with activity and the latter with passivity. *Fight Night* demonstrates that non-participation can be as active a choice as participation within the democratic electoral system. *Gym Party* prompts considerations of the ethical relationship between self and other as a consequence of neoliberal capitalism, and *Gob Squad's Kitchen (You've Never had it so Good)* asks audience members to consider their legacy to the future of society. In each instance, the emphasis is not on advocating participation over non-participation as a more empowered or active mode of engagement. Rather, the emphasis is on highlighting the extent to which

both choices impact upon the collective identity of our shared political community highlighting that the bigger issue at stake is the consciousness with which we choose to participate or not. Thus, while Chapter One focused on political participation as a mode of doing and taking action, the case-studies in Chapter Two conceive of political participation as a critical mode of consciousness.

This exploration of the relationship between participation and non-participation and activity and passivity is a significant aspect of how the case-studies challenge the rationalities of neoliberal citizenship. Nikolas Rose asserts that neoliberalism conceives of citizenship as active and individualistic rather than 'passive and dependent' (1998: 165). Rose states that an understanding of the citizen as 'a social being [...] a locus of needs that were to be socially met [through social welfare and responsibility] if malign consequences were to be avoided' has shifted to an understanding of welfare 'as bureaucratic and inefficient, as patronizing and patriarchal, as doing nothing to tackle or redress fundamental inequalities, as a usurper of private choices and freedoms' (1998: 164-165). The implication here is that active, individualistic, self-sufficient behaviour has come to represent a positive, desirable and empowered conception of self, whereas the passive citizen is considered as dependent, undesirable, disempowered and is viewed with disdain and negativity. The focus in this Chapter on exploring the extent to which political empowerment and disempowerment can be found in both 'active' acts of participation and 'passive' acts of non-participation separates out the value judgements that the neoliberal rationale has attributed to the terms. This process undermines the limiting and manipulative neoliberal emphasis on 'active' modes of citizenship as favourable, creating alternative options for how to assert one's agency.

Provocation is a core tool used within each performance to support this possibility, inviting shock and dissonance into the theatre space to stimulate emotional responses about how it feels to assume one's citizenship obligations. *Fight Night* produces an emotional sense of frustration by co-opting all possible participatory options that would allow audience members to assert their agency, controlling the outcome of the performance regardless of how audience members act. *Gym Party's* invitation for audience members to become involved in the competitions the performers play implicates them in the creation of a winner. The process produces a sense of conflict and rivalry between audience members with differing preferences about who should win, if anyone, whilst also producing an inner sense of conflict and guilt in audience members about whether to participate in the behaviours endorsed by the 'aspiration nation' or not. And *Gob Squad's Kitchen* contains the potential for a conflict of opinions to arise between performers and audience members during improvisatory exchanges. The provocative participatory aspects of each performance, therefore, conform to Lehmann's suggestion that 'we have to realize the growing importance of a certain cultivation of affects, the "training" of an emotionality that it not under the tutelage of rational preconsiderations', in the interests of facilitating the possibility for change to occur (2006: 186). The significance of this point is that it acts as a rehearsal ground for incorporating democratic dissonance into the relationship between self and other and facilitates an understanding of how it feels to engage with the development of the shared political community. As John Shotter states, if diversity is to be 'a part of the very concept of citizenship for us today [...] we must find an arena of public "joint action", which will help create, in all involved, the kinds of *feelings* within which attempts to formulate and coordinate corporate projects can be "rooted"' (1993: 131).

To reiterate, I argue that the case-studies use theatrical convention to render visible socially and culturally inscribed norms that invite audience members to consider whether and how to participate both within and outside the theatre space. *Fight Night* defamiliarises the politics of the electoral system, through the act of voting, to consider the merits and limitations of effecting change through sanctioned forms of participation. *Gym Party* uses competitive game play to problematize our motivations for acting, as a consequence of the drive to succeed promoted by David Cameron's 'aspiration nation'. And *Gob Squad's Kitchen (You've never had it so good)* exonerates the failings Lehmann attributes to the mediatised image celebrating process over end result and inviting audience members to negotiate how to take hold of their agency and responsibility for their choices. As a whole, the performances that follow conceive of the containment of the theatre space as a microcosm for society defamiliarising the ideological and structural limitations to citizen freedoms and problematizing the issue of participatory citizenship. This use of the theatre space allows audience members to experience what it feels like to assume one's participatory agency or not and challenges the idea that participation always constitutes the most empowered mode of political engagement. .

Fight Night

Fight Night (2013) is a production by Belgian theatre company Ontroerend Goed. In each of the company's performances, the company director, Alexander Devriendt, emphasises how they look for the 'ideal form to convey each idea' (Devriendt, 2014). Frequently this has involved some form of audience participation: In *The Smile Off Your Face* (2008) audience members give their trust to the performers who blind-fold them and wheel them around in a wheelchair, and in *Internal* (2008) audience members are invited to exchange intimate information with a performer who then shares this information publically later in the show. These two examples emphasise the varying degrees of participation that the company invites in their work since the former retains a hierarchical distinction of knowledge between audience member and performer about how the performance will unfold, and the latter lacks a structurally certain outcome since it evolves over the course of the evening, dependent on the audience participant. The exposure of private information in *Internal* also highlights the reputation the company has for exploiting audience participation to cynical ends. *Fight Night* operates in a middle ground between these two poles of participation. The performance occurs within conventional auditorium settings with the actors and audience members on separate sides of a demarcated stage space.⁵⁰ Despite this, the audience play an important role in the performance since it requires their participation, not just their presence, to progress. As the host of *Fight Night* indicates in his opening dialogue:

⁵⁰ It is worth noting that the end of the performance provides the opportunity for members of the audience to sit on the edge of the stage space. However, throughout the majority of the performance the demarcated relationship is maintained.

It has often been said that you can't have a show without an audience and tonight that is more true than ever.

Because tonight we will not only need your eyes and ears but at the centre of everything will be your voice.

(Ontroerend Goed, 2014)

The flattery and promise of 'voice' referred to in this opening discussion are taken to task by the performance, which exposes the limitations of electoral politics and the control that sanctioned forms of participation levy. In other words, the outset of the performance tells audience members that they have a voice only to defamiliarise how their agency is limited and might be located beyond the sense of activity associated with participation.

The set for the performance is defined by a diamond shaped raised white platform, above which are two television screens.⁵¹ Each of these screens is angled to either side of the auditorium. At the back of the stage, behind the platform and on stage right is a railing of clothes and three stools. In the same position stage left there is a bell and a table at which the technicians for the performance sit in full view, dressed in white shirts and black bow ties. The setting is reminiscent of the characteristic features of a boxing ring with ring side judges, further emphasised when the candidates enter the stage space wearing black, hooded, silk dressing gowns.

⁵¹ The production referenced throughout this analysis occurred in the Drum Theatre, at The Theatre Royal in Plymouth, 27th September 2013.

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this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 9: *Fight Night*: Round One (Lardot, 2013).

The company describes the production as follows:

Five contenders. Five rounds. Your vote. Only one will survive. The stakes: your attention, your love, your approval, your laughter, your compassion, your weak spot, your guilty pleasure, your heart, your support, your choice. We help you to decide through random checks, voting signposts, coalitions, campaigns, debates, consultants, exit polls, spin doctors, opinion gauges, list pushers, referendums. We'll do anything to make the best not win.

(Ontroerend Goed, 2014)

As indicated above, the premise of *Fight Night* is that five candidates are introduced to the audience who vote for a winner; with the word 'help' pointing to the doubts the performance raises about participatory agency and the possibility of effecting change in the democratic electoral system. The five candidates are referred to by their names. In the performance I attended this included Angelo (Tijssens), Charlotte (De Bruyne), David (Heinrich), Roman (Vaculik) and Sophie (Cleary). In the first half of

the performance Angelo did not offer himself as a candidate but played host to the audience in order to establish and facilitate the voting process. The voting takes place over five game rounds, which slowly reveal information about each candidate.⁵² The voting occurs through remote control voting pads distributed to audience members as they enter the theatre auditorium by a technician. At the end of each round the loser is required to leave the stage.

Throughout the performance the results of each vote are projected onto the television screens situated above the stage space so that audience members are continually reminded that they are situated within a collective of individuals with differing choices and

preferences. This dramaturgical choice depersonalises the voting process, as it turns audience members' personal contributions into statistical data, whilst also establishing a connection between the votes to the individuals in the room.

Throughout the performance this requires that the majority confront the fact that they are imposing their choices upon the minority of others situated within the theatre space. In other words, each audience member is given an almost instant visual representation of their individual standpoint in relation to the others within the room.

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Figure 10: Voting pad (Cobra, 2013).

⁵² In the first round, audience members vote on the candidate's looks; only their faces and lower legs are visible at this point since they are wearing the black, silk dressing gowns earlier mentioned, but with the hoods down. In the second round, audience members vote after having heard a speech from each candidate about who they think will vote for them and based on their image as a whole; the dressing gowns having been removed by this point. The third round differs since the audience members do not vote on a specific candidate but vote on the attributes they would like their ideal candidate to have. The results in this round contribute to a game in which the candidates with the attributes favoured or shared by the audience take a step forward on a grid and the candidate with the least votes takes a step backwards. Questions in this round are exemplified as follows: 'do you consider yourself... /a little bit racist / a little bit sexist / a little bit violent / without any of these flaws' (Ontroerend Goed, 2014). Hence, the performed attributes of the candidates are slowly revealed throughout this process. The fourth round is a question and answer session about Round Three. This section firmly establishes the candidates' personas and allows them to justify, dramatize and expand on the aspects of their personas that became apparent in Round Three. The final round asks audience members to side with one of three candidates whose stances typify idealist, conformist and revolutionary stand points.

This process calls upon Lehmann's 'aesthetic of responsibility (or response-ability)', by transposing the relatively anonymous and untraceable aspects of democratic contribution into a contained, personalised space that visually demonstrates the mechanics of the electoral process (2006: 185 original emphasis).

Electoral politics and the question of democracy

Devriendt (2014) stated that the inspiration for the performance came from the political situation in Belgium in 2010-2011 when the country was without government for a record breaking 541 days (BBC News, 2011). Devriendt emphasised how, during this period, there was much discussion about whether to eradicate the multi-party voting system. His own political standpoint did not support this view instead erring towards the need for compromise. It was these questions that encouraged him to create a performance about voting, inflecting it with a consideration about 'the tyranny that the majority can impose [...] and what makes you vote if you don't have any party' (Devriendt, 2014). Thus, the idea for *Fight Night* grew from the political situation in Belgium, and Devriendt's own political standpoint, to become a piece that asks what it means to participate in a democratic electoral system that results in majority rule, and what the resulting implications of living within such a system are.

In October 2013, the future of the British electoral system was brought to widespread attention in an interview between Newsnight presenter Jeremy Paxman and comedian Russell Brand, offering an articulated indication of a generalised and widespread discontent with the state of democracy and a desire for change.⁵³ In the

⁵³ Considering the status of each of these notable figures, in each of their respective fields, the interview was widely reported on across a range of media. In particular, social networking sites contributed to the filmed footage of the interview quickly amassing 9,691,682 hits on YouTube (BBC News Night, 2013). Of the 9,691,682 hits, 96,880 gave the video a positive or negative rating. 92,471 liked the video while 4,409 disliked the video. The suggestion is that since most of the rating

interview Brand passionately emphasised that he did not vote since he did not want to play a part in the proliferation of a democratic system ‘that is quite narrow and only serves the needs of a few people’, preferring alternative political systems that ‘might be of service to humanity’.⁵⁴ Brand spoke in favour of revolution and non-participation; rather than ‘tacit complicity’ with the current system (BBC News Night, 2013).⁵⁵ While Paxman continued his trend for persistent and provocative questioning, seemingly adopting the opposing standpoint, he later indicated in an interview with the *Radio Times* that he too chose not to vote in a recent election because he “thought the choice was so unappetising” (BBC News, 2013). In *Fight Night’s* demonstration of the manipulation of the electoral system and mediatisation of politics I experienced a similarly frustrating sense of impotence when confronted with my voting choices. Even the dissenting point of view, that provided audience members with the choice to protest against the system, is scripted into the performance demonstrating the all-encompassing containment of capitalist democracy and the electoral system and, thereby, the difficulty of conceiving of an alternative socio-political order. *Fight Night*, thus, problematizes the need to consider how we might make democracy work for us, and how we might work within democratic structures.

viewers liked the video they agreed with Brand’s standpoint. Further insight cannot be deduced as to the credibility of this assumption since the comments for the video have been disabled.

⁵⁴ It is interesting to note that Paloma Faith became the celebrity figurehead advocating voting ahead of the 2015 General Election. She referred to Brand’s non-voting policy as ‘irresponsible’ and urged her fans not to vote for UKIP. See <http://www.channel4.com/news/russell-brand-is-wrong-we-need-to-vote-then-complain-paloma-faith> for more details.

⁵⁵ It is necessary to acknowledge that while Brand advocated a no voting policy at the time of writing, three days before the General Election he changed his stance, encouraging people to vote Labour. His desire was to ‘get the Conservative Party out of government in this country so that we can begin community activism’ (BBC News, 2015). Hence, his long term goal of community activism that can effect change has not altered, but the revolutionary means through which he originally conceived of achieving it have. Some have criticised Brand for this reversal since it came two weeks after the deadline for voter registration, while others have welcomed his recognition of the need to vote, considering his celebrity influence. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2015-32582337> for more details.

In his interview with the *Radio Times* Paxman equated a sense of responsibility and activity with the act of voting. He stated, reflecting on his aforementioned choice not to vote:

By the time the polls had closed and it was too late to take part, I was feeling really uncomfortable: the person who chooses not to vote – cannot even be bothered to write “none of the above” on a ballot paper – disqualifies himself from passing any comment at all.

(BBC News, 2013)

In his statement, Paxman implies that he felt guilty about not voting and references the idea that his choice not to vote, and disengagement with the political system, invalidated his right to political comment. Paxman’s statement mirrors a general assumption that participation in the electoral system is a duty-bound activity that equates to a mode of active engagement, while non-participation and low electoral turn-out is inexcusable and is indicative of an apathetic electorate. As Harold D. Clarke et al. state, Britain ‘remains a place where many people have at most ‘some’ but not a ‘great deal’ of interest in government and politics, and many feel powerless to influence what goes on in the political arena’ (2004: 319). The electoral turnout in 2001 was a significant factor in the creation of this assumption since turnout in the UK dropped from 71.4% of those registered to vote to 59.4%, marking the lowest turnout figures since the Second World War (UK Political Info, 2014). However, the various publications that have explored the topic further reveal that while electoral voting is down, other forms of political activity, such as petitions, boycotts and protests, have risen (see Clarke, 2004; LeDuc, Niemi & Norris, 2010). These findings suggest a need to reconsider the perceived apathy of the electorate by

widening the scope of what political activity is and the ways in which participation is occurring today. As will become apparent in the following analysis, participation cannot be simply equated with the act of doing and emancipation, and cultural activities, such as performance, might offer alternative forums for engaging with the question of political progress.

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Figure 11: Electoral turnout since 1945 (UK Political Info, 2014).

Fight Night could be interpreted as an indictment of democracy. As Devriendt states, ‘it’s [democracy’s] a bit depressing’, before invoking Churchill’s dictum that the democratic system is ‘the best of the worst’ (2014).⁵⁶ However, by rehearsing our political participation in a staged environment *Fight Night* offers itself as a tool for political progress, raising awareness about the limitations of the electoral system.

Fight Night was born out of, and addressed, a need to problematize the political

⁵⁶ On 11th November, 1947, in a House of Commons speech, Churchill stated “‘Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time’” (Hilton, 2003).

situation in Belgium. But rather than imposing a solution to the question of how democracy and democratic procedures might be made more egalitarian, Devriendt defamiliarises the electoral process exploring what change might look like and inviting creative considerations about how it might occur. As I will go on to discuss, the key questions that *Fight Night* explores encompass the de-politicisation of party politics, as a consequence of media representations that focus on personality politics over policy, and the consequences we are accountable for when we choose to vote or not. The former issue comes to the fore through the techniques the candidates in *Fight Night* use to 'dress up' the less favourable aspects of their personalities – including attributes such as racism and misogyny, and the latter issue comes to the fore through the attributes the audience endorse by continuing to vote as the performance progresses. I appreciate that audience members in *Fight Night* might vote for a candidate that they would not tolerate beyond the playfulness of the performance experience. However, this process still mirrors the concessions that citizens make when choosing which political party to vote for. As highlighted by Devriendt's earlier noted paraphrasing of Churchill's statement that democracy is the 'best of the worst' (Devriendt, 2014), and speaking from personal experience, citizens are required to pick the party that best fits their ethos even though they may not agree with the party's policies in their entirety. Consequently, in what follows, I argue that the theatre space acts as a micro-nation, which encourages reflective assessments about the legitimacy of the electoral system for effecting change and the limitations and freedom of our choices within a majority rule democratic system.

Party politics and popular culture

There is an inherent critique in *Fight Night* which suggests that, with the increased use of television and digital media, party politics is devolving into a

popularity contest based on the individual and not their party policy. *Fight Night* structurally demonstrated this point in Round Four of the performance I attended. Round Four is presented like a talk show in which the candidates are interviewed by the host to expand on their personalities. In the middle of this round an opinion poll indicated that Roman was the least favoured out of the three remaining candidates; Roman, Charlotte and David. This can likely be attributed to his admission of violent tendencies, his unapologetic pronouncement that there is no such thing as God and his suggestion that 'stupid people have the right to be represented, by stupid people' (Ontroerend Goed, 2014). Yet, Roman continued to win the round. Arguably, this occurred as a result of his dramatic response, following the opinion poll, that he would play the role of the hero in a hostage situation. To demonstrate his point fully, Roman offered a comprehensive narrative, akin to an action movie plot, about how he would put his violent tendencies to use to sneak up on the hostage takers, kill them and save the day. During this description Roman's face wore an expression of glee, he had difficulty remaining seated because his portrayal was so excited, his voice was fast and loud and his language was expressive. This demonstrative display was enjoyed by the audience who erupted in spurts of laughter throughout the narrative.⁵⁷ The explicit point to be acknowledged in this example relates to the way in which the performance edited and ordered the information offered. When Roman confessed to being an atheist with violent tendencies this was not considered a favourable quality; but when these ideals were put to use in the interests of others, and conveyed in a dramatic story, they were qualities endorsed by the audience.

⁵⁷ Roman's characteristics were not unfamiliar from the role Boris Johnson plays as the 'loveable buffoon' Mayor of London (see comments in Purnell, 2012). At the time of writing, Johnson's most famed act of buffoonery occurred in August 2012 when he featured as a special guest zip lining across Victoria Park, where the Olympic Games were being aired on large television screens. Dressed in a hard hat and waving two Union Flags, Johnson ground to a halt approximately 20 metres before the end of the line and was left dangling from the wire until staff towed him the rest of the way (Furness, 2012).

The placement of the opinion poll in the middle of the round was integral for demonstrating this point to the audience, thus, drawing attention to the staged design and edited manipulation of political rhetoric. Consequently, *Fight Night* acted as an educational tool that allowed the audience to deduce how their vote may be scripted through careful editing processes.

This need is pertinent considering the increasing presence of politicians on non-political television shows and the growing prevalence of personality politics in contemporary society. While the appearance of politicians on television shows such as *Question Time*, a UK-based political question and answer programme, is well established, the move into popular entertainments has been attempted in order to reach a wider audience and convey a humbleness that belies the interpretation of the politician as part of the ruling elite. As John Street states:

A leading politician makes himself available for an exchange, not with a heavyweight political interviewer but rather with a talk-show host. The rationale is obvious: this is the way to reach the largest possible audience [...] and to convince his audience that “he is one of us”.

(2010: 63)

At the time of writing, Prime Minister David Cameron has appeared on television shows such as the popular British breakfast television show *This Morning*, David Letterman’s late night American talk show *The Late Show*, Jonathan Ross’s talk show *Friday Night with Jonathan Ross* and the British arts and culture programme *The One Show*. This prevalence of party politics within popular culture could be considered as a positive move towards greater inclusion by addressing a wider cross-section of society. This much is apparent in Street’s comment above.

However, when the loser in Round Four of *Fight Night* states, 'Who is winning what? Being the funniest? Being the most entertaining?' (Ontroerend Goed, 2014), the performance takes the stance that increased access is not necessarily a positive step since the resulting outcome is an absence of political policy in politics. Moreover, with talk show interviews with politicians devolving into questions about whether, for example, Cameron had pictures of Margaret Thatcher on his wall as an adolescent, the "dumbing down" of party politics becomes a pertinent question (Street, 2010: 62). Thus, *Fight Night* proposes that even if the rise of the celebrity politician results in increased participation at the voting polls, this participation will not necessarily indicate a greater critical engagement with party politics but be premised upon the superficial and passive participation of the manipulated majority. By demonstrating this triviality, one could argue that *Fight Night* encourages its audiences to be mindful of engaging critically with the electoral system and mediatised representations of political leaders.

The need for conscious awareness regarding the manipulating capabilities of the media is further articulated by an article about the Mayor of London Boris Johnson, published in 2012 in *The Observer* by Sonia Purnell. Purnell's article, 'So bumbling Boris Johnson is lovable and funny? Well, have I got news for you', makes the claim that Johnson's lauded affable nature, the rambling tangents that characterise his spontaneous speeches and his pithy jokes are all part of a highly scripted and rehearsed persona that disguises a vehement ambition and job ineptitude. While the article offers little evidence to support its claims, and functions to promote Purnell's biography on Johnson, it offers a provocative indication of the way public appearance, in a mediatised age, generally results in increasing opportunities for politicians, and those of public standing, to conform to the cult of

personality and use it to their advantage. This depiction of the media, thus, further suggests that the electoral body are more often than not victims to its inherent manipulation.

The control that the pervasiveness of the media exerts even raises concerns about the implementation of the live, televised debates re-introduced prior to the 2010 election.⁵⁸ In 2010 the debates occurred across three consecutive weeks between David Cameron, Nick Clegg and Gordon Brown, lasted ninety minutes and were broadcast on prime-time television by ITV, BskyB and the BBC. The debates were again scheduled as part of the 2015 General Election campaign, extending the three party debates of 2010 to four televised discussions, in one of which seven political parties participated.⁵⁹ In both instances, the debates occurred live and audience members were provided with the opportunity to submit questions in advance, which were not disclosed to the politicians prior to the event. These procedures for the debates imply that viewers are given unmediated access to party politics; just as the appearance of politicians in popular forms of entertainment suggest that audience members are being given access to their personal lives.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ The last televised election debates prior to this date occurred in 1964. See <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/mar/26/general-election-2015-the-drama-behind-the-leaders-debates> for more details on the history of the process.

⁵⁹ The seven politicians participating in the second televised debate included Ed Miliband of Labour, David Cameron of the Conservatives, Nick Clegg of the Liberal Democrats, Nigel Farage of UKIP, Nicola Sturgeon of the SNP, Natalie Bennett of the Greens and Leanne Wood of Plaid Cymru. These debates were aired on the BBC, Sky, ITV and Channel 4. The 2015 televised debates included two debates between politicians and two Q & A sessions with audience members. The increase in the numbers of politicians participating and the extended number of debates and channels involved contributes to the idea that the process was fairer than in 2010. This understanding detracts from the knowledge that the debates are highly staged events, which carefully shape the degree of citizen engagement allowed, despite positively creating a forum for mass engagement. See <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/mar/21/cameron-blocked-clegg-tv-debate-general-election> for further details on the 2015 debates.

⁶⁰ A similar concept of perceived access is echoed in Twitter and the idea that it provides intimate and personal insight. In actuality, it is a highly mediated platform that can cultivate an image of choice, dependent on what information the user chooses to display. Daniel Miller refers to this idea in relation to the alternative social networking site Facebook. He states that such technology helps 'create a greater degree of privacy through simultaneously using its ability to make oneself constantly more public' (Miller, 2011: 66). Miller uses the example of one Facebook user who posted such a breadth

However, this semblance of ‘access’ belies the politics surrounding what political parties are allowed to represent themselves, the editorial processes that pick the questions to be asked, the choice of channels that the debates are aired on, the constitution of the audiences for each debate and the strict rule-bound structures which are designed to give each politician equal focus, but also support the ability for swift movement through any contentious issues.⁶¹ This is to name but a few of the editorial processes that may function to shape the way the politicians are represented; but, what is clear is that any mediated representation – entertaining or otherwise – provides a persuasive impression of unmediated access to those under question when they are actually highly staged events, the rehearsals for which are undertaken with each public appearance politicians make throughout their careers. As Crouch’s concept of “post-democracy”, summarised by Street, suggests:

This is a world in which the vestiges of democracy remain – the formal institutions and processes – but the reality is marked by elite control, a control engineered through the use of the media to give the *appearance* of populist democracy, while the exercise of real power is confined to the elite.

(2010: 76)

Reductive binaries: Elite rule and ruling the elite

Hitherto I have argued that *Fight Night* saliently demonstrates how the cult of personality works to the advantage of the politician, allowing the ruling elite to

of material online that he felt as if he knew her intimately. However, in reality her extensive use of the social networking site allowed her to contain how and where people engaged with her, and about what. This plethora of information, consequently, ensured that she could maintain a fiercely private identity behind her Facebook avatar, which Miller realised when he met her in person.

⁶¹ These issues were brought to the fore again ahead of the 2015 General Election, which saw a prolonged period of political posturing and critique about the political parties to be included. There was much press coverage over Cameron’s decision not to engage in a head-to-head discussion with Ed Miliband, and his apparent vetoing of Nick Clegg from the third party debate. See <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/mar/21/cameron-blocked-clegg-tv-debate-general-election> for more information.

dominate the populace. However, *Fight Night* simultaneously stages the idea that its candidates are shaped by the audience members' choices, thereby, evoking audience accountability. The candidates ad lib throughout the performance, dependent on the information gleaned from votes that specify the audience demographic and their poll ratings after each of the competition rounds. Much of the improvisatory dialogue that the candidates offer addresses perceived, and in some cases quantified, prejudices that the candidates believe the audience may hold against them, as a consequence of their access to this information. For example, Charlotte, as the youngest candidate and dressed childishly in a dress and woollen tights, stated 'I'm smarter than you might think' (Ontroerend Goed, 2014). This statement, and the following elaboration on it, acted to win back votes that she lost in the middle of the performance when David offered a detailed discussion about the benefits of his age and won the majority vote from the mainly middle-aged audience. This response was specific to the performance I attended and the audience demographic within the room. However, this feedback mechanism is characteristic of *Fight Night's* use of improvisation. In effect, the play makes tangible Erika Fischer-Lichte's autopoietic feedback loop, which is premised upon the circulation of energies and 'mutual interaction between actors and spectators' to bring forth the performance (2008: 163). The consequence of underlining this feedback process is that *Fight Night* highlights how the candidates create personas that, in the main, tally with the desires of the audience, premised upon the latter's voting choices. *Fight Night's* making visible of the audience members' acts of participation, therefore, offers audience members a critical insight into the role that they play in shaping and constructing the micro-nation that they are situated within inside the theatre space. In other words, *Fight Night* asks audience members to recognise their responsibility

for the political milieu they are beholden to. If, as Joe Kelleher states, 'in grasping hold of the act that produces an image we put ourselves in a position to do something about what we see, to conceive new laws for instance; in short, to do politics' (2009: 14), *Fight Night's* demonstration of the role that audience members play in their own regulation makes a wider point about participatory agency, creating space for audience members to consider how they might contribute to changing the co-ordinates of their choices to affect change from within.

Reality and fiction: *Fight Night's* political potential

The extent to which *Fight Night* can be considered a tool for political progress is demonstrated by the desire for other countries, such as Turkey and Hong Kong, to produce it in response to their political climates. In Hong Kong there is growing concern about the extent to which Beijing may attempt to control the democratic elections in 2017. While the Chinese government has granted universal suffrage, there are fears that Beijing will revoke this promise and use its influence to select the candidates for election. In response, over 10,000 pro-democracy protestors took to the streets of Hong Kong on January 1st, 2014 to voice their concerns. Pro-democracy advocates also organised a city-wide referendum to ascertain what eligible voters wanted to achieve in terms of political reforms and what 'free' democracy means to them (BBC News: 2014b). Similarly, although Turkey has an established democratic government the country has seen widespread civil unrest with mass anti-government protests in 2013, and government officials facing corruption allegations (BBC News: 2014c). It is in response to these political climates and divergent cultures that theatre producers consider *Fight Night* to have the potential to raise topical questions about the forms that democracy can take. As Devriendt states:

They [Hong Kong and Turkey] want to do the piece as a reflection of the several systems. [...] Let's just say that the first round and the second round [in *Fight Night*] are more of like the Belgium system and the more you go towards the end of the show the more you come into the Westminster-based, American politics.

(2014)

Devriendt is here referencing the way the performance begins with five candidates and ends with only one.⁶² Devriendt sees this process as progressing through a scale from that of a multi-party governmental system that utilises proportional representation, to what he refers to as a 'dictatorial democracy', such as America, where there is a winner-takes-all policy (Devriendt, 2014). The implication in this use of the performance to engage with the constitution of democracy is that *Fight Night* offers a process of artistic thinking that may help to rehearse potential futures, accumulate information about the democratic preferences of those who attend the performances and problematize the varying formulations democracy can take. This perceived potential is a striking example of a belief in the arts to directly respond to the needs of a country, or city, and play an influential role in politics. *Fight Night*, thus, responds to Tim Etchells' call for what performance might be in the twenty-first century:

After all that "is-it-really-acting" and "is-it-really-theatre" and "is-it-really-art" etc etc etc perhaps we can say now, finally, that theatre can be what we want and need it to be in order to meet audiences and look them straight in the eyes

⁶² It is interesting to note that Sophie was persistently revealed as the UK's ideal candidate, via the tally of results that the company kept regarding the winner of each performance.

with a question and an attempt to talk about what it is like to live in this world now.

(2007: 22)

Fight Night's most powerful moment of political potential occurs at the end of the performance in a meeting point 'between aesthetic contemplation and its caesura by the intervention of social reality' (Lehmann, 2013: 108). The final section of the performance leads to a stalemate between three candidates. One represents an idealist standpoint, one represents a conformist standpoint and one represents a revolutionary standpoint. The idealist wants 100% of the votes so that we might use the theatrical experience to understand what it feels like to agree and be united; the revolutionary asks the audience to give up their voting pad in an attempt to 'break the system' (Ontroerend Goed, 2014); and the conformist represents the pro-choice standpoint advocating the importance of disagreement. Audience members are, therefore, asked to either agree – the idealist standpoint, disagree – the pro-choice conformist standpoint, or not to vote – the revolutionary standpoint. Charlotte, as the idealist, was the first to stand-down, referring to the impossibility of her task; this left only the choice to disagree and endorse David, or not-vote and endorse Roman. At this point Roman asked the non-voters to give up their voting pads and 'occupy' the stage space. This meant that the only voters were those who had already decided to vote 'disagree', thus, allocating one hundred percent of the votes to David. Once David was announced as the winner of the round he explicitly questioned the tyranny of the majority, and opened up a caesura, by posing the following question:

The nonvoters here tonight have decided they don't want to be a part of it anymore and I don't want to force them to stay

you are the majority
the first true majority of tonight

you don't only decide for yourself now
you decide for all of us

you represent the rest

so to all of the voters here tonight

I propose a referendum

tell them what we want them to do

Should the non-voters here tonight leave or stay?

(Ontroerend Goed, 2014)

During this scene I was situated within the voting majority. This left me with two disclosed options and a third undisclosed option. I could vote for the protesting audience members to leave, I could vote for the protesting audience members to stay or I could choose not to abuse my position, and impose the tyranny of the majority, by not voting. I chose not to vote in an option that felt like a liberating escape from the scripted choices offered to audience members throughout the performance. In this moment, I put the knowledge I gained through my aesthetic contemplation of the performance to the test and used my agency to make a new and undefined choice within the social reality of the theatre space. Thus, my political agency resided in my ability to re-script my modes of engagement.

The idea that my moment of liberation came through an act of non-participation is important to consider in relation to the debates surrounding democracy and citizen participation. André Blais states that ‘without substantial citizen participation democracy falls short of its goals [...] Participation is a “good” thing, and a crucial challenge is to understand why so many people remain “passive” citizens’ (2010: 165). In *Fight Night*, informed non-participation offered an emancipatory option, as discussed, whilst participation in the prescribed choices offered by the performance conformed to problematic socially and culturally scripted modes of engagement that the performance was attempting to critique. *Fight Night*, therefore, distinguishes between participation and emancipation to demonstrate how non-participation can be a politically motivated form of engagement. Thus, *Fight Night* illustrates how the association between participation and activity and non-participation and passivity must be split since it is the intention behind the mode of engagement that matters (2010: 7). This understanding also serves to highlight the wider point that non-participating members of the electorate are not necessarily politically disengaged. Rather, they might be simply participating in alternative ways. If democratic theorists were to acknowledge this separation it would allow for some diversion of research away from the dominant focus on understanding the ‘passivity’ of citizens, called for by Blais, towards considering how the electoral system might be shaped to incorporate the diverse ways in which ‘active’ acts of participation and non-participation are occurring.⁶³

It is, however, crucial to acknowledge that the outcome of the majority vote in the afore-discussed section of the performance did not tally with my choice; dictating

⁶³ There is a body of work developing in this field. See Marsh, D., O’Toole, T. & Jones, S. (2007) *Young People and Politics in the UK: Apathy or Alienation*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan for one example.

that the minority must leave the theatre space. This would suggest that not all audience members recognised the conclusion I reached, or that they asserted their authority regardless. The point of concern here is that although my experience of the performance highlighted that participation cannot necessarily be equated with emancipation, it also suggested that an emancipated act of non-participation cannot intervene within the hegemony of the electoral system unless it offers a united response. So, while this caesura in the performance highlights the tyranny of the majority and its failure to acknowledge minority rights, it also urges caution about conceding the sanctioned choices one has for participating in the electoral system. This section of the performance, thus, also somewhat cynically suggests that all options lead to a lose, lose situation, creating a confusing stalemate about whether to opt in or out of sanctioned modes of electoral participation.

This sense of redundancy is enhanced in the final moments of the performance when David reveals the audience's ideal candidate. The logical conclusion to the elimination of candidates throughout the performance is that, he, as the last remaining candidate, will be the overall winner. However, the winner is revealed to be an immaterial compilation of audience voting data. The last candidate standing merely wins the right to reveal the 'real winner':

I believe it's time to declare your winner for tonight
Because you can't have a game without one

She is not among you

She is you

She is the one whose opinion matters the most of all

She decided everything tonight

She is always right, even when she's wrong

Ladies & gentlemen your winner

The majority is an atheist woman who is thirty-four years old, in a relationship, makes £1750 a month, is neither racist, sexist or violent and wanted the others to leave.

(Ontroerend Goed, 2014)

This final statement marked the end of the performance in a dramatic revelation of the accumulated data that the audience voted on throughout the course of the evening. The unexpectedness of the information acted, at least for me, as a surprising affront. While the ideal candidate was perfectly tolerable, she was not representative of the choices I made throughout the performance, as a consequence of the occasions on which I voted with the minority. My experience, therefore, conflicted with David's statement that she 'was me', positing me within a fictionalised social reality. I would also hypothesise that my experience was indicative of most audience members since in order for the 'ideal' candidate to tally with an audience members views it would have required that they were consistently situated within the majority across the breadth of votes that occurred throughout the performance; an unlikely situation. Audience members might also have made radical, untruthful or provocative choices to enjoy the fun of the performance. In other words, audience members might not have answered the questions seriously since their chosen candidate would not have agency beyond the performance. This point further highlights the unlikelihood that the politically correct 'ideal' candidate represented the views of the majority of audience members in their entirety. In any case, the discrepancy between my personal choices and the resulting candidate pointed

towards the understanding that minority rights are disqualified by a democratic electoral system that results in one party rule. One could thus argue that, encountered within the context of the UK, *Fight Night* advertises the idea that the first past the post system of government is a democratically incompetent and redundant system that requires total reformation.

Inciting or reflecting discontent

If we turn to a consideration of Devriendt's political and artistic values it is possible to explore the extent to which *Fight Night* incites or reflects a sense of discontent with democratic electoral systems. Devriendt states that although he identifies as a socialist he believes in political compromise. However, he does not believe in artistic compromise because audience members buy a ticket to see a performance and should not be responsible for the artistic point. He uses the metaphor of a book stating, 'you don't want to buy a book to write your own ending, you still want to hear an artistic point of view' (Devriendt, 2014). Devriendt's artistic intention was to expose the tyranny of the majority and consider what it means to vote. When asked about his "ideal" spectator Devriendt stated:

First of all I would question my own voting, that would be the first I hope I would achieve [...] The second thing I would do is like, even if you feel you are part of the majority [...] don't impose. [...] That would be what I wish that it translated. But like I said I keep that pretty open, I always want that.

(2014)

This sense of openness conveys the idea that Devriendt's aim was to create a performance that could act as a forum for exploration, allowing audience members to

reach their own conclusions inflected by the electoral system of government that characterises the country in which they are viewing. If these points are considered in relation to the fact that at the time of the performance the UK was being run by the first coalition government since the Second World War (Conservative-Liberal Democrat), there is a sense that *Fight Night* reflects more than incites democratic discontent acting as a timely critical tool for appraising party politics.

Before concluding, it is, however, necessary to acknowledge that *Fight Night* conforms to a tightly structured format that also employs invisible aspects of control, necessary for its smooth running (Ontroerend Goed, 2014). For example, in interview, Devriendt highlighted how the system is programmed to avoid ties; specific actors always perform specific speeches within the performance since they prompt predictable voting outcomes; and devices such as the coalitions in Round Two allow the actors to control who leaves the stage at that point. Audience members are not made aware of these mechanics, even if they suspect them, highlighting how the performance exerts an invisible level of control that contradictorily conforms to the critique it makes about the manipulative aspects of party politics and the ruling elite. *Fight night*, thus, limits its potential for audience emancipation by duplicitously disguising the acts of control it exerts, perhaps leading to misinformed conclusions that might play a bigger role in inciting democratic discontent than might be apparent. It is far from my intention to suggest that the performance might provoke a riot, and it has not. More to suggest that it may prompt the development of audience members' thoughts about the democratic electoral system in previously unconsidered, provocative directions, without disclosing the full extent of the influence it exerts. Certainly, I will concede that the performance contributed to the development of my political consciousness.

Summary

In summary, both the content and structure of *Fight Night* combine to create a participatory performance that acts as a tool for political progress and extends current conceptions of what participatory theatre ought to be. Freshwater summarises current debates surrounding participatory theatre as follows:

Performances which ostensibly invite the audience to make a creative contribution, only to offer them the choice of option A or option B – or the chance to give responses which are clearly scripted by social and cultural convention – are as disappointing and mendacious, in their own way, as political consultation exercises which merely provide an illusion of public dialogue.

(2009: 75)

Freshwater's statement emphasises the need for participatory performance to allow audience participants freedom in the ways they can engage and contribute, beyond pre-scripted choices. One might, therefore, argue that *Fight Night's* interactive process between host, candidates and audience voters offers only a form of redistributed spectating that fails in Freshwater's conception of what participatory performance ought to be. However, *Fight Night* demonstrates the need for participatory performance to engage with modes of participation that are scripted by social and cultural convention in order to critique these modes of engagement from within. To a certain extent, *Fight Night* agrees with Freshwater's idea that 'political consultation' creates only the illusion of dialogue, but harnesses this illusion through acts of participation that expose it. In other words, the performance participates in

the activities Freshwater condemns but only in the interests of highlighting the very point she makes.

Through the technique of self-implication *Fight Night* is able to make visible the invisible forces of production that characterise the politics surrounding party politics acting as an educational starting point for creating an informed electoral body. As Lehmann states, 'it has become clear that theatre is not a place and a means to distribute an ideology, to teach an insight. It works only *modo obliquo*, for example by laying bare ideological structures in our everyday way of seeing the world' (2013: 108). *Fight Night* convincingly demonstrates the potential for participatory performance to function as a rehearsal ground for directly addressing, and actively working through, contemporary political issues. In the cases of Belgium, Hong Kong and Turkey the performance has evidenced itself as a tool for political empowerment and emancipation. There is no reason to suggest that it does not serve a similar purpose for British audiences; despite my reservations about the duplicitousness of some of the techniques it employs to this end. Significant to this process, the performance also indicated that there is a problematically presumed affiliation between participation and emancipation that needs to be considered further, whilst also suggesting that the non-vote and small seemingly inconsequential actions may contain the potential to be as politically efficacious, if not more, than overt acts of protest.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Here I reference Baz Kershaw's concept of performance efficacy as 'the potential that theatre may have to make the immediate effects of performance influence, however minutely, the general historical evolution of wider social and political realities' (1992: 1).

Gym Party

The second case-study to be discussed in this chapter is Made in China's (2013) *Gym Party*. Made in China's production employs similar techniques of participation to those used in *Fight Night* but increases the visibility of audience participation, as well as the range of ways in which audience members can choose to participate. These techniques range from audience members raising their hands to vote, to shared dialogue with the performers and the invitation for an audience member to enter the stage space. The production responds to Taylor's appeal, included in the introduction of this chapter, that to develop culture and society participants must undergo a process of defamiliarisation in order to ascertain what the ethics of our participation actually involve (1991: 72). *Gym Party* facilitates this possibility by utilising the relationship between performers and audience members to evoke ethical considerations about what it means to play along and the motivations for one's choices.

The premise of *Gym Party* is to critique competitive capitalism, with specific reference to Cameron's 'aspiration nation' speech delivered at the Conservative Party Conference in October 2012. Cameron's concept of the 'aspiration nation' aims to 'help the poor and the weak and the vulnerable' (*The Independent*, 2012). However, the Conservative Party contradicts this claim through a 'succeed on your own terms' policy, which serves, in the main, only to promote opportunities for the economic, social and cultural elite to enhance their privilege further (*The Independent*, 2012). In other words, the Conservative Party adheres to the neoliberal agenda, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis and Chapter One. Consequently, it fails to address the circumstances that limit the possibilities for the 'underprivileged' and the 'vulnerable' to achieve success, promoting individual

reward over collective co-operation and widening the gulf between those who have and those who do not (*The Independent*, 2012).

In interview, Tim Cowbury of Made in China highlighted this disparity stating that the starting point for the performance developed from outrage at the company's interpretation of Cameron's speech as an endorsement of 'ruthless' competition amongst individuals, and the idea that the country was being run by a coalition government and, therefore, 'people who weren't really, quite actually, elected in' (Cowbury & Latowicki, 2013). This premise is made retrospectively clear at the end of *Gym Party* in a rhetorical speech about success, winning and 'what it takes to build an aspiration nation' (Made in China, n.d.: 26). *Gym Party's* critique of neoliberalism is, however, implicit throughout the performance. The first line of the performance's opening speech, delivered by Jess, highlights its focus on the self-centred, individualism propounded by neoliberalism. Jess states, 'I want to be successful. I want to be the best there can be' followed by a string of eleven sentences highlighting vacuous 'wants', ranging from people caring how much she weighs, to the desire to be respected for her brains and bravery despite incredible looks (Made in China, n.d.: 1). Following this, the performance introduces the neoliberal obsession with success in a discussion about 'winning'. Audience members are rhetorically asked 'There's nothing wrong with winning, is there? / [...] It's a lovely feeling, winning, isn't it XXX (*use audience member's name*)', (Made in China, n.d.: 2). The performers then enter into 'shameless' pursuits of success in violent, task-based competitions, whilst continually reiterating that they remain friends who 'have love for each other' (Made in China, n.d.: 5). These acts of 'friendly' game play make a sardonic critique of neoliberalism and Cameron's 'aspiration nation' whilst also evoking considerations about the political posturing and

power plays employed by political parties to secure citizen's votes, despite maintaining an outwardly, good-humoured relationship with their competition; a point that shares echoes with *Fight Night*. This point was bolstered by the performers' costumes – one wears a red wig and red Converse footwear, another a blue wig and Converse and the third an orange wig and Converse, offering a colour coded representation of the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties. It is, thus, necessary to analyse the performance with the concept of the 'aspiration nation' in mind.⁶⁵

Gym Party's correlation with the 'aspiration nation' cannot be analysed without acknowledgement of the *Occupy* movement that gained widespread critical attention in 2011, beginning with *Occupy Wall Street* and, within four weeks, spreading to protests across nine hundred cities worldwide (Addley, 2011).⁶⁶ The *Occupy* movement began in response to vast economic disparity, with the concentration of wealth in the USA being shared among the top-earning 1% of citizens at the expense of the remaining 99%. As *Occupy London* states, 'our political elites have chosen to protect corporations, financial institutions and the rich at the expense of the vast majority' (ILF, n.d.). The initial manifesto for *Occupy London* reflected these concerns in ten points that emphasised the unsustainability of the economic system, the solidarity of the 99%, the need for structural change for global equality, independent economic regulation, and the end of global oppression. Its closing point declared: 'this is what democracy looks like' (2012). *Occupy* is, therefore, not an anti-capitalist movement; rather, it seeks to act as a catalyst for democratising

⁶⁵ This consideration of the 'aspiration nation', and its relationship to the neoliberal agenda, shares resonance with *Major Tom*, analysed in Chapter One. However, where *Major Tom* focused on the effects of neoliberalism on the production of Melody's individual identity, *Gym Party* uses acts of audience participation to consider the implications of the neoliberal agenda on the relationship between self and other.

⁶⁶ In Britain, protesters occupied public spaces across all major cities.

capitalism by emphasising the need for greater social responsibility.⁶⁷ Similarly, *Gym Party* does not take an anti-capitalist stance, nor does it present a utopic vision of the future. Rather, *Gym Party* situates itself within the debates surrounding the future of democracy, acting as a form of public engagement by problematizing the ethics of, and considering what it means to act within, the political and economic milieu of competitive capitalism (Latowicki in Cowbury & Latowicki, 2013). As Kerry-Anne Mendoza states, 'broader social movements are resetting the horse before the cart by asking first – what kind of society do we want?' (2012).

This discussion highlights how *Gym Party* shares resonances with *Fight Night*, whilst also drawing upon the themes of competitive capitalism explored in Chapter One. The analysis that follows differs from the arguments in Chapter One by focusing on audience participation and by considering the impact of the neoliberal capitalist ideology on the relationship between self and other, as opposed to the individual. This approach is also what differentiates the analysis of *Gym Party* from *Fight Night* since it focuses on the audience performer relationship rather than the act of voting in and of itself. Additionally, in *Gym Party*, audience members are invited to participate in varying ways, whereas *Fight Night* restricted its audience members to a formulaic mode of participation throughout. *Gym Party*'s participatory techniques include audience vote, dialogue between audience members and performers, the opportunity for audience members to compete against each other in a short game to win a chocolate and the climax of the performance expects at least one audience member to step into the stage space, take a stand and make a

⁶⁷ While *Occupy* no longer maintains the same visible presence through occupied public spaces, the movement continues to arrange assemblies committed to discussing current political topics, and also creates working groups for specific campaigns (see *Occupy London*, 2014).

difference to its outcome.⁶⁸ The acts of participation *Gym Party* asks of audience members are therefore visible, countering *Fight Night's* anonymised use of digital vote. *Gym Party* also places a strong emphasis on stimulating audience emotional investment alongside the objective engagement that *Fight Night* prompted. These differences guide the analysis that follows.

Made in China describes *Gym Party* as such:

Three intrepid contestants compete in a series of games that range from hilariously stupid to uncomfortable, arbitrary, and downright heartbreaking. The contestants are fearless in their commitment to doing whatever it takes in the showpiece games. But they are also eager to share their stories, perspectives and awkward dances in between: to please the audience and influence the course of the show.

(Made in China, 2012)

Gym Party's suggestion that its use of task-based, participatory competitions are undertaken in the interests of 'pleasing the audience' is indicative of its aim to invite audience culpability by pursuing the tension between whether and how to act, or not. As Cowbury states, the participatory aspects of the performance ask the audience member to make a 'choice to stick your neck out and really do something [...] its "I know what I have to do but I don't know if I want to do it"' (Cowbury & Latowicki, 2013).

⁶⁸ The game that involves audience members competing to win a chocolate requires that each self-selected, competing audience member verbally justify why they should have the chocolate over the other audience members who want it. Chris facilitates the game and throws the chocolate to whoever he thinks deserves it.

In Part One of *Gym Party*, the performers play juvenile games for points. These include *Dizzy Racing*, where the performers each spin repeatedly around a golf club before racing to the other side of the room; *Marshmallows*, where performers attempt to stuff the most marshmallows into their mouths; and *Skittles*, where the performers enlist the help of audience members to throw skittles at them to catch – the winner being the contestant who catches the most. In Part Two, audience members vote on statements about the performers provided by Cowbury's voiceover. And Part Three of the performance requires audience members to, firstly, establish that the performers want someone to step into the stage space and dance with them and, secondly, negotiate for themselves whether to choose to participate. Each of the game rounds is followed by a winner's speech and a penalisation round for the losers. The penalisations variously require that the performers punch themselves, verbally ridicule each other and hold each other's heads under water before taking it in turns to slap each other. These competition and penalisation rounds are interspersed with personal childhood stories on the theme of competition; specifically in relation to friends, sports and love (Made in China, n.d. 12).

I attended two productions of *Gym Party*. The first was during the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2013 in Summerhall, and the second was at a community arts centre in Torquay in October of the same year. For reasons of clarity, I will refer throughout the case-study to the version of the production that I saw in Edinburgh, unless otherwise stated.⁶⁹ The three contestants (performers) who performed in the Edinburgh production were Christopher Brett Bailey, Jessica Latowicki and Jenna Watt, with Tim Cowbury acting as the voice over.⁷⁰ In what follows, I argue that *Gym*

⁶⁹ Specifically, the performance occurred August 17th.

⁷⁰ Jenna Watt replaced Ira Brand during *Gym Party*'s Edinburgh I run since Brand was performing her solo work *A Cure for Aging* during the festival. Brand was the collaborator who originally created and

Party is a leftist piece of political performance that demonstrates the potential passivity of mass participation, problematizes the motivation to act within competitive capitalism, emphasises the ethics we subscribe to and asserts its cultural value by inviting a consideration of whether we want to live within an ‘aspiration nation’ or not.

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this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 12: Made in China’s *Gym Party* with Ira Brand instead of Jenna Watt (Del Ray, 2014).

***Gym Party*, passivity and participation**

Gym Party structurally draws upon modes of participation common to televised popular entertainments. Its competitions are reminiscent of game shows and reality television shows that depict competitors partaking in unpleasant or ridiculous activities for the entertainment of at home viewers – consider, for example,

developed the performance with Christopher Brett Bailey and Jessica Latowicki and had returned to the cast for the version of the performance I attended in Torquay. In the following analysis, I focus on the Edinburgh version of the performance that I attended, whilst also drawing on the script. This choice is designed to ensure my analysis of the play’s scripted elements is based on the dialogue as delivered. Consequently, I have taken the liberty of changing the name ‘Ira’ to ‘Jen’ in all the quotations from the script that I include in what follows, so as to avoid confusion.

I'm A Celebrity Get Me Out of Here and *Total Wipeout*.⁷¹ According to Susan Murray 'reality formats and subgenres have solidified [...] with audiences being able to recognise and anticipate familiar character types, plot points and narrative structure' (1991: 321). The point I wish to make here is that reality television is a known and established format designed for entertainment purposes and often invites audience participation. *Gym Party* utilises these known conventions in order to invite similar modes of audience engagement and response. However, *Gym Party* replicates these modes of audience engagement within the liveness of the theatre space to critique mediated modes of participation as passive, judgemental outlets for citizen participation that belie the negative aspects of competition and negate the ethical relationship between self and other.

Gym Party's critique of audience passivity is set up in Part Two of the performance. Here audience members are invited to judge the performers based on their appearances in relation to questions such as, 'who's the most attractive?', 'based on the technique displayed here, who's the best kisser?', 'who's the only one to have never cheated on a partner?' and 'if you could only save one of these people from certain death, who would you save?' (Made in China, n.d.: 16) The audience members vote by raising their hands, meaning that their acts of judgement are visible to their fellow audience members as well as the performers (Made in China, n.d.: 16-17). The audience does, however, have two choices during this section of the performance: they can either make a choice about who to vote for or choose not to vote at all. During both of the performances I attended, the audience response to this section of the performance was jovial and lively. There seemed little concern

⁷¹ The former posits celebrities in a jungle and asks them to perform tasks, which include eating animal testicles, and the later asks contestants to perform difficult and humorous physical tasks above water, without falling in. These include balancing on floats and dodging barrels rolling towards them on water slides.

over whether to participate or not with most, if not all, audience members automatically playing along. This section of the performance, in and of itself, makes little comment about the unthinkingness of participation but sets up the possibility for this critique later in the performance.

The defamiliarisation of participatory passivity is specifically brought to the fore in Part Three of the performance through a communicative backlash between performers and audience members. Part Three of *Gym Party* singled out audience members, enquired after their name, and then asked questions about the way they voted in Part Two. The section of dialogue is exemplified by the following:

CHRIS (pick a new audience member) Hey. Did you vote for me? Did you think I was a good kisser?

JESS Hey XXX, did you say that I'm most attractive?

JEN You have the right to remain silent, you don't have to say.

(Made in China, n.d.: 21)

In each instance the audience member is not required to answer since the questions occur in quick succession. However, since the questions are designed to be rhetorical the absence of the opportunity to justify one's choices acts to prompt critical consideration about one's earlier responses. Jen's invocation of the rights of arrest attests to this point since it places the audience in the position of being guilty of a misdemeanour. The point of significance here is that the visibility of the voting process, by other audience members and the performers being judged, creates a call and response relationship that raises questions about the readiness of audience members to participate and make appearance based judgements when asked, even

though it meant defaming the performers' personalities. If, as Lehmann states, the mediatised screen 'produced far from its reception and received far from its origin [...] imprints indifference onto everything shown' through an 'erosion of the act of communication', then *Gym Party's* repositioning of the judgement of another into the shared theatre space re-establishes a two-way process of communication between the production and reception of the image that evokes audience answerability for their acts of participation (2006: 185). In other words, *Gym Party* allows individual audience members to be called out on their actions and made to feel personally responsible where the anonymity of distanced participation, such as in mediatised entertainments, prevents the production of such a direct and individuated sense of accountability.

There is also a more insidious point to be made here about how citizens are controlled and regulated through the mass media. Rose states that the mass media regulates life-styles through 'documentary and soap opera; [...] advertising, marketing, and the world of goods', providing a plethora of 'indirect mechanisms that can translate the goals of political, social, and economic authorities into the choices and commitments of individuals' (1998: 165). The point Rose makes, overviewed in the introduction to this thesis, is that popular acts of participation portray the idea that individuals have an increasing array of freedoms, choices and abilities to play an active role in the activities they pursue, when in actuality these modes of popular participation act as a guide for the accumulation of data that regulates citizens. David Harvey refers to such modes of participation as 'pseudo-busy' since they offer little opportunity to affect an outcome of significance to civic life and prevent the process of self-realization (2014: 279). *Gym Party's* focus on the ethical relationship between self and other, as it draws on popular modes of participation, counters this

criticism by highlighting the extent to which such activities are defining our social identity as ethically negligent, as well as how participatory agency is being diverted into superficial and self-regulating outlets. By inviting recognition of these points, *Gym Party* offers audience members the opportunity to reconsider how they participate and what they participate in relation to. In other words, the performance invites audience members to think before they act.

The irruption of the 'real', affectivity and audience responsibility

Gym Party enhances audience answerability through the use of impactful penalisation that expose the consequences of the constant strive for success and the arbitrariness of the daily challenge to 'perform—or else' (McKenzie, 2001: 177). As Jon McKenzie states, we live in an age of performance 'populated by high performers, peak performers, star performers, performers who challenge forth themselves and others' (2001: 177). Subsequent to each competition round the winner makes a speech of thanks before the losing contestants perform their penalisations. After the voting competition in Part Two the penalisation round is characterised by the performers taking it in turns to humiliate each other. One contestant degrades the other's personality before they swap roles and the other's body is degraded. The degrading comments are delivered through a microphone while the performer being degraded stands on a raised platform, as if placed on display and objectified for the audience. In Edinburgh, Jess derided Chris's personality stating that he was incapable of having emotional relationships and that he likes to think he is 'an original little snowflake' when he is merely a normal, uncool, banal individual (Made in China, 2013). All of these comments were directed to Chris who at the end of his derision was told to smile at the audience and take a bow. In turn, Chris derided Jess's 'piggy nose', the bags under her eyes, stated that

her hair colour was unflattering and did not suit her face and that her 'thunder thighs' were genetic and there was nothing she could do to change the fact (Made in China, 2013). This derision occurred after Jess had removed her clothes and rotated 360 degrees to display her body in full to the audience. This penalisation scene is exemplary of *Gym Party's* exaggerated portrayal of the violent way competition pits individuals against each other, with the performers' acquiescence to their penalisations also pointing to the self-punishment that characterises failure.

This section of the performance suggested that the performers personally had to endure the exposure of their insecurities as a consequence of audience participation, stimulating affective audience response premised on 'the irruption of the real' in the theatre space (Lehmann, 2006: 99). As Lehmann states, 'when it deliberately remains uncertain whether an actor is really being tortured [...] the audience possibly reacts to it as to a real, morally unacceptable incident' (2006: 103). Chris's bow to the audience, as well as his direct use of eye-contact, specifically drew upon theatrical post-show convention to create the idea that his personality was being degraded for the audience's entertainment. In other words, the audience presence within the theatre space played a 'real' role in the requirement that he be subjected to scrutiny. Jen's winning speech of thanks, prior to the penalisation, also played a core role in embedding this idea since she stated, 'mostly, I'd like to thank all of you, who've just endorsed it [Jen's win and the subsequent penalisations]/ You guys/ Have earnt this, you've voted, you're in control' (Made in China, n.d.: 17). This sense of culpability then remained as Jess rotated for audience members to get a better view of her imperfections. The performance also created the idea that the criticisms were premised upon the 'real' identities of the performers. This process was foreground through the derision of Jess's body

since she did have bags under her eyes and she did have well-shaped thighs; albeit, Chris's interpretation of them was negative. The emphasis on imperfections that were visibly present on Jess then retrospectively enhanced the likelihood that Jess's comments regarding Chris's personality were centred, at least in part, on a truthful critique. In other words, her suggestions that Chris has issues with emotional relationships and likes to convey the idea that he is 'alternatively' cool were apt interpretations of his personality. The differing dynamics of the two scenarios, therefore, referred back and forth to one another to invite Lehmann's 'irruption of the real' into the theatre event (Lehmann, 2006: 99). Consequently, *Gym Party* stimulated my moral indignation and guilt about the role I played in delineating losers to be penalised as a consequence of my participation, thus, destabilising my sense of self and prompting a critical consideration of my responsibility. As Janice Lindsay-Hartz, Joseph de Rivera and Michael Mascolo argue, 'to feel guilty we must take responsibility for the violation, with the conviction that we could have done something to prevent it' (1995: 290).

Rehearsing new actions and the significance of the public sphere

After producing this sense of responsibility in audience members, the final section of *Gym Party* provides the opportunity for them to seize hold of their participation, make a choice about whether to act or not and, thereby, redeem their apparent ethical negligence. In Part Three of *Gym Party* the performers stand together onstage listening to the song *Alone* by Heart. The winner of the game is the performer who convinces an audience member to dance with them. The premise of the competition is not explicitly stated and the performers do not approach or vocally petition audience members to dance. Instead, they use emotional blackmail; after all, each contestant is 'willing to do whatever it takes to win' (Made in China, n.d.:

11). The performers seek out eye contact with individual audience members by visibly scanning back and forth across the rows of seating. Chris allowed his jaw to relax, widened his eyes and looked up from underneath his lashes, imploring someone to alleviate his sadness. Jess slowly allowed her eyes to fill with tears so that she visibly looked upset and Jen pursed her mouth and blinked her eyes a significant amount of times to portray herself as brave and humble. As the competition round continued and no audience member was forthcoming, each of the performers extended their hands outwards to the audience as if begging with an open hand for their want to be fulfilled. Thus, the onus in this section of the performance was on transforming felt audience response into the desire to act on the performer's appeal.

In Edinburgh the audience members were slow to respond. However, as the chorus of the song began one male audience member from the front row of the seating bank visibly thrust himself into the stage space, avoided Jen, who he was closest to in proximity, and grabbed Jess in a tight embrace. The audience member's actions seemed motivated by Jess's tears, particularly since he bypassed Jen as if compelled to react to Jess and bring her some sense of comfort. Latowicki confirmed this reading of his actions, in interview, when she specified that he offered a compassionate level of reassurance, saying things such as, "you're so wonderful. You're amazing. It's an amazing show, you've done such a good job" (Cowbury & Latowicki, 2013). If, as Shira Musicant states, in movement "the witness [...] has a unique opportunity to know something about herself, perhaps something about what calls her to action, what motivates her' (1994: 104), then the action that this section of *Gym Party* facilitates allows for a cognitive and embodied exploration of the ethical imperative to act. I would argue that this even occurs to a certain degree amongst

those audience members who choose not to act since they are required to negotiate the possibility of action based on their personal interpretation of the performers' pleas, their thoughts on the performance, level of comfort and perception of one's fellow audience members' responses. In the example here discussed I did not act but my empathetic engagement was prompted through my reading of the acting audience members actions, resulting in a consideration of what prevented my action. Thus, Part Three of the performance invites audience members to mentally and/or physically rehearse potential responses to the ethical call of the other, providing the opportunity for the revival of their "sentiment de l'existence," – a direct moral feeling of right and wrong, through the recognition of one's connection to a wider whole' (Taylor, 1991: 91). Cowbury certainly affirms this intention of the performance when he states:

It doesn't really matter if you're the one who gets up or not, as long as you've worked out what it is we want you to do the job has been done because you've had that moment of "do I have to do this?" or "hopefully someone else will do it".

(Cowbury and Latowicki, 2013)

Cowbury's statement also points to the politics of action within the public sphere since each individual audience member responds to the performer from within the collective audience body. According to Mark Cladis 'in the public realm, our moral outlook is often informed not by personal relationships, but by more impersonal considerations or even by universalist stances such as deontology (do the right thing, in spite of the consequences)' (2003: 21). However, it is quite possible that the public space of the theatre auditorium could result in the absence of

action according to the 'bystander affect' (Darley & Latané, 1968). John Darley and Bibb Latané argue that collective situations can prompt a diffusion of responsibility and a lack of action through indecision. They state, 'when there are several observers present, however, the pressures to intervene do not focus on any one of the observers; instead the responsibility for intervention is shared' (Darley & Latané 1968: 378). Yet, one audience member always acts in *Gym Party* with the time variables for response, according to the company, ranging from almost immediately to half way through the song. Todd Sandler explains this possibility in his social psychology study of collective action, which motivates 'individuals to coordinate their activities to improve their collective well-being' (2004: 19). In *Gym Party* there is a need to improve the collective well-being of the audience since they are persistently posited as a collective body responsible for the performance's violent penalisation. Considering this, Part Three's invitation for an audience member to respond to the needs of a performer provides the audience with the possibility of carrying out a redeeming action, prompting at least one audience member to act in the interests of elevating the status of the collective body to which they belong, if only for a moment before another penalisation ensues. Thus, the responsibility to act is constituted as a result of fellow audience members and performers alike, circumventing the bystander effect since the audience members are contained in a space comprised of a finite number of individuals; no-one is free to move on.

This final section of *Gym Party* does, however, also emphasise the catch-22 that audience members are required to negotiate in their choice to participate or not. Any response to the emotional pleas of the performers will contribute to the progression of the performance and, consequently, result in a penalisation round. The invitation for audience members to participate in this section of the performance,

therefore, raises questions about whether one should help one performer at the expense of the others, whether one's motivation to act is actually about self-gain and achieving a temporary respite from the emotional pain that the performers convey, and what the ethics of acting are when one has knowledge of its negative outcomes. This section of the performance raises more questions than it answers and may have been part of the reason why audience members were much slower to participate than in other rounds. It also required the audience member to participate to a much greater extent, and alone, with these two factors also likely having a heavy influence on the slower uptake of participation in this instance. In any case, this section of the performance suggests that whether an audience member participates or not there is no favourable option or 'greater good' (Cladis, 2003: 21), highlighting the complicated ethics of the neoliberal agenda that *Gym Party* aims to critique.

Emotional manipulation and critical self-reflexivity

In the example discussed above, the opportunity for an audience member to enter the stage space and dance with one of the performers is not a liberated and individuated act of freedom; rather, it is premised upon emotional manipulation. Cowbury acknowledges this point and, yet, asserts its need since it mirrors the imposition of being ruled by a 'sham democracy' (Cowbury and Latowicki, 2013). However, *Gym Party's* sham democracy purposefully exposes its manipulation of audience members, through continued metatheatrical comments about its audience members' acts of participation, defamiliarising the hegemonic authority of the neoliberal agenda in the interests of effecting change.

This practice is facilitated through references, reiterated throughout the performance, to the audience as a consensual group who endorsed the

performance's games and penalisations. Initially, this suggestion is innocuously used to create a sense of rapport with audience members and encourage their participation. Consider the following example:

CHRIS it doesn't matter, you look very nice, either way. Doesn't s/he?
Does anyone not think XXX looks nice?

JEN I think we can call that a consensus

(Made in China, n.d.: 8)

However, as the performance progresses it also self-reflexively critiques its imposition of audience members into a consensual group, as well as their acquiescence to this process through an adherence to accepted behaviours and the disempowering relinquishing of their voices:

JEN does anyone identify with my inability to say "no"? Does anyone
find that things happen because of that?

[...]

JESS you find things happening whether you want them to or not

JEN you find maybe comfort and distractions and politeness and a
general sense of wellbeing

CHRIS being safe

JEN you find they maybe stop you from saying much at all

JESS like yes or no

JEN you exercise your right to remain silent

JESS and good for you

CHRIS You contribute to the consensus, in this way

JESS good for you.

(Made in China, n.d.: 19-20)

These later references to the audience as a consensual group are performed with a sardonic tone, criticising the audience for acquiescing to their homogenisation.

The use of sarcasm and the repetition of the phrase 'good for you' in the above passage is designed to prompt critical considerations about the ethical relationship between self and other and the transformation of the status quo beyond the theatre space. Firstly, it commends the audience member for playing along and functioning within the audience consensus since this process supports the exploration of the themes that *Gym Party* endeavours to critique. However, since this passage occurs at the end of the performance after audience members have been privy to the violent penalisation that *Gym Party*'s losers must endure, the repetition of the phrase suggests a further subtext. It asks for a consideration of what the audience consensus has endorsed throughout the performance, as well as how conformity to a consensus offers the easiest option of engagement not the most ethical. The transparency of the inherent manipulation within the performance, therefore, draws on Emmanuel Levinas' concept of the face-to-face encounter, whereby the performer is the 'Other' to which the audience member is invited to respond, with the intention of stimulating a critical questioning that opens up broader perspectives about the guiding principles of the socio-political climate of the country. As Colin Davis states, the face-to-face encounter functions to 'disturb the intimacy of

my relationship with the Other, provoking a questioning which opens up broader perspectives and lays the foundations of society' (1996: 83). *Gym Party*, thus, defamiliarises the limitations of choosing how, why and whether to act or not in the interests of stimulating as many critical and creative answers as there are audience members about how one might participate within the hegemony of the neoliberal agenda differently. As *Made in China* affirms:

If you get people in a room all voting and all feeling the responsibility of what that voting meant [...] and looking at each other and saying "I am in this group with you and even though we might have voted differently we're both here". That creates that kind of participation and unifying the audience into a group that they don't necessarily want to be a part of [and] that then creates the question that we are trying to ask on a larger scale, by getting people to recognise themselves in society.

(Cowbury & Latowicki, 2013)

Re-imagining the 'aspiration nation'

The finale of *Gym Party* directly introduces the 'aspiration nation'. As discussed at the outset of this analysis and thesis, Cameron's concept of the 'aspiration nation' is ostensibly one of equal opportunities for all, whereby the individual is not hampered by their social circumstances. In actuality, the concept endorses the inequalities promoted by the neoliberal agenda and promotes a ruthless, succeed on your own terms policy. *Gym Party* quotes directly from Cameron's 'aspiration nation' speech inviting audience members to critique its

premise.⁷² While the performance does not explicitly refer to the speech as Cameron's, the dramaturgy of how it is delivered invites audience members to make this association. The winner of the final round, in this case Jess, delivers the speech on mic on top of a box. The imagery connotes the idea that the winner is preaching from a 'soap' box to advocate the cause of aspiration, which is referred to twice, drawing parallels with Cameron's original speech. The speech is as follows:

I'm not here to defend privilege

I'm here to spread it

To back aspiration all the way.

I think you and me know

What it takes to win. Don't we?

We know what it takes

To win for all our people

To build an aspiration nation –

So I guess we should get out there and do it.

(Made in China, n.d.: 26)

The speech offers a positive interpretation of aspiration and the promotion of success, indicating that its critique comes to the fore by how it is performed over a violent penalisation. In the accompanying penalisation scene in Edinburgh, Chris held Jen's head down in a bucket of water twice in succession, slapped her face and

⁷² The first, second, fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth lines in the extract quoted in this analysis are all direct quotations from Cameron's original speech.

punched her in the stomach. Jen then held Chris's head down in the bucket of water before lifting a golf club and smashing it into his back in time with the end of the winner's speech, performance and stage blackout. The scene thus offered an exaggerated and visual depiction of the negative aspects of competition proliferated by the drive to succeed, echoing the penalisation scene in Part Two where the performers derided each other verbally and progressing on from the self-punishment of Part One, not discussed, which was characterised by the losers punching themselves.

It is as a consequence of the disparity between the positive interpretation of aspiration detailed in the speech and the visual imagery of the negative aspects of competition showcased by the penalisation round, and the performance as a whole, that audience members are invited to critique the concepts of aspiration, competition and winning. This process occurs regardless of whether audience members make the link to the Conservative Party's concept of the 'aspiration nation' or not. For those who do, the ending of the performance brings the political leanings of Made in China to the fore, whilst simultaneously harkening to the potential value of the arts for questioning the dominant ideology in playful and provocative ways. For those who do not, the scene still raises provocative questions about the notion of aspiration and its insidiously negative aspects bringing the performance's critique into sharp relief and leaving the lingering question of whether we should just 'get out there and do it', create an 'aspiration nation' (Made in China, n.d.: 26). In either case, if, as Brian Sutton-Smith states, play activates 'the zestfulness in organisms that have the capacity for anticipating and enacting possibilities', then the scene's playful duality endeavours to activate its participants to confront the ethics and the arbitrariness of the daily challenge to strive for success (1997: 32).

Instrumentalisation of the arts

Throughout this discussion the question of the value of participatory performance has been pertinent; in particular *Gym Party*'s potential to challenge the underlying principles of the 'aspiration nation'. Across the performance the performers repeatedly asked audience members 'are you getting bang for your buck' prompting consideration about the questions of 'value' surrounding performance and what people want from the arts (Made in China, n.d.: 2). The performers directly ask audience members whether they come for a good time, or to improve oneself, whether they come hoping to learn something or to gain 'an experience, badge of honour, a conversation starter to take home with you, something to show off and use' (Made in China, n.d.: 19). Thus, implicit within the performance is a critique of the instrumentalisation of the arts.⁷³

The need for such a critique is salient considering the comments made by the Culture Secretary, Maria Miller, in 2013. Miller stated that the arts needed to make an economic case for their existence so that government subsidy could produce "healthy dividends" (in Humphrys, 2013); a point made after the 2010 budget cut Arts Council funding by 29.6% and when drama does not have a programme of study in the National curriculum (Bennett, 2015).⁷⁴ The opposing standpoint is exemplified by the Artists' Assembly Against Austerity, formed in 2013 with the aim of showing

⁷³ John Humphrey's excellent article, 'John Humphrey asks: Should the Focus of the Arts be Its Economic Impact', offers an excellent example of the instrumentalisation of the arts under Tory rule. See <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2013/04/25/arts-funding-what-justifies-subsidy/> for more information.

⁷⁴ Debates about the arts also raged ahead of the 2015 General Election, and played a large role in party posturing. Labour stated that they could not reverse the Conservative party's cuts but would reinstate the importance of the arts in education, whilst raising strong concerns about the future of the arts if another Conservative government was elected. For more information on the debate see <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2015/jan/06/labour-accused-bragging-commitment-83m-arts-funding-cuts-harman-defend>. And, for a salient article about the significance of the arts in a socio-political milieu centred on economic gain, see <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/apr/21/government-arts-schools-michael-gove>.

visible, broad and co-ordinated oppositional action to the coalition government's programme of cuts (*The Guardian*, 2014). The demands of the movement centre on four key issues:

Keep healthcare free at the point of need and resist privatisation; ensure equal access to arts education by scrapping student fees and ending cuts to creative subjects in schools and universities; provide affordable homes and studios by capping rents; and invest in the arts, which generate a significant cash benefit to the taxpayer. This means no more cuts to the cultural and heritage sectors and reinstatement of arts funding to pre-2010 levels, appropriately adjusted for inflation.

(*The Guardian*, 2014)

The sardonic, rhetorical comments that *Gym Party* makes about the value of performance situate it alongside such movements to make a rallying call about the trivialisation of the arts under Tory rule. The questions somewhat angrily provoke audience members into considering why they attended the performance, what their expectations were and at what cost they participated, harkening to Miller's problematic valuation of the arts in an economically driven society that desires calculable impacts, outcomes and effects. Thus, *Gym Party* acts as a public forum for inviting audience members to engage with the arguments surrounding the need for, and importance of, the arts, affirming their value even though, and perhaps because, they cannot be quantified according to the tangible concept of value espoused by the neoliberal agenda and the concept of the 'aspiration nation'.

Summary

In summary, this case-study analysis has emphasised how *Gym Party* enacts its political ideals upon its audiences to question the dominant ideology of the governing body and make a case for the value of theatre in a period of political and economic change. *Gym Party* conforms to Lehmann's suggestion that theatre deal with extremes of 'affect', offering a form of emotional training through its cultivation of participants' responses (2006: 186). As Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger state, 'the notion of participation [...] dissolves dichotomies between cerebral and embodied activity, between contemplation and involvement, between abstraction and experience: persons, actions, and the world are implicated in all thought, speech, knowing, and learning' (1991: 52). *Gym Party* invites audience members to competitively participate in a rehearsal of behaviours that the performance emphasises are a dominant aspect of our relationships with others in an 'aspiring' nation, providing them with the opportunity to explore the ethics of competition and consider what else might motivate us to act. *Gym Party*, thus, creates playful situations in which the participatory effects of the performance are released and played out, acting as a form of public engagement that provocatively stimulates reflective considerations about competition and aspiration, both within and beyond the theatre space (Lehmann, 2006: 186). As Johan Huizinga states:

Such at least is the way in which play presents itself to us in the first instance: as an intermezzo, an *interlude* in our daily lives. As a regularly reoccurring relaxation, however, it becomes the accompaniment, the complement, in fact an integral part of life in general.

(1970: 9)

Gob Squad's Kitchen (You've Never Had it So Good)

The third case-study to be discussed in this chapter is Gob Squad's (2013) *Gob Squad's Kitchen (You've Never Had it So Good)*.⁷⁵ The use of audience participation has progressed over the course of the two previously discussed case-studies from relatively anonymous audience vote in *Fight Night*, to visible audience vote and the opportunity for an audience member to transgress the boundary between stage and auditorium and step into the playing space in *Gym Party*. *Gob Squad's Kitchen* increases the extent of audience participation in a performance that culminates with the four onstage performers being replaced with four audience members; albeit the number of audience members participating is fewer.

The degree of audience participation is magnified in this chapter since four audience members enter into a performance structure created by Gob Squad. However, this point also highlights how the amount of audience members invited to participate is less. Nonetheless, since the possibility of participating is an option extended out to include all audience members it heightens one's sense of engagement with the performance regardless of whether one is physically participating or not. In other words, as I sat and watched and the performers were replaced I began to consider how those audience members on stage could have been me and how I had an opportunity to go on stage if the performance continued in a similar vein. This breaking of theatrical convention heightened my engagement with the performance, and consciousness of self, by creating the idea that something unexpected might be asked of the audience collective I was situated in. I will discuss the implications of this experience at the end of the analysis.

⁷⁵ I will, henceforth, refer to the production as *Gob's Squad's Kitchen*.

The audience members who act within the production that Gob Squad has structured have not been prepared in advance of the performance and are picked, by the performers, during the course of the show. The participating audience members are involved in scenes of improvisation with the performers, as well as directly exchanging roles with the performers who move to the audience members' vacated seats in the auditorium. Audience participation is supported throughout the performance through the use of headset technology, which allows the performers to feed instructions and dialogue to audience members. The use of a cinema screen also supports the audience members' participatory actions since it acts as a protective barrier between the stage and auditorium and enhances the images presented. This use of the screen creates what the company refers to as an 'alienated intimacy' and reflects their aim to take care of audience members and depict them as flatteringly as possible (Gob Squad, n.d.: 69). As Sharon Smith of the company states, 'we're not interested in exploiting people [...] we want them [audience members] to feel fantastic [...] to give them a beautiful light [...] and we always say that "you're going to look amazing in here"' (2014). This sense of generosity in *Gob Squad's Kitchen's* participatory performance tactics, the use of technology and exploration of the mediatised image will be the focus of this analysis.

The performance

The production of *Gob Squad's Kitchen* that will be referred to throughout the course of this case-study was performed in the Metropolitan Arts Centre (MAC), Belfast.⁷⁶ The production was billed as a 'unique piece of theatre' that would 'attempt to reconstruct [Andy] Warhol's film **Kitchen** along with elements of his other films such as **Eat, Sleep,** and **Screen Test**' (MAC, n.d. original emphasis). Gob

⁷⁶ On 29th March 2013.

Squad's recreations of *Kitchen* and *Eat* offer depictions of people talking, drinking coffee and making toast in a kitchen; their version of *Screen Test* offers an individual sitting on a sofa with the instruction to 'just be yourself'; and *Sleep* offers performers and audience members pretending to sleep (Gob Squad, 2013).

Throughout the performance, Gob Squad continually comments on their failure to recreate Warhol's films. Until the inclusion of audience members, the performers attempt to act like the subjects in Warhol's films before stepping out of these roles in order to deconstruct their efforts. Their critiques refer to the action not looking 'natural' enough, resulting in various different attempts to recreate the scene, and they frequently declare boredom and an inability to carry out the task required – such as sleeping. Audience members are therefore presented with a performance that is designed to look like a work-in-process.

The production has been touring since 2007 and won the 2012 Drama Desk Award for Unique Theatrical Experience. The production uses four performers who change and swap roles each time it is performed. Equally, the performers move in and out of the recreation of each of Warhol's films. This means that their roles within the performance are not based on a character trajectory; rather, the cast offers four performers endeavouring to problem-solve the best way to recreate Warhol's films. The cast for the performance I attended included Simon Will, Sharon Smith, Laura Tonke, and Erik Pold.

Audience members view *Gob Squad's Kitchen* through a large cinema screen positioned across the breadth of the stage space. The acting occurs behind this screen in three separate sets. The first focuses on a bed (*Sleep*), the second is a set that is modelled on a kitchen (*Kitchen*) and the third focuses on a sofa (*Screen Test*). As the scenes in these sets are acted out they are fed in real time onto the

cinema screen for the audience members to view. In essence, the performance locates both the production and reception of the mediated image in the same spatial and temporal space. Audience members see only the mediated image of the action but are aware that what is viewed on the cinema screen is live since they are invited backstage to view the sets and interact with the performers before taking their seats in the auditorium and the performance begins. The use of live feed is then further made apparent as the performance progresses when the performers are replaced by audience members.

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Figure 13: An image of *Gob Squad's Kitchen* demonstrating the performance in creation behind the cinema screen and the image that the audience members view (Drama Queen, 2012).

The performers remain behind the screen until approximately two-thirds of the way through the performance when they invite their replacement. The rules for this engagement are that the performers will come out from behind the cinema screen and make eye-contact with an audience member. This connection signifies an agreement between performer and audience member resulting in the latter's involvement in the performance. As Erik states before seeking an audience

replacement, 'I know when I've found the right person because our eyes will meet' (Gob Squad, 2013). The first audience member is invited to participate by Eric, replacing his role in *Screen Test*; however, Eric does not move into the auditorium but into a party occurring in *Kitchen*. Sharon follows the same process to find an audience member to participate in *Sleep* and, then, she too moves into *Kitchen*. Simon is the third performer to invite an audience member to participate; however, Simon uses this opportunity to leave the stage space and sit in the auditorium. Simon fits his replacement with a 'remote acting' headset so that he can provide them with instructions for action and dialogue as they interact with the remaining performers. This process is repeated until Sharon, as the last performer left onstage, participates in an improvised scene with an audience member in *Sleep*. This improvised scene attempts to recreate Warhol's film *Kiss*, in which two people kiss. The performance concludes after this scene is over, all the audience members have moved into *Kitchen* and the image projected onto the cinema screen shifts from black and white to colour and then fades out.

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Figure 14: The three films that occur simultaneously in *Gob Squad's Kitchen*: *Sleep* – *Kitchen* – *Screen Test* (SCA, 2013: Photo by David Baltzar).

Arguing for mediatised connection

The use of the cinema screen in *Gob Squad's Kitchen's* is the dominant visual and thematic focus of the performance. According to Lehmann, the proliferation of the mediatised image in contemporary society has resulted in disengaged modes of spectatorship and the disintegration of an 'ethico-political' responsibility in the act of communication (2006: 186). This point was touched upon in *Fight Night* but is worth expanding on here since *Gob Squad's Kitchen* employs the use of a mediatised screen alongside live performance, thereby, explicitly engaging with Lehmann's theoretical perspective. He states:

The basic structure of perception alienated by media is such that there is no experience of a connection among the individual images received but above all no connection between the receiving and sending of signs; there is no experience of a relation between address and answer.

(Lehmann, 2006: 185)

Gob Squad's Kitchen presents a challenge to Lehmann's reading of the mediatised image since it facilitates moments of connection between audience members and performers by producing the mediatised image in the time and place of its reception. This process facilitates personal encounters between performers and audience members that support audience participation, break down hierarchical relationships within the theatrical setting and enable moments of intimacy and connection to unfold. This occurs through the use of the cinema screen, which functions as a protective barrier, preventing the participating audience members from being exposed to the gaze of the spectating audience members. It also occurs through the heightened intimacy of the cinematic, close-up effect. This use of enhanced

audience participation provides audience members with access to the intricacies of the relationships being negotiated onstage implicating both audience members and performers in the production and reception of the image, according to Lehmann's '*aesthetic of responsibility*' (2006: 185 original emphasis).

The possibility the close-up creates for person-to-person communication is important to consider in relation to the proliferation of communication technologies and the contemporary, individualistic narrative. In *Alone Together: Why we Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (2010), Sherry Turkle expresses concerns about the use of communication technologies and Artificial Intelligence for experiencing a sense of connection since they facilitate the ability to communicate without an understanding of obligation or a sense of reciprocity and generosity. She states, 'we are lonely but fearful of intimacy. Digital connections and the sociable robot may offer the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship. Our networked life allows us to hide from each other, even as we are tethered to each other' (Turkle, 2010: 1). Turkle's concerns about the substitute technology offers for person-to-person intimacy are not unfounded; however, they fail to consider the ways in which technology might support these modes of engagement and, consequently, consider how we might function ethico-politically within an increasingly technological society.

Gob Squad's Kitchen exonerates the mediated image through the celebration of human fallibility. Since the performance is streamed live onto the cinema screen it provides access to that which is usually edited out. While I acknowledge that the performance is pre-rehearsed and, therefore, presents a purposefully edited and perfected structure, the inclusion of audience members eludes the company's control. As Smith states in relation to *Kiss*, 'of course they

[the audience member] can say no and they do say no. [...] For each member of Gob Squad there's slightly different desires in terms of outcomes' (2014). Smith's point emphasises how the relationships between audience members and performers in *Gob Squad's Kitchen* are negotiated and improvised based on each performer's aim and according to the limits which the audience member is willing to go.

According to Sara Jane Bailes any response that did not result in a wholehearted acceptance of the performer's request would result in a failure of the performance's intended outcome. However, Bailes articulates such failures as empowering and positive opportunities for the exploration of alternative actions that require a consideration of one's agency and responsibility within the exchange. She states, 'a failed objective establishes an aperture, an opening onto several (and often many) other ways of doing that counter the authority of a singular or "correct" outcome' (Bailes, 2011: 2). *Gob Squad's* openness to allow for the development of various outcomes, therefore, creates a generative performance space, which asks audience members to make a commitment to their actions in a temporal unfolding that gives purpose, definition and direction to one's being. As Charles Guignon states, with a consideration of Heidegger's concept of existence, 'in taking a stand on its own life, Dasein takes over some range of possibilities as definitive of identity [...] and exists as a "being toward" the realization of a final configuration of possibilities for its life overall' (2006: 278). *Gob Squad's Kitchen*, thus, counters the indifference of the mediated image through a work-in-progress style aesthetic that celebrates and facilitates human fallibility and prompts the critical engagement of audience members.

Gob Squad's exploration of the ethico-political potential of the mediated image is particularly pertinent in relation to the political and economic instability

prompting civil unrest across the world in a bid to re-evaluate the meaning of democracy. It is not my intention to over-rehearse this point. However, *Gob Squad's Kitchen's* use of the theatre space creates a collective framework for exploring the significance of our social identity, on a micro level, through acts of collaboration and negotiation that explore the relationship between participation and responsibility. As Charles Lindholm states, 'as taken-for-granted meaning systems [are] challenged from within and without, human beings everywhere [seek] ways to recapture a degree of significance and stability' (2008: 145). *Gob Squad's Kitchen's* exchanges counter Lehmann's interpretation of society as anaesthetizing 'urgently needed human reflexes' by employing a '*politics of perception*' that jointly implicates audience members and performers in the production of the performance (Lehmann, 2006: 186 & 185 original emphasis). This exploration is not as explicitly tied to the question of capitalist democracy as the case-studies discussed thus far. However, it plays a core role in engaging with the idea that neoliberal capitalism has transformed citizens into spectators, as discussed in *Major Tom*, incapable of assuming their agency for contributing to the conditions of their existence and the development of the socio-political milieu (Lehmann, 2006: 183). In the analysis that follows, I argue that *Gob Squad's Kitchen* exonerates, critiques and counters the passivity associated with the mediatised image addressing citizen inability to act to effect change through a celebration of process that offers an exploration of how we ought to live. In order to pursue this argument, the following analysis will initially focus on the relationship between past, present and future, at play in *Gob Squad's Kitchen*, before moving into an in-depth analysis of the improvisatory exchange between a participating audience member and performer in *Kiss*.

Doing, failing and temporal continuity

Gob Squad's failure to recreate Warhol's films is commented on throughout the performance by the performers. This is exemplified a third of the way through the performance when Erik demands that the creation of the film stops, the screens showing *Sleep* and *Kitchen* fade out and he rants about Laura's inability to recreate Warhol's film *Screen Test*. He states, 'what an earth are you doing? What do you look like? [...] Get off, this is ridiculous [...] You just really, really messed up [...] Just stop the film. Stop it' (Gob Squad, 2013).⁷⁷ These moments in the performance, whereby the performers comment on each other's inability to achieve the goal of recreating Warhol's films, emphasises how they endeavour to connect the present to the past. This is made particularly apparent in the opening of the performance when Simon and Laura discuss the contents of the set and the various different food items they have in the kitchen. In one example they show a bag of Walkers 70% less fat *Baked* crisps to the camera only to state that they would not have been baked in the sixties and would have contained more fat. This process of commenting on the disparities between 2013 and 1964, between Gob Squad's version of *Kitchen* and Warhol's version, emphasises the stagedness of the set to make a performance out of Gob Squad's act of failure. If, as Bailes states, 'strategies of failure in the realm of performance can be understood as generative, prolific even; failure *produces*', then *Gob Squad's Kitchen's* act of failing opens up a space of resistance that celebrates the imperfect and encourages the attempt (2011: 3). In other words, the emphasis in *Gob Squad's Kitchen* is on the process of endeavour, not the fetishisation of the mediated image, countering the passivity that Lehmann argues characterises the

⁷⁷ Erik decried Laura's inability to just 'be herself' in the film since she began humorously wrapping scarves around her head until she looked as if she had been mummified.

contemporary transformation of citizens into 'radically detached spectators' (2006: 185).

Alice Rayner's arguments in *To Act, To Do, To Perform* offer a way to consider how this process is based on *Gob Squad's Kitchen's* work-in-progress style aesthetic, in which the performers stand between acting and doing. Rayner states that 'to do' allows 'discoveries about emotion, attitude, even reasons occur as a *result* of doing. [...] In the dimension of doing, it is possible to learn *about* the deed' (1994: 25 original emphasis). This relationship between acting and doing can be seen in the example above, and the way the narrative of the performance emerges out of the critiques that the performers offer on their attempts to re-create Warhol's films. Throughout, the performers critique their inability to 'do' Warhol's films, instead veering towards 'acting' them out through impersonation and affected speech. The performers consistently interrupt each other's enacted behaviours with assertions such as 'No, no, this is all wrong' creating the idea that they are shifting from performed actions for purposeful display and consumption to a non-acted presentation of self (Gob Squad, 2013). Of course, throughout the performance the performers play versions of themselves in a loosely structured and rehearsed show. But the point of significance here, according to Rayner's suggestion, is that *Gob Squad's Kitchen's* constant shifting between 'acting' and 'doing' offers a template for reflection about the past through the present, and vice versa. This process counters the passivity of viewing that characterises a society of spectacle by highlighting the evolving, temporal continuity of the present moment. In other words, *Gob Squad's Kitchen* historicizes, highlighting the transitory nature of the present as a work-in-progress that is subject to change, thus, inviting critical engagement.

The act of doing is also extended out to include audience members through their participation within the performance, demonstrating their ability to consciously and actively live out the present. Audience members are invited to 'do' through the task-based requirements that the performance asks of them. When Erik seeks a replacement in *Screen Test* he states that it is 'just beautifully simple, you just sit someone down in front of the camera and the camera reveals that person's natural charisma' (Gob Squad, 2013). This is not to say that audience members cannot impose a representational façade on their acts of participation but this process is tempered by the company's use of 'remote acting' headsets, which invite a perfunctory 'doing' of task-based actions, movements and speech. The company states that the aim of the headset is so the audience participant cannot

establish direct and unmediated feelings towards what is said, because [they] don't know how the text [they are] hearing develops, nor can [they] influence it. In this way lives, texts and narratives can be made audible, free from any psychology and pathos and their essence and authorship cannot be accounted for.

(Gob Squad, n.d.: 72)

Certainly this lack of 'feeling' was apparent in the actions of the audience participants in the performance I attended. However, Gob Squad here more importantly acknowledges how the merging of performer instruction with the actions of the participating audience member results in a collaborative creation that exceeds the performer's control and authorship. This would suggest that the audience members' participatory acts of 'doing' are premised upon the negotiation of their agency, demonstrating their active role in contributing to the performance. Consequently,

one could argue that the select use of audience participation prompts an understanding of how one might consciously and actively shape the future of the present moment within pre-structured constraints. As Bailies states, 'the potential for change lies not only in the story, therefore, but in the processes of telling, in the reciprocal relations established by and because of communication' (2011: 15).

The idea that audience members bring their own agency to play within *Gob Squad's Kitchen* is actually referenced at the end of the performance. While the structure of the performance follows a pre-planned trajectory, the nuances of the audience members' acts of participation exceed that which could be anticipated, producing an excess that emphasises the transience of, both, performance and the present epoch. At the close of the performance an audience participant communicates this point through the delivery of the following monologue to the camera: 'we are the beginning, we are the essence of our time [...] and in one hundred years people will look at this and say "that's why"' (Gob Squad, 2013). In the opening of the performance Simon also emphasised how *Kitchen* was the 'essence of its time' harkening to how it now inhabits a past-tense moment and Gob Squad's re-production inhabits the present. So, when these lines are repeated at the end of the play, after all the performers have been replaced by audience participants, there is a sense that they take on another new resonance: this is not a re-creation of Warhol's films nor is it Gob Squad's version; rather, it belongs to all those in attendance, audience members included, and is premised upon the time and place of each particular performance. The inclusion of audience members within the performance, therefore, foregrounds *Gob Squad's Kitchen's* generative structure, magnifying the idea that next time it is performed it will resonate in a different socio-political context amongst a gathering of different individuals. In other words, this

monologue at the end of the performance points towards a future moment in which the presently performing and spectating audience members' experiences will inhabit the past. If, as Guignon states, 'the result [of recognising the temporality of being] is the ability to live with a clear-sighted grasp of the temporal continuity and future-directedness of one's own life-happening' (Guignon, 2006: 282), *Gob Squad's Kitchen's* narrative and temporal trajectory creates self-aware audience members invited to consider their legacy to the future, based on an understanding of their agency within the present-tense of the performance, which is premised upon a reflection on the past.

Improvisation, collaboration, freedom and difficult choices

In *The Society of the Spectacle* Debord states that the spectacle results in a 'tendency to make one see the world by means of various specialized mediations (it can no longer be grasped directly)' (1983: n.p.). Lehmann's concept of the mediatised image, and its political incapacity, is based on this premise. However, *Gob Squad Kitchen's* use of the mediatised screen invites dialogue that counters the idea of the spectacle as 'that which escapes the activity of men, that which escapes reconsideration and correction by their work', through the use of improvisation between performer and audience member (Debord, 1983: n.p.). This point is best illustrated in *Kiss* since the scene places both audience member and performer within the mediatised image, asks for the performance's most challenging act of audience participation and does not use the remote acting headset. The scene, therefore, unfolds without instruction requiring the performer and audience members to negotiate their relationship and the unfolding scene.

Kiss offers a structured gap within *Gob Squad's Kitchen* for the performer and audience participant to negotiate an interview that ideally ends in 'a three-minute kissing scene [...] in which the two performers move their faces in a slow motion way towards each other until their lips finally meet' (Gob Squad, n.d.: 35). In the performance I attended Sharon joined the female audience participant, who had replaced her in *Sleep*, to perform this scene. *Kiss* is presented as an opportunity for Sharon to have a dialogue with herself since the audience participant is playing Sharon. The questions Sharon asked included 'why haven't you settled down?' and 'don't you want to start a family?' (Gob Squad, 2013), with Smith indicating in an article about the scene that 'these are real questions that tear me apart in my real life' (n.d.: n.p.). The dialogue ran sentences together as it built towards the climax of Sharon asking the audience participant to kiss her. Phrases included, 'you want to keep your sparkle', 'you want to see everything go forward' and 'you've just got to keep experimenting and I wondered would you kiss me?' (Gob Squad, 2013). The question of kissing occurs suddenly after Sharon's comments have built in volume, pace and excitability, challenging the participating audience member with a provocative request. As earlier evidenced in *Fight Night* such requests of audience members create a caesura between aesthetic contemplation and the intervention of social reality (Lehmann, 2013: 108). The question to kiss a stranger, in public view, acts as a confrontation that raises the stakes of the audience member's participation and requires a consideration of their own principles and willingness to respond to the request. In other words, since the possibility of kissing raises the stakes of the interaction, the participating audience member is confronted with their self-identity, requiring that they recognise and acknowledge their level of comfort and then negotiate the situation through dialogue, lest they betray their sense of self.

Consequently, this confrontation with self prompts an interruption of social reality within the aesthetic of the performance, activating the participating audience member to understand their response-ability and affirm their sense of self, or not, through the process of choice. As Taylor states, 'we discover what we have it in us to be by becoming that mode of life, by giving expression in our speech and action to what is original in us' (1991: 61).

Rebecca Schneider states that 'meaning is a social affair, a matter of exchange' (1997: 9), suggesting that the improvisatory negotiation in *Kiss* functions as a form of meaning-making that acts to challenge the hierarchical distinction between performer and audience member. Smith's vulnerability during the moment of the request, which she refers to as a 'conscious political choice almost' (2014), supports this negotiation. She states that the moment is 'excruciating', that there is 'big potential for rejection' and that 'I am now out of control, no longer in charge. [...] I want the audience to know this' (Smith, 2014). This sense of anticipation and dread was apparent in Sharon's tentative speech and timid actions following her request, emphasising how, alongside the audience participant, she too feels a sense of exposure during the scene, despite, and perhaps even because of, her knowledge about the request she must make. The framework requires that Sharon rely upon an attentive process of listening, conversation and exchange so that the audience member is provided with space for the moment to unfold according to their level of comfort. This is a process that the company employs in their rehearsal practices in order to establish a sense of trust. *Gob Squad* refers to this process as follows:

It is important to take a certain attitude to oneself and to the others. This attitude is difficult to rehearse on your own. It can't easily be learnt [...] Trust

has to be created. I think it has something to do with being honest with oneself combined with courage to be open to one and to the others.

(n.d.: 55)

The interaction in *Kiss* is a microcosm of this process where the audience participant and performer must be open and responsive to one another in order to build an element of trust that facilitates a process of negotiation and, with it, the production of meaning. Meaning-making, therefore, becomes a social activity in *Gob Squad's Kitchen* that allows the participating audience member to assume response-ability for the course of their engagement within the performance, directly grasp its modes of production and shape its progression. The implication here is that *Gob Squad's Kitchen* acts as a rehearsal ground for active modes of participation that offer a way to re-imagine the conditions that shape the social world.

The need for this process of compromise and communication was particularly emphasised in the performance I attended since the female audience participant seemed reluctant to kiss Sharon. The scene, therefore, required a negotiation to discover what the audience participant would be willing to do, ending with a hug and a kiss on the cheek. This process was delicate and fraught to watch as both Sharon and the audience member lay with their faces inches apart and attempted to come to an agreement and understanding of the other's needs. The compromise was navigated through a process of conversation, negotiation of body language, nervous laughter, smiles, nodding and shaking of heads. If, as Beatrice Allegranti emphasises in *Embodied Performances*, we reconfigure our subjectivities 'in everyday interactions and relationships that shape and reshape us physically, emotionally and mentally' (2011: 211), *Kiss* empowers the audience participant and

the performer to become the subject, rather than object, of their lives, through their inclusion in a process of doing through practice. This process is facilitated by, and because of, the cinema screen since the magnification of the interaction, streamed directly onto the screen for public view, requires that something occur in the interests of performance.

The face-to-face request to be kissed does, however, raise an issue about whether the audience member is obliged to respond positively, despite Gob Squad's desire for a process of negotiation to take place. As Davis states, 'in the face to face, the Other gives my freedom meaning because I am confronted with real choices between responsibility and obligation' (1996: 49). By dint of the fact that the question is asked, and is followed by an outline of the premise of the film, one could argue that pressure is placed on the participating audience member to agree to the request since this is detailed as the desired and intended outcome. This possibility comes into play through the hierarchical structure of the performance since the audience member has no understanding of how the performance will unfold as a whole. The question, therefore, imposes upon the audience member who may feel required to "play along", passively accepting the authority of the performance despite the possibility this moment offers for a process of collaboration to take place. Certainly, the use of music in the scene creates a tension surrounding the participating audience member's response since it cuts out after the request has been made. This creates an awkward silence as the participating audience member considers how, or whether, to respond. Smith is conscious of the pressures the performance exerts. She states:

It's very hard because I say "will you kiss me" all the music stops and then it's all about their answer and I think it's a pressure for them [the audience

member] maybe to say yes if they didn't want to say yes or to feel backed into a corner.

(Smith, 2014)

I would argue that the very fact that Smith acknowledges this possibility emphasises the care that Gob Squad takes to approach the participating audience member in such a way that negotiation does remain an option. This is certainly Smith's desire since she states 'I really want them to be allowed to say no, if no is their instinctive response' (Smith, 2014), before affirming that participating audience members do make this choice. Thus, the only obligation in this instance is to respond, the choice of how to respond lies with the participating audience member; the response-ability is theirs for the taking. As Smith states, 'you are negotiating with that person who is now negotiating their own control' (2014).

Intimate protection and magnified investment

Contra Lehmann's hypothesis about the mediatised image then, the use of the cinema screen is the most integral aspect of *Gob Squad's Kitchen* for facilitating moments of connection and allowing participating audience members to negotiate their agency and control (2006: 185). Gob Squad speaks of the use of technology generally as a shield that offers a form of protection for audience participation, referring to it as 'technical "construct" or "corset"' (Gob Squad, n.d.: 72). The company even states that the use of media allows encounters that are 'more honest than with a face to face encounter', and that the distance between proximity and mediatisation 'mirrors an alienated intimacy, [...] different to what we are like in the real world' (Gob Squad, n.d.: 69). The suggestion here is that mediated distance facilitates responses that are unselfconscious of a wider audience since the spatial

distance that it creates makes intimacy possible. In *Gob Squad's Kitchen*, while the participating audience member knows there is an audience situated beyond the barricade of the cinema screen, this presence is not immediately felt or seen, potentially alleviating the pressure to perform. As an audience member who performed in *Kiss* stated, I was 'SO present that the analytical part of my brain was not really activated, and I wasn't thinking of myself from an outside perspective – which is wonderful, to be in it, and to actually forget that you are in it' (n.d.: n.p.). The sense of distance that the cinema screen provides, therefore, allows for the development of intimate moments of connection between participating audience members and performers. This process potentially enhances the likelihood that the participating audience member will enter into a negotiated exchange rather than feeling obliged to play along with the implied outcome of the scene, thus, exonerating the alienation Lehmann and Turkle attribute to the mediatised image.

This process is not confined only to the relationship between participating audience members and performers. Rather, *Gob Squad's Kitchen* extends the mediated possibility for connection out to include the spectating audience members, prompting their recognition of their agency and response-ability. As Smith states:

They [the audience members] are not actors, they are not us, there is something to do with the audiences relation with itself, which allows a different kind of projection because part of it is saying [...] that could be me on the stage [...] it gets the whole room involved because it's an...the audience went from here to there.

(2014)

The implication here is that the spectating audience members are able to live vicariously through the participating audience members since the latter came from within the audience collective. In my experience, the process creates an intimate connection between participating audience members and performers and participating audience members and spectators, which is, simultaneously, disaffected and involved. The effect 'make[s] visible the broken thread between personal experience and perception', thus, demonstrating each spectating audience member's agency to respond (Lehmann, 2006: 186).

This sense of response-ability, which bridges the distance between those on stage and the position of those in the auditorium, functions according to an enhanced process of 'kinaesthetic simulation' (Foster, 2008: 55). Leigh Foster states, that 'kinaesthetic simulation of others' actions establishes an empathetic connection among all humans who recognise in those actions an equivalent intention and goal' (2008: 55). According to Foster's hypothesis, when a person executes an action the brain of the observer creates an action trajectory that assumes the end point of the action that they observe. However, in an improvised exchange there is an emphasis on collaboration and exploration, as opposed to an end goal. This results in frequent changes of trajectory and unexpected, instinctive responses. Consequently, improvisatory processes make it more difficult for the spectator to predict the outcome of the actions correctly. Foster emphasises how, in these instances, 'the viewer completes the movement in advance and then sees the guess confirmed or refuted, leading to added engagement with the movement and increased efforts to predict the next arc correctly' (2008: 56). Considering this in relation to *Kiss*, suggests that its improvisatory processes intensified the experiences of the spectating audience members since although the performer articulates and

attempts to reach a certain goal the audience participant may thwart this possibility through their agency. As I watched this scene unfold I was riveted to the screen, employing reactive and intuitive responses that continually re-negotiated the outcome that I thought would unfold based on how I would negotiate the scene if I were the audience participant. My spectating stance, therefore, mirrored the negotiation that the audience participant was sharing with Sharon, with the contrasting difference between my responses and the participating audience members demonstrating the specificity of my agency and response-ability. The use of the live, mediated image played a core role in facilitating this process since it magnified the visibility of the minutiae of the negotiations taking place between Sharon and the participating audience member, through the use of the close-up. As Janis Jefferies and Elena Papadaki state, 'close-ups offer the subtleties of expression that cannot entirely be witnessed from a theatre seat however close to the stage this might be' (2012: 190). Consequently, *Gob Squad's Kitchen's* use of improvised, mediated exchanges prompts greater active, intentional and embodied investment in its performances for all audience members, including those only engaged in acts of spectating, countering the political incapacity Lehmann attributes to the mediated image and its creation of a spectacular, inaccessible reality that limits change.

Summary

In summary, *Gob Squad's Kitchen's* use of live film provides the opportunity for audience members to articulate and explore their agency within the mediated image and, thereby, rehearse their potential to contribute to changing the conditions of their existence. Failure is a core aspect of the politics of the performance since it is employed to explore alternative ways of connecting to others, the past and the

future, and prompts the critical reflexivity of audience members. As Cormac Power states, failure, and the space of doubt it creates, 'brings about possibilities for a re-orientating of the audience's perceptual and epistemological habits, assumptions and patterns of thought' (2012: 68). This process is premised upon non-participating audience members vicariously experiencing the acts of negotiation they watch participating audience members grapple with. The experience blurs the boundaries between the mediated and the live to foster a connection between the production and reception of the image through the audience's relationship to itself. This use of the cinema screen demonstrates the potential the mediated image has to promote, support and facilitate connection, allow the forces of production to be grasped, reinstate a process of communication and response-ability and celebrate human fallibility, thereby, countering the passive dislocation of the representation from the represented.

Throughout the performance the performers evidence and demonstrate their connection to others, in careful acts of negotiation that demonstrate their answerability to the audience participant and the audience participant's sense of answerability for themselves and to the performer. This inclusion of audience members creates a caesura of possibility that highlights their historical and temporal continuity and activates them to recognise their responsibility for the legacy they will leave to the future. Ultimately, *Gob Squad's Kitchen* facilitates the re-negotiation of the hierarchical boundaries between performers and audience members, acting as a platform to invite audience agency and rehearse how we might live ethico-politically as individuals through our response-ability to others. As Karen Jürs-Munby, Jerome Carroll and Steve Giles state, theatre can overcome the ungraspable and disabling

qualities of the spectacle 'by virtue of the ways in which it is able to precipitate an "activity" that is collective, and that is not "pre-ordained"' (2013: 19).

Chapter Two: Conclusion

Chapter Two has focused on a discussion of scripted participatory performance, which occurs within the theatre space. That is, theatre-based performances that invite audience participation but maintain a hierarchical knowledge about how the performance will unfold. The chapter has challenged Deloglu's idea, included in its introduction, that such participatory performance practices disempower the audience member who is merely required to follow a range of protocols. Rather, I have argued that each of the case-studies analysed in this chapter imposed participatory limitations on their audiences to simulate and defamiliarise the ideological structures that narrow citizen freedoms outside the theatre space. This process drew on the discipline of psychology to problematize the relationship between participation and activity and non-participation and passivity inviting audience members to reflect on the limitations to their participatory freedoms and consider their motivations for, and the consequences of, how they currently participate in the neoliberal version of capitalist democracy. As Slavoj Žižek states, "formal" freedom is that freedom to choose *within* the coordinates of the existing power relations, while "actual" freedom grows when we can change the very coordinates of our choices' (2011: 358).

The emphasis throughout the case-studies was on inviting audience members to consider how they might affect change for themselves from their personal perspectives by conceiving of the theatre space as a microcosm of society. The performances purposefully imposed participatory limitations on their audience members with *Fight Night* even scripting and containing the subversive stance within its performance structure. However, all of the case-studies also purposefully deconstructed these limitations through the metatheatricality of their performance

practices. This process was designed to create a multiplicity of self-aware audience members all engaging with the issues of political citizenship and consensus politics to problematize how and where they might advance their political agency.

Consequently, the case-studies facilitated a plurality of perspectives to arise and with them the expression of disagreement and debate. If, as Adrian Little states, 'conflict and disagreement are an inherent part of democratic political societies. In this sense democracy is envisaged not as the mechanism for solving disagreements but rather as a means for enabling their expression' (2002: 378), each case-study's emphasis on stimulating the critical capabilities of their audience members contributed to re-invigorating the public sphere and enhancing the conditions for the development of a radical democratic community. To reiterate an aspect of Lehmann's thinking that occurs throughout the chapter:

A correct appreciation of these practices depends on the recognition that they are not necessarily claiming an ideology of participation and equality between spectators and performers, but rather that they seek ways of creating a meeting point and conflict between aesthetic contemplation and its caesura by the intervention of social reality.

(2013: 108)

This use of the theatre space, to problematize the issue of citizenship and political agency, adds credence to the idea that society has assumed a post-democratic stance. As discussed in the analysis of *Fight Night*, by way of Crouch, post-democratic society is one in which the institutions of democracy remain but the energy of the political system has moved out of the 'democratic structures of parties and elections' (Crouch in POLPHikonstanz, 2013). This perspective suggests that

political institutions currently offer little opportunity for citizens to do politics with Crouch advocating how political action also needs to occur outside the procedural processes of governmental politics. It is this practice that is being evidenced in the democratic discontent occurring around the world in civil society with the case-studies included in this chapter acting as an extended arm of democratic politics by expanding and diversifying the spheres in which political education and engagement can occur. *Fight Night* and *Gym Party* quite explicitly recognised the post-democratic stance in the lack of faith they expressed regarding the democratic electoral system and the current governing body, problematizing whether to opt in or out of governmental politics to advance socio-political change. However, all three of the case-studies opened up a process of shared public debate about politics and participatory citizenship problematizing the issue of political consensus and demonstrating the need to disassociate the binary relationship between participation and activity and non-participation and passivity since either of the latter can be characterised by either of the former. The case-studies, thus, empowered their audience members to rethink their understanding of what it means to participate and do politics conceiving of participation as a mode of critical consciousness and citizens, not institutions, as the lifeblood of democracy.

Fight Night imposed on audience members a frustrating inability to operate outside of, or against, the electoral system it depicted. The performance offered itself as a tool for political progress that problematized the politics of party politics and raised questions about whether to work within, or outside of, the system of politics for political gain and in the interests of rebalancing capitalist democracy.

Gym Party's use of play acted as a form of public engagement that problematized the ethics of playing along and exposed how participation is being directed, and

submissively contained, by popular culture. This process critiqued the policies of the current governing body, the ethical relationship between self and other and troubled the notion of political consensus. *Fight Night*, therefore, problematized citizen agency in party politics whilst *Gym Party* focused on one's ethical responsibilities for the way one participates. *Gob Squad's Kitchen*, subsequently, focused on how and why we might participate to stimulate audience response-ability and question how the legacy of the contemporary moment might be shaped. Collectively, all of the case-studies used the containment of the theatre space to bring audience members to a point of critical consciousness about their participatory citizenship, explore the consequences of their participatory choices, or lack thereof, and consider how the ability to choose is socially and culturally conditioned. Thus, the case-studies acted as educational and trouble-shooting forums for inviting a multitude of creative explorations about if and how a more democratic political community might be advanced, despite their seemingly cynical perspectives regarding the prospect of socio-political change.

The focus in this chapter has been on the in-depth analysis of three case-studies. However, the findings within these examples and acts of participation are characteristic of a much broader scope of participatory performance occurring across the stage/auditorium divide. Possible examples for the reader to explore further include Nathan Penlington's (2012) *Choose Your Own Documentary*, Sylvia Rimat's (2011) *I Guess if the Stage Exploded*, Daniel Bye's (2011) *The Price of Everything* and Hannah Walker and Chris Thorpe's (2013) *I Wish I Was Lonely*.

The chapter that follows analyses three immersive performance case-studies that variously offer therapeutic, activist and confessional participatory experiences. As in this chapter, each of the analyses employ Bishop's concept of 'continual play'

between performance and audience member, but with a heavier weighting on the side of the audience member not the performer. The performances all occur outside conventional, demarcated theatre auditoriums to further explore the extent to which participatory performance practices, as a diverse whole, are addressing the question of socio-political transformation. I argue that the case-studies included in this chapter posit audience members within acts of co-creation that realise the co-constitution of identity. This understanding highlights the need for citizens to participate in relation to the wider society they inhabit since its standards play a role in defining the constitution of the individual identities within it. In other words, the case-studies evidence how the individual is obliged to participate in the wider social world since diversity of identity can only be maintained according to the matrix of freedoms society allows all individuals. As Taylor states, 'the free individual of the West is only what he is by virtue of the whole society and civilization which brought him to be and which nourishes him' (1992: 45).

Chapter Three: Alone Together

Hedonistic, because the experiences are often pleasurable, with pleasure often sought as an end in itself, as a site of self-indulgence or even eroticism; narcissistic, because the experience is all about you, the participant.

(Alston, 2013: 130)

Chapter Three extends the participatory discussion in Chapter Two to analyse three immersive performances in which the audience member becomes the art object: Analogue's (2014) *Re-Enactments*, Rosana Cade's (2013c) *Walking: Holding* and Adrian Howells' (2013) *Unburden (Saying the Unsaid)*. The chapter draws on Josephine Machon's scale of immersivity and the discipline of developmental psychology to investigate the extent to which the case-studies that follow challenge dominant interpretations of immersive theatre, which argue that it only bolsters the enterprising and individualistic aspects of the neoliberal ideology. All of the case-studies analysed in this chapter occur outside conventionally demarcated theatre spaces, in contrast to the case-studies discussed thus far, and invite varying degrees of improvisation from audience members.⁷⁸ In other words, the participation of laypersons not involved in the conception of the work is a highly significant aspect of the production of the following performances.⁷⁹ I appreciate that a lack of participation in the case-studies in Chapter Two would have resulted in the performances being unable to play out, since they required audience input in terms

⁷⁸ *Re-Enactments* takes place in the basement space of Shoreditch Town Hall, *Walking: Holding* occurs outdoors in public space and *Unburden (Saying the Unsaid)* took place in a derelict room inside the Battersea Arts Centre. These points will be reiterated and analysed in the main body of each case-study.

⁷⁹ I use the term 'laypersons' to refer to the inclusion of non-rehearsed or non-artistically prepared individuals. I favour this term over 'non-performer' since actors, or performers, might also attend the performances as audience members, bringing their performance expertise to their acts of participation.

of voting, or audience members were required to substitute the actors for the performance to continue. However, there remained very substantial elements of the performances that occurred independently of the audience members, such as when the actors performed alone. The case-studies included in this chapter extend this premise further. A useful way to consider the difference is via the rehearsal process: no element of the performances included in this chapter could be rehearsed without audience members.

The audience members' acts of participation that occur in this chapter do however take place within tightly structured, conceptual, artistic frameworks, premised on choices such as concept, narrative, choice of venue, set, and inclusion of performers and stage hands other to the audience participants. These range from instruction based acts of role-play to highly improvised scenarios based around key structural elements, which reoccur for each audience member. *Re-Enactments* asks an ensemble of six to eight audience members to re-enact the memories of a traumatised subject. This process is facilitated by the use of individual headsets that feed instructions for action and narrative to each audience member. The improvisatory element of *Re-Enactments* is minimal but occurs in how the audience members carry out the instructions they are given. *Walking: Holding* offers an experience for one audience member at a time to hold hands, in public space, with various different performers. The audience member is led on a walk, which has been pre-planned, but has the choice to engage in an improvisatory process of conversation, or not, as they so desire. The audience member and performer are also required to negotiate the responses made by members of the public to the

various couplings that the act of hand-holding creates.⁸⁰ *Unburden (Saying the Unsaid)* offered a one-to-one performance experience with Howells, performed within a private space.⁸¹ The improvisatory emphasis of the performance was on a confessional, conversational process of exchange, which provided an opportunity for each of its audience members to unburden themselves and make a shared commitment to the development of the public sphere.⁸² As a whole, I argue that the case-studies aim to utilise the immersive form, and its focus on the individual, to kinaesthetically work through and perform a relational and socially response-able socio-political order into existence. This process counters the alienation of the autonomous, individualistic identity seeking self-fulfilment, creating space for participants to act out their social citizenship obligations in participatory, performance-based, developmental learning experiences. This is not to suggest that the enhanced degree of participation in the case-studies that follow can be unproblematically equated to the creation of an enhanced version of democracy or equal participatory opportunity, as will be discussed. However, I contend that it does magnify the politics of the performances intensifying the relationship between performers and audience members and bringing audience acts of political doing into the theatre space.

⁸⁰ This basic description suggests that *Walking: Holding* acts as a one-to-one performance; but, I am hesitant to refer to it as such since the audience member individually encounters a range of performers and it occurs outdoors in city space. Consequently, the performance involves the audience member developing a relationship with multiple others, ranging from the various performers in the work to unwitting members of the public, who can, and do, affect the course of the performance.

⁸¹ Although the main section of the performance was a one-to-one performance experience, the audience member was led to and from the encounter by a second performer, Will Dickie.

⁸² The reader will note that I use the past tense when referring to *Unburden (Saying the Unsaid)*. This choice, which I also retain in the main analysis of the performance, differs from each of the other case-studies included in this thesis. However, it is done out of respect for Howells' untimely death only four months after the production of the performance herein discussed. I appreciate that the present tense can add a sense of immediacy to performance analysis; however, this choice felt inappropriate in light of the situation, as well as illogical since the performance cannot be performed again.

Immersive theatre and the pursuit of self-fulfilment

Immersive theatre has only relatively recently become the focus of theoretical consideration, with all articles and publications surrounding the topic occurring after the new millennium, if not post-2005.⁸³ As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Machon's (2013) recent publication *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance* offers a scale of immersivity and range of practitioner discussions on the topic. Machon's scale serves to demonstrate how the case-studies included in this chapter can be classified as immersive. The key shared indicators of immersivity in the three case-studies to be discussed, according to Machon's scale, are located in the way they blur the boundary between art and life; the ambiguity they create surrounding what to expect from the performance situation; the lack of curtain call, bowing and applause at the end of each of the performances, magnifying their resonances; the agency that each audience member has to influence the course of the show through their embodied involvement; and the performances', subsequent, transformative, experiential potentials.⁸⁴ As Machon states:

Active decision making is transformative; in terms of the way the individual audience member influences the shape of the "show"; and transformative, like a rite of passage, where one can be personally and positively changed

⁸³ It is no coincidence that these dates correspond with the practices of two highly esteemed and oft discussed practitioners in the field of immersive theatre: Adrian Howells and the company Punchdrunk, headed by artistic director Felix Barrett. Punchdrunk formed in 2000 at the University of Exeter, finding continued popular and critical acclaim following their production of *Faust* (2006) when they were nominated for the Evening Standard Theatre Award 'Most Promising Newcomer'. *Faust* was quickly followed by *Masque of the Red Death*, which had a seven month sold out run (Punchdrunk, n.d.). Howells began creating one-to-one performance experiences for audience members at the beginning of the millennium, receiving an Artistic Fellowship at the University of Glasgow from 2006-2009.

⁸⁴ It is impossible to detail Machon's scale in full here since she explores it across the breadth of a chapter. See her publication for more information.

through the thematic concerns of the event, communicated via its experiential form.

(2013: 28)

Immersive Theatres only references this possibility fleetingly and does not provide example. However, the following analyses contribute to this point by exploring the process of transformation from my personal perspective. This approach allows for an exploration into the varying ways that immersivity is being put to use and experienced in the contemporary moment. Specifically I focus on immersive theatre's potential to contribute to the creation of a more socially orientated political community by providing opportunities for audience members to form and sediment allegiances with others and engage in public debate.

The core critical debates surrounding immersive performance tend to focus on the relationship between the individual pursuit of experience and the desire for self-fulfilment. Adam Alston's (2013) article 'Audience Participation and Neoliberal Value: Risk, Agency and Responsibility in Immersive Theatre' offers a critique of immersivity based on its entrepreneurial mode of participation, which rewards the audience member for acting autonomously, and the possibility for commerce to co-opt the form for promotional gain. Alston argues that each of these elements of immersive theatre encourage the development of an 'experience industry' that promotes only 'narcissistic' experiences that are 'all about you' (Alston, 2013: 130); referencing an opportunism one might attribute to David Cameron's 'aspiration nation', as discussed in Chapter Two (2013: 128). The main concern for Alston is that the enterprising self and its individualistic pursuit of experience has become the *raison d'être* of immersive performance, prohibiting equal participatory opportunity

and the uptake of social responsibility. Alston's article, thus, suggests that immersive theatre offers only limited opportunities for producing public-spiritedness, advancing the political agency of citizens and re-balancing the inequitable and individualistic aspects of the neoliberal dominant version of capitalist democracy.

Alston is not alone in his critique. Wouter Hillaert (2011) offers a similar perspective in his publication '(Long) Live the Experience: Reflections on performance, pleasure and perversion'. Hillaert comparatively discusses Ontroerend Goed's (2009) *Orgy of Tolerance* and Jan Fabre's (2009) *Under the Influence*, arguing that Ontroerend Goed offers an extreme, and critically lacking, perversion of the style of work Fabre began during the 1980s. Hillaert argues that in contrast to *Under the Influence's* socio-critical comment on the fast-paced consumer world, Ontroerend Goed's *Orgy of Tolerance* offers only a quick, erotic fix and a 'complacent individualistic perspective' (2011: 436). Hillaert's perspective tallies with Alston's interpretation of immersive theatre as sustaining the neoliberal experience economy, thus, failing in its political ability to offer any critical commentary on the marketization of society that might 'legitimise the arts' (2011: 434).

In an interview in *Intimacy Across Visceral and Digital Performance* (2012) Maria Chatzichristodoulou and Rachel Zerihan articulate concerns surrounding the fledgling practice of one-on-one performance, the terminology of the form, and its potential lack of relationality. Zerihan's critique is centred on the 'troublesome' ethics of the homogenised marketing of the Battersea Arts Centre's 2011 one-on-one performance festival, which provided audience members with a 'menu' of performances to consume, rated according to their chilli pepper 'hotness' (Chatzichristodoulou & Zerihan, 2012: 225 - 226). Zerihan states:

The “Challenging” menu had three chillies and the note “A powerful mix of uncompromising flavours, for those with an appetite for experience”; “Intimate” was awarded two chillies and was described as “A tender and caring combination that leaves you with the taste of time well spent”; and “Self-aware”, one and a half chillies: “A tasty combination of self-observation and personal memory washed down with a glass of voyeurism” (!).

(in Chatzichristodoulou & Zerihan, 2012: 226)

Zerihan’s concerns about the festival’s marketing relate to its interpretation of one-on-one performance as offering sensationalised and sexualised experiences premised upon a hierarchy of imposition between performer and audience member, in contradistinction to the varying intentions of the programmed performances. Zerihan states, ‘the fact that the (arguably) first international One-to-One festival was shot-through with consumerist, capitalist and potentially illicit lures and promises was, for me, a concern’ (in Chatzichristodoulou & Zerihan, 2012: 226). Zerihan and Chatzichristodoulou’s views exemplify the need for immersive theatre practices to continually negotiate the idea that they offer only consumer-led, individuated performance experiences that negate one’s ethical responsibilities to the other during the exchange, in the name of self-fulfilment. They, thus, point to the perceived inability of immersive theatre to also offer a platform for positioning audience members within wider social contexts that might foster an inclusive process of democratic debate and exchange and act out the ethical relationship between self and other.

There are also articles which explore the aesthetic qualities of immersive performance, such as Gareth White’s (2012) ‘On Immersive Theatre’, which focuses

on the kinds of interiors such performances might offer. White challenges the idea that immersive theatre offers a sense of 'deep involvement' in, and access to, a fictional or imaginative interior (2012: 225). Rather, he makes the apt claim that immersive theatre can misconceive audience members about hidden depths that cannot be reached since the form maintains a subject-object divide that functions no differently from that of conventionally structured audience arrangements. White states, 'we move within the artwork, intimately close to it, but still distinct from it' (2012: 228). However, his argument seems to take the subject-object divide to the extreme, failing to consider moments when this distanced sense of engagement might temporarily cease to be at the forefront of the audience members' awareness and their agency activated. And this is an argument I advance in the following case-studies in relation to moments where the emotionally charged affectivity of my experience resulted in the receding awareness that I was participating in a performance. Thus, while salient, White's article would seem to reinforce the discourse surrounding immersive theatre, which argues that it only subsumes audience members into performance practices that duplicitously limit their engagement and reinforces the alienation of individuals from one another.

In all of the critical discussions surrounding immersive theatre there is little consideration as to how and whether the form might have the potential to counter the perpetuation of individualism and its co-option by a free market economy. Contra Machon, the main body of literature on immersion suggests that such performances lack any progressive political or ethical potential for a consideration of our responsibility towards others and the development of the shared political community. This concept of the form is not aided by Punchdrunk's dominance as a popular point of reference for immersive theatre since they offer a brand of immersivity that

markets itself as one of the thrills of the experience industry and promotes the commodification of theatre. This was exemplified during the close of their most recent production, *The Drowned Hollywood Man* (2013), which offered the purchase of items from the set to members of the show's mailing list, allowing audience members to proclaim their association with the performance and its cultural cachet. As Alston phrases it, merchandise boasts "I was there!" (2013: 135). Moreover, Felix Barrett of the company states that Punchdrunk attempt to create a parallel universe in their performances where "for a few hours inside the walls, you forget that it's London 2013 and slip into this other place" (in Hoggard, 2013). The company's brand of immersivity, thus, contributes heavily to the popular understanding that immersive theatre offers only an entertaining escape from the obligations one has in one's daily life and an opportunity to seek one's self-fulfilment, transforming audience members into passive consumers of the spectacle they are offered.

Immersive theatre and the radical democratic community

The argument I advance in this chapter recognises the salience of the dominant scholarly interpretations of immersive theatre. However, it argues that the case-studies that follow also use the platform of performance to act out expressions of political difference that challenge the individualistic hegemony, foreground the primacy of relationships over the individualistic stance and contribute to the egalitarian development of capitalist democracy. As Adrian Little states, radical democratic communities are 'predicated upon the need to open up democratic spaces for political engagement and the need to think of a multiplicity of public spheres to enable the expression of difference' (2002: 377). This focus shares affiliation with the case-studies in Chapter One, which evidenced performers actively

re-making their self-identities and assuming a sense of social responsibility for others and issues of public concern. It also shares resonance with Chapter Two's case-studies, which limited the participatory freedoms of their audience members to invite them to problematize how the structural and ideological limitations to citizen acts of participation might be surmounted and the socio-political order advanced. However, the specificity of Chapter Three's argument is based on how it posits audience members within acts of participation akin to those spectated on in Chapter One and problematized from audience members' personal perspectives in Chapter Two, asking them to act out a relationally orientated mode of existence through the act of performance itself and, thereby, contribute to the creation of a perspective dissonant to the status quo.

This focus highlights how the case-studies that follow also address the issue of how a more socially orientated political community might be advanced from a stance that more readily aligns with a communitarian perspective. In her re-conception of the citizen, Chantal Mouffe focuses on finding a middle ground between the communitarian version of citizenship and the liberal version of citizenship. She states:

On one side we have those who defend a communitarian view of politics and citizenship that privileges a type of community constituted by shared moral values and organized around the idea of the "common good." On the other side is the liberal view, which affirms that there is no common good and that each individual should be able to define her own good and realize it in her own way.

(Mouffe, 1992: 29)

Mouffe's aim is to conceive of a mode of citizenship based on a sense of 'commonality that respects diversity' so that neither perspective is sacrificed to the other (1992: 30). Chapter One firmly rooted this investigation in the individualistic liberal stance through each performer's assumption of personal responsibility. Chapter Two offered more of a middle ground by using the collective audience body to invite audience members to consider the extent to which their desires were advanced or limited by the actions of others and, subsequently, consider the implications for socio-political change. But, in the main, both of these perspectives considered how a more socially orientated political community might be advanced from the perspective of the individual and the hegemonic liberal stance. Chapter Three's heavier emphasis on foregrounding the idea that the individual is embedded in society, with each a precondition for the other, aims to solidify communities of individuals with shared values. This stance does not sacrifice the individual to the collective but does invite audience members to recognise the relationality of existence and unite in common action in the interests of advancing the liberties and equalities of all. Thus, Chapter Three still straddles the middle ground Mouffe's concept of participatory citizenship seeks but approaches it from a stance more akin to a communitarian perspective that advocates common and collective action over individual desires.

The performances facilitate this possibility by using the immersive form to place audience members in 'as if' scenarios that combine distanced moments of engagement with intimately and emotionally charged shared performance experiences. These 'as if' experiences are a distinctive element of the degree of participation and improvisation offered by each case-study allowing audience members to participate within the safe framework that the contrivance of the

performance situation provides, whilst vicariously embodying the perspectives of others, acting out alternative identities and/or experiencing their self-identity as other. In *Re-Enactments* audience members act out the perspective of a traumatised subject. *Walking: Holding* positions audience members in a range of different pairings that sit outside the heteronormative dominant and *Unburden (Saying the Unsaid)* invited audience members to reflect on their own lives under the pretence that they only had three months left to live. This 'as if' experience of seeing from an other's perspective and embodying different subject positions opens audience members to others, encouraging respect for diversity and revealing forms of exclusion and the marginalisation of difference. This aspect of the case-studies, thus, invites embodied considerations about individual and social identity formation and produces public minded individuals engaging in embodied modes of debate about how the democratic freedoms and equalities of all in the shared political community might be advanced, regulated and sustained. As Mary Duggan and Roger Grainger state, 'we try to find clues to the plot of the drama in which we are currently and chronically involved, by acting "as if" we were in fact two people, not one – one involved, the other detached and calmly observing' (1997: 5).

In *The End of Knowing: A New Developmental Way of Learning*, Fred Newman and Lois Holzman (1997) refer to the act of performing as an embodied, developmental learning process 'unconstrained by truth-referentiality' (1997: 128), pointing to the possibility that improvisatory, immersive performance practices have to create new subjectivities and citizens engaged in the on-going development of self and society. Newman and Holzman state, creating environments for performance to occur provides the opportunity for the creation of 'other responses (emotional forms of life), to experience being other [...] to produce something new, to develop'

(Newman & Holzman, 1997: 129). The implication here is that performance is a mode of social interaction that defies the fixity of the dominant principles or truths that order our world, thereby, facilitating the possibility of recreating one's sense of self and investigating the socio-political order that characterises our existence with an open mind. This process is at play in the following case-studies since the performances only come into being through the audience members' and performers' joint acts of participation. In other words, the audience members become performers of these works. This process exposes and destabilises the fixity of the individualistic identity and supports audience members to kinaesthetically embody an alternative mode of being premised upon a reciprocal process of exchange. Thus, the acts of participation discussed do not offer an escape from the world and our obligations within it, as argued in the current critical debates surrounding immersive theatre practice. Rather, they offer a way of living together, premised upon the on-going co-creation of knowledge and meaning.

The enhanced participatory aspects of the performances cannot, however, be unproblematically equated with enhanced modes of democratic exchange and the development of a radical democratic citizenship. I would argue that the performances attract individuals wanting to play along with their participatory elements and who are sympathetic to their professed politics. This was certainly apparent in my experience of the work that follows. As I will discuss, in *Re-Enactments* audience members played along with the premise of the performance even if they seemed to encounter degrees of discomfort about the participatory actions they were required to perform. *Walking: Holding* served mainly to forge a sense of solidarity between audience members and participants positing them against members of the public situated outside the performance event. And the

gentle generosity Howells offered to listen to audience members in *Unburden (Saying the Unsaid)* unburden themselves was designed to accommodate the needs of the audience member rather than inviting conflictual or combative dialogue. It is in this sense that the performances further aim to bond the actions of like-minded communities of individuals together in the interests of challenging the individualistic hegemony and advancing the possibility of change. However, the implication here is that, to a certain degree, the case-studies reductively essentialise their audience members, potentially limiting the possibility for democratic debate and dissonance to arise within the performances themselves and solidifying the legitimacy of the values they espouse over others'. As Kenneth Gergen states, 'whenever we are clear about what is valued, we create a potential world of that which is not valued' (2009: 187), referring to how the shared communication and interaction of participants in like-minded communities of individuals can create an 'us' versus 'them' mentality that fails to legitimise the rights of others to defend their ideas as valid (Mouffe, 2000: 114). My experiences of the performances and the analyses that follow advocate their progressive potential for contributing to the egalitarian development of the shared political community, contra the dominant discourse and the counter-argument here referenced. However, I make this point to highlight that the approach I take recognises that there are potential limitations to the performances and that they might function differently in other contexts and with different audience members. Thus, despite my optimistic appraisals of the performances that follow, I do not endorse a tacit hierarchy which argues that increased participation automatically and indisputably results in enhanced democratic modes of exchange and community on all levels.

To reiterate, I argue that Chapter Three's case-studies ask audience members to kinaesthetically work through and perform a relationally response-able socio-political order into existence. *Re-Enactments* invites its audience members to engage in an exploration of, and work through, the consequences of living within a society of spectacle, via the metonym of 9/11. The case-study raises questions about the potential for the immersive form to play a progressive role in creating producers and problem solvers capable of contributing to the development of the shared political community. *Walking: Holding* queers the city space, confronting audience members with their personal politics and functioning as an act of political resistance to the heteronormative dominant. The performance's political dimension resides in its ability to act as an empowering platform for marginalized groups of individuals to share in a democratic process of exchange with audience members about their personal politics. The possibility also arises for this process to be expanded out to include members of the public, if and when they intervene within the performance event, generating dialogue about the individual identities within, and the public identity of, the city spaces in which the performance is produced. And *Unburden (Saying the Unsaid)* offered a ritualistic and therapeutic structure that equipped audience members to assume responsibility for themselves and others through the practice of 'Universal Love' (Howells, 2013). The performance invited moral explorations about how to live an inclusive and tolerant life in relation to others and produced a sense of community between all of its participating audience members. This process advocated audience members' shared abilities to participate in the public sphere and the necessity of assuming this responsibility. Collectively, in the absence of a curtain call, the end of each performance offers an ellipsis to

audience members asking whether and how their acts of participation might impinge on their behaviours and assumption of responsibility beyond the theatre space.

Re-Enactments

This chapter begins with an analysis of Analogue's (2014) *Re-Enactments*.⁸⁵ Analogue formed in 2007 to create new theatre work 'inspired by real stories and contemporary ethical questions' (Analogue, 2015). The company's work is frequently informed by neuroscientific research, documentary, new technologies and audience participation. These elements are all at play in *Re-Enactments* since it draws on the topics of brain trauma and the 9/11 terrorist attacks, functioning as an interactive performance that requires the technologically guided participation of at least four audience members. The performance expands on the degree of audience participation discussed in *Gob Squad's Kitchen* since it does not use any pre-rehearsed, professional actors. Without audience participation the performance exists only as an audio-recorded narrative and set.

Analogue describes the performance as follows:

Re-Enactments is an interactive audio performance that casts its audience, a small group of eight participants, as the "re-enactors" of the narrator's story. Via headphones, the re-enactors receive instructions for action, speech and navigation through the cavernous basement space beneath the imposing Shoreditch Town Hall building.⁸⁶

The voice inside the headphones belongs to a patient who has recently recovered from a serious brain trauma. They have undergone extensive physiotherapy since the accident in order to be able to move again. But their movements now feels [*sic*] over-rehearsed and second-hand; ever since the

⁸⁵ The particular performance I make reference to occurred Wednesday 5th February 2014 in the basement of Shoreditch Town Hall, London.

⁸⁶ There were six audience participants in the performance I attended. Four is the minimum requirement for the performance to function.

accident the narrator has felt like an “actor” rehearsing to be themselves again in a world that now feels like a television show. The images on the television seem more real than the world that the narrator’s body belongs to. To feel real again, the narrator must stage a re-enactment. To live inside the images onscreen. Your reality and that of the narrator’s are about to meet.

(n.d.)

Re-Enactments’ narrative can be summarised as such: the protagonist is involved in an accident. It is implied that his accident occurred when a plane crashed into the building in which he was situated. He wakes in hospital and his actions feel over-rehearsed. He has to learn how to move his body once more growing frustrated with his inability to perform even small tasks. In hospital he watches a film and perceives the actors to be fully absorbed in their role. He aspires to achieve this perceived concept of a fully immersed form of being in his everyday life. However, following his discharge from the hospital he continues to experience life at a sense of remove and as if he is operating outside of reality. His pursuit of reality takes over and he embarks on a series of increasingly elaborate and violent re-enactments, which involve building various film-sets, in order to stimulate his memories and experience the feeling of being within the world as opposed to an onlooker of it. The scenes that he re-enacts are discussed later in the analysis so suffice it to say for now that they end after he decides that none offer the necessary level of reality and, therefore, boards a plane to simulate the hijack in person. This end to the protagonist’s actions is the culmination of his need to repeatedly act out his traumatic experience. This process brings the performance full-circle by referring back to the plane crash that resulted in the onset of the protagonist’s trauma at the beginning of the performance. The cyclical structure is then put into play once more

when the performance repeats for the next group of audience members. As the actors within this story the audience members perform the actions of the protagonist's narrative, raising questions about whether *Re-Enactments* constitutes part of their reality. *Re-Enactments* foregrounds this idea in its final moments when audience members follow a model aeroplane out of the building and into Shoreditch where they are told to remove their headsets. Despite doing so, the narrative and music of the performance's finale continues as the audience members look up and, in my instance, view a plane on the flight path adjacent to the building.

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this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 15: Snapshots of the hospital and bar scenes in Analogue's *Re-Enactments* (Trueman, 2014 & Analogue, n.d.).

Depersonalisation and immersivity

Trauma is the central theme in *Re-Enactments*, with Liam Jarvis of Analogue stating that research surrounding the experiences of disassociation and depersonalisation played a core role in the creation of the performance. Elizabeth Howell argues that disassociation often arises in response to an overwhelming sense of trauma and is defined as 'the separation of mental and experiential contents that would normally be connected' (2005: 18). In *Re-Enactments* the protagonist's persistent statements about his 'over-rehearsed' and 'second-hand'

actions, as if he was watching them being performed by someone else, draws on this premise. He states, 'I wanted to live inside this set and feel real again, like before my accident'; a desire that leads to increasingly violent re-enactments (Jarvis, n.d.: 22). Tim Bayne refers to this experience of disassociation, more specifically, as a maladaptive form of depersonalisation. He states:

Depersonalization is characterized as involving an "alteration in the perception or experience of the self, so that one feels detached from, and as if one is an outside observer of, one's mental processes or body" (DSM-IV-TR). [...] patients will describe themselves as a "mere bundle of thoughts".

(Bayne, 2010: 259)

The protagonist in *Re-Enactments* is literally a 'bundle of thoughts' since he exists only as a voice over narrative, embodied by audience members who assume his role through their participation (Bayne, 2010: 259). It is not my intention here to offer a reductive overview of the wider body of work that Howell's and Bayne's perspectives contribute to. However, their points on disassociation are worth considering in relation to my embodiment of the protagonist's role, and materialisation of his narrative, since it correlated our experiences, paradoxically, immersing me in the performance.

Immersive theatre often claims to transport audience members to a world separate from their everyday reality. As Barrett of Punchdrunk states of the company's immersive work, "We're trying to build a parallel universe" (Hoggard, 2013). However, this idea that immersive performance can offer an escape into a different world is a claim that, I argue, cannot be fulfilled since it fails to acknowledge the contrivance of the performance situation, thereby, falling short of the promise

made; an opinion Sophie Nield (2008) shares in her article 'The Character Named Spectator'. *Re-Enactments* acknowledges this point to, paradoxically, immerse the audience member in an experience analogous to the disassociated stance of the protagonist. As Jarvis states, sharing similar thoughts to my own on immersivity:

Of course, the nameless narrator in *Re-Enactments* isn't able to feel at home in his own body and that is often how I feel in immersive performance [...] this feeling of never being able to quite inhabit our role is exactly what the experience of disassociation is like so the paradox is that if you are not immersed in the immersion of *Re-Enactments* you are immersed because that is exactly how a disassociated subject feels.

(2014)

Jarvis here highlights how the audience members' immersive experiences in *Re-Enactments* share the protagonist's alienation from his sense of self since their actions occur 'second-hand' in response to the prompts of the narrator. This is not to suggest that my experience of *Re-Enactments* was traumatic but to make the case that it acknowledges the disingenuous promise of immersive performance, consequently, resulting in immersion. The significance of this point is that *Re-Enactments'* exploration of immersivity does not function to provide the audience member with an escape from the world they inhabit on a daily basis, but politicises the potential for the immersive form to directly address and challenge the question of identity in an increasingly individualistic, alienated, mediatised world.

Trauma and the mediatised spectacle

The sense of alienation that is characteristic of the experience of depersonalisation is a core contemporary concern in our increasingly mediated society. Patrick Duggan, citing Marshal McLuhan, has argued that ‘exposure to media has both “psychic and social consequences”, and that a media-dominated world (such as the one we, in the West, currently inhabit) is characterised by a sociological “numbness” and “mental breakdown”’ (2012: 48). Duggan’s argument here suggests that contemporary society is experiencing a pervasive sense of ‘social, psychic, trauma [...] rooted in our image-driven, mediatized social structure’ in which we have lost our sense of self and live an anesthetised existence (2012: 48). This is not a new point. Jean Baudrillard’s writing on simulation and simulacra is also characteristic of such an existence, attributing it to the circulation of mediatised images as follows:

Everywhere, in no matter what domain – political, biological, psychological, mediatized – in which the distinction between these two poles [the beginning and the end] can no longer be maintained, one enters into simulation, and thus into absolute manipulation – not into passivity, but into the *indifferentiation of the active and the passive*.

(Baudrillard, 1994: 31 original emphasis)

Baudrillard was a key influence in Analogue’s creation of *Re-Enactments*, with Jarvis stating that he was interested in exploring the ‘mobius strip’ between reality and fiction and how these two points fold into one another in performance (Jarvis, 2014). In fact, Jarvis stated that the hold-up in the performance is almost a ‘direct quotation’ of the fake bank hold-up in Baudrillard’s (1994) ‘The Precession of Simulacra’. Thus,

there is a sense that *Re-Enactments* offers a framework for the exploration of the conflation between reality and fiction that has arisen via the specularity of the mediatised image.

The underlying point of reference for this consideration in *Re-Enactments* is the specularity of the mediatised representations of 9/11. Gerry Canavan suggests, 'though the attacks lasted only a few hours on one very devastating morning, on the level of spectacle they remain ongoing and unending' (2011: 119). And Marvin Carlson further emphasises how the images of the 9/11 terrorist attacks that circulated were reminiscent of 'all-too-familiar' catastrophic disaster films, resulting in an implosion of the real and the fictional. He states, 'suddenly these identical scenes appeared on our television screens, in a horrifying Baudrillardian example of the real projected as a simulacrum of an already familiar imaginary' (in Taylor et al. 2002: 133-134). Canavan and Carlson, thus, highlight how 9/11 exists as a shared cultural memory continually reinscribed through the unremitting circulation of mediatised images from which there is no escape (Canavan, 2011: 131).

Re-Enactments does not directly reference the terrorist attacks on the twin towers. However, the association is made clear through the prop of a model aeroplane that guides audience members throughout the building; the protagonist's accident, wherein a plane crashes into his building; the discussion of a plane hijack, as if watched on the news during one of the re-enactments; and the plane hijack the protagonist performs. I would even argue that 9/11 becomes an obvious point of reference as soon as the plane crash is referred to at the beginning of the performance since the images and circumstances that it evokes then continue to be played out, as anticipated, throughout the course of the performance, bolstering the association. Despite this, in interview, Jarvis surprisingly stated that the 9/11

terrorist attacks were not a direct point of reference for the performance (2014).

Jarvis instead stated that his focus was on an exploration of the traumatic experience of disassociation, the novel *Remainder* and the film *Synecdoche New York*.⁸⁷ However, my understandings of these influences were not apparent during the performance since I had not previously encountered them, and this will have been the same experience for all audience members similarly unformed.

Contrastingly, 9/11 is a globally recognisable event. Thus, this point of reference is the most likely to inform its audiences' interpretations. Although difficult to believe, Jarvis's bewilderment about the association could evidence Canavan's earlier point about the cultural reinscription of 9/11 by suggesting that in order to explore an attribute of trauma he unthinkingly drew upon the shared, globally recognisable event to structure the protagonist's narrative. Whatever the case, it is apparent that 9/11 has come to stand in for the moment when, as Slavoj Žižek states, 'the image entered and shattered our reality', resulting in its singularity as a point of reference for the implosion between the real and the fictional (n.d.). Thus, in what follows, I argue that 9/11 acts as a metonym in *Re-Enactments* for the exploration of the 'spectacular' consequences of the mediatised image, which may offer a step towards facilitating the re-embodiment of our contemporary narrative by demonstrating the implications of the infinite, temporal looping characteristic of the society of spectacle.

⁸⁷ The experience of audience participants spectating on, and acting within the performance, offers a pseudo-likeness of the process of disassociation. *Remainder* is about a narrator who experiences bouts of déjà vu whilst recovering from an accident and *Synecdoche New York*'s plot follows a theatre director's production of a play that begins to blur the boundaries between reality and fiction and art and life. The former influence is apparent in the narrative of *Re-Enactments*, as is the latter, which also shares resonance with how the framed reality of *Re-Enactments* is purposefully blurred with the day-to-day reality of its participating audience members; a point I will go on to discuss.

Role-play and disassociated participation

The possibility of re-embodiment, or re-writing, one's individual narrative and, in turn, our contemporary narrative, is considered by Peter Brooks (2011) in his publication *Enigmas of Identity*. Brooks makes the argument that by 'derealizing' the self it is possible to come to a point of self-knowledge. He states, 'moments of loss, falling from consciousness [...] perhaps are necessary to the very project of self-knowledge and self-narration; or better, self-narration as the way to self-knowledge' (Brooks, 2011: 153). This process is at play in *Re-Enactments* through the audience members' acts of role-play since they create a heightened sense of awareness about one's individualised identity and actions in contrast with the actions of the narrator. Throughout the performance my actions felt self-conscious and disparate from my sense of self. When it was my turn to act the experience felt as if I was spectating on myself as I reviewed whether I was carrying out the instructions as conveyed, conscious of my collective role in bringing the performance into being and that others were watching me and relying on my cues for their actions. Contrastingly, when I had no actions to perform I was able to give my full attention to the narrative and the actions of my fellow performing audience members; albeit, I did remain in a heightened state of awareness throughout *Re-Enactments* since I was conscious (hoped) that I might be provided with further instructions to carry out. .

My experience could be likened to the mental technique of dual consciousness, which describes the relationship between emotion and intellectual control navigated by the actor. Alan Hughes, quoting the eighteenth century French actor François-Joseph Talma, summarises the experience as follows: 'while the "inspiring and directing self" believes and feels, the "executive self" remains detached, controlling speech and gesture' (2011: 119). In *Re-Enactments* my

experience could be more readily defined by the idea of the “executive self” but there remained a sense that I was both fully engaged in, as well as distanced from, my experience. My consciousness and sense of self was, therefore, split between acting as another, listening to the narrative of the performance and watching my fellow performers as an audience member. I was also conscious that my fellow audience members’ interpretations of my identity were based on all of these actions and roles, whether they felt representative of my sense of self or not. Consequently, the experience destabilised my identity by preventing any clear distinction between my inner core self and its relationship to my outward actions, acting as a framing device that allowed me to establish how my self-identity sat in relation to the protagonist’s and the extent to which action defines identity. Thus, through the self-conscious splitting of the self, *Re-Enactments*’ acts of role-play de-realised the self only to re-realise the self with an understanding of the performativity of identity. This process demonstrated how selfhood is influenced by, and influences, our shared contemporary narrative based on a consideration of ‘what our identity might be and where it might lie, and how we might find it authenticated by other identities’, urging audience answerability for what our actions in the world amount to (Brooks, 2011: 9).

Ethics and the obligation to participate

The use of audience members to collectively create *Re-Enactments* raises questions about the participatory ethics of the performance. Throughout the performance I was conscious that if I chose not to carry out one of the instructions I was given the performance would cease to function. I felt a sense of obligation to my fellow audience members to do what was asked of me so as not to negatively affect their experience of the performance. The result was that the experiences of the other audience members were constantly in my thoughts. This point was

foregrounded in the dressing room scene at the beginning of the performance when one of the audience members was asked to step forward into a circle created by the bodies of the group, look each of us in the eye and then take a bow. This moment was an uncomfortable and confrontational experience as the audience member flushed bright red. I cannot speak for the audience member in question; but, his response made me feel uneasy and claustrophobic within the small room that the six of us inhabited since it raised questions about whether he was performing the action because he wanted to, because he was instructed by the performance to do so and/or because he felt obliged to do so for his fellow audience members.

The use of direct eye-contact was a key aspect of the development of my discomfort and offers a useful perspective from which to consider the manipulative potential of *Re-Enactments*. Jeffrey Green references the former possibility in *The Eyes of the People*, with specific reference to the gaze. Green states that the gaze can function as a 'hierarchical form of visualization that inspects, observes, and achieves surveillance' (2010: 9). Green's concept of the gaze offers a consideration about how the everyday citizen might be empowered to play a role in politics, making it 'impossible for [...] leaders to disclaim their actions and deny complicity in events in which they were involved' (Green, 2010: 156). Green here highlights how the gaze can impose and implicate suggesting that exposing politicians to such a mode of observation ensures their answerability. This surveilling use of the gaze was at play in this section of *Re-Enactments* resulting in the disempowerment of my agency to choose whether to participate or not. As a consequence of the visible discomfort of the audience member asked to step forward and put himself on display, as well as the instruction that told him to 'look into their [his fellow audience members'] eyes', *Re-Enactments* staged my complicity in its creation (Jarvis, n.d.: 7). In other words,

since my fellow audience member agreed to follow the instructions to create the performance experience, at the cost of his embarrassment, I felt required to do the same. This point was further reinforced by the bow that the audience member took, at the behest of instruction, since it asserted the idea that he was performing for me and the rest of the spectating audience members. The main point of significance here is that the sense of exposure that the gaze evoked disallowed my inhabitation of a solely personal, individualised sphere. I was individuated through the use of the headset, but this individuation only served to demonstrate the significance of my actions for the collective group. This process obliged my responsibility to the others in the performance so that *Re-Enactments* hijacked my agency and coerced my participation.

One could contend that this argument is not withstanding since the company did prep expectation by marketing the performance as participatory. The blurb included earlier in this analysis refers to casting the audience as the 're-enactors' of the performance (Analogue, n.d.). However, since the extent of audience participation varies significantly across participatory performance practices, as this thesis demonstrates, this information did not explicitly highlight the level of participation required of audience members pre-performance. I certainly found the extent of the participation and the absence of other performers unexpected; albeit, I was happy to participate. Jarvis does acknowledge the need for audience members to be able to choose not to participate if they so desire. He states:

If an audience doesn't do something that has to be okay and that's their choice, which is partly why myself and my production manager Helen are present within the work [...] so that moment can still happen for the rest of the audience.

(Jarvis, 2014)

But, the idea that Jarvis could step in for audience members in the performance I attended did not convey itself as a viable option since he also performed small roles throughout the performance. His production manager was also rarely visible as we moved through various chambers of the basement of Shoreditch Town Hall, vetoing the understanding that she was ready to assume a participatory role if necessary. I am in no doubt about the sincerity of Jarvis's understanding of his duty of care to audience members and his desire that they have the option of opting out; but the conveyance of its practical possibility, during the experience of the performance, was lacking. Moreover, since the presence of Jarvis and his production manager would only feasibly allow for two audience members to choose to opt out of *Re-Enactments* on any one occasion, there is even argument to be made about the performance's lack of accommodation for the possibility. It is worth acknowledging that Jarvis did indicate in interview that there are audience members who fail to step forward and follow instruction in the section of the performance under discussion. However, the reasons for this could be numerous ranging from a desire not to participate, to feeling an overwhelming and incapacitating sense of obligation and embarrassment, or even a lack of surety about whether the action should be performed or not since it is the first instance of audience participation. The lack of participation in this section of the performance by some audience members does not, therefore, necessarily suggest that the choice not to participate is clear. I, thus, maintain that there is an obligation to participate in *Re-Enactments*, which arises through the imposition of group guilt levied on audience members for the creation of the performance, as well as its failure to indicate the possibility of any other option.

This negative appraisal aside, the requirement that audience members conform to the roles that *Re-Enactments* posits them in also demonstrates the social scripts we persistently conform to in order to accommodate living in a social world. This was a core aspect of the dialogue in this section of *Re-Enactments*, which focused on asking whether we were performing or not and, if we were, when our performance began. It also made reference to the audience's agency within the performance. In this section of the performance the narrator states, 'who is this person now standing in the centre of the room? / Are they an actor, or are they just like you? / Are they being themselves, or someone else?', followed by 'if they were to bow, would they be doing it of their own free will' (Jarvis, n.d.: 7). My point here is to highlight that although the opening section of the performance, as discussed above, offered an uncomfortable experience it also played a significant role in defamiliarising the obligations that we conform to and the roles that we are required to fulfil as a consequence of our inherent sociality. This point is not intended to excuse the patchy ethics of the performance but highlight that they might also have served a wider purpose, constraining the agency of audience members' in the interests of prompting them to re-consider the social limitations placed on their actions. The chosen interpretation, either that the performance is ethically negligent or usefully provocative, will depend on the level of comfort each audience member has with the acts of participation asked of them; mine fell somewhere in the middle.

Working through the protagonists' re-signification of 9/11

A common element throughout works of art dealing with the topic of 9/11 is the tendency to avoid representations and replications of the event. Instead, works such as Rupert Goold's (2011) *Decade*, Anne Nelson's (2002) *The Guys*, Michael Moore's (2004) *Fahrenheit 9/11* and Art Spiegelman's (2004) *In the Shadow of the*

Towers offer various responses to the terrorist attacks, use it as a point of narrative departure or depict the struggle to deal with the event. In each instance there is a sense of the incapacity of language and images to replicate or capture the breadth of issues, consequences and feelings that the global catastrophe induced. *In the Shadow of the Towers* is a particularly apt example of this point since Spiegelman states in the forward of the publication that its creation offered a way to work through the trauma of his experience of 9/11. Spiegelman argues that this need was partly premised on the American governments instrumentalisation of the attack for their own agenda – the war on terror, and his desire to ‘sort out the fragments of what I’d experienced from the media images that threatened to engulf what I actually saw’ (2004: n.p.). In these comments Spiegelman refers to the conditional aspect of traumatic memory, which leaves it susceptible to appropriation and interference. In *The Trauma Question* (2008), Roger Luckhurst references this point when he emphasises how symptoms of trauma can be induced, or worsened, by early interventions that endeavour to prevent post-traumatic stress disorder (2008: 210-211). The point of significance here is that the perception of traumatic memories can be altered through acts of intervention, influenced by external factors, since memory is open to revision and recall. If this is so, then one must question whether artistic interventions actually serve to re-inscribe, or resignify, the traumatic experience they endeavour to work through and, thereby, ‘distort cultural memory’ (Canavan, 2011: 119).

This latter point, and the conditional aspect of memory, is demonstrated to the extreme in *Re-Enactments* as the protagonist endeavours to work through the memories he has of the night of his accident in order to feel ‘real’, ‘present’, counter the sense that he is just ‘playing a part’ in his life and inhabit his memories to

exorcise the 'd  j   vu' of his traumatic experience (Jarvis, n.d.: 27, 24 & 32). The re-enactments progress as follows: initially the protagonist re-enacts a bar scene he sees on film in hospital; his memory is prompted during this process leading to his re-enactment of a bar scene in which there is news about a terrorist attack playing in the background; this re-enactment is then repeated to include a discussion of the terrorist attacks and the unreality of the situation. Subsequently, the protagonist takes the re-enactment one step further and creates a hijack situation within the bar. The performance then culminates with the protagonist's 'staged' re-enactment of a hijack situation on a plane.⁸⁸ As the re-enactments proliferate it becomes apparent that they lack a point of origin in the sense that they circulate out from a mediated representation of a film to become an act that will be recycled again through the media, via the news. As Baudrillard states, 'all the holdups, airplane hijackings, etc. are now in some sense simulation holdups in that they are already inscribed in the decoding and orchestration rituals of the media' (1994: 21). *Re-Enactments*, thus, suggests that the protagonist's actions occur in thrall to the mediated image, and are manipulated by its inscribed outcomes, functioning only to reinforce the autonomy of the image and the specularity of 9/11.

The protagonist's actions in his section of the performance demonstrate a psychiatric process referred to as 'acting out', propelling the repetition of his traumatic experience. Dominick LaCapra states that 'acting-out is related to repetition, and even the repetition-compulsion – the tendency to repeat something compulsively', preventing the traumatised subject from establishing a sense of

⁸⁸ The protagonist's narrative is re-enacted by audience members on a stage-set, which they are informed the protagonist designed in the basement of Shoreditch Town Hall, until the plane hijack situation. At this point the narration details that the protagonist's actions breach the relationship between reality and fiction to occur outside of a staged environment, in a plane, on an everyday flight with passengers.

distance from their traumatic experience (1998: 2). The contrasting experience is that of 'working through', which acts as a 'countervailing force' in which 'the person tries to gain critical distance on a problem, to be able to distinguish between past, present and future' (1998: 2). The former process is at play in the actions of the protagonist since he desires to enter into the production of the initial image that he watched in hospital, consequently pursuing a self-destructive and ethically negligent narrative trajectory. The protagonist's desire to enter into an image to understand the past neglects to consider how his actions are operating in the present as he imposes his will and re-enactments on others – the fictional others of his plane hijack and the audience members who perform his re-enactments. The protagonist, thus, fails to maintain any comprehensive sense of what he is producing eradicating the distance necessary for exorcising his traumatic experience.

LaCapra is, however, keen to point out that 'acting out' and 'working through' are not binary oppositions, suggesting that they are both necessary for facilitating an exploration of a subject's experience since occupying a standpoint that 'utterly transcends' the issue is impossible (1998: 7). The audience members in *Re-Enactments* occupy this dual position since they engage with the repetitive process of 'acting out' on the dramatic level of the performance when they act on the protagonist's behalf and, subsequently, enter into a process of 'working through' via their awareness of the contrivance of the performance situation. The audience members' 'as-if' second-hand acts of role play, therefore, facilitate a distanced engagement with the re-enactments that the protagonist carries out allowing for a critical acknowledgement of the relationship between his past, the narrative trajectory he pursues in the present and its inevitable future culmination in an act of terrorism. *Re-Enactments*' defamiliarisation of the protagonist's process of 'acting

out', thus, emphasises how participation in and of itself is not enough for the spectacle to be remade; rather, it requires a self-estranged, critically engaged mode of participation. As Debord states, the spectacle eliminates 'any direct personal communication between the producers [in this case the protagonist] and any comprehensive sense of what they are producing' (n.d.: 6).

Re-enacting reality

The significance of this understanding comes to the fore at the very end of *Re-Enactments* in two scenes that draw upon its cyclical structure. The circularity of the performance refers to the apparent inescapability that constitutes a society of simulation and simulacra, in which there has been a conflation between the real and the fictional and a loss of a higher order. Baudrillard states:

All of Western faith and good faith became engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could be exchanged for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange – God of course. But what if God himself can be simulated [...] then the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum [...] without reference or circumference.

(Baudrillard, 1994: 5-6)

The implication of this loss is that we live within a world without a sense of finality in which the end point has been replaced by an orbital reoccurrence of models without a point of origin, suggesting not only that there is no end but that we are incapable of imagining alternative endings. However, rather than perpetuating this stand point, *Re-Enactments* purposefully disrupts the ending of the protagonist's narrative on a

dramatic level, coupling this with a lack of ending to the performance on a dramaturgical level, to offer an ellipsis to audience members that asks them to consider how they might intervene in what comes next.

The narrative at the end of the protagonist's story is as follows:

Narrator: No, there's no going back now. I can't. Just tell them you're being hijacked.

Pilot: Jesus. Okay, where do you want to go?

Narrator: What direction is this?

Pilot: We're banking right. I'm taking us in circles over London. Which way shall I take us?

Narrator: Nowhere. Just keep banking right.

In loops.

Keep flying around in this same pattern.

(Jarvis, n.d.: 44)

After this dialogue the audience members are instructed to return to the hospital room where the narrative and sound effects of the performance suggest that the protagonist flat lines. There is no indication as to whether the entire narration has been a coma induced fantasy or whether the protagonist's return to the hospital is part of the ending to his re-enactment narrative, occurring after he hijacked the plane. However, the edited cut between the looping in circles of the plane and the protagonist's hospitalisation somewhat automatically links the two events since there is no further extreme to which the protagonist can aspire. His is a story in which the

plane will crash, lives will be lost and the images of the event will be recycled, domesticated and re-consumed as spectacle, through news reports and variously edited mediatised outlets. As Canavan states, 'though the attacks lasted only a few hours on one very devastating morning, on the level of spectacle they remain ongoing and unending' (2011: 131).⁸⁹ It is my contention that this all too imaginable, absent narrative functions to challenge audience members to query the readiness of the imagery evoked inviting them to imagine how one might embody a counter-narrative to the cyclical, specularity of contemporary society via the metonym of 9/11.

The foundation for each audience member's assumption of this responsibility is created through their acts of role-play. While audience members' acts of participation are based on instructions that the protagonist provides, there is no indication as to *how* the instructions should be carried out. Consequently, throughout the performance audience members are provided with the opportunity to appropriate the protagonist's story as they wish, nuancing their narrative trajectory through the performance in collaboration with their fellow re-enactors. In other words, the audience members have the choice to elaborately play along with gusto or to follow the protagonist's instructions methodically and without flourish. The freedom of choice in the *how* of the audience members' actions allows them to claim a sense of ownership over their participation in the performance enhancing their sense of complicity and recognition of their agency, despite their obligation to participate. I argue that this process evokes audience consideration about how their

⁸⁹ I refer here to Canavan's insightful reading of mass media reformulations of 9/11, in which attention is paid to the survivors of the attacks, the collapse of the towers is erased and the carnage of the event hidden. Canavan argues that this occurs in an attempt to reassert the event, in Debordian terms, as an enormous positivity: 'the shock and horror of that day opened the door to a better, safer, freer world – for Americans, at least' (2011: 130)

actions might interrupt the contemporary narrative that is the society of spectacle, premised upon an appreciation of their capability to engage in a creative act of production with others. This is not to claim that the audience member's attending *Re-Enactments* will leave the performance with a plan of action for the transformation of our contemporary narrative, far from it. However, the performance does act as a mechanism for rousing audience members from the Debordian spectacle, in which 'the most mundane aspects of life have become impenetrable and unbreathable' (n.d.: 4), acting as a rehearsal for their participation beyond the theatre space.

Re-Enactments amplifies this association, in its final instance, when the protagonist's narrative has come to an end and the audience members exit out of the basement of Shoreditch town hall and onto a side street. There is no applause after the final narration and once the audience members have handed back their headsets they are free to venture forth into the night. The narrative is as follows:

When you walk down a street like the one in front of you now, / and a song plays on your iPod, / and for the briefest of moments you feel like it's your soundtrack. / That this is all some film. / That you're at the centre of it. / That these buildings are facades. / And that reality is paper thin. / *Take off your headphones.* / And if your soundtrack is still playing. / Well, perhaps this is your film after all.

(Jarvis, n.d.: 45 *italics added to differentiate stage direction*)

This section of *Re-Enactments* makes explicit the underlying theme of the relationship between reality and fiction that runs throughout the performance since it asks to what extent the performance constitutes part of each audience member's

reality. There is a sense that the performance extends out beyond the theatre space refusing to come to an end and allow the audience member to exit their process of 'working through', whereas the story of the protagonist, stuck in the repetitive process of 'acting out', begins again for another group of audience members. In both the protagonist's narrative and the audience members' trajectories through the performance reality and fiction infiltrate one another. However, the disassociated, immersive experience of the audience members allows for the recognition of this point, whereas the protagonist aims to inhabit a violent, futile and non-existent spectacular reality. Baudrillard argues that the problematic fallout of the order of simulation and simulacra occurs through the act of concealing the fact that the real is no longer the real in order to save the reality principle (1994: 13). Considering Baudrillard's point in relation to *Re-Enactments*' exiting demonstration that the inter-relation between reality and fiction is a normative modality of experience suggests that *Re-Enactments* offers a possible first step in exiting the perpetual cycle of specularities that characterises our contemporary narrative, thus, facilitating our potential to play a role in the progressive re-enactment of the social world.

Summary

In summary, Howell states that 'disassociation, as a state of being divided and as a chronic process, is ultimately a barrier to relationality both within and between selves' (2005: 2). However, by utilising the contrivance of the immersive form, *Re-Enactments* allows audience members to critique the ethics of the protagonist's behaviour and re-realise their sense of self; albeit, at the expense of its ethical responsibility to its audience members. *Re-Enactments* commandeers the cyclical structure of the society of spectacle, via the metonym of 9/11, to deny audience members any sense of closure, perpetuate the themes of the performance and

stimulate a process of 'working through'. The experience exposes the fantasy of the reality principle, and its neurotic pursuit, highlighting the need to recognise the inter-relation of reality and fiction in order to re-embody our contemporary narrative. In other words, audience members are posited within 'as if' experiences of the disassociated standpoint to, paradoxically, facilitate reflective considerations about personal and social identity and counter what Duggan refers to as 'the psychic trauma of living' (2012: 56). Thus, *Re-Enactments* utilises the act of role-play as an embodied form of understanding to bring the audience member to a point of self-knowledge, promote their uptake of responsibility and counter their illusory participation in the spectacular world. As Krysia Yardley-Matwiejczuk states, role-play involves 'participants in "as-if" or "simulated" actions and circumstances' acting as a useful tool for constructing "real life" scenarios under controlled circumstances that can lead to the understanding of 'human action and experience' (1997: 1 & 5).

The next case-study to be analysed is Rosana Cade's *Walking: Holding*. In similarity to *Re-Enactments*, the performance challenges the specularity of contemporary society, demonstrates the potential for immersive performance to counter the individualistic perspective, invites audience members to assume a sense of responsibility for our social existence and blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction. However, *Walking: Holding* takes this process a step further by occurring within public space. It also offers an analysis of a differing form of immersive performance that adheres most closely to one-to-one performance practices. I argue that the performance aims to defamiliarise and counter the heteronormative ideology, which promotes intolerance, through affective performance practices that can prompt political action.

Walking: Holding

“It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to celebrate those differences” – Audre Lorde’ (in Cade, n.d.a).

This quotation is spoken to me by the second to last performer, Irene, on my walk. She then invites me to choose a copy of the quotation from a series of hand-written notes. Each note offers a different handwriting style since they have been transcribed by the performers of Walking: Holding. I choose one, thank Irene and put the note in my pocket as a reminder of the premise of the performance – the celebration of difference and tolerance in our assumptions about others.⁹⁰

Walking: Holding (2013c) is a performance by live artist Rosana Cade. Cade refers to herself as a coming from a live art background and the majority of her work is focused around ideas associated with queer discourse. Her website states: ‘Through all my performance work, including (especially) the everyday performance of myself, I aim to disrupt heteronormative ideas about gender and sexuality’ (Cade, n.d.a). *Walking: Holding* is no exception. It was developed in response to experiences of homophobia that Cade encountered in her hometown of Glasgow, as well as Cade’s same sex partner’s discomfort about holding hands in public. In my experience of the performance the theme of sexuality came to the fore as I confronted my heterosexual privilege, while the theme of gender became pertinent in relation to the provocative encounter I shared with Lori, a cross-dressed performer.

⁹⁰ These clearly delineated and descriptive extracts are drawn from my personal performance journal. These extracts lead each section of analysis throughout *Walking: Holding*, and are similarly used in the following case-study *Unburden (Saying the Unsaid)*. I offer these extracts, in these two instances, in the hope of imparting a sense of the emotional engagement I experienced when participating in these two performances, and their affective potential. I make the claim for this use of descriptive writing as part of each case-study’s analytical framework and see this choice as presenting a logical trajectory through the nine case-studies, which become increasingly affective and personal as the thesis progresses; hence, its lack of use until this point.

Walking: Holding challenges audience members, and I argue, unsuspecting members of the public to confront, recognise and counter a white, male, heterosexual dominant. This aim counters the critiques of self-fulfilment attributed to immersive performance experiences in its desire to effect social change that might benefit those situated outside the heteronormative hegemony. In other words, audience members and performers who participate in *Walking: Holding* contribute to the development of the city space, with significance to others, even if this process also results in some form of self-gain. The performance received the Athena Award via New Moves International in 2011 and has toured various locales across UK and Ireland. I attended the performance as part of the Forest Fringe, which took place during the Edinburgh fringe festival in 2013.⁹¹

Cade describes the performance as follows on her website:

The performance involves one audience member at a time being taken on a walk around a city, whilst holding hands with a series of different people, of different ages, sexes and appearances. It is a unique and, at times, challenging experience, which investigates preconceptions, spontaneous personal connections, and the public's reactions to displays of different sexualities.

(n.d.b)

The route of the walk designed for the Forest Fringe began at the festival's main location, the Out of the Blue Drill Hall situated in a suburb of Leith. It then progressed out onto the main road and moved through a pub on the main street before detouring down a quiet back street. From here the walk travelled back onto the main thoroughfare, past Tesco, progressed down a back alley and past a

⁹¹ The specific performance I make reference to occurred 21st August 2013.

mechanic's garage, through a residential area and ended in a park seated on a bench. The walk lasted approximately thirty minutes.

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Figure 16: Lori and Rosana with audience members of *Walking: Holding* (Cade, n.d.b).

I held hands with six different people during the performance. The names and order of my hand holders were Rosana, Debbie, Lori, Tom, Irene and Robert.⁹² The genders, ages and outward appearance of my hand holders all differed so that at times it felt as if I was holding hands with a partner or friend (male or female), parent and/or grandparent.⁹³ These varying dynamics were purposefully facilitated by Cade

⁹² I have no record of the performers' surnames to offer here since there was no program accompanying the performance. The performers introduced themselves by their first names during the performance and they change each time *Walking: Holding* is produced in a new location.

⁹³ Rosana is a small, pale, homosexual, female Glaswegian in her twenties. Debbie is a small, dark-haired, homosexual female in her late thirties. Lori is a tall, fair male in his twenties, who dressed as a woman in the performance. Tom is a swarthy and dark Portuguese male in his twenties. Irene is a small, white-haired, spritely female in her sixties and Robert is a large, kindly male of a similar age,

who was keen to avoid simplistic binary considerations of same-sex or mixed-sex couplings; instead extending the consideration of difference, in terms of gender and sexuality, out to include age and ethnicity. In the touring pack for the performance Cade emphasizes that she prefers a range of performers with the ideal of ‘an equal number of male and female’ participants, ‘a range of ages’, ‘people who are different races/from different social backgrounds/ have very different appearances’ and ‘a male to female cross dresser’ (Cade, 2013a: 7). She states:

When I did it in London I had four gay men who were all under thirty-five and white and I thought “that’s not much of a range” but actually these people are all really different [...]. But obviously when you are looking at something that is being perceived by face value, and how people are reading you in the street, it is interesting to have a range.

(Cade, 2013a)

This acknowledgement of the range of difference that exists amongst people who can be categorised similarly demonstrates how Cade celebrates the minutiae of difference amongst any and all individuals who perform within *Walking: Holding*, preventing the performance from playing into homogenous categorizations. However, it also emphasises how the homogenization of difference often occurs through facile appearance-based judgments. This tension is exposed in *Walking: Holding* since the framing of the audience member’s identity is premised upon their self-conscious assumptions about the ways in which members of the public, who are not part of the performance, are interpreting the couplings that they become a part of. This understanding is designed to conflict with the insight that the audience

who used two walking sticks in the performance. These descriptions are based on my own approximations of the performers and the information they shared in discussion.

member is given into the complexities of difference amongst the individuals they are paired and engage with and their own knowledge of how they personally self-identify.

Queering the city space

The premise of *Walking: Holding* is simple: the audience members hold hands with each of the performers who lead them on a pre-planned route. There is no scripted dialogue delivered during the walk; rather, the focus is on improvised exchanges between performer and audience members.⁹⁴ However, if, as Misha Myers states, ‘walks conducted ‘by the “live” voice of the performer engage participants in particular modes of attentiveness that generate and present knowledge of places through conversational and convivial activity’ (2010: 67), *Walking: Holding’s* improvisatory exchanges both exposed the hegemonic, heteronormative prejudice of Leith, whilst also facilitating the re-creation of its spatial dynamics through a visible queering of the city space. As Alexander Bridger argues, ‘through “queering” public and private spaces, it is possible to contest hegemonic, gendered norms, opening up new anti-sexist forms of understanding’ (2013: 288).

The political potential of walking performance, situated within the city, lies in its ability to create an indistinction between art and life. This tension can be traced back to the ethos of the Situationist International whose primary aim, according to Carl Lavery (2010), was to transform the city through a process of *détournement*. This continuing practice is designed to contest the specularities of everyday life, expose the guiding ideology of the city and counter its alienating potential by ‘creating situations – public performances – that subvert reality from the inside out, in

⁹⁴ Albeit, the structural framing of the performance means that each audience member holds hands with the same individuals, follows the same route (although this did encounter some difficulties during the Edinburgh run, as will later be discussed) and were each asked to choose a handwritten card from Irene.

the here and now' (2005: 159). The need for such a process is articulated by Debord, one of the founding members of the situationists, when he states that in a society of spectacle 'each individual becomes incapable of recognizing his own reality. Ideology is at home; separation has built its own world' (n.d.: 68). And Debord argues that this 'at homeness' of ideology hampers progress and results in political passivity. *Walking: Holding's* inclusion of audience members in the production of the performance is designed to counter this political passivity since it offers a framework for audience members to enter into a process of *détournement* that allows them to experience, appropriate and rewrite the city for themselves.

This potential to rewrite the city and the political capacity of walking is clearly demonstrated by protest marches. Although such walks are not necessarily designed with the concept of performance in mind they are, nonetheless, performative in the sense that the act of walking produces a series of effects. If, as Judith Butler states, the appearance of the body is to bring the space into being, to 'lay claim to the public' and to reconfigure one's material environment (2011: n.p.), then protest walks function as performative interventions within public space that can act upon the dominant ideology of said spaces and/or society. *Walking: Holding* harnesses this political intent of protest marches to act as a platform for increasing the visibility of non-heteronormative identities within public space.

Gay Pride marches are the most direct point of reference for *Walking: Holding*. The movement is a growing, global, annual event that aims to promote equal rights, develop a sense of community and raise awareness of discrimination against members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, queer, intersexual

and asexual community (LGBTQIA).⁹⁵ Visibility is a core aspect of the politics of Gay Pride, explained by Butler when she states that the assembling, growing crowd finds and produces ‘the public through seizing and reconfiguring the matter of material environments’ (2011: n.p.). *Walking: Holding* differs from Gay Pride in this regard since it acts as a much more discreet intervention into city space, suggesting that it may not offer the same potential to reconfigure the material environment. However, if, as Butler also argues, ‘political claims are made by bodies as they appear and act’, it becomes apparent that mass visibility is not the only way to rewrite the city (2011: n.p.). I contend that *Walking: Holding’s* political potential is actually premised upon its invisible (or at least much less visible) status since it infiltrates public space discretely, changing the topography of the city space through a subtle increase in visibility of alternative couplings and variously gendered bodies. The intention in this instance is different from that of the mass protest march since *Walking: Holding* is not designed to present alternative lives and narratives in an act of mass protest and show of solidarity. Rather, it aims to challenge and modify the day-to-day collective identity of the city space by subtly increasing the visibility of alternative lives and narratives that sit outside the heteronormative dominant, queering the city space from within its normative codes of conduct. I appreciate that what is classed as an “alternative” life or narrative will differ according to the locale and the interpretations of the relationships viewed by members of the public populating those places. The prevalence of already “alternative” couplings in the cities in which *Walking: Holding* is performed will also influence, or detract from, the effective potential of the performance. However, in Leith, based on the responses that Lori’s cross-dressed presence created, it is fair to say that the dominant adhered to the generally

⁹⁵ The term LGBTQIA also makes reference to allies, defined as those who do not identify as LGBTQIA. This anachronism is constantly in development, but the point of significance is that Gay Pride celebrates sexual and gender difference in all its guises.

proliferated white, male, heterosexual standpoint with Lori's presence consequently acting as a provocative intervention into the hegemony of the city space.

The possibility *Walking: Holding* offers for queering the city space is facilitated through the opportunity it provides for audience members to walk alongside the footsteps of another while being held and, thereby, supported/ing and cared for/caring. This dynamic conforms to Fintan Walsh's suggestion that 'by stepping into another person's shoes, we might increase our sensitivity to others, and learn more about ourselves' (2013: 1). The point of significance here is that *Walking: Holding's* format creates a relationship between intimacy and confrontation that nuances Lehmann's '*politics of perception*' (2006: 185 original emphasis). Lehmann's concept requires a 'situation [...] that confronts the spectators with abysmal fear, shame and even mounting aggression' (2006: 187). Lehmann's suggestion leaves no room for a consideration of how theatre might develop a politics of perception based on an ethical duty of care to the audience member, which can assist them through the provocation presented by the performance. Lehmann's point even goes so far as to suggest that such a practice would dilute the capacity of the performance to challenge the apathy induced by a society of spectacle (2006: 187). *Walking: Holding* nuances this standpoint to demonstrate the political potential of performance that offers an ethical duty of care to its audience members, whilst also conforming to Lehmann's politics of perception.

The politics of *Walking: Holding* occurs as a result of the choice and motivation for its creation, in its modes of production, through the challenging, experiential processes it facilitates for its audience members and in its confrontation of members of the public. These aspects of the performance will be the focus of the following analysis. I argue that *Walking: Holding* intervenes within public space to offer an act

of political resistance that counters the hegemony of the white, male, heteronormative dominant queering the city space and highlighting the transformative potential of theatre. This process is facilitated by a politics of perception premised upon an aesthetic of care and response-ability.

A guilty heterosexual

I step outside the Drill Hall in Leith, close my eyes, take three deep breaths and open them again, as instructed. I watch Rosana walk towards me. She arrives, introduces herself and asks how I like to hold hands with my partner, or how I liked to hold hands with a previous partner. She tells me that we are going to go for a walk, if I wish I can speak but it is also okay if I want to remain silent. We stop in front of a wig shop and turn towards the reflective surface. Rosana asks what we look like. I see an eclectic duo – one with pink hair and wearing swathes of scarves and one with a shaved head wearing a seventies shirt. Holding hands and the same height they look like a couple comfortable and happy in each other's company. As we continue on our journey, walking and talking, I become conscious of not "outing" myself as a heterosexual.

As noted, *Walking: Holding's* political potential resides in its transgression of the boundaries between art and life since it occurs in public space. Cade states that she questioned the purpose of her live art and wondered what its significance was situated inside a gallery space (2013a). Arguably, this concern relates to the idea that performance situated within purposefully constructed indoor spaces is accessible only to the select audience who choose to attend. Contrastingly, performance that occurs outdoors, and without boundaries demarcating it from the activities of daily life, reaches a wider audience since the general public is provided

with unwitting access. Simone Hancox argues that this implementation of art in public spaces facilitates a process of defamiliarisation for the participating audience member, which allows for a critical sense of engagement. She states:

By framing the city as art or performance, these walks temporarily occupy the participant with an amplified attention to, and critical distance from, their everyday environments. They prompt the participant into interpreting the city with a similar level of critical attention as she might have towards theatre or art.

(Hancox, 2012: 244)

Rosana foregrounded this critical engagement at the beginning of *Walking: Holding* when she invited my appraisal of our reflection. By asking what I thought we looked like Rosana made me consider how other people might be interpreting what they saw. Initially, I had felt unselfconscious as I amiably walked along holding Rosana's hand; however, Rosana's inviting of my appraisal prompted my critical engagement with the performance since I participated in making the same judgments that I assumed members of the public would be making about our act of hand-holding. Rosana and I quite feasibly looked like a couple and this image is, perhaps, what other people noted. The result was that I became self-conscious that my sexuality jarred with what members of the public might deduce from our pairing. This section of the performance, therefore, problematically exposed the possibility that my self-consciousness occurred as a result of my internalization of the heteronormative standpoint as superior. Consequently, *Walking: Holding* called into question my 'taken-for-granted assumptions of gender and sexuality [...] to contest hegemonic, gendered norms' (Bridger, 2013: 288). Put differently, the exposure of the

heteronormative dominant in *Walking: Holding* is facilitated through the recognition of one's own prejudice/privilege/subjugation in the presence of public others unaware that a performance is taking place.

This induced moment of self-consciousness made me feel guilty about my heterosexual status and uneasy about revealing my sexuality. In my discussion with Rosana I learnt of the self-consciousness she experienced as a homosexual female when holding hands with her partner. This knowledge prompted my guilt since I have never had to give conscious consideration to the act of hand holding for fear of how it will be interpreted. I, therefore, felt part of a problem that impeded the actions of those who have been posited as other to the heterosexual dominant and feared being 'outed' as a heterosexual complicit in this process. Paradoxically, however, this experience posited me within a standpoint similar to that which characterised Rosana's experience of holding-hands with a same sex partner since my heterosexuality sat outside the homosexual norm of this initial section of the performance. Consequently, I occupied the status of other experiencing, by proxy, the way in which the heterosexual dominant internalises the homosexual other as 'deviant'. As Baz Kershaw states, 'hegemony reinforces the dominant form of consciousness by making it seem "natural" or "common sense"' (1992: 19). Thus, *Walking: Holding's* defamiliarisation of my sexuality prompted me to become aware of my unrealised, privileged standpoint.

This process had an immediate effect on the language I chose to use when engaging in dialogue with the first two performers, Rosana and Debbie. I would usually presume heterosexuality in those I speak to and use gendered terms oppositional to the sex of the person I am in dialogue with. Contrastingly, in *Walking: Holding*, I became very conscious that Rosana and Debbie used the word 'partner'

(Cade, 2013c). According to Andrew Parker and Eve Sedgwick's interpretations of identity, the repetition of my choice use of language prior to participating in *Walking: Holding* asserted and produced my identity as a heterosexual, as well as proliferating this standpoint as the normative stance. They state, 'performativity has enabled a powerful appreciation of the ways that identities are constructed iteratively through complex citational processes' (1995: 2); a point extended by Butler when she states that these citational processes '*precede and condition* the formation of the subject' (1993: 226). Rosana and Debbie's deliberate use of the term 'partner' was ambiguous enough to prevent the labelling of my sexuality, therefore, making me conscious of how my assumption of heterosexual, gender specific terms reinforced and produced the heteronormative standpoint acting, by default, as a homophobic prejudice. I appreciate that the term 'partner' is not gender neutral since it can still infer the gendered terms boyfriend and girlfriend, but it is ambiguous enough to not impose a heterosexual standpoint. Consequently, I too became conscious of using the term partner based on its inclusivity; a choice that has remained with me since the performance. Not every audience member will have necessarily adapted, or needed to adapt, their use of language. But for me the performance encouraged my understanding of the varying potentials for speech to reinforce and perpetuate, or expose and challenge, the heteronormative standpoint.

The confrontation of audience members' with their own prejudices is an integral aspect of *Walking: Holding's* potential to affect change and act as a political intervention within public space. Berthold Schoene states, 'liberation or emancipatory change is not accomplished by a sudden revolutionary seizure of power, but by dint of subtle, intricate processes of unravelling, reconnecting, and evolving' (2006: 299). Schoene's argument emphasises how *Walking: Holding's*

confrontation of audience members with their personal standpoint defamiliarises, facilitating its potential 'evolution'. While this may occur only for one audience member at a time it, nevertheless, still contributes to the progressive queering of the heteronormative standpoint and 'humanity's gradual spiralling out of one set of power relations into another, hopefully less oppressive, set of power relations' (Schoene, 2006: 299). *Walking: Holding*, thus, demonstrates the political potential of performance to remodel society through the challenge it offers audience members to consider what their actions and words amount to.

The politics of walking side-by-side

I am holding the hand of the third performer Lori. We walk in silence. He towers above me wearing blue eye shadow, pink lipstick, skin tight clothes, black fishnets and high-heeled stilettos. I feel him wobble as he walks and I am conscious of taking care of him, preventing him from toppling over. He asks me how I feel holding his hand; I ask him how he feels holding mine. We near Tesco and stop; our way is barred.

In *Walking: Holding* audience members stand beside the performers as they encounter the city together experiencing it from different and unfamiliar subject positions dependent on who their partner is. I appreciate that this is a temporary 'as if' experience that cannot be equally equated to the daily experience of another. However, it does facilitate an understanding of what it *would* be like to be another, encouraging audience members to recognise the hegemonic forces at play in the construction of their socio-political world. Certainly the process creates a dynamic that Jo Lee Vergunst and Tim Ingold describe in their discussion of walking performance as follows: 'to participate is not to walk *into* but to walk *with* – where

“with” implies not a face-to-face confrontation, but heading the same way, sharing the same vistas, and perhaps retreating from the same threats behind’ (2006: 67). Vergunst and Ingold’s discussion harkens to Levinas’ concept of the face-to-face encounter, premised upon a confrontation whereby the ‘face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in doing so recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question’ (in Hand, 1989: 83). *Walking: Holding*’s side-by-side proposition equally invokes this sense of responsibility, but accompanied by the support of one’s hand holding partner. In other words, the audience member and performer encounter face-to-face confrontations together with the act of hand-holding inducing a caring sense of responsibility for one’s partner.

This point was made explicit in *Walking: Holding* when I walked with Lori and our presence was met with public resistance. Lori’s leg of the walk moved from a backstreet, crossed a main road and was designed to progress through Tesco, exiting at the back door. However, this section of the route had been altered by complaints that prevented Lori from walking through Tesco, limiting his spatial mobility (Lori being the common denominator in this section of the walk). The implication here is that consumer capitalism and Tesco’s aim to maximise profit responded to the complaints against Lori by barring him from the store, in the interests of preventing the greatest loss of customers. In other words, the ideology of consumer capitalism played a role in reinforcing a binary concept of gender that Lori’s appearance complicated, relegating his status to that of other deviant from the norm.

When we reached Tesco Lori informed me that his way had been barred, offering me the choice of talking to the security guard or walking around. His final words were, ‘the choice is yours, I am entirely in your hands’ (Cade, 2013c). This

created a situation that placed me firmly within a position of responsibility. According to Bernhard Waldenfels it is the third party that invokes our responsibility when met by the face of the other. He states, 'it [the face] functions as a bridge to the third party, to the claim of justice [...] where the whole of humanity looks at us through the other's eyes' (2002: 78). In *Walking: Holding*, this third party was not hypothetically assumed but was physically embodied in Lori's presence. In other words, Lori physically represented all those prejudiced by the heteronormative dominant. This meant that I felt the weight of Lori's request to make a decision on both of our behalves since I was required to confront and assert my thoughts on the issue whilst conscious of the relationship between the amassing choices of individuals and humanity as a whole. The turmoil that this decision created in me was unparalleled with the following questions occupying my thoughts: should I approach the security guard and complain that we were not allowed to walk through the store, countering the comments by others?; should I walk around because I did not want to have to make a public statement about my rights?; and what was my responsibility to Lori in this situation?. At first, my indignance made me want to approach the security guard and I shared this information with Lori. However, as I watched Lori rub his neck and look towards the store I read a sense of discomfort in his actions leading to a change in my decision: I decided against approaching the security guard since it would be an uncomfortable ordeal that Lori may have to continually repeat throughout the duration of the performance's run. Thus, the responsibility I felt to care for Lori overwhelmed my need to protest in the short-term, especially since I could not avoid directly answering for my choices and their resulting fallout as we continued on our walk together.

My relationship to Lori did not, however, limit my ability to affirm my standpoint and make what felt like an important statement about human rights in the long term. Rather, my experience drew upon Patricia Clough's discussion of affectivity to create a situation that combined a process of critical contemplation about my ethical responsibility to Lori, resulting in non-action, with an unsettling experience that prompted my political action later in the day. Clough states that affectivity is 'the augmentation or diminution of a body's capacity to act, engage, and to connect, such that auto affection is linked to the self-feeling of being alive – that is aliveness or vitality' (2007: 2). This dual quality of affectivity allowed for the diminution of my actions, through a process of critical reflection, when Lori conceded responsibility to me. This prevented my assumption of authority over Lori allowing me to choose not to reinforce his marginalisation by assuming an understanding of his experience and speaking on his behalf. However, the difficulty of this decision created a sense of ambivalence about my actions so the moment continued to percolate and influence the remainder of my experience of the performance. As Helen Grehan states, 'performances that generate ambivalence open up the "saying" (le dire) so that it can interrupt spectators, fracture any finite responses, expose their vulnerabilities, and create an experience of seduction and estrangement' (2009: 23). The result was that *Walking: Holding's* long-term affectivity augmented my actions later in the day when I returned to Tesco to make a statement that countered the complaints about Lori's appearance, unable to reconcile myself with the experience I had encountered. Thus, the performance's affectivity employed a dual relationship between action and non-action to prompt a political effect when I was answerable only to myself and my personal experience.

The broader efficacious impact of the relationship between critical reflection and experiential encounter was evidenced by how it marshalled numerous alternative responses to the heteronormative restriction of Lori's movements. Cade states, 'on the last day [of the performance] they actually let us walk through because some people went down and complained' (Cade, 2013a). If, as Butler states, identity is brought to the fore through 'a *stylized repetition of acts*' (1999: 179 original emphasis), it is possible to argue that the continued repetition of this affective moment in *Walking: Holding*, which resulted in a shift from hostile and unwelcoming interpretations of difference to at least a state of tolerance if not quite celebration, went some way towards modifying the social identity of Leith acting as an empowering catalyst for change.

The affective capacity of *Walking: Holding* is also evidenced by the interventions the performance has prompted from members of the public not participating in the performance. This point is well evidenced by the Brighton version of *Walking: Holding*. In each version of the performance Cade creates a situation that is designed to confront the audience member and feel 'in some way threatening' (Cade, 2013a). In Brighton, this experience was structured into the middle of the performance when the performer changeover occurred in an alleyway. The new performer was to approach the audience member and their current partner from behind and tap them on the shoulder. Cade describes the scenario as follows:

I had him [the male performer that was to be the audience members next hand holder] [...] just going up and grabbing the person, like tapping the person on the shoulder. But he was like following you and then would kind of grab you. And then another person who was in the public ran over because he thought that he [the performer] was mugging the people. So then they [the

performers and audience member] had to explain that everyone knew each other and it was fine.

(Cade, 2013a)

In this example, the boundary between art and life failed to exist for the intervening member of the public, whose affectivity was stimulated. If, as Allan Kaprow states, that 'what we do to space affects its meaning, its identity' (in Lavery, 2005: 154), the actions of this member of the public characterised the identity of Brighton as one populated by courageous and responsible citizens who refuse to stand-by and allow wrong-doing to occur. Thus, this example demonstrates how *Walking: Holding's* erasure of the boundaries between art and life extends the affective potential of the performance out to include members of the public whose actions, for better or worse, also contribute to *Walking: Holding's* shaping of the norms of the city spaces in which it is performed.

It is crucial, however, to acknowledge that the political potential of *Walking: Holding* is premised on the insertion of spectacles of difference into public space, suggesting that it negates its ethical responsibility to its audience members since they form part of the spectacle on display. Cade argues that the insertion of specularities of difference into public spaces is an integral and necessary aspect of the performance's potential to perform a 'positive political action' (Cade, 2013a). She states, 'if someone on the street comes up and asks me what I am doing because I keep walking past the same point I say "oh, I'm just walking past here holding hands with different people"' (Cade, 2013a). Cade here demonstrates a belief that the lack of knowledge spectating members of the public have of *Walking: Holding's* status as a performance is an integral factor for ensuring their commonplace engagement with

the various lives and narratives on offer. This process ensures that audience members are exposed to the dominant character of the city space, enhancing *Walking: Holding's* ability to make an ethical and political comment about our shared, social identity. However, this point also highlights how *Walking: Holding* knowingly posits audience members within potentially contentious scenarios, as a consequence of their participation in the performance, in the interests of facilitating the greater good of challenging the legitimacy of the heteronormative hegemony. Thus, despite *Walking: Holding's* admirable intentions, the supportive act of hand-holding and the 'as ifness' of the performance situation the performance still conforms, on an individual basis for audience members, to Lehmann's ethically negligent politics of perception, summarised by Nicolas Ridout's suggestion that theatre's justification of itself 'in terms of its contribution to an ethical life, might be the very thing that prevents theatre from meeting such a demand' (2009: 70).

The transience and endurance of *Walking: Holding*

Irene leads me to a park and we approach Robert. He sits on a bench holding onto a walking stick. He looks as if he is peacefully contemplating life. The park is quiet and green and I can hear the sound of birds. I take a seat beside Robert and place my hand on top of his as he holds his walking stick; it brings to mind the imagery of a team pact. He asks how I am. I feel safe. So safe that the experience of the performance catches up with me and I am overwhelmed and frustrated. We talk about my experience until he leads me to the park gate, hugs me goodbye and I walk away from the performance. As I walk on I continue to reflect on what has passed.

My choice to participate in *Walking: Holding* was partly premised upon my desire to hold hands with someone and was partly premised upon an established affiliation with the subject matter of the performance. Consequently, it is necessary to consider whether *Walking: Holding* attracts the audience members it would be best served to challenge in the interests of acting as a 'positive political action' (Cade, 2013a). As evidenced throughout this analysis, despite my belief that I am an open-minded individual who already celebrates difference *Walking: Holding* exposed an inherent bias in my actions, premised upon the pervasiveness of the heteronormative standpoint. In the performance I attended, this process unsettled my sense of self so that *Walking: Holding* continued to trouble my critical assumptions about gender and sexuality long after the performance; a process still ongoing for me at the time of writing, almost a year after the performance. While what the performance exposes will differ for each audience member, dependent on how they self-identify, *Walking: Holding's* placing of its audience members in heightened affective encounters of equal rights injustices will either serve to challenge or intensify one's initial standpoint on the topic of difference. The result may be a direct political action, a thoughtful ethical troubling of one's standpoint surrounding questions of heteronormativity, or both. Either way, I argue that *Walking: Holding* will offer some degree of efficaciousness by troubling the legitimacy of hegemonic gender and sexuality norms and 'influence[ing], however minutely, the general historical evolution of wider social and political realities' (Kershaw, 1992: 1).⁹⁶ Thus, regardless of the audience members *Walking: Holding* attracts, I would argue that it maintains its transformative, political potential.

⁹⁶ I make this point with the acknowledgement that not every audience member will be prompted to take action and recognition that not all productions of the performance will offer such a direct

It is, nonetheless, necessary to consider the political potential of the performance of *Walking: Holding* that I attended since it occurred during the Edinburgh Festival Fringe; a time when the city becomes a multi-arts venue that offers music, performance, arts and comedy in the streets and in various indoor and outdoor venues and locales. If, as Mikhail Bakhtin states, in relation to carnival, the festival atmosphere results in a “time out” from “official” culture’ (in Harvie 2005: 102), there is a sense that anything out of the ordinary occurring during the period of the festival may have been dismissed as a transient, inconsequential activity.

Jen Harvie addresses the transformative potential of work staged during the Edinburgh festivals in her publication *Staging the UK*. Harvie states that the “time out” from “official” culture’ that the festival experience offers actually enhances the transformative potential of performance since it provides ‘opportunities for cultural renewal and reinvention’ through the ‘interrogation of cultural rules’ (2005: 102). Harvie does concede that aspects of the Edinburgh festivals have become increasingly commercialised and globalised. However, she also argues that these ‘deleterious effects can be negotiated [and] resisted’ by ‘challenging market priorities, maintaining product variety, refusing to reduce cultures always to clichéd cartoons, and actively struggling with globalisation’s dangers’ (2005: 103).

These points are particularly pertinent in relation to the Forest Fringe, which programmed *Walking: Holding*. The Forest Fringe’s manifesto states that its purpose is to specifically make ‘space for risk and experimentation at the Edinburgh festival and beyond’ (Field, Pearson & Brand, n.d.). It programs work by UK-based artists providing time, place and space for artistic experiment and collaboration. All

provocation. The situation involving Lori and Tesco was unique to this particular performance, offering the ability to trace the performance’s efficaciousness.

of the performances occur under a 'pay-what-you-can' policy and all the events of the Forest Fringe occur in the suburb of Leith, positing them at a literal remove from the city centre of Edinburgh.⁹⁷ This particular area offered no other theatres or venues operating as part of the fringe festival, it was quieter, contained no performing street artists and there was a sense that this was not an area that attracted an influx of tourists.⁹⁸ Consequently, the Forest Fringe presents itself at a literal and metaphorical distance to the claims of globalization and commercialization surrounding the Edinburgh festivals offering transgressive 'anti-capitalist behaviors' that place artistic priorities over market priorities. Thus, I would argue that the performance of *Walking: Holding* I participated in was not depoliticised through its affiliation with the Forest Fringe and the Edinburgh fringe festival; rather, these associations conform to Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's argument that carnival, or in this case festival, can act 'as a *catalyst and site of actual and symbolic struggle*' (in Harvie, 2005: 103).

Walking: Holding theoretically reinforces this possibility through its use of performer-participants. When creating the performance in each locale Cade employs what she refers to as 'participants', and I have referred to throughout this analysis as performers. Prior to taking the performance to different locations Cade asks the programming venue to distribute a call for participants, which informs the latter of the premise of the performance and the commitments involved in participating. The participants are not required to have any particular theatre or performance skills or abilities. Cade then holds a one-day workshop with the

⁹⁷ The location of the Forest Fringe has varied since it began in 2007. However, in 2013 it took up occupation in the Out of the Blue Drill Hall in Leith and has remained in the same venue since.

⁹⁸ I acknowledge that *Walking: Holding*, and other of the Forest Fringe's performances, had elements that moved into the street and out of the Out of the Blue Drill Hall; however, these were all affiliated with the Forest Fringe and there were no busking performances.

interested participants to introduce the framework of the performance and facilitate their ability to perform within the work. This is an improvised process that allows the participating performers to develop, and provide, a contribution to *Walking: Holding*. Cade states, 'the idea is that people are local [...] then you get people speaking about the place that they live in' (2013a). The significant aspect of this process is that the participants contribute to a reshaping of the performance in each new locale in which it is performed, specific to the shared knowledge of the area. If, as Kershaw states, 'a performance which engages with the ideological identity of a particular community may enlist powerful forces for change' (1992: 29), this aspect of *Walking: Holding* allows members of the community who choose to get involved to reclaim the city space for their own purposes, through the act of walking and holding. In other words, participants have the opportunity to create a performance that befits the locale, according to their own experiences, providing the opportunity to share, shape and transform the identity of the space in which they live.

Walking: Holding facilitates the possibility for participants to instigate change through the artistic control that Cade accedes. The premise of the performance, to celebrate difference, is defined by Cade. She also chooses the route of the walk with this premise in mind and she facilitates the performer workshops which assist the performers in identifying their unique contribution to the performance. However, these elements of artistic control are tempered by the range of performers that have chosen to work on the project and the viewpoints and experiences that they bring to the project. Cade emphasises how the performers' contributions are an integral aspect in the creation of the performance. She refers to the re-creation of the performance in each different venue as 'an experiment' and emphasises that it 'isn't a scripted performance and it's about responding to each person individually and

seeing what they are bringing to it and definitely giving space for their own journey through it' (Cade, 2013a). This latter point refers to the performers who create the work. However, she also makes the point that 'the audience member can very much lead it [the performance] as well' (Cade, 2013a). *Walking: Holding*, therefore, acts as an empowering, positive, political platform for local participants and audience members to engage in a symbolic struggle over the heteronormativity of their city spaces. This occurs as a consequence of the artistic input Cade invites during the development of the performance at each new locale and the degree of improvisatory input the performance accedes to audience members.

This, however, was not the case in the performance I attended in Edinburgh since Cade did not use local participants. Cade is a Glasgow based theatre artist with strong links throughout the UK. She was, therefore, able to draw on the participation of performers from her home city, as well as those from further afield that would be gathering in Edinburgh for the festival. She states: 'normally the venue or whoever is programming it [*Walking: Holding*] will find the participants. But actually for this one I found them because I live in Scotland [...] and actually Irene and Lori both did it when it was in Glasgow' (Cade, 2013a). This statement highlights that the participants in the performance I attended were not empowered residents of Leith since Cade favoured convenience over her usual process of community engagement. Consequently, Cade negated *Walking: Holding's* ability to act as a political platform for the local community. Cade's statement also raises questions about how local the performers are at each venue that programs *Walking: Holding*. The tour pack for the performance does evidence Cade's desire to engage with the local community since it contains an invitation letter for the venue to send to possible participants, encouraging them to target local, minority, community groups.

The examples she offers include LGBT societies, groups designed for older people, Asian/black communities, pregnant women and young people (Cade, 2013b: 8). However, in interview, Cade also acknowledged that the ideal range of participants is hard to find and that she has not yet 'mastered [her] call out' (2013a). The implication here is that the inclusion of 'local' participants may be more geographically disparate than one would expect – as with her inclusion of Glaswegian based participants in Edinburgh. Moreover, since the audience members who participated in the Edinburgh performance may have all been visitors to Leith, as a consequence of the renowned reputation of the festival, their subsequent dispersal may have also dissipated and diluted any lasting consequences that the performance's intervention into public space created. Thus, it is necessary to acknowledge that *Walking: Holding's* ability to act as an empowered political platform for local communities to effect change is an ideal that is not necessarily achieved each time the performance is produced.

Summary

In conclusion, *Walking: Holding détours* city spaces to disrupt heteronormative ideas about gender and sexuality. It does so by increasing the visibility of non-heteronormative genders and sexualities and through the stimulation of affective response. The affectivity of *Walking: Holding* is a core aspect of its political potential since it is connected to a sense of vitality and bodily response that prompts an individual's capacity to act or not (Clough, 2007: 2). This affectivity is premised on the intimate act of walking and holding, which Vergunst and Ingold state 'can lead to a very particular closeness and bond between the people involved' (2006: 69), further enhanced by the performance's blurring of the boundaries between art and life. This dynamic creates a politics of perception premised on a relationship

between the care and confrontation of audience members, exposing their prejudices and the role their speech and actions do, or do not, play in the proliferation of oppressive, normative standpoints. As Charles Guignon states:

We are at the deepest level *polyphonic* points of intersection with a social world rather than *monophonic* centers of self-talk and will. For this reason, we generally come to have a better knowledge of who we are through our social interactions than we do through introspection or self-reflection.

(2004: 121)

The act of walking and holding, in *Walking: Holding*, literally and metaphorically functions to break down the barriers that divide individuals, thereby, contributing to the creation of a wider, more inclusive, social equality. This process offers an ethico-political mode of performance with transformative potential for those who are aware of *Walking: Holdings* status as a performance, as well as those who are not. Cade's intention to create the performance from within city communities is a core aspect of this process since it provides the opportunity for the actions of performer participants to identify, shape, and re-appropriate the visual dynamics of their city spaces. This ideal is not always achieved in production and the performance could be interpreted as ethically negligent of its audience members. Nonetheless, I have argued that *Walking: Holding* maintains its ability to challenge and modify the collective identity of city spaces, as well as the identities of its audience members, serving a wider socio-political purpose that counters the narcissistic critiques of immersive performance practice.

I think about the last time I held hands with someone. I remember what it felt like: at times novel, uneasy, emotional, turbulent, defiant, empowering, supportive, supporting but, at all times, caring and tender.

The next, and final, case-study to be analysed in this chapter is Adrian Howells' *Unburden (Saying the Unsaid)*. The performance draws on the concepts of care and responsibility, embedded in the act of hand holding in *Walking: Holding*, to encourage audience members to assume a sense of generosity towards self and others – a practice Howells refers to during the performance as 'Universal Love' (2013). *Unburden* invites audience members to reflect on, and own up to, the life that they are living and make a commitment to the shared life world. This premise challenges the individualism propounded by the neoliberal capitalist ideology and endorsed by the narcissistic pursuit of experience that often characterises immersive performance practices. It also counters the idea, included in the introduction to this chapter, that immersive performance offers only an escape from the obligations of daily life. Ultimately, as with *Re-enactments* and *Walking: Holding*, *Unburden's* immersive performance experience encourages audience members to recognise and assume a sense of responsibility for our relational existence.

Unburden: Saying the Unsaid

“Even one trace of condemnation against ourselves, or others, is a trace of condemnation against the Universal creation of love, and restricts us, limits our power to allow the Universal Love to flow through us to others” – Edward Bach

(Howells, 2013)

I find this quotation written on a cue card and hidden in the pocket of my coat following Adrian Howells' performance of Unburden: Saying the Unsaid.⁹⁹ It brings the emotive experience of the performance rushing back to me and I begin to reflect. I think about how Unburden encouraged self-forgiveness, inspired generosity, demonstrated how my identity is irrevocably tied to others and a shared sense of culture, and asked me if I would live my life differently in the face of death. I linger over the consideration of the latter point as I carry on with my day.¹⁰⁰

The performance of *Unburden* I attended took place in a large, disused looking room in the Battersea Arts Centre (BAC).¹⁰¹ Daylight was blocked out of the space by boarded up windows and the walls were covered in chipped, faded, peeling paint, lending a feeling of dereliction to the space. *Unburden* took place on two chairs that faced each other, beside a table and amidst a floor of lit votive candles. The table and the chairs were positioned within a circle of space that contained no candles at one end of the room. To the right of Adrian's chair there was a table holding two glasses, a jug of water, a bottle of Bach pine remedy, three pine cones

⁹⁹ From henceforth I will use the shortened version of the title of the performance: *Unburden*.

¹⁰⁰ As indicated in footnote 90, these extracts are drawn from my personal, performance journal in an attempt to impart the depth of emotional engagement I experienced when participating in the performances. In this instance, I also hope that the use of descriptive writing might assist in offering an evocative, sensorial depiction of *Unburden* since I was unable to access any images of it.

¹⁰¹ The performance I attended occurred 20th November 2013. *Unburden* was also performed at The Arches in Glasgow at a secret, off-site venue in early November 2013.

placed in ascending height order, an oil burner, a bottle of oil, two tea light candles, two votives and a selection of cue cards.¹⁰² Each of these props was carefully aligned on the table so that they were all clearly visible to the audience member seated opposite. This care of placement was mirrored in the specificity Adrian took when handling each of the items during the performance; Adrian never held two items at once and picked each item up with purpose and attention, completing each action before attending to another. The décor, combined with the flickering candles, lack of electricity, oil burner and the silence and stillness that characterised the performance gave the space a warm, fragrant and other-worldly appeal; particularly since it contrasted so sharply with the bustle of the Battersea Arts Centre and the bright daylight of the city space outside the building.

Unburden occurred for one audience member at a time. The experience was primarily facilitated by Howells, with Will Dickie facilitating the audience's experience prior to and post their encounter with Howells. *Unburden* was a unique performance experience centred on each audience member that required an improvisatory, dialogic exchange. However, the artistic framework of the performance meant that each audience member also experienced several shared elements. These included Dickie's actions at the beginning of the performance when he guided audience members to the room in which the performance would take place and invited them to leave their belongings outside; a period of silence that all audience members shared with Howells at the beginning of the performance; the placing of a lit candle on the floor of the performance space; listening to extracts of information about Bach's pine

¹⁰² In what follows, I use Adrian Howells' and Will Dickie's first names when discussing my encounters with them during the performance, acknowledging that they were engaging me with a performed version of themselves. In other words, they did not play character-based roles but stepped into a performance persona. I use their surnames according to usual scholarly convention when engaging with critical materials they have produced, such as interviews and articles.

remedy; and the drinking of a tonic containing said remedy. Following the performance all audience members were guided to a table by Dickie and invited, if they wished, to take time to reflect, write about their experiences and/or read other audience members' reflections, in a book designed for this purpose. These shared elements of the performance will be the focus of the following analysis.

Performance as relational therapy

The premise of *Unburden* was defined as follows on the BAC's website:

Providing individuals with a meaningful opportunity to unburden themselves, "to get something off their chest" and "to wipe the slate clean", the performance will be in the form of a conversational exchange within a candlelit environment and include a small, symbolic "cleansing" ritual.

Participants should hope to explore the unsaid in their life and to share some of their thoughts and feelings in a warm, loving and non-judgmental environment, leaving the space feeling in some way "lighter" and unburdened.

(BAC, 2013)

This description of the performance refers to the idea that *Unburden* offered a secular place of confession for audience members, acting as a tonic to the concerns and worries of daily life. Howells affirmed this intention in his discussion of confessional performance, which he argued has appeared as a result of a decline in religion or a higher authority. He stated:

Once upon a time, not so long ago people would have, as a matter of course, gone to church, they would have gone and they would have confessed and the priest would have absolved them at the end of confessional [...] I'm interested in giving people an opportunity to alleviate shame and guilt.

(BritishCouncilArtsSg, 2010)

Howells' statement aligns him with the role of a religious authority, suggesting that he offered himself to audience members as a secular priest. However, this idea contrasts with Howells' aim to create a non-judgemental environment since such an assumption of authority over the audience member would require judgement of their actions in order to grant their absolution. Rather, since Howells, in his role as Adrian, invited the audience member to share their personal experiences in response to a series of open-ended, improvised questions, the exchange could be more readily likened to a psychoanalytical, therapeutic dialogue premised on a process of talking and listening, as opposed to judgement. As Walsh states, citing Adam Phillips, "calling psychoanalysis a talking cure has obscured the sense in which it is a listening cure [...] Being listened to can enable oneself to bear [...] listening to oneself and others" (2013: 53-54). The implication to be explored is that the collaborative, conversational dialogue in *Unburden* may have facilitated an experience of self-absolution for the audience member through a therapeutic process of affirmation. As Gergen states, the therapist and client are 'engaged in a subtle and complex dance of co-action, a dance in which meaning is continuously in motion, and [...] may transform the relational life of the client' (2009: 282).

This experience was not entirely disparate from the concept of 'working-through', discussed in relation to trauma in *Re-Enactments*, but was facilitated through a consideration of Martin Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*, or authentic being, which Piotr Hoffman explains 'requires the lucid acceptance of one's own death' (1993: 196). Guignon argues that Heidegger's concept of authenticity can act as a political tool for the development of society since it allows individuals to become 'more clear-sighted and reflective about the issues that face us in our current

situation' (2004: 161). *Unburden* brought Heidegger's concept of authenticity to the fore by placing a time limit of three months on each audience member's life before asking how one would act in relation to others if given this knowledge. If, as Hoffman states, being-towards-death allows for a consideration of how one might view life 'as something I have the potential to realize' (1993: 197), this reminder of my finitude prompted me to assess the life I choose to lead and the stance I, thereby, take in relation to the shared life world. In other words, the experience required that I separate the trivial from the significant in a consideration about what was most important to me at that moment in time. Thus, *Unburden* acted as a therapeutic tool that facilitated my sense of significance in the world by foregrounding the finite aspects of existence and inviting me to assume a sense of responsibility for my choices.

In what follows, I argue that *Unburden* facilitated a Heideggerean process of authentic self-focusing, which encourages a moral consideration of how one should live one's life. This process was based on an intimate and dialogic one-to-one encounter between Adrian and each audience member that demonstrated how self-identity is premised upon our interactions with others and a process of giving expression to one's sense of self. *Unburden* induced a sense of responsibility that invited audience members to answer for the choices that they make, consider their potential for personal transformation, at least during the performance, and emphasised how one's sense of self includes social commitments and responsibilities. As Taylor states, 'authenticity is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self; it supposes such demands' (1991: 41). The following analysis will explore this point considering whether *Unburden* merely acted as a temporary tonic to 'the dispersal, distraction, and forgetfulness of everydayness'

(Guignon, 2006: 282), or whether it functioned beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries of the one-to-one performance event at the service of a wider community of individuals.

Slowing down and taking time

After entering Battersea Arts Centre I am directed to wait at a table in the corner of the entrance hall. The space is busy: there is music playing in the bar, people are chatting, eating and laughing and there are shouts and cries from the day care facility to my left. Dickie approaches me, introduces himself as Will and invites me to follow him up the stairs. The energy exuding from Will is quiet, calm and meditative and he speaks little; but I still feel buzzed by the excited energy in the building. When we reach the top of the stairs Will invites me to leave any belongings I wish on a clothes rail and to take my shoes off.¹⁰³ I am sensitive to the deliberate time and care Will takes in his conversation with me, foreshadowing the gentle dynamic of the encounter I am about to have. However, I still feel over-stimulated and am conscious of time; I rush to ready myself for the performance, feeling the pressure of time more acutely since I have already noted that the performance began late.

The key point that arose during this preliminary element of the performance was the issue of time. Being on time, not wasting time and getting the most from my allocated time in the performance were at the forefront of my mind. Guignon, citing Heidegger, states that ‘our ordinary preoccupations in the busy-ness of the world are actually a form of “evasion” or “fleeing” that prevents us from taking responsibility for, and owning up to, our lives in the face of death (2006: 282). Heidegger classes

¹⁰³ The emphasis throughout this dialogue was encouraging and open – I was *invited* to take my shoes off, and there was another pair of shoes sitting on the floor, but I was not told that this was something I must do.

this form of existence, or *Dasein*, as inauthentic, with Guignon stating that it prevents an understanding of one's sense of significance in the world and the potential one has for participating in the public context. He states, 'the outcome of this disjointed way of living is alienation from oneself, an inability to see anything as really mattering, and feelings of futility' (Guignon, 2006: 228). This interpretation of inauthenticity is directly related to the concept of time since it is based on the temporality of existence, whereby one's past creates who one is in the present and the choices one makes in the present contribute to the creation of the future; as discussed in *Gob Squad's Kitchen*. Hoffman states:

The overall attitude of "expecting" one's future and of "forgetting" one's past shapes one's inauthentic stance towards the present, the stance of "making-present." The inauthentic *Dasein*'s search for security is reflected in a collection of entities – of persons, things, goods, and so on – with which this sort of *Dasein* surrounds itself [...] in order to gain a sense of having a place within the reassuring world of the "they".

(1993: 207)

Hoffman here highlights how inauthenticity occurs when the temporal structure of time is not acknowledged and one is overly concerned with the present; rather than recognising the forward directedness of one's life with its assured culmination of death. This point shares parallels with Debord's concept of the commodification of time, which results in an '*estranged present*' 'loaded with pseudovalorizations [...] and pseudoindividualized moments' (n.d.: 52 original emphasis & 49), emphasising how the society of spectacle results in inauthentic modes of existence. Considering this in relation to the opening moments of *Unburden* it becomes apparent that I was

involved in a process of “making present”, in which I was conscious of making the most of the time allocated to me by the performance with little significance beyond my self-fulfilment. In other words, I awaited my ‘life-happening’ rather than ‘clear-sightedly’ directing it, failing to take up an authentic stance in relation to the unfolding of my existence in the interests of gaining a valuable experience for my time spent at a cultural activity (Guignon, 2006: 282).

This preoccupation with time and the scheduling of one’s everyday activities is attributed, by Marc Augé, to the increasing speed of communication technologies, such as the media, which result in ‘the overloading of events in the world’ and ‘the proliferation of information’ (2010: 228). Augé argues that there is a contemporary preoccupation with the impression that time is accelerating, resulting in a lack of connection between individuals. This point was a starting point for many of Howells’ one-to-one performance experiences, which allowed audience members a “time out” from technology to engage in what Howells intended to be intimate and nurturing exchanges. In all of Howells’ one-to-one performance works there was no use of communication technologies. Instead, the emphasis was often on touching and conversation. Consider for example, *The Pleasure of Being*, in which Howells bathed audience members and held them for a prolonged period of time on a bed; *Foot Washing for the Sole*, which involved washing, massaging and kissing the feet of audience members and *Salon Adrienne*, where audience members had their hair washed and dried while Howells encouraged them to open up about their lives. In each of his one-to-one performance experiences the audience member was offered an opportunity to engage in a shared and intimate experience. Howells even stated that his work was motivated by the alienating age of mass-mediatisation and the belief that ‘the more isolatry and disconnected our experience of life becomes [...]

people are in real need of nourishing, intimate, person-to-person, eye-to-eye, flesh-on-flesh experiences and exchanges' (in Zerihan et al., 2009: 36). *Unburden* conformed to this premise by providing audience members with a therapeutic 'time out', or time apart, from their everyday mode of existence. This process induced a state of authentic self-focusing that invited its audience members to engage in reflective considerations about how one lives one's life and might live it differently. As Duggan and Grainger state, the therapeutic space is defined by spatial and temporal boundaries that create a safe space for the exploration of our understanding of ourselves and others (1997: 120-121). The first aspect of *Unburden* to facilitate this possibility was a joint act of contemplation between each audience member and Adrian.

Embodying the present

Once I have alleviated myself of my accoutrements Will tells me that the performance will take place beyond the door that I am standing in front of and to enter when I am ready. He then takes a seat. I pull open the heavy wooden door and emerge into a darkened room. I follow the light emerging from a doorway to my right and walk through a narrow pathway of candles to reach Adrian. Adrian sits facing me with his eyes closed and his head bowed, allowing me to walk towards him unselfconsciously. The room is tranquil. When I sit opposite Adrian he raises his head, smiles, looks at me and says 'hello'. When Adrian speaks it is deliberate and slow. To begin he tells me that we will take some time to look into each other's eyes and hold each other with our gazes.

My encounter with Adrian, in *Unburden*, began with a meditation.¹⁰⁴ The first thing Adrian asked that we do was to take ‘some time’ to hold each other through eye-contact. The period of time was unspecified and, based on my experience, I would argue, reliant upon the energy being exchanged between Adrian and I, culminating when we had acclimatised to one another. At first I found my concentration waning, pondering how long I had been looking at Adrian for and when the experience would come to an end. However, each time my mind wandered I returned to his gaze as a point of focus until I was conscious of nothing else. Time slowed down during this process to the extent that I became aware of each time that I blinked. When I did so Adrian’s image was emblazoned on the insides of my closed eyelids. If, as Jonathan Smith states, when ‘each needless distraction [is] put aside [...] [it] is a meditation. Each instance of pointless striving that is let go [...] is also a meditation’ (1987: 140), then the intention of this initial activity was to induce a meditative state that could attune each audience member to the quiet tranquillity of the performance. As Howells stated, ‘my understanding of immersive practice is that its [*sic*] absolutely about being really, really *present*, being in the moment [...] It’s about *really* slowing down, *really* paying attention’ (in Machon, 2013: 267). In my case, this experience allowed me to let go of the temporal distractions that I was preoccupied with and enter into a reflective mode of reception.

The concept of meditation that I draw on to explain this section of the performance could be likened to a state of heightened attention. Meditation does, however, mean different things to different people. Michael West’s publication, *A*

¹⁰⁴ While I focus here on a particular meditative aspect of *Unburden*, there is a sense that the performance was a meditative experience throughout. From the moment Will greeted me in the BAC there was a sense that the performance was attuning me to a different rhythm. The process encouraged me to take time and attend to the present rather than be distracted by errant and unnecessary thoughts.

Psychology of Meditation, focuses on this point in its opening chapter highlighting how the term refers to a cross-cultural phenomenon ubiquitous ‘in secular and religious domains’ (1987a: 6). West highlights how meditation can be traced to Buddhism and Christianity, as well as secular practices of reflection, contemplation, relaxation and mindfulness. These terms are used somewhat interchangeably to refer to a form of activity centred on altering perception, the experience of existence and the pursuit of meaning. The point I wish to make here is that use of any one of these terms will not offer any more clarity than another. I, therefore, choose to use the term meditation premised on my experience of meditation classes and yoga relaxation sessions. These experiences attend to focusing on the present moment, aim to calm the mind, allow the body and mind to coalesce and provide space for a consideration about how I will move forward with my day. These points shared synergy with this section of *Unburden*.¹⁰⁵ Jon Kabat-Zinn explains the implications of this form of meditation as follows, arguing that the term is interchangeable with the concept of contemplation:

[These terms] refer to methods of disciplining the mind by focusing on a specific object of thought or by completely letting go of all thoughts and emotion, and just simply watching or witnessing whatever arises in consciousness. Such practice usually results in a growing awareness of non-attachment to the contents of our mind, with an increasing ability to exercise choice in how we use our mind. In practical terms, this usually brings about a greater sense of self-mastery, well-being, equanimity and reduced stress.

¹⁰⁵ For more information on the varying usages of the terms herein discussed see West, M., A. (ed.) (1987b) *The Psychology of Meditation*, Oxford: Clarendon; the introduction to Krinke, R. (ed.) (2005) *Contemporary Landscapes of Contemplation*, London: Routledge; <http://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree> and http://www.thenewmedicine.org/health_planner_info/spirituality/recommendations_practice_contemplation.html.

(1994: 4)

Considering Kabat-Zinn's points in relation to *Unburden* highlights how the performance's meditation/contemplation facilitated an awareness of the relationship between my internal experience and external action allowing me to re-embody my corporeal sense of self. The significance of this point is that *Unburden's* meditative practices played a key role in prepping my ability to authentically 'own up to [my] life' and effect a change of conduct if so desired (Guignon, 2006: 282).

This meditative process also drew upon the Levinasian concept of the face-to-face encounter, described by Hass as a confrontation of being 'thrown back into oneself' which '*interrupts* my living experience' (Hass, 2008: 115 & 114 original emphasis). Although I was invited to look at Adrian my focus was not an intent stare; rather, there was a sense that I looked through Adrian seeing myself reflected in his gaze. In other words, my focus on Adrian called my 'being into question' allowing me to become conscious of my sense of self. This included an awareness of where my attention and focus lay, the rhythm of my breath, the tension in the muscles of my face and the position of my body. It was as if I experienced my sense of self from Adrian's external standpoint, as well as accessing my internal thoughts and feelings. This experience adheres to Duggan and Grainger's suggestion that drama forces our awareness in two directions, 'inwards and outwards', creating a therapeutic intimacy 'that is available to us all of seeing and wholly experiencing the self reflected in the other' (1997: 116). This point indicates that where Levinas focuses on the confrontation of the other to induce a response, based on whether my 'being is justified, if the *Da* of my *Dasein* is not already the usurpation of somebody else's place' (in Hand, 1989: 85 original emphasis), *Unburden* invoked similar considerations through its intimate and awareness inducing meditative dynamic.

Both dynamics have the potential to call one's being into question, but Howells' use of himself to facilitate and support the audience member through this process, within a non-judgemental environment, offered an ethically considered performance practice that led by example to demonstrate *how* one might respond to the other. This facilitation of audience responsibility was put into play as the performance continued through the dialogic exchange it invited, prompting audience members to engage critically with the choices that have, and will, shape the course of their existence.

The future, death and owning up to life

To end our meditation Howells takes a deep breath and smiles. He then says, "Hannah, I'm going to ask you a question but before you answer I want you to take your time, not rush in and think carefully. I want you to imagine that you only had three months left to live. I want you to imagine that for a minute and then think about where you would go, who you might spend time with and what you would say to them". As he spoke a tear ran down my face.

Adrian's statement that I imagine that I had only three months left to live was an integral factor in my assumption of responsibility. Philippe Ariès states that in contemporary, Western society 'a heavy silence has fallen over the subject of death' and 'neither the individual nor the community is strong enough to recognise' its existence (1981: 614). Ariès claims that the Western failure to conquer death has been internalised as a defeat that results in the silence of mourners and the medicalised silence of the dying. In other words, the most we can do is give the dying a dignified end. This concept of death is also familiar to Baudrillard's discussion of the hyper real, which he argues has abolished death. He states:

Everywhere we live in a universe strangely similar to the original - things are doubled by their own scenario. But this doubling does not signify, as it did traditionally, the imminence of their death – they are already purged of their death.

(Baudrillard, 1994: 11)

In Baudrillard's case death becomes unintelligible through a process of simulation, which blurs the boundaries between the real and the imaginary, proliferating the 'vast inaccessible reality' that is Debord's society of the spectacle (n.d.: 5). Consider here, as an example, Facebook profiles which portray an interpretation of an individual through the archiving of photographs and events, existing without the immanence of death. Moreover, Facebook accounts often remain active following the death of the user allowing for Facebook friends to view the page and post thoughts, prayers and words of condolence as they wish. Consequently, the deceased's Facebook profile becomes an active memorial of sorts. The result of these contemporary, Western conceptions of death would be to suggest that it ceases to be at the forefront of our awareness and, consequently, we live without a sense of our finitude and its accompanying potential to answer for the trajectory of our existence (Guignon, 2006: 282).

These arguments on the incomprehensibility of death, however, fail to consider the idea that death's persistent imminence may actually be the reason for our desire to seek a sense of significance to life. Death may be hidden out of the way of our daily lives and experienced at a sense of remove, as Ariès argues in relation to old people's homes and funeral homes, but that is not to say that death is absent. Rather, one might argue that death is an absent presence burdening us with

the need to achieve a sense of significance since our existence is finite. In other words, we attempt to do as much as possible to stave off death and make our time count rather than project ourselves towards it. If as Irvin Yalom states, 'our ongoing search for substantial meaning systems often throws us into crises' since our pursuit of meaning is combined with the denial of our personal authorship of this meaning' (2002: 308), then conceiving of death as an absent presence can also explain how individuals become mired in a state of distraction and deny responsibility for leading their lives, limiting the authenticity of their being. The implication here, regardless of whether death has ceased to exist or whether it asserts itself as an unconquerable, impending force, is that there is a need to assert ourselves in the face of death and seize control of our existence.

Guignon, according to Heidegger, makes this point explicit when he states that 'confronted with our being-toward-death, the roles we have been playing suddenly seem anonymous, and we are faced with the demand to own up to our lives' (2006: 282). This statement suggests that the reminder of our finitude allows for an objective and reflective consideration of the life we have led and the life we wish to lead. It is this dynamic that *Unburden* harnessed through Howells' choice to place a time limit of three months on the life of each audience member, before asking how it would affect their actions. In my experience, the question prompted a consideration of the family and friends I would wish to see and the activities I would want to partake in exposing where my loyalties and commitments lay and revealing that which really mattered to me. This experience will have varied for all audience members; but, the point of significance is that *Unburden's* requirement that audience members confront death in an 'as if' scenario asked that they take a stand on the significance of their being and, potentially, make 'a decisive dedication to what [they]

want[ed] to accomplish for [their] lives' (Guignon, 2006: 282). Thus, *Unburden's* confrontation of death established that we are what we make of ourselves, whether we give conscious consideration to this process or not, urging our assumption of responsibility.

The ensuing improvisatory, dialogic exchange between Adrian and each audience member played a key role in articulating and defining one's sense of self. Adrian responded to audience members' stories with a series of questions that assisted in the creation of a narrative about the course of their lives. Taylor argues that 'being true to myself [...] is something only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it, I am also defining myself. I am realizing a potentiality that is properly my own' (1991: 29). Taylor's statement indicates two points about the dialogic exchange in *Unburden*. Firstly, it demonstrates how the improvisatory encounter provided the opportunity for audience members to grasp their life story as a whole, recognising how one's actions contribute to one's identity – we are what we do. Secondly, it emphasises how *Unburden* formed a part of its audience members' future projections of themselves, through a therapeutic process of articulation. As Gergen states, 'therapy is dedicated to a process of re-storying one's life' with conversation about possible improvements and new alternatives replacing the weight of failure with active planning (2009: 299). *Unburden* required that I acknowledge how my personal relationships were defining the narrative of my life, supporting me, propelling me forward or holding me back. The paradox here is that my freedom to live a life of my choosing required that I acknowledge and come to terms with my relationships with others, supposing the demands that these relationships would place upon me, and negotiate any conflicts of interest. *Unburden*, therefore, brought the temporal and social structure of existence into alignment so that audience

members could ascertain the implications of their past choices to the trajectory of their future in a shared world and set an agenda to adapt or change their choices, if desired, through a process of articulation. Moreover, by prompting audience members to recognise how self-identity is tempered by one's interconnectedness to a world of shared values that transcend the self, *Unburden* challenged the stability of the contemporary, individualistic narrative. As Guignon states, 'imparting narrative structure to a life involves emplotting events along the guidelines of a moral map of aspiration and evaluation that is rooted in the tacit background understanding of our moral heritage' (2006: 289).

Mourning individualism

Adrian gently hands me a glass votive and a tea light and takes one of each for himself. He lights his candle and when I hold mine out, lights mine too. We place our candles in the votives. Each action is carried out carefully and methodically. He then invites me to place my candle anywhere in the room amongst all the others. I notice a rounded corner of the room that has very little light. I walk towards it and set my candle down. This simple action is reverent and reminds me of the times I have lit a candle in church. I think of the hymn This Little Light of Mine.

The lighting and placing of a candle in *Unburden* had strong religious and spiritual overtones. It is often a key aspect of religious prayer and/or mourning, with candlelight vigils offering a show of solidarity in support, mourning, or commemoration of specific causes, tragedies or individuals. *Unburden* drew upon this shared cultural knowledge so that the act of placing a candle marked a finality to the story, wish or prayer that Adrian's dialogue with audience members invited to unfold. The specificity of the experience will have differed for each audience

member. But, for me, the experience allowed me to let go of personal worries and concerns. If, as Ariès states, that ‘the community [has] come to forbid the mourning which it was responsible for imposing’ (1981: 612), this ritualistic act played a key role in providing audience members with a sense of closure, thus, enabling their ability to take an assertive stance on their self-identity in the future.

It is also worth considering this section of the performance in relation to Ariès’ claims that responsibility for the ‘organization of collective life’ has been abandoned in the West since ‘community in the traditional sense of the word no longer exists [but] has been replaced by an enormous mass of atomized individuals’ (1981: 613). *Unburden* went some way towards countering this premise since the placing of a candle established a shared sense of community between me and the other audience members of *Unburden*. This occurred since each candle suggestively symbolised the actions of a previous audience member, whilst harkening to the actions of those to come. In other words, as I performed this act of mourning I unburdened myself, recognised that others had done the same before me and “lit the way” for another. I appreciate that even the first performance of *Unburden* would have taken place in a room full of candles, placed there by Howells, which is why I use the term ‘suggestively’. However, each audience member will be aware that their action is an act shared by everyone who participates in *Unburden*, thereby, creating a sense of relationality. This occurs even for the first audience member of the day who might think of the audience members to follow or audience members in previous performances. The first ever audience member will be the only one not able to think back to audience members from previous performances. However, they will be able to think of those to come, and they may have thought of possible previous performances and audience members if they did not know they were the

first to participate. Thus, despite being in a one-to-one experience I was conscious of being part of a larger audience group with which I felt a shared sense of community, and I would conjure that this was the case for other audience members too.

The point of significance here relates to the politics of one-to-one performance and the scrutiny it has received for promoting an individualistic culture; as discussed in the introduction to this chapter. Howells even stated, 'I'm concerned that by doing one-to-one shows I might be encouraging individualism' (in Mansfield, 2010). The relationship between one-to-one performances and individualism arises in relation to the idea that the audience member buys into a unique performance experience that gives access to alone time with the performer. The improvisatory characteristics of one-to-one performances can, therefore, been seen to provide a unique performance experience for the audience member, which temporarily affirms their significance through a narcissistic focus on the self. As Alston states in relation to immersive theatre:

Attention tends to be turned inwards, towards the experiencing self, accompanied by a persistent reaching towards a maximization of experience, underscoring the indulgent meaningfulness of that "special complicity" [...] In sum, immersive theatre is about *experience*.

(Alston, 2013: 130 original emphasis)

This interpretation of immersive theatre negates the possibility that the one-to-one format might be used to advance the relationship between the self and the collective organisation of social life, resulting in an inauthentic state of being. As Guignon states, 'being authentic is not just a matter of concentrating on one's own self, but

also involves deliberation about how one's commitments make a contribution to the good of the public world in which one is a participant' (2004: 163). However, *Unburden's* references to other audience members – as symbolised through the use of candles, and to others in one's personal sphere – as discussed in the dialogic section of the performance, challenged this presupposition demonstrating the potential for one-to-one performance to promote the idea of relational responsibility and counter the narcissistic focus on the self. *Unburden* reinforced this point through a shared, ritualistic act in the second half of the performance, which acted as a therapeutic 'carry-over'. Gergen describes this process as one in which 'the client and therapist [in this case Adrian and the audience member] negotiate a new form of self-understanding that [...] contribute[s] to relational recovery outside the therapy room' (2009: 300 original emphasis). Specifically, *Unburden's* ritualistic act instilled a sense of responsibility in audience members referencing their potential to contribute to the development of a shared "we" world through the practice of universal love. (Heidegger in Guignon, 2006: 288).

Communing with others

Adrian reads from a cue card: 'even one trace of condemnation against ourselves, or others, is a trace of condemnation against the Universal creation of Love, and restricts us, limits our powers to allow the Universal Love to flow through us to Others'. He sets the card down, raises a bottle of pine Bach remedy to my eye line and continues with the following: 'the positive aspect of pine is seen in those who acknowledge their faults but do not spend time dwelling on them. In a positive state we are willing to take responsibility and bare the burdens of others if it will truly help them but have the wisdom to know that this is not always the best way of helping'.

Adrian then carefully prepares two drinks containing three drops of remedy. We toast, drink and hug and I gather myself to enter the hubbub of the BAC once more.

The drinking of the remedy was, both, a toast to the future as well as an act of communion. Christian communion is typically a time when one examines the self individually, whilst also partaking in a ritual act that creates a communal body. This occurs through the sharing of bread, or paper wafers, and through drinking from a shared cup of wine. The Bible states, 'because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf' and 'a man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup' (1 Corinthians 10: 17 & 11: 28, New International Version). This overview is to simplify the act of communion but since it is designed to create the idea of 'one body', a collective of individuals, my drinking in tandem with Adrian, following my consideration of the finitude of existence and surrounded by the plethora of candles, reinforced the idea that I was part of a larger collective body, all of whom had made a shared toast and commitment to a future defined by the practice of universal love. The drinking of the remedy, therefore, embedded the relational connection between myself and Adrian, as well as *Unburden's* previous and future audience members who performed the same act, making my actions resonate with a greater sense of significance as I pondered if my fellow audience members would carry this moment with them beyond the performance space as I knew I would.

The qualities that ingesting the pine remedy aimed to promote tallied clearly with the role Howells played in the performance as Adrian allowing audience members to offload their burdens. This was a selfless deed that affirmed each

audience member's experiences through the act of listening.¹⁰⁶ Throughout the experience Adrian offered no conversation about himself instead focusing on asking questions of audience members. Gergen refers to this experience as a therapeutic process that 'removes plaguing doubts' about one's sense of significance and facilitates a state of relationality between the client and therapist (2009: 288). In other words, Adrian led by example in his demonstration of universal love providing guidance for the conduct of one's own life and demonstrating how our embeddedness in the world amongst others 'operate[s] within the range of possibilities opened up by this background of shared intelligibility' (Guignon, 2006: 288).¹⁰⁷ Audience members were then invited to internalise the guidance Adrian offered through the act of toasting and drinking, provocatively creating the idea that they would leave the performance equipped to utilise Adrian's practice of universal love and go forth and nurture others. Howells affirmed this point when he stated, 'I'm looking for these opportunities all the time for people to have community with one another; for people to have opportunities to nurture themselves and each other' (in Machon, 2013: 261). Consequently, although this act of communion took place on an individual basis with Adrian, *Unburden* opened up the possibility for personal and social transformation to occur within and beyond the theatre space through a literal and metaphorical internalising of relational responsibility. This transmission of the performances principles beyond the performance space was reinforced at the end of *Unburden* through a process of reflection.

¹⁰⁶ This dynamic differs from much of Howells' other performance work. As his female persona Adrienne, Howells often invited audience members to share information with him, but did so by sharing his own stories in return, and much of Howells' other one-to-one performance work involved silence and touching. *Unburden* moved away from the use of touch and Howells' sharing of autobiographical information to focus entirely on the audience member.

¹⁰⁷ Prior to attending the performance I had never met Adrian, to whom I was a stranger. On leaving the performance I felt as if we were more than strangers having shared an intimate experience; yet, I was no more a friend of Adrian's than before I entered. In this sense, I was an anonymous other to Adrian and yet he shouldered my burdens for me, thereby, providing an example of how I might relate to anonymous others outside my immediate, personal sphere and the sphere of the performance.

Ritual and reflection: Committing to a shared life world

Will greeted me silently when I entered the BAC's main hall. He held open the box of my valuables and waited for me to gather my belongings. He then led me on a circuitous route to the stairs on the opposite side of those I ascended. Half-way down he invited me to take a seat and spend some time reflecting on my experience, if I wished. He pulled a book from the book shelf. It contained comments and feedback others who had participated in Unburden had left. He told me that I could take as much or as little time with the book as I wanted and add my own reflection if I desired. Then he bid me goodbye.

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Figure 17: The split stairway in the Battersea Arts Centre. Audience members began the performance by splitting to the right and ended the performance by crossing the balcony and descending down the left hand side (The London Salon, 2013).

Unburden literally moved in a full-circle, via its circuitous walking route through the BAC, and metaphorically moved in a full-circle in the way it consciously

asked audience members to reflect on how it fed in and out of their day-to-day existence. If, as Victor Turner states, performance ‘is both “living through” and “thinking back.” It is also “willing or wishing forward,” i.e., establishing goals and models for future experience in which, hopefully, the errors and perils of past experience will be avoided or eliminated’ (1982: 18), this structure played a core role in informing its audience members’ actions beyond the theatre space.

Turner’s cyclical process of rites of passage exemplifies this point. Turner describes the process as follows:

The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a “state”), or from both. During the intervening “liminal” period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the “passenger”) are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or the coming state. In the third phase (aggregation or reincorporation), the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a relatively stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations vis-à-vis others.

(1995: 94-95)

Turner’s discussion of the three-part structure of rites of passage mirrors the three part structure of *Unburden*. As outlined in the course of this analysis, at the beginning of the performance I was mired in an inauthentic state of being caught up with the trivialities of daily life. The middle section of *Unburden* provided a time-out from this state, acting as a liminal space. Here my self-identity was in a state of flux as I self-consciously reflected upon and articulated it in the face of death. My re-

entry into the BAC marked Turner's third phase, reincorporation, committing me to a contract with myself and others, through the acts of reading and writing, about living with a sense of purpose and responsibility. As Gillie Bolton states in relation to writing therapy, 'writing can also be an unparalleled form of communication [...] Clients do not always need to be listened to by another; they can – to an extent – listen to themselves and work on their own understandings' (2004: 1).

Consequently, one could argue that *Unburden's* circuitous temporality offered an artistic and ritualistic form that equipped audience members with an understanding of their relational being and agency within the shared life world to stimulate a process of authentic self focusing that had the potential to effect change beyond the performance space. As Guignon states, 'authentic Dasein "remembers" its rootedness in the wider unfolding of its culture, and it experiences life as indebted to the larger drama of a shared history' (2006: 287).

I acknowledge that the performance was not a rite of passage that offers a consistent, transitional stage in life for all individuals – an important aspect in the discussion of many rites of passage such as birth and death. I also appreciate that this is a large claim and that not all audience members participating in the performance will have undertaken, or needed to undertake, a process of self-transformation in line with Adrian's promotion of universal love. However, considering that the performance was marketed as a 'non-judgemental' environment for unburdening oneself, there is a sense that those attending the performance would have been open to its therapeutic and transformative potential. Certainly this was apparent in the range of testimonies by other audience members that I viewed in the comments book at the end of *Unburden*. Most of these comments offered

experiences akin to my own, opening up a dialogue between myself and my experience of the performance and the experiences of other audience members.

Summary

In conclusion, *Unburden* suggested that there is a perceived lack of interpersonal connection within the world as a consequence of the increasing technologization of everyday life. It is for this reason that Howells 'prioritized interpersonal connectedness' in his performance work, and *Unburden* is no exception (Howells & Heddon, 2011: 2). However, this point raises the concern that *Unburden* acted only as a temporary, therapeutic respite to the perceived social atomism of contemporary society allowing audience members to return to their daily lives unchanged but rejuvenated to deal with this lack of connection anew. However, throughout this analysis, I have argued that *Unburden* played a role in shaping society more widely through a process of authentic self-focusing, or being towards death. This process aimed to develop reflective, responsible individual's conscious of the possibilities open to them for re-embodying their being and clear-sightedly directing the issues at play in their own lives. This process was based on an improvisatory, ritualistic structure that resulted in the destabilisation and reformation of one's sense of self, influenced by Adrian's generous demonstration of his universal love for others and the inherent interconnectedness of existence. If, as Guignon states, authenticity involves a consideration of 'questions about the kinds of relationships that will foster and strengthen a free society', *Unburden* acted as a catalyst to problematize the social atomism of contemporary society and encourage its audience members to assume a sense of social responsibility (2004: 161). In the wake of Howells' tragic suicide, which occurred only four months after the BAC production of *Unburden*, this premise becomes more pertinent urging us to live more

authentically amongst one another, seize control of our futures and develop a shared “we” world that we can all imagine being a part of (Heidegger in Guignon, 2006: 288).¹⁰⁸

Later as I run for a train, caught up again in the distracting pace of city life, I discover a cue card in my coat pocket containing the words of Edward Bach. It reminds me of Unburden: the smell of pine, the warm, soft glow of the candles and my discovery of what is important in life. It provides me with a surprising and welcome moment of calm, happiness and perspective amidst the maelstrom of the city.

¹⁰⁸ Howells' suicide occurred 16th March 2014. Howells had made one previous suicide attempt many years prior, and had in later years received therapy for his battle with depression; a point he shared openly in his performance *Adrienne: The Great Depression* (2004) (Howells, 2005: n.p.). Howells frequently spoke of his desire to create performances that could offer mutually nourishing experiences to counter the isolating, alienation of contemporary society, raising questions about whether this lack led to his suicide. He stated, 'my motivation is often how can I best create experiences that are, above all, mutually nourishing and nurturing for both myself and the audience-participant' (in Zerihan et al., 2009: 35).

Chapter Three: Conclusion

‘Human beings become who we “are” by continuously “being who we are not”’

(Newman & Holzman, 1997: 110)

Chapter three has focused on a discussion of immersive, participatory performance practices, their progressive socio-political potentials and ability to allow audience members to engage in an embodied process of debate regarding the identity of the shared political community. The chapter has challenged Alston’s suggestion that immersive performances only offer outlets for audience members to pursue their self-fulfilment, thereby bolstering the individualism propounded by the neoliberal ideology, with the aim of adding to the critical debates on the form. The chapter has analysed the themes the performances explored, their dramaturgical structures and the practitioners’ motivations for creating them arguing that the case-studies offered developmental learning processes, and produced a relational mode of living together, defined by a continual process of call and response between self and other. As Newman and Holzman state, ‘to learn anything developmental, we have to create something together’ (Newman & Holzman (1997: 129). This stance recognised that immersive theatre practices can support the individualistic hegemony and reinforce personal prejudices. However, it also highlighted how immersive theatre is being utilised to encourage audience members to find a sense of significance in their personal and social assumption of responsibility and their agency to assume their citizenship obligations and take action within and outside the theatre space. As John Shotter states, in coordinating social activities individuals can produce ‘a particular social order, as well as a corresponding psychological make-up in themselves’ (1993: 125).

I acknowledge that each of the performances discussed did offer a focus on the individual, and recognise that my decision to attend these performances was self-fulfilling: In *Re-Enactments* I wanted to act; in *Walking: Holding* I had a desire to hold hands with another; and in *Unburden* I wanted to intimately converse. However, I also wanted to share these experiences with other people and was profoundly affected to question my personal politics and the extent to which my actions grant and/or deny the democratic freedoms of others as a result. Thus, while my initial desire to attend the performances was based, in part, on an individualistic pursuit of self-fulfilment, this achievement was far from the defining factor of my experience when I walked away from each performance, as I hope these case-study analyses have demonstrated.

The uniqueness of the case-studies included in this chapter was centred on their creation of individualised, 'as if' performance experiences for audience members to inhabit, positing them both within and at a distance from the performances. This process allowed audience members to temporarily experience being other to themselves emphasising how the self comes into existence through, and sometimes at the expense of, others. If, as Shotter states, citizenship is about providing 'a new way for people to attempt to discover who they are, or might be, in terms of how they might re-interrelate themselves with each other' (1993: 115), these 'as if' aspects of the case-studies fulfilled a citizenship function by positioning audience members in wider social contexts that invited moments of confrontation and created bonded allegiances in which one's obligations to others could be rooted. In my experience, this process played an integral role in encouraging me to sympathise with the perspectives the performances offered, recognise the ways I reinforce the marginalization of others and make a commitment to participate in the

public sphere with a sense of generosity. And even audience members unsympathetic to the politics the performances espoused and any who refused to participate acted out their citizenship obligations by embodying a conflictual stance necessary for the creation of on-going dialogue about how the political community ought to be characterised. As Little states, 'community manifests itself in radical democratic theory in terms of opening up political spaces for contestatory dialogue and debate' (2002: 380). Overall, the case-studies demonstrated the necessity of recognising the obligations we have to others and the need for equal recognition in the interests of creating and sustaining a world that allows for the development of the shared freedoms of all. As Taylor states, 'if realising our freedom partly depends on the society and culture in which we live, then we exercise a fuller freedom if we can help determine the shape of this society and culture' (1992: 47). Thus, contra dominant discourse, the case-studies employed the immersive form and the 'as if' experience to challenge the individualistic narrative and, potentially, expand the perceptions of audience members consciously seeking out such performance practices for self-gratifying ends.

Re-Enactments utilised the contrivance of the immersive form to invite its ensemble of audience members to explore the repercussions of pursuing a fantastical reality and the consequences of living within an alienated society of spectacle. *Re-Enactments* demonstrated how centring on oneself flattens one's sense of significance, providing audience members with the opportunity to work through the 'psychic trauma of living' that constitutes our individualistic, contemporary narrative (Duggan, 2012: 56). *Walking: Holding* acted as a quantifiable act of political resistance to the heteronormative dominant of Leith's city space, demonstrating how 'the micro-level of individual shows and the macro-level of

the socio-political order might somehow productively interact' (Kershaw, 1992: 1). The performance's political potential was premised upon a relationship between care, confrontation and responsibility, which posited audience members in scenarios that aimed to advance the freedoms and equalities of socially excluded individuals and, in the performance I attended, facilitated opportunities for democratic debate and difference to come to the fore. *Unburden (Saying the Unsaid)* facilitated a process of authentic self-focusing for its audience members, encouraging them to assume responsibility for oneself and others through a nurturing and affirming dialogic exchange. This process allowed each audience member to take hold of their existence, acknowledge the commitments that define the self and take their place in a shared 'responsibilized' community. If, as Newman and Holzman state, 'it is through performance – that is, doing what is beyond us (if only for a moment) – that [...] we (learn to) do the varied things we don't know how to do' (1997: 129), the case-studies discussed in this chapter did not just act as a rehearsal for how one might assume a sense of personal and social responsibility, or endorse the idea that immersive performance offers only an escape from one's daily life. Rather, they in and of themselves played a developmental role in contributing to the transformation of the contemporary, individualistic narrative by creating communities of individuals embodying a relational mode of existence, if only for the duration of the performances.

The findings in this chapter are characteristic of a much wider range of immersive theatre performance practices, as was the case with the conclusions reached in Chapter Two. I hereby conclude with a brief, and by no means exhaustive, list of some of these performances should the reader wish to consider the arguments in this chapter further: Ontroerend Goed's *The Smile off Your Face*, II

Pixel Rosso's (2013) *The Great Spavaldos*, Lundahl and Seitz's (2009) *Symphony of a Missing Room: Archive of The Forgotten Remembered* and Sarah Jane Norman's (2007) *Rest Area*. If, as Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort state, by way of Baudrillard, 'joint production through genuine interaction. In this [...] lies the true potential for change – in the refusal to accept a model of producers and consumers, even one in which these positions can be reversed' (2003: 277), these co-created performances also all play a part in performing a relational understanding of personal and societal identity into existence and open out the possibilities for political debate to arise, thereby, contributing to the egalitarian development of capitalist democracy.

Conclusion

This thesis employed close performance analysis to explore how participatory performance is questioning what it means to participate in capitalist democracy and problematizing the relationship between neoliberal individualism and identity. It also considered the extent to which participatory performances might be contributing and responding to the on-going crisis of capitalist democracy ahead of the 2015 General Election. To do so, and as a consequence of variances in theme and content across the case-studies analysed, it drew on expertise from a range of disciplines. These included scholars in the fields of theatre and performance, sociology, psychology and political theory and philosophy. The participatory performances discussed throughout the thesis co-opted the neoliberal preoccupation with the individual in the interests of exposing the problematic inequalities endorsed by the neoliberal agenda and the superficiality of pursuing success for its own sake. The chapters evidenced the possibility of re-conceiving of the individualistic, self-serving, instrumentalist concept of identity propounded by the neoliberal ideology; exposed the ways citizens are habituated to participate, enhancing their freedoms for thinking about how, and if, they might choose to act differently; and demonstrated how countering the individualistic aspects of the neoliberal hegemony requires co-operation with others and the co-creation of meaning. Contra the dominant discourse, I, thus, argued that the participatory performances discussed used artistic and cultural means to create political communities of individuals capable of contributing to the on-going development of capitalist democracy. As Al Campbell states, 'humans are both shaped by the institutions that they are part of and the human relations these represent, and [...] these institutions and relations are shaped by the socially conditioned nature of the humans that are part of them' (2012: 21).

Capitalist democracy and freedom to choose

The introduction to the thesis situated the case-studies discussed within a theoretical framework that argued for the possibility of advancing a more socially responsible version of capitalist democracy rather than conceiving of a radically alternative socio-political order. It also departed from the perspective that the act of consumption has become the defining characteristic of citizenship in capitalist democracy, providing an outlet for the presentation and assertion of one's individualised identity and the expression of ideological choice and political preference. As Nikolas Rose states, citizenship is 'active and individualistic [...] manifest through the free exercise of personal choice' in 'acts of consumption and pleasure' (1998: 165). The point of significance here is that the dominance of the neoliberal agenda within capitalist democracy diverts citizens away from acts of participation that might change the ideological conditions of their existence. As Slavoj Žižek states, the problem 'is that we are forced to choose without having at our disposal the kind of knowledge that would enable us to make a proper choice' (2011: 360). The case-studies herein discussed challenged this perspective by co-opting and subverting the aspirational and individualistic concept of identity endorsed by the neoliberal ideology to counter its specularly, defamiliarise structural limitations to citizen empowerment and thematise the issue of participatory citizenship. This use of the hegemonic, individualistic stance ensured the theatre-makers' endeavours to engage with wider questions about participation, social responsibility, community and democracy in neoliberal capitalism remained intelligible, whilst also bringing audience members to a point of critical consciousness about how one's significance and agency can exist only within a

horizon of possible choices for self-definition not limited by, or to, the dominant ideology.

The emphasis in the case-studies on reconceiving of the individualistic aspects of the neoliberal ideology conformed to central-leftist political territory. In *The Democratic Paradox* Chantal Mouffe argues that a radical, democratic project cannot be located in central politics, suggesting that the case-studies lack any significant progressive potential for contributing to the rebalancing of capitalist democracy. Mouffe states, 'radical politics cannot be located at the centre because to be radical – as Margaret Thatcher, unlike Tony Blair, very well knew – is to aim at a profound transformation of power relations. This cannot be done without drawing political frontiers and defining an adversary or even an enemy' (2000: 121). Yet, the socially responsible concept of identity that the case-studies advocated across the thesis did offer an alternative to the individualistic, neoliberal hegemony and recognised the need for existing structures of power and authority to be challenged. I would, therefore, argue that the approach taken by the case-studies actually reflected the lack of viable political alternatives Mouffe calls for, highlighted the need for their development and endeavoured to consider how reconceiving of social relationships might play a part in contributing to this radical project from within the limitations of the neoliberal hegemony.

All of the performances occurred in, or associated with, theatre venues. The performances, therefore, played to those with the social, educational, cultural and economic capital to attend the theatre, which features on their social radar. It is also likely that the case-studies attracted those with political perspectives that aligned with the premise of the performances, as a consequence of marketing materials that sought out interested parties. However, despite my ability to attend, my interest in

and sympathies with the questions the performances explored, and although I think of myself as a left-wing individual who desires a fair and egalitarian socio-political order, my acts of participation shamed me into realising that I still endorse the democratically limited aspects of capitalist democracy. As Žižek states 'we are facing the shameless cynicism of the existing global order whose agents only imagine that they believe in their ideas of democracy, human rights, etc.' (2011: 410). This point is not meant to discourage the idea that the performances could engage with challenging the growing social inequalities propounded by the neoliberal ideology by reaching out to wider communities of individuals. But simply make the point that the performances were of necessary significance to the limited audiences they addressed. Moreover, by challenging those with the capital to choose to participate and consider the issue of social citizenship, the performances played to those who benefit from the spoils of neoliberal capitalism and may therefore need to recognise what their actions grant or deny others in the interests of a more democratic version of capitalist democracy being advanced. Of course, this possibility relies on the assumption that increased knowledge will result in more socially responsible and democratic behaviours, whereas Žižek above points to the ease with which such responsibilities can be ignored. But, regardless of whether audience members assume this sense of responsibility or not, the performances still acted as useful catalysts for defamiliarising the need for change in the hope of prompting audience members to choose to act differently.

The chapters across the thesis offered varying interpretations about how capitalist democracy might be rebalanced and how citizens might assume their participatory agency. Chapter One advocated the political potential for the individual to effect change on a personal and local level producing the idea that contributing to

social change is an easy and enjoyable task that all are capable of. Chapter Two's case-studies invited participatory explorations from audience members about how the relationship between the individual and collective might be negotiated to find one's political agency. Chapter Two problematized the possibility of change highlighting the difficult structural challenges that must be surmounted if the inequitable aspects of capitalist democracy are to be advanced, whilst also suggesting that socio-political transformation can only occur through slow incremental losses and gains. Chapter Three's case-studies conversely foregrounded the primacy of relationships over the individualistic stance, suggesting that a more democratic version of democracy might be best advanced by essentialised communities of individuals capable of offering united perspectives dissonant to the status quo. The differing stances taken highlight the value of the performances to on-going considerations regarding how capitalist democracy might be rebalanced. However, all of the case-studies also emphasised the need for participatory citizenship to be founded between the individual and the collective since individual liberty is only rendered possible by the freedoms advanced to all within the political community. As Mouffe states:

Citizenship is not just one identity among others – as in liberalism – or the dominant identity that overrides all others – as in civic republicanism. It is an articulating principle that affects the different subject positions of the social agent [...] while allowing for a plurality of specific allegiances and for the respect of individual liberty.

(1991: 79)

Thus, despite their differing approaches, the case-studies across the thesis were united in their shared recognition of the relationship between the individual and the collective, self and other. They all also offered perspectives dissonant to the status quo in the interests of contributing to democratic debate and advancing the liberties and equalities of all.

Participatory affects: Real feelings and feeling real

Mouffe's concept of radical democratic citizenship has been indispensable to this thesis. However, Mouffe fails to address how individuals might be motivated to recognise and assume their citizenship obligations. In *Citizenship, Markets and the State*, Crouch, Klaus Eder and Damian Tambini indicate that the central dilemma regarding political citizenship focuses on the need to mobilise moral feelings. They state, 'political citizenship, in contrast to markets, conceives of members of a society as political beings, as morally responsible for their community, for the *res publica*' (2011: 12). The publication is primarily focused on problematizing how participatory political institutions might be realised. But, the case-studies analysed throughout this thesis also assumed the task of considering how individuals might be motivated to contribute to the moral resources of society. The case-studies advanced this possibility by showcasing the personal endeavours of their theatre-makers to advertise the individual's ability to effect change, however minor; using the containment of the theatre space to confront audience members with the motivations and consequences of their actions; and asking audience members to work through and embody their obligations to others. This range of performance practices used the act of participation to elicit emotional bonding, public spiritedness, antagonism and provocation. This process negotiated a precarious balance that was not without its ethically problematic elements but was designed to encourage audience

members to emotionally invest in the performances, buoying and confronting them with their response-ability to the wider political community and, in chapters Two and Three, allowing them to experience what it feels like to act out one's citizenship obligations. As James Thompson states:

It is the feelings that flow between people as they share space: sensations that exist in one body as a result of the care (or animosity) it feels for the other. And the unfathomable aspect of a person (and of that feeling) multiplies the depths of the responsibility I have towards him or her.

(2009: 162-163)

Thus, the emphasis across the case-studies was on using the act of participation to motivate audience members to assume and exercise their citizenship obligations, acting as alternative platforms for founding and supporting choices dissonant to the status quo and supplementing salient considerations about how the moralising of political participation at an institutional level might be advanced.

This point raises an interesting antecedent area for further research and development. In the field of theatre and performance the potential for provocative and/or antagonistic performance practices to provoke response is well theorised.¹⁰⁹ However, the entertaining and enjoyable aspects of the case-studies advance arguments surrounding the concept of entertainment, which is typically associated with anti-serious fun and a shallow form of escapism lacking any edifying qualities.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ This process has been charted throughout the twentieth-century, ranging from the riots at the beginning of the century at the Abbey Theatre's production of *Playboy of the Western World*, to the 'in-er-face' theatre of the nineties. Aleks Sierz's publication *In Yer-face Theatre: British Drama Today* offers a useful introductory overview of theatrical provocation in the twentieth-century, before focusing on artists producing provocative work in the nineties.

¹¹⁰ I appreciate that 'entertainment' is a loose term, and I use it here loosely with reference to my discussion of the playfulness and humour of the performances discussed, as well as their interesting, insightful, charming, fun and exciting moments. I ask for the readers indulgence with the sense of

As Richard Dyer explains, 'because part of its [entertainment's] meaning is anti-seriousness, against coming on heavy about things. It still perhaps carries a guilty conscience. It rejects the claims of morality, politics and aesthetics in a culture which still accords these high status' (Dyer, 1992: 2). Dyer also emphasises how those publications which have endeavoured to elevate entertainment's status usually acknowledge its presence only to continue to state that these art forms also do something else. Put simply, he argues that entertainment is merely considered as the 'sugar on the pill of ideological messages' (Dyer, 1992: 1). Contrastingly, enjoyable entertainment was a core aspect of the political potential of the performances discussed since it sensitised and motivated audience members to the idea of obliging others. The case-studies, thus, evidenced how enjoyably entertaining performance is an integral accompaniment to provocation for fostering emotional connections that might allow individuals to advance their participatory agency and prevent them from shirking their social citizenship obligations and responsibilities to others in a hyper-individualised world.

To a certain degree, this claim is bolstered by a 2014 AHRC funded report on theatre spectatorship and value, which detailed tentative findings about the inter-relatedness of entertainment and critically reflective 'thought provoking' responses (Reinelt et al., n.d.: 35). The report, which surveyed theatre-goers, did not suggest that entertainment is capable of fostering enthusiasm for responding to others, but it did challenge the idea that entertainment has no significant aesthetic or cognitive value. In summary, on the value of entertainment, the report concluded:

entertainment here referred to recognising that it is an area and term that requires further research and clarification.

For most theatregoers in our sample, “entertainment” is a term that does not initially imply superficiality or escapism and those who report looking for entertainment also consider it compatible with thinking and other cognitive values. However, there is also evidence that over time entertainment becomes slowly separated out from other values and may even be seen as antithetical to them. This may be a *post facto* rationalization or it may mean that entertainment is more compatible with the immediate values of a performance than with those released two months later.

(Reinelt et al., n.d.: 37 original emphasis)

The point of significance here is that entertainment is an area ripe for further research, which might clarify its significance in performance and the potential it has, or not, to foster emotional connections.

Throughout the thesis I also raised concerns about whether the framed reality of the theatre experience limited the political potential of the performances. However, the case-studies offset this limitation to a certain degree by inviting ‘irruption[s] of the real’ into the theatre space (Lehmann, 2006: 99), creating “grey” zones of indistinction’ between art and life (Lehmann, 2013: 100). In Chapter One performers brought their ‘real’ experiences outside the theatre space in, and in Chapters Two and Three the ‘real-world’ experiences of the audience members and performers played an integral role in the creation of the performances. This approach invited audience members to engage with a consciousness of the reality of the issues presented and worked through, alongside their processes of ‘aesthetic appreciation’ (Lehmann, 2013: 100). This oscillation between ‘aesthetic make-belief’ and ‘real actuality’ troubled the unreality of the performance encounters to invite

reactions that were to some degree real (Lehmann, 2013: 99). This process created ambiguity around the idea that the performances offered safely contained, non-consequential experiences, necessitating response and playing a core role in enhancing the ethico-political potential of the performances and the urgency of their appeals to audience members. As Lehmann states, a precondition of the political in the theatre requires 'the momentous undermining of key certainties: about whether we are spectators or participants; whether we perceive or are confronted with perceptions that function "as if" or for real' (2013: 99). The implication here is that the political efficacy of participatory performance is magnified by the extent to which it becomes part of the embodied, lived experience of audience members and performers, rather than being experienced as separate to the self and daily life beyond the performance event. As Thompson states, 'understanding and meaning arise from the struggle that takes place in interactions on the ground' with participatory performance acting as an 'open means for the discovery of the impact of a full range of social processes and conditions' (2003: 148).

Future alternatives: An on-going process

The case-studies added to the development of current critical debates in the field of participatory performance. The dominant discourse on participation in contemporary theatre and performance practices argues that 'good' modes of participation allow a democratic process of exchange between performer and audience member and 'bad' modes of participation do not, negating the ethical relationship between self and other and offering audience members only limited choices imposed by the theatre maker. There are also concerns about the extent to which participatory performance bolsters the neoliberal experience economy by limiting equal participatory opportunity, producing only individualistic and self-seeking

consumers, duplicitously offering only highly standardised aesthetics disguised as bespoke experiences and through its co-option by commerce. These arguments are salient and some of these points have been critiqued in the performances discussed. However, the case-studies analysed highlighted how participatory performance is also being used to challenge the individualistic aspects of the neoliberal hegemony; thematise the issues of identity politics and participatory citizenship; limit the democratic exchange between performers and audience members in the interests of questioning the legitimacy of the institutions of capitalist democracy and thematising the limitations to citizen freedoms both within and outside the theatre space; and act as platforms for allowing dissonant voices to come to the fore and challenge the status quo. Thus, contra the arguments in the dominant discourse, the case-studies exploited the inequalities and ambiguities of the participatory form to engage with the difficult realities of effecting change from within the neoliberal version of capitalist democracy. This stance also indirectly highlights how the idealistic, egalitarian modes of exchange that the academy advocates would offer only a temporary respite from the symptomatic inequalities of the current socio-political milieu, imposing unrealistic and authoritarian notions about 'good' and 'bad' modes of participation despite critiquing these very practices amongst theatre makers.

As a whole, the participatory acts considered throughout the thesis destabilised the fixity of identity, exposed one's motivations for acting, or not, and posited audience members in dialogic and kinaesthetic explorations that allowed them to work through their obligations to others and contribute to the evolution of self and society. As Fred Newman and Lois Holzman state "performing is a way of taking "who we are" and creating something new', 'to create other responses [...] to produce something new, to develop' (1997: 129). This approach tested the values of

performers and audience members in participatory encounters that required them to face up to the potential and actual consequences of acting in shared public spaces. This occurred in relation to new situations, diverse topics and unknown others pointing to the basic understanding that the rights and freedoms of all individuals are dependent on networks of social relations. This process encouraged a shared recognition of our common humanity, and countered instrumentalist considerations of using others as a means to self-gain, in the hope of creating a more egalitarian socio-political order premised on finding one's sense of significance outside the self. The performances, thus, nuanced the hegemonic, individualistic narrative by inviting audience members to conceive of the individual as an entity in dialogue with the communities to which one belongs. An understanding of the individual as individuated but not necessarily individualistic in one's behaviour offers a more apt indication of the relationship advanced between self and other in the case-studies discussed throughout this thesis. As Peter Flemming states:

The truth of oneself – may also be derived from a dialogical recognition that allows one to speak in a socio-political setting frequently defined by injustice. This theorisation does not subsume the self into a social body, but nurtures one's truth of being in a community of mutual awareness and respect (solidarity).

(2009: 148-149)

The performances discussed across the thesis also de-legitimised the power of the neoliberal ideology over the individual by mobilizing audience members to recognise how they might do politics beyond the realm of representational democracy, conforming to a post-democratic stance. None of the performances

offered definitive answers or a fixed sense of truth about how the individualistic aspects of the capitalist hegemony might be subverted. Rather, the case-studies offered open-ended and process-based participatory performance encounters that provided suggestions, defamiliarised problems to be addressed and required co-constituted acts of creation encouraging on-going, collaborative considerations about how we might reconceive of the identity of, and identities within, capitalist democracy. This exploration was prompted within each individual audience member, rather than being thematised in the performances themselves, enhancing the possibility for change to occur by creating communities of individuals all thinking about how and whether to define themselves alternatively to the individualistic tradition. I, thus, argue that the case-studies conceived of a form of political activity that eliminates knowing, outcome and end result and empowers audience members to do politics on a daily basis in their everyday lives through the values they express and the actions and they choose to take or not; rather than conceding their political agency solely to their democratic representatives. As Newman and Holzman state, 'to move forward we must create new political *activity* which is not rooted in epistemological overdetermined programmatic (Truth and Rightness)' (1997: 100).

Colin Crouch's recognition of the need for citizens to engage in exerting their personal politics outside intermediary governmental politics has been a core aspect of the argument advanced across this thesis. However there has also been an implicit sense that citizen action can only go so far in its ability to rebalance capitalist democracy as a consequence of the pervasive specularity of the neoliberal ideology, the process of self-governing it instils in citizens and the limiting, procedural aspects of governmental politics. This point highlights the imperative for links to be created between citizen action and traditional forms of political intervention in the interests of

advancing change. It also foregrounds the importance of Mouffe's point about the vital need for viable political alternatives to neoliberalism within the political system to ensure democratic debate and limit the growth of support for forms of extremism uninterested in the democratic principles of liberty and equality for all. As Mouffe states, 'too much emphasis on consensus and the refusal of confrontation lead to apathy and disaffection with political participation. Worse still, the result can be a crystallization of collective passions around issues which cannot be managed by the democratic process' (2000: 104). Thus, the progressive political potentials of the performances as a whole can only be ensured by similar explorations amassing across diverse sectors of civil society and at an institutional, political and economic level.

A final reflection

The culmination of the write-up for this thesis coincided with the results of the 2015 General Election and the appointment of a majority Conservative government. This point is worth reflecting on since the result momentarily destabilised my belief in the ability of theatre and performance to imagine alternative socio-political frames of reference, thereby, prompting me to query whether the case-studies had failed in their attempts to counter the marginalisation of social responsibility as endorsed by neoliberal individualism. The election results seemed to suggest that the case-studies, and the social mobilisations I situated them as a part of, had done little to advance a radically more egalitarian socio-political order within the UK, with the majority desiring increasing levels of privatisation, competition, austerity measures and growing inequalities. However, the readiness of this thought was based on a dominant, linear and instrumentalist understanding of change, as characterised by the relationship between cause and effect. And it contrasted with my argument

throughout the thesis that the political potential of the works discussed resided in their commitment to the on-going, processual development of alternative futures. It also conflicted with my suggestion that they contribute to networks of alterity and democratic discontent that can modify the values of the socio-political milieu in subtle ways from within, however marginally. If one conceives of these networks as amassing and enduring on a long-term scale, in similarity to the function of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's rhizome discussed in the introduction of this thesis and analysis of *CLSRM*, then the idea that the results of the General Election might act as the marker that dictates the efficacy of the performances is entirely arbitrary.

It is also worth reflecting on the protests in Cardiff and London, post the announcement of the election results, since they offer a hopeful outlook regarding the creation of a more accountable and egalitarian version of capitalist democracy. The protests called for the Tories to leave office, a move to proportional representation, a hold on further public spending cuts and austerity measures, and placards affirming that citizens would resist the government. The protests were relatively small and isolated to only two areas but they indicate that members of the minority are unwilling to passively accept majority rule. They also foreshadow continued discontent and highlight the prevalence of individuals continuing to exert pressure and do politics through alternative means. The election of a Conservative government might even have prompted new voices to support this counter culture. In any case, the response raises questions about the stability of the Conservative government and the legitimacy of the first past the post political system, enhancing the likelihood that the participatory performances herein discussed, and others like them, might yet prove useful for conceiving of alternative futures and exert some influence over the development of capitalist democracy. The necessity of

recognising this point is that it contains the potential to challenge the defeatist and apathy inducing aspects of the causal model of change, potentially enhance the uptake of civic engagement and the potency of networks of alterity. Put differently, spreading the understanding that direct action and politically certifiable outcomes are not a pre-requisite for meaningful acts of citizen participation, and may in fact be less durable than interweaving actions and voices, might be the key to change. It is the contention of this thesis that the participatory performances discussed form a strand in this mesh of resistance.

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