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Come Closer: Confessions of Intimate Spectators in One to One Performance

*We have licked and plucked the ripe red strawberries held gently
between his fingers, feeling the juice dribble down our chins.*

*We have had our eyes blindfolded and our skin teased with the
seductive caress of her peacock feather.*

*We have pressed our ears against the metal grille to soak up the
secrets of wrong doing.*

'One to One', 'One on One' or 'Audience of One' are all terms used to describe performances that invite one audience member to experience the piece *on their own*. In practical terms, the spectator books a performance slot during which they alone encounter the work. This formal shift in the traditional performer/spectator divide can, quite radically, reallocate the audience's role into one that receives, responds and, to varying degrees restores their part in the shared performance experience. In place of the metaphorical or imaginary dialogism that pertains to all acts of theatre (the spectator is always in some sort of relationship with what is seen), in One to One performance the spectator is actively solicited, engendered as a participant.

Demanding a more explicit and overt relational exchange, performers Adrian Howells, Sam Rose and Martina Von Holn are part of a wider group of UK-

based live artists and performance practitioners including Kira O'Reilly, Franko B and Oreet Ashery who have been drawn to utilising the form in their practices. In the last few years, early career artists can also be seen experimenting with the seemingly intimate at live art festivals and at the Edinburgh International Fringe Festival too. The Battersea Arts Centre in London has now hosted two 'One on One' festivals. Notably, the latest (in April 2011) presents spectators with a number of 'set menus', inviting them to make individual choices of what to see, according to - or framed by - appeals to personal taste: from the 'mind-bending' Menu 1 (for those with 'strong stomachs'), to the 'personal' Menu 2 (which offers a 'spicy main with subtle nostalgia inducing sides').¹ One to One performance is employed as a tool for claiming and proclaiming individuality.

The concurrent popularity of both the One to One form and of digital 'first person' platforms for seemingly intimate displays is surely not coincidental. Both media suggest the possibility of connection and personal encounter via their forms. The intimacy proffered by live performances has previously been framed as 'real', and a deliberate intervention into and resistance to the 'virtual' relationships engineered via digital interfaces such as Facebook and twitter.² Whilst we would not wish to deny the differences that the sharing of time and space make to the phenomenological experience of an encounter between people, nor do we wish to uncritically presume it - or presume a total lack of intimacy in the virtual. What both forms share is a potentially

¹ <http://www.bac.org.uk/whats-on/one-on-one-festival/> [accessed 21 May 2011]

² See Dee Heddon and Adrian Howells, 'From Talking to Silence: A Confessional Journey', *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 97 (Volume 33, Number 1), January 2011, pp. 1-12.

paradoxical promise of sociality through performances of 'self'. Crucial to this discussion, then, are the practices of *exchange* between selves enabled by One to One work. For this reason, we choose to use the term One *to* One.

Jacques Rancière argues in *The Emancipated Spectator* that all spectators are active irrespective of the form of performance being witnessed,³ yet the prevalence of the One to One form and its particular dramaturgical-spectatorial structure prompts interrogation into what it means to be a literally performing spectator. The generic term One to One risks erasing the diversity of ways in which and degrees to which this work actively constructs participant-spectators, engendering different participant-spectator roles and the experiences that arise from playing them. As we suggest, in creating a space within the work for the spectator to become a participant, the perceived value of this form of performance hinges on the seeming authenticity of exchange, on the engendering of a relationship between performer and performer-spectator. This relationship – this performance of the *between one and another* – is intertwined with and inseparable from the sensitive, generous and demanding work of collaboration; collaboration makes the work. Claims of authenticity, though, are tricky to define in an environment of roles and masks, of script and improvisation, of being a performer and playing at being one. As we suggest, alongside the 'parts' created for us by the performers are other habitual, sticky roles, including that of spectator. What is it to collaborate as a spectator? And how does the collaborating spectator evaluate the – and their – performance? What and whose performance are we judging?

³ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London, New York: Verso, 2009).

Whilst arts bloggers and journalists use the Internet as a way of sharing experiences and opening discussion on One to One,⁴ to date only a few detailed discussions have been published on artists' use of this form, perhaps, in part, due to the unappealing yet inescapable subjectivity inherent in such authored works, something we choose to embrace in this dialectic exchange.⁵ The shame of scarce documentation is magnified when one considers the rich variety of One to One works made over the last ten years or so – Howells, Von Holn, Rose as well as O'Reilly, Franko B and Ashery adopt vastly different strategies for making use of such constructed engagements. The decisions of seminal live artists' such as O'Reilly, Franko B and Ashery to work with the form reflects not only its lure for practitioners (as well as spectators), but also says something - still being put into words - about the genre's inclusion of and expansion into the form's possibilities.

⁴ See Lyn Gardner, 'I Didn't Know Where to Look', *The Guardian online*, 25 March 2003, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2005/mar/03/theatre2> [accessed 28 August 2011], Emma Safe, 'Come Into My Parlour' *The Guardian online*, 3 March 2005 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2002/may/25/artsfeatures.books1> [accessed 28 August 2011], Theron Schmidt 'Review: Helen Paris, Vena Amoris, *Writing from Live Art blog*, 24 June 2007, <http://www.liveartuk.org/writingfromliveart/index7e5b.html> [accessed 28 August 2011], Alex Eisenberg 'Becoming a Child or a Lamb? Review of Samantha Sweeting's *La Nourrice: Come Drink From Me My Darling*', *Spill: Overspill*, 12 April 2009, <http://spilloverspill.blogspot.com/2009/05/becoming-child-or-lamb-by-alex.html> [accessed 28 August 2011], Lyn Gardner, 'How Intimate Theatre Won Our Hearts', *The Guardian online*, 11 August 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2009/aug/11/intimate-theatre-edinburgh> [accessed 28 August 2011]

⁵ See Rachel Zerihan 'La Petite Mort: Erotic Encounters in One to One Performance' in *Eroticism and Death in Theatre and Performance*, ed. by Karoline Gritzner, (University of Hertfordshire Press: 2010), Rachel Zerihan 'One to One Performance: A Study Room Guide' for *The Live Art Development Agency*, 2009. Available to download via www.thisisliveart.co.uk/resources/Study_Room/guides/Rachel_Zerihan.html [accessed 28 August 2011], Rachel Zerihan 'Revisiting Catharsis in Contemporary Live Art Practice: Kira O'Reilly's Evocative Skin Works' in *Theatre Research International*, 2009, 35(1), pp.32-42, Deirdre Heddon, *Autobiography and Performance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Helen Paris, 'Too Close for Comfort: One to One Performance', in *Performance and Place*, ed. by Leslie Hill and Helen Paris (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006),

The authors of this article are well-practiced participants in the circuit of exchange and desire that functions as the architecture for One to One performance. Our collective attendance at a symposium, *i confess...* (Glasgow, 2009)⁶, provided a forum for us to participate in the same One to One performances and then to share our experiences of that participation. Practice-as-Research is normally about making performance but, given that One to One is usually participatory, here the practice is located in the experiential processes of reception: PaR becomes SPaR (Spectator-Participation-as-Research). This acronym intentionally signals the relational dynamic embedded in the One to One form, a dynamic - or enfolding - that we unfold here.

The symposium, *i confess...*, was the culminating event of a three year creative arts fellowship held by Adrian Howells at the University of Glasgow (funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council). Howells' research project had practically explored the use of intimacy and risk in solo performance. *i confess ...* afforded the opportunity to invite academic researchers (including Dominic Johnson, Roberta Mock, Helen Iball and Geraldine Harris) and performance practitioners to engage in discussion and debate around the use of intimate and confessional forms in performance. Reflecting on our participation in Howells' *Garden of Adrian*, *Rose's Bed of Roses* and Von Holn's *Seal of Confession*, in this article we individually and collectively explore the shifting dynamics of subject/object, gift/demand,

⁶ *i confess...* was the final event of Adrian Howells' AHRC funded Creative Fellowship, which he had held at the University of Glasgow from 2006-09.

performer/spectator and authenticity/performance, revealing the complexity inherent in playing the role of an intimate spectator. The intimacy of our individual encounters with each of the three practitioners is remembered as at times excruciating and at other times very moving. We begin to recognise here the ways in which these differences map onto acculturated expectations, and relate to personality traits and personal histories.

One to One proposes a dialogic and collaborative encounter, though as our discussion reveals, identifying and claiming the success of those encounters is not straightforward either. Our discussion also strategically staged another dialogic and collaborative encounter as in writing this article we devised a collaborative writing process. We spent four days together in a rented apartment, reflecting on our experiences, allocating writing tasks, reading aloud and sharing our draft writing and then agreeing a structure. In this iteration, we consciously retain both the dialogue and the collaboration that took place between us as we sought to make sense of what had taken place between us and the performers.

Garden of Adrian

Dee Heddon: *In The Garden of Adrian I am led gently and carefully by Adrian through a woman-made garden (designed by Minty Donald), built inside a converted church that is now a theatre. Leading me by my hand, Adrian softly tells me that if there's anything I don't want to do, I shouldn't do it. Over the next hour or*

so, I will place my bare feet into cool soil; gingerly pluck strawberries from Adrian's fingers, letting the juice dribble down my chin; cradle Adrian's head in my lap, holding him like a lover, like a mother; have my hands and arms tenderly washed, each one in turn; and lie on a blanket atop a perfect square of green grass, Adrian spooning into me. Engaging with the five senses, I will travel through childhood reminiscences, prompted by tastes, smells, sounds, and textures. My memories will be re-membered, re-inhabited, re-lived, re-stored, re-storied.

Rachel Zerihan: *My dad, who I would do almost anything for, once tried to tempt me with a freshly picked ripe one on a trip to a 'pick your own' farm when I was a child. I squirmed and whinged until he reluctantly accepted my refusal. More recently my boyfriend brought a punnet of them onto a romantic picnic break. He sought to edge them into an erotic sphere of sensual delight, but my disdain for their hairy skins and mushy middles meant he eventually ate them all, my mouth remaining dry and berry-free. The twenty years or so in-between, I'd even tried to coax myself to eat a whole one yet failed each time, nibbling only a hamster's portion with winced eyes and screwed up-face.*

I don't like strawberries, yet I ate one for Adrian Howells. Moreover, I ate two.

Adrian's welcome hug was warm and inviting and it was a relief to see him after being stuck in the shed so long; a reward, it felt, for my time in isolation. We had not long left the first stage of the journey, the visual feast of looking at a beautiful white flower whilst wriggling fresh earth beneath our feet, when I saw the full punnet waiting for me at the next station. Adrian held my hand as we walked towards the bench and gently led me to take my place.

I don't like strawberries. 'I don't like strawberries' was all I needed to say. He asks me if I like them and I lie, 'yes', though my eyes plead 'no'. Why lie? My will to please has followed me throughout my life, from asking my mother each night whether I had 'been a good girl' and only accepting her affirmation as license to sleep with ease (this lasted for years), to more recent decisions I've made to behave, do good, please others. My role as dutiful spectator in Adrian's garden was led by my desire to please even though he had explicitly told me that I would not have to do anything I felt uncomfortable with shortly after the hug that marked my entrance to the garden space.

The sensation of tasting the strawberry, quite clearly, was intended to be a pleasurable one and I remember trying to fake enjoyment. Like receiving an unwelcome lover, I feigned delight and satisfaction.

One to One performance is an art form that both relishes and can get interrupted by autobiographical fragments. In other art forms this is the case for *reception*. One to One is unusual in that the artist's moments of *production* are inevitably affected by - entwined with - the participant's life experiences and senses of self. In its processes of signification, One to One performance presents as inevitably and unpredictably dirty; it is revealing to consider how readily participants protect the performance from the 'clutter' of personal baggage. The more we reflect on our spectator-participation at *i confess...* the more it is evident how, as spectator-participants, we so easily (though, often, not willingly, as you will see from the examples that follow) adopt 'ready-made narrative templates to structure experiential history' and thus 'take up culturally designated subjectivities'.⁷ Indeed, One to One often piggybacks on everyday autobiographical practices. These provide a useful shortcut in behavioural acclimatisation, given that 'recitations of our personal narratives' are 'embedded in specific organisational settings and in the midst of specific institutional routines or operations: religious confession goes to church, psychological trauma goes to the counsellor's office or the analyst's couch' and so on.⁸ We are aware that 'only certain kinds of stories need to be told in each narrative locale' and 'in this way, the institution writes the personal profile, so to speak, before the person enacts and experiences it as "personal"' and thus 'in everyday life, autobiographical narratives are part of a

⁷ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds., *Getting a Life: Everyday Uses of Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 9.

⁸ Smith and Watson, *Getting a Life*, p. 10.

frame-up'.⁹ Invited to offer some reflections at the *i confess...* symposium, Helen Iball recognised spectatorship as a process of conventionalised 'self-presentation and composition' that is 'largely unreflective',¹⁰ an impulse that she identified as 'giving good audience' - where there is a compulsion to participate in the normative assumptions that are a pitfall of One to One performance. So it is that coercion becomes a much more problematic issue than it might seem: it goes beyond the intentionally manipulative, because there is a (danger) zone where practitioner's assumptions meet the participant's desire to 'give good audience'. Rachel has assumed her response to strawberries is too insignificant in terms of the hierarchies of experience that experiential performance proffers; invoking the notion of an 'ideal audience-participant' perhaps. That Rachel had agreed to have her experience filmed for the archive probably heightened her sense of responsibility for the piece of performance to be realised. In fact, and for such reasons as Rachel *pretending herself*,¹¹ intimate spectatorship agitates for recognition that, as Helen has written elsewhere, 'to a greater extent than in other forms, no response is easily dismissed as inappropriate, over-sensitive or shallow because there can be no grounds to be frustrated with audience response'.¹²

⁹ Smith and Watson, *Getting a Life*, p. 11.

¹⁰ Smith and Watson, *Getting a Life*, p. 17.

¹¹ This phrase is borrowed from - "the character Adrian" - played by Adrian Howells), the 'audience member' in Tim Crouch's *The Author* (Royal Court Theatre London, 2009) who declares: 'I saw a play last year. And I remember thinking, "that writer has imagined me". I've been imagined! Poorly imagined! The audience has been badly written! We're all going to have to pretend ourselves!' (London: Oberon, 2009), p. 20.

¹² Helen Iball, 'My Sites Set On You: site-specificity and subjectivity in "intimate theatre"', in Anna Birch and Joanna Tompkins, eds., *Performing Site-specific Theatre: politics, place, practice* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012 forthcoming).

In discussing our experiences of *The Garden of Adrian*, we talked a lot about Rachel consenting to eat the two strawberries. As Rachel has described above, she chooses to suffer this course of action in response to Adrian's request because she believes she should be good. This is the sort of dogged observance of once prescribed and now habitual behaviours carried by us all: it is called introjection. Commitment to our "introjects" ('I should be, I must be, I ought...') can be so strong that they often have the power to override our interest in our own wellbeing. Clarkson and Mackewn explain that introjection interrupts 'the individual's holistic functioning because' she is 'internally split between the original impulse':¹³

Rachel: *I don't like strawberries*

Helen: - *'and the introject':*

Rachel: *I must be a good girl to please others.*

Rachel described how this introject interrupted her experience of *The Garden of Adrian*. Her dialogue with Adrian at this point is based on habitual rather than honest responses.

¹³ Petruska Clarkson and Jennifer Mackewn, *Fritz Perls* (London: Sage, 2007 [1983]), p. 73.

The processes of Gestalt psychotherapy, such as this notion of introjection - along with perspectives from, for example, psychology and applied ethics - suggest themselves as useful ways of attending to responses that other critical methods might dismiss as incidental, personal, or indeed 'analytic dirt' - further clarification please Helen?. Using existing formulations of behavioural processes such as introjection enables the expression of blocks and digressions. These are part of the autobiography of the participant-spectator - as much as are (maybe rarer, elusive) moments of meaningful One to One contact and dialogue.

Rachel: *Stawberries aside, in the response that I wrote immediately after the event, I gushed at length about the need for everyone (not just the participants of the I confess... symposium) - and particularly vulnerable or dejected people - to be offered such a rewarding, nourishing and life-affirming experience. This intense response was caused by cumulative qualities including Howells's phenomenally caring presence, the Zen-like environment, the opportunities for sensual experiences and the natural materials used in constructing the garden path, yet most profoundly for me, was an action of cleansing that made me both incredibly sad and, quite simply, touched.*

There's not much to say of the action involved -- after asking me to roll up my sleeves Howells led each of my arms closer to a pool of water and gently dropped cool water over my hands, then my

wrists, then onto my forearms. I've recounted the affect of this gesture and it seems out of proportion to the simple, solitary action but my response to Howells's gesture made me think about others: others in my life who deserve such care-ful attention, others I don't know who surely do too, others who are somebody's others, others who feel they have no other; re-connecting one with the human through contact is a skill Howells embodies in many of his One to One works and is something he does with an openness that is often infectious. The completely self-less act of refreshing, cooling, bathing my lower arms inexplicably triggered a sense of gratitude that overwhelmed and moved me. If the camera hadn't been there I'm pretty sure I would have spilled tears.

The current preoccupation with performances of intimacy is arguably contextually related to wider cultural concerns around inter-subjectivity, anxieties over how - in a world of inter-racial and inter-ethnic conflict and global inequalities and injustices - we might live together, better. Performances of intimacy, in their very staging, seem to demand performances of trust, mutual responsibility, mutual openness and mutual receptiveness. In this, they correlate with a critical understanding of subjectivity, of 'being' as 'being-together'.¹⁴ The subjective is always inter-subjective, depending on identifying with the other as a subject. Understanding subjectivity as in process, our encounters with others have the potential to affect our selves and vice versa. Hélène Cixous, figuring this process of

¹⁴ See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. by Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (California: Stanford University Press, 2000).

intersubjectivity, writes that 'When I say identification, I do not say loss of self. I become, I inhabit. I enter. Inhabiting someone at that moment I can feel myself traversed by that person's initiatives and actions'.¹⁵ Cixous' insights frame the duality of identification - a problematic process, perhaps, in that the other becomes transformed as much as the self. But what is clear, here, is that the self *is* transformed. Sara Ahmed also underlines the extension of self that results from empathetic identification. As she writes, 'Identification is the desire to take a place where one is not yet. As such, *identification expands the space of the subject*. [...] Identification involves *making likeness* rather than being alike'.¹⁶ This expansion of the space of the subject is arguably enabled by the creation of a space *for* inter-subjectivity; a place for showing what Adriana Cavarero might call *who one is* - or, more simply, that one *is* one - to another *who is* and who is a singular one too (that is, unique and irreplaceable).¹⁷ This creation of particular (one-to-one) inter-subjective space could be considered a site for 'resingularization', set against 'mass-media manufacture' of homogenous subjectivity.¹⁸ So One to One might fit Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's account of 'queer social practices like sex and theory' that 'try to unsettle the garbled but powerful' project of 'normalisation

Comment [H11]: Rachel, if I recall correctly, the footnotes were done manually in the original and so they will need re-numbering manually once complete...I've not added the Berlant stuff as footnotes, as I think some of it might be "too much" and could be removed...The ref is: *Intimacy* Lauren Berlant (ed.) Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000. The sections I use are Berlant's introduction (pp.1-8), and her chapter with Michael Warner 'Sex in Public' (pp.311-330)

¹⁵ Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. by Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975), p. 148.

¹⁶ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 126.

¹⁷ See Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and selfhood*, trans. by Paul A. Kottman (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

¹⁸ See Felix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. by Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (London and New York: Continuum, 2008).

that has made heterosexuality hegemonic';¹⁹ performance might, then, be situated as a 'counterpublic'²⁰ – a way of 'rethinking intimacy'.²¹

Rachel finds herself moved by Howells' gentle, giving gesture. Ahmed, in her critical revalorisation of the emotion of being moved, writes evocatively and usefully: 'Moving here is not about "moving on" or about "using" emotions to move away, but moving and being moved as a form of labour or work, which opens up different kinds of attachments to others'.²² Berlant and Warner recognise that non-standard 'border intimacies' can 'give people tremendous pleasure'.²³ Howells' performance operates in ways that accord with such 'border intimacies', dismantling some of the 'conventionally based forms of social division' such as male and female, friend and lover, hetero and homo and also, by creating a personal encounter in a performance space, some of the 'taken-for-grantedness of spatial taxonomies like public and private'.²⁴ By such means, Howells consciously disentangles the intimate from the sexual. In his use of physical intimacy, Howells engages a process of identification, using touch as a means to impress the other into/onto Rachel, bridging the space(s) between. Howells moved Rachel beyond the space of their personal interaction into a wider social realm: is this perhaps to reconfigure the One to

¹⁹ Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner 'Sex in Public' in Lauren Berlant, ed., *Intimacy* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp.311-330, p.312

²⁰ Berlant and Warner, 'Sex in Public' in *Intimacy*, p.322

²¹ Lauren Berlant, Introduction to *Intimacy* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp.1-8, p.6

²² Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, p. 201.

²³ Berlant and Warner, 'Sex in Public' in *Intimacy*, p.324

²⁴ See Berlant, 2000: p.3.

One as One to Two to Three?... foregrounding social engagement through its 'rethinking' of intimacy', in contrast to the hegemonic model of intimate life sited in the 'elsewhere of political public discourse, a promised haven' that 'consoles' citizens 'for the damaged humanity of mass society'.²⁵

Bed of Roses

Helen: *Attending Sam Rose's Bed of Roses, I was aware of the play on words in the title. The bed belonging to a Rose: Sam Rose. I was invited to get into bed.*

Dee: *Sam and I are in a four poster bed, huddled under its voluminous, fluffy white quilt. Sam is wearing a long, black, thin, floaty night dress. I am fully clothed, but without my shoes. Sam is wearing very red lipstick, her bottom lip pierced through with a ring. Sam is so close to me I smell not only her perfume but her make up. I am hot and feverish - though not with desire but raging tonsillitis. It is true, I want to be in bed, but I don't think it's this bed I want to be in. This bed is set up in the black box studio of the Department in which I work at the University of Glasgow. This basic, black box studio is where I teach undergraduate students every week. The studio is not, to me, a site of seduction. And I am not sure, in any case, that this is, really, a scene of seduction; though it might be a script of one.*

²⁵ Berlant and Warner, 'Sex in Public' in *Intimacy*, p.317

Helen: *I made a concerted effort not to objectify myself. I mean, lying there waiting for Rose to emerge out of the shadows of the studio, I arranged my body in a pose that appeared relaxed and that sent out no alluring signals. I felt corpse-like and hyper-tense simultaneously. I have lain in some bedrooms waiting for lovers in my time, and I have wanted to look sexually enticing: the object of their attraction. This remembrance felt very strongly to be my signal of what not to do or be with Sam Rose. What did she want with me? I had a pretty clear idea what was wanted and what I wanted with my lovers. But in a One to One with Sam, what did I want? What did she want? Who did she want? How did she want me? Did she want me?*

I wanted her to think well of me. I wanted to appear collected, unfazed. Game to participate but sending clear signals about the performance of all this.

Dee: *We may be lying closely together, but I do not feel close. I feel like the grin on my face is an act. I must also admit that I am a little anxious that Rose might think I am actually being seduced by her. That she might believe my performance? (Am I that good at faking it?) I can't quite dislodge the (internally homophobic?) thought that, as I identify as a lesbian, Rose might think I really do want to kiss her. And this thought is quickly followed by wondering whether*

Rose is awkward, being in bed with me? Is she performing differently, with me? But maybe Rose is a lesbian? It doesn't matter anyway, does it, because none of this is real? That this performance is fake is evident; but my hyper-anxiety and self-consciousness propose that the 'real' nevertheless keeps surfacing, troubling the performance; performance anxiety.

Helen: *I felt caught in the duration and demands of the piece, and I did not want to be subjective because my subjectivity was taking me down roads that I had left behind. I could feel the pull of episodes in my life that I was not in a place - literally or metaphorically - to recall here and now in this bed with this person I did not know. We couldn't have taken it. The piece depended on a person but it mattered that the person wasn't being me.*

Rose did not ask anything about me. I found it difficult to look at her and so, out of the three choices I am offered by Rose, I choose one that involves feathers and a blindfold. I found it difficult to look at her because I did not want her to see the vulnerability in my eyes. The vulnerability was produced by pushing against the memories trying to slip in.

Dee: *I choose to be blindfolded, and rather awkwardly ask if I can remove my glasses (another passion killer) before I am plunged into darkness. My throbbing throat is momentarily relieved to be tickled*

by a soft feather. It feels soothing rather than erotic. I lie back, relaxing for the first time - perhaps because I cannot see Rose? I can only feel the sensation of the feather on the skin of my neck, my arms, my face. Though I have selected my encounter, I am utterly passive within it, an object to be worked on and over. This fits with my mood. As symposium organiser, suffering from chronic tonsillitis, it is good to just lie here, to receive. Rose is silent. I can relish the softness of the peacock feather, in these brief moments of repose.

The feather is put away, the blindfold removed, the real world of the studio brought back into focus, alongside the fake world of Rose's seduction. The red lips, the wispy voice, the slight negligee, the crafted words, it's all carefully constructed, and whilst we might be literally close, I'm reminded of fourth-wall proscenium staging.

Helen: *She was the show and, lying there on my back, legs overheating under duvet and in jeans, I wonder if I was the stage and the full auditorium for her.*

Rose offers a performance of seduction, perhaps, but a tightly scripted one. One to One work engages with the dramaturgy of relations constructed between one and another. This relational dramaturgy is a recognised feature of contemporary arts practice, with Nicolas Bourriaud and Grant Kester just two of its most influential critics. As Kester writes, artists pursuing this

aesthetic, if that is what it is, abandon the object of art in place of a more 'performative, process-based approach'.²⁶ These artists are 'context providers' rather than 'content providers'.²⁷ Kester's citing of 'process' signals a particular tradition of theatre practice - that of devising. In devising, the script emerges from the performance process, rather than existing prior to it. The performance text emerges through a range of activities, including improvisation, trying things out, and chance procedures (though we should not forget the impact that habit has on the way things work out). Words typically associated with devising are collaborative and collective and it is surely not coincidental that both Bourriaud and Kester use these too: Bourriaud writes that 'relational art works seek to establish intersubjective encounters [...] in which meaning is elaborated *collectively* rather than in the privatized space of individual consumption'.²⁸ Relational art extends the practice of devised theatre by moving it beyond the closed circuit of the practitioners to the spectators. In this context, no text exists in advance of the interaction between the artist and the spectator, or participant. As Kester writes, with a nod to educational theorist Paul Friere, relational artists 'replace the conventional, "banking" style of art [...] with a process of dialogue and collaboration'.²⁹ Collaboration is positioned as a political practice that engenders multiple authorship and multiple ownership.

Comment [E2]: Reference please?

²⁶ Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 1.

²⁷ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, p. 1.

²⁸ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. by John Howe (Paris: Les Presses du réel, 2002), p. 18.

²⁹ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, p. 10.

Returning to Sam Rose's performance, *A Bed of Roses*, what becomes clearer is that its relational potential was foreclosed because the performance script was 'closed' rather than 'open', driven by the artist rather than via a process. This is in contrast to Kester's summary of 'dialogical aesthetics', which suggests an image of the artist 'defined in terms of openness, of listening [...] and of a willingness to accept a position of dependence and intersubjective vulnerability relative to the viewer or collaborator.'³⁰ Whilst the spectator in *A Bed of Roses* was required to complete the performance, the performance was already written. The space was certainly intimate - a shared bed - but there was little inter-action, let alone intercourse. The spectator, then, as suggested by our accounts, figures more as an actor than a collaborator, but at the same time, also as a spectator gazing on Rose's performance. We were solicited to perform and spectate, but not to co-create.

If we agree with Bourriaud that relational work is a response to the lack of face-to-face encounters in an increasingly mechanised world, then Rose's performance's failure for us (if that's what it is) might be located in its *lack* of face-to-face encounter. In the face of Rose's seemingly fixed, theatrical facemask, it is not clear *who* it is that sees us, or even if she does see us. It feels like we are neither addressed nor responded to as individual subjects, which must mean that we function as objects; and interchangeable, undifferentiated ones at that.

³⁰ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, p.110.

Helen: *And yet... Sam Rose got to me the next morning. I opened my suitcase and crumpled inside was the shirt I'd been wearing the day before. The smell of roses was overpowering. All of those memories I had been suppressing in A Bed of Roses flooded in. Including the unpleasant memories, the regrets, the one night stands. Then Rose became fickle: a repetition of the performance to numerous others transformed into a vehicle for my regrets.*

Our description, in relation to Rose, reveals that, even as Rose attempts - and as we, independently, separately attempt - to resist 'ready-made narrative templates to structure experiential history', we risk imposing those very narratives on ourselves, and on others, because we so easily (even though often if not willingly) adopt and thus 'take up culturally designated subjectivities'.³¹ We have found that this happens even through participation in One to One performance, which would seem to offer an alternative and resistant space. Maybe, even in performance, intimacy's 'potential failure to stabilise closeness always haunts its persistent activity' causing a state of 'constant if latent vulnerability' which 'somehow escalates the demand for the traditional promise of intimate happiness to be fulfilled'?³² All three of us have been quite harsh critics of those performances that do not make us 'happy' and that make us feel 'vulnerable'.

Rose wears a mask; we attempt to wear our own masks, in response. The *play* we are engaged in here is clear; and if we were different players, we may

³¹ Smith and Watson, *Getting a Life*, p. 9.

³² Berlant, *Intimacy*, p.2

choose to play our roles differently: what would happen if we chose to remove all our clothes? Or chose to kiss Rose? Whilst it is suggested that relational art, dependent on a collaborative process, dislodges the artist from a position of authority, this cannot be taken as a given. Collaboration does not, in itself, guarantee equality or democratic process. As theatre makers we have learnt from the attempts at collaborative models of our feminist predecessors of the 1970s that simply providing the opportunity for everyone to speak does not ensure that they will. Such opportunity does not address the network of power relations that precede the moment. Personal histories and experiences make some more confident in speaking than others; and cultural bias means that some who speak seem to be more readily heard. There is a politics to participation and this sticks to relational, One to One performance practices (which is not to deny that one potential outcome may be the increased confidence of the participant-spectator).

Howells is a very experienced, professional practitioner. Where Rose perhaps fails to wholly seduce us, Howells succeeds. We are, indeed, disarmed by him. Where Rose prompts the putting on of a mask and the playing of a role, pretending to be seduced, Howells' performance of authenticity, of being unmasked, encourages us to similarly unmask ourselves, to give ourselves to him and the performance, to actually be seduced without knowing it. So we are unmasked while Howells *performs* (pretends) an unmasking. His performance is as structured, crafted, and repeated as Rose's. But his skill is to disguise that skill, to try and persuade that this is not performance. Whilst Howells might function as a 'context provider' rather than a 'content provider',

his skill and professionalism provide him with security, a script of sorts that he has constructed. The spectator, however, has no such safety net. We have not done this before. We know not what we do, what we might do, what we will come to wish we had not done. Howells' beguiling tone is not one to easily resist. Just as collaboration does not guarantee equality, so we must be careful not to confuse action and activity, or participation, with agency.

Rachel: *I don't like strawberries. 'I don't like strawberries' was all I needed to say. He asks me if I like them and I lie, 'yes', though my eyes plead 'no'.*

Seal of Confession

Dee: *In the otherwise empty, subterranean basement room, a bulky confessional box. A woman sitting behind a table takes my name, invites me to wait in the single chair, placed against the wall. Eventually, she instructs me to enter the confessional box. I close the red curtain behind me. The partition wall to my left is punctured with small round holes. I can see an eye peering through at me, then a softly whispering voice. I bring my ear closer, feel the breath on my face. She is telling me a tale, of a friend and a stolen ring. She is confessing to being a thief, to a betrayal, to deceit, to cowardliness, to shame.*

She asks me to share a confession with her, to return the gesture; but what is this gesture she has performed? For it is clearly a performance; this is a well-rehearsed, carefully crafted narrative. In this respect, then, perhaps not so far removed from the habitual scripts of confession, the 'forgive me father for I have sinned' litany of small misdemeanours that is met with an equally habitual script of forgiveness, an exchange of Hail Marys for absolution.

It would be difficult to mistake this performance for the really performed confessionals though. We are in a crummy basement room of my Department, where the pipes from toilets flush persistently. The shabby confessional box, constructed of plywood, is clearly a stage replica, a stand-in. The red curtain signals theatricality as much as secrecy; open the curtain, step into the show and play your role.

Helen: *Hearing the raw edges of scripting, recognising something as staged, is not to say that its impact is inevitably distancing. I say this because I found Von Holn's confessional booth a standardised product and I might easily have felt objectified, depended upon to comply, part of a transaction. I did not feel this. I think there are two reasons for this. One is that on that day something very fresh had happened to me, I had discovered a part of myself I did not know and felt I probably should not like but was in some way rather excited by - and so the opportunity was so coincidentally and*

entirely fitting, it was so 'me' (though she clearly had no idea and no intention or practical capacity to facilitate such a happy accident).

Thrilled at the sight of a burnt-out car near the hotel that morning, I realised I was a potential arsonist. I'm certain I shouldn't be telling you this. It's the sort of confession that comes back and bites hard. I did not feel objectified or judged by Von Holn. She responded positively to my story and corroborated my evidence. She was clearly staying at the same hotel, I see that now.

The other reason Von Holn's piece got away with stagey-ness has to do with novelty. The lack of comparable experiences of Catholic confession because I was brought up Methodist, had fuelled a sense that confession booths were something missing from my life. She also let me steal a cheap ring, a permission I granted to myself because I knew the ring wasn't authentic and that I wasn't really stealing it (but also it was thrilling because she hadn't told me I could take it, just told me where I would find it) and so I depended on getting away with something I have always been too afraid to do or too responsible or too aware of the likely consequences.

Dee: *I slip it onto my finger. For the rest of the day, I look for others wearing a similar ring. It's become a badge of identity, a marker of shared experience. Before long, the cheap metal begins to leave a green imprint on my skin. I am doubly marked by my sin.*

Rachel: *I had seen other delegates wearing the little purple rings and what began as something like envy soon became mild contempt. I knew that Seal of Confession would provide me with my own opportunity for obtaining my very own ring though I was unsure what I would have to do to get one. And I wanted one - if only to feel part of the gang.*

Dee: *I have stepped into the shoes of confessant and confessor and played my part, taken and given. She has spoken and I have listened. I have spoken and she has listened. The stakes, the exchange, feel about equal, with nothing lost on either side; but nothing gained either. No, that's not true. I had an experience. I heard a story. I told a story. Here, now, I tell that story of listening and speaking.*

Rachel: *By the time my performance slot came through I was a bit disgruntled by my wait and put off by the superficial title of the piece. 'What to confess...' I thought as I walked to the room where the performance took place. 'What to confess...' I thought as I sat waiting outside the makeshift confession booth, covered with red velvet curtain to reveal only the confessor's shoes. 'What to confess...' I thought as the artist began to speak through the little hole between us. 'What to confess...' I kept thinking as our script played out. 'What to confess...' I thought momentarily, before answering that I had no confession to proffer though I was told I*

could take the ring anyway. 'What to confess...' I thought as I walked away from the piece frustrated, grumpy and dissatisfied.

The context of Von Holn's *Seal of Confession* - and indeed of Howells' and Rose's performances - was the symposium *i confess...* Such explicit framing inevitably prompted reflection on confession as an act of performance, and the 'I' that is constructed through that act. Heddon's and Howells' choice to deny the first person singular in the symposium's title by deploying an 'i' signalled that the terms and their inter-relationship were open to mutual scrutiny and resistance. If, as Michel Foucault proposes, confession is a (self)policing technology through which truth is produced and maintained then, as Heddon has written elsewhere, it also affords productive potential to be performed differently.³³ Rachel's performance was a determined refusal to confess to anything, to be a confessant.

Conclusion

Helen Freshwater notes that 'academic theatre studies continues to engage with hypothetical models of spectatorship'³⁴ and her book *Theatre & Audience* asks some uncomfortable questions of that practice. There is an interesting paradox in *One to One*: that the survey can cover 100% of the audience, and yet the data is always partial and subjective and significantly incomplete. And

³³. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, An Introduction*, trans. by R. Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1980). See Deirdre Heddon, 'Personal performance: the resistant confessions of Bobby Baker', in *Modern Confessional Writing: New Critical Essays. Series: Routledge Studies in Twentieth-Century Literature*, ed. by Jo Gill (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), pp.137-153.

³⁴ Helen Freshwater, *Theatre & Audience* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 29.

that whilst the academic commentator might, for once, reasonably speak for the whole audience that is only because she was the whole audience and this makes it impossible not to confront the narrowness of that perspective and the inevitability of a spectrum of responses, many of them very different from her own (because that range is part of the point of the form and its popularity). The Spectator-Participation-as-Research that we have applied in this paper has begun to reveal the usefulness of comparative study, based in phenomenological description and reflection and personal revelation between the three of us having experienced the same three performances, sometimes very differently. As a result of this research method, it has become apparent that personal insecurities and digressions have the potential to produce *more* intimate connections to the 'integrity of experience', through 'immediacy', 'relationship', 'awareness' and 'attention',³⁵ if we are able to sidestep the autobiographical subjectivities that we feel bound to (re-)produce. What is also revealed, in our eagerness to compare notes and discuss individual experiences, is our desire to know 'what it was like for you'; in the fragmented, singularised and often insecure space engendered by One to One, this shared desire is surely bound up with needing reassurance: 'That's what I did too'. It has not slipped our notice that our conscious collaboration between three has returned the 'individual' experience towards the 'collective'.

³⁵ Petruska Clarkson, *Gestalt Counselling in Action*, 3rd edition (London: Sage, 2004), p. 30, p. 181. In these terms, Clarkson draws direct comparison between the concerns of Gestalt counselling and those of qualitative research. She adds that, just as qualitative research is concerned with 'the examination of practice' and 'research into the qualities of [...] subjects, subjective experience, the phenomenological quality of experience unique and inimical as it is. So is Gestalt' (pp. 182-5).