

The artist interrogates violence: A Practice-as-research project considering the efficacy of different forms and styles of theatre through a portfolio approach which articulates and animates narratives of violence in private and public domains.

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Masters by Dissertation

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October 2018

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Abstract

A creative and theoretical interrogation into the symbiosis between violence as a matrixed systemic and individual act. My practice-as-research involves using the relationships founded in live performance to interrogate the interdependence of private and public displays of violence, generating an 'archive of the permissible'. The critical commentary begins by articulating my research questions as to the interplay between intimate and extimate violence, before moving to document and evaluate such representations in my creative practice. Each of the four-performance works presented aims to disrupt societal address to images of violence, using theatre as a dialogical tool, playing with imagery to sensitise audiences to explicit and sensitive subjects. Each creative work is animated by one of my research questions, and experiments with form and modes of receivership to create a suite of interlocking works aiming to add to the wider debate and ownership over narratives of violence.

The critical section of this thesis opens by exploring the socio-cultural intertextualities that have informed my practice-as-research, and I enrich this context by then identifying works of performance artists, playwrights, and theorists as influencers and case-studies. The second part of my commentary focusses on artistic process, unpicking the problematics of ethical but effective representation of images and narratives of violence, to create activated response for social change within the audience. I identify the artistic challenges of approaching discussions of violence and the precarious co-existence of sensitising and desensitising audiences to these subjects, namely; pornography as a cultural shaper on heteronormative identity and intimate relationship behaviours, the pervasive presence of workplace violence, and

the frequency of domestic violence in relationships, theorising these as a co-dependent interexchange of violence. The thesis details my methodology as an artist; script-writing, rehearsal process and performance, whilst acknowledging and evaluating my research findings according to the overarching research questions.

**ORIGINAL
SCRIPT-**

CAN WE TALK

Gray, Francesca

Can We Talk

To be performed in either Space A or B.

A- In a kitchen.

B- In an office.

So I used to be with this guy who was really violent and if I'm honest with myself I always knew he was, like, he had a really explosive temper and before we got together properly he used to say to me "oh you don't wanna see me get angry, trust me" and I didn't really take it seriously, I just thought that he was blowing it out of proportion. But he wasn't. About 2 months in, he blew up and it was one of the scariest things I've had to face.

The first issue was over me having male friends. Once I went to the cinema with a friend and I didn't reply to his messages for two hours whilst we were in the cinema. When I got out and messaged him back he accused me of being a whore and really inappropriate with my male friends. He was texting me saying "why don't you just go suck his dick if you're so desperate for it." I was so angry and shocked and felt so disrespected. So, we ended up arguing and it escalated so quickly, and I was speechless I couldn't believe how rude he was being to me and when I didn't reply he was like "ahhhh cat got you tongue? Don't have a response for that one?". I was so mad, so I didn't reply and just drove round there in this fit or rage. I took my friend with me just in case, because in the back of my mind I was worried about what would happen to me if I went alone. So, I drive round there and fling the door open, sprint up the stairs and into his room, I push his flat mate out the way who is blocking his

door and he's in the dark laying in his bed. I go in all guns blazing, I was quite antagonistic, like, "youho000, I'm here now so you can stop being a keyboard warrior and tell me what you really think of me to my face" and he didn't reply, so I kept on saying how I thought he was so rude and how dare he speak to me like I was so worthless.

He just kept telling me to go home and I said no, so I sat on the floor and said, "I'm not leaving until you look at me", because the whole time he had been with his back to me. I sat there for about 10 minutes which felt like forever, until finally saying "you're such a coward" and then he turned over and started shouting at me saying how dare I and being really threatening. So, I stood up and went over to the bed and was asking him how he could be so rude to me and what was I supposed to not see my male friends anymore? Because there was no way that was going to happen. He was saying I knew exactly what I was doing and that I was a slut and then kept saying fuck off to me over and over and over. So, I put my finger in his face – which was the worst thing I could have done. He flipped his shit, threw his covers off, lunged out the bed and at me, I stepped back, and he kept coming at me. He was naked, so it was really awkward and intimidating and he squares up to my face and tells me to "fucking leave". The only way I can explain it is that he roared at me and it was like the house shook. We are literally eyeball to eyeball and I say in this really controlled voice- "No".

Now, in my head I was terrified, and I wanted to leave, but I also thought, I couldn't stand to be bullied by him and cower- I'd do anything to hold my ground. He then erupted and pushed me so hard I fell backwards onto the ground and I looked back

and he was still coming towards me, so I put my hands in the air and pleaded with him saying “ok, ok, ok I’ll leave” and we had this moment where we just stared at each other in the eye, and he could see that I was terrified and I could see that he felt ashamed. He turned around and got back in his bed. I ran and got my friend and told her she had to leave right this instant. I didn’t even let her put her shoes on. I then started shouting through the door at him saying that he was disgusting to lay a hand on someone he cares about and stuff like that. I wanted to shame him.

My friend was really worried for me, I could tell because she kept asking me if I was ok and staring at me from the passenger’s seat. I insisted that I was fine. But then, just before we got home I pulled over and had this panic attack where the adrenaline was so strong, and I crashed. That was the first instance.

The thing was that we always managed to talk everything out. I’m the sort of person that if I choose to forgive someone, I decide to move on and I will do that as quickly as possible, because, it’s for them as much as me. I don’t wanna feel that way and I don’t want them to be guilt ridden and yea I just think it’s easier. Which I think was the main issue with this relationship.

It wasn’t that I didn’t recognise that it was really messed up, it’s that I thought it was salvageable and I kept forgiving and moving on from these huge mistakes.

The next time a red flag popped up was with our sex life. I think I have a healthy sex drive but his was off the radar. We used to make a joke of his temper and call it HTH, which stood for hungry, tired, horny. If he was any of these things it was tense. We would have to have sex at least twice a day. I often had bruises or cuts on me after

having sex and he cut my vagina quite a few times from being violent in foreplay.

Thing was I always put it down to being rough in bed.

If we didn't have sex, we would fall out because he'd be frustrated or short-tempered.

If we went to bed and I didn't want it, he'd pester me until I'd cave, and the worst part was I would have to pretend to want it. Once he was choking me, and he was doing it really hard and I told him I couldn't breathe, and he didn't ease off and I started to panic, my eyes widened with this awful blood draining feeling of -oh my god I am totally powerless, and you could kill me if you wanted to.

He also used to make these comments about how easy it would be to crush my skull and then he'd put his hand around my head and I'd kind of laugh it off and be like "ohh yea probably, ha ha". The other awkward thing that happened during sex sometimes would be that I would feel red raw and ask him to stop and he would hold me down and I literally would beg him to stop but I think he thought that was a part of my act or something like the whole "ohhh stop" but actually I'm really into it. On reflection it was actually pretty messed up and it really hurt, like the next day I would walk funny or, sorry for being graphic, but I'd feel like my vagina had been destroyed into this gaping whole.

The next issue happened when he found this app on my phone that keeps private images and videos locked away. He knew my passwords for everything. It basically had loads of my nudes on there from my previous relationship and a sex movie. He confronted me about it and I told him that I had forgot it had even been there. He demanded that I delete everything but not after he had looked through it all. I didn't

want him to look at it all as it was intimate between me and another person. He got really angry. I agreed because he was saying he felt betrayed and didn't trust me and all the rest of it. I begged him not to look at the movie, but he made me sit and watch the whole thing with him and look at every picture. I sat there crying feeling mortified and humiliated at watching this video. Then I had to go through and delete everything on my devices, even things that I didn't want to delete like a stream of messages from my ex and friends over the years that were kept in the same note on my phone that had meant a lot to me. I felt really guilty and he told me that I had to earn his love and trust back and I agreed.

I spent the next three months at his beck and call. If he called or was upset I would fly over there.

That night he said the only way he would feel better is if he could have something from me that my ex hadn't had. He wanted to do anal. I laughed and thought he was joking, he wasn't. He said "I want you to bend over and take it and if it hurts I don't want you to tell me to stop. That's the only way". My face dropped, and I realised he was being serious. So, I did as he asked, and it hurt so much I wanted to cry. We went straight into it. No foreplay, no nothing. Just straight in. Afterwards, we went to bed and I lay there feeling really dirty next to him. We kept doing anal because that was the only thing that seemed to make him happy.

One morning, he said he hated me and felt sick at the sight of me, whilst laying in my own bed. He said he didn't love me. When I asked how he could have sex with me he said he had needs and the only thing I was good for was that- that he had been using

me for sex for weeks and it was all my fault. I didn't cry. I sat looking in the mirror while I was doing my makeup and I felt completely empty and void of any worth. I think it was the worst thing anyone has ever said for me. He had totally taken advantage of me and made it my fault. I finished getting ready in silence. Stood up kissed him on the cheek and left for work. When I got in the car I burst out crying and cried the entire way to work. I didn't want to eat, I was on auto-pilot and his words kept replaying through my head. It sounds dramatic but all I could hear was that.

One night he had gone out with friends to a club and I had been at home, but he was really angry with me for some reason, so I went over. He was so cruel saying he couldn't trust me, I was like every other slut at the club, dressing like a whore, dancing like a slag. He went through everything that he thought was inappropriate in my wardrobe and I wasn't allowed to wear it anymore. He didn't say that, but that was the gist.

Every time we went out he would come with me and my friends and we would leave early because we would fight over something. Even on my birthday.

I once had to leave home at 4am and drive an hour and half to him because he was upset about something and I had to go and sit with him all night while he slept because "he would do it for me". The difference was I never asked anything like that from him.

The next big incident was in the summer, we went on holiday with a big group of friends and the first night there he was threatening to kill himself. I was so angry

because this wasn't the first time and I didn't ever believe him when he said it. It felt more like an opportunity to scare me into loving him or taking care of him- that sounds bad, but I mean it.

On the last day of the holiday we had had the most amazing day, so much laughter- everything ached. Then it took a turn. I took the joke too far and didn't think before I acted. I spat on him in response to him licking my face, it was a one-up but totally playful. The only way I can describe it is that the air turned sour and everyone who was around us seemed to stop breathing. He then spat on me really hard. I laughed it off hoping it was all still in jest and that the situation could be salvaged. He stormed off in a rage. I went to find him and give him his suitcase. He was so angry I have never seen him so angry. We were on the upper ring of the duty-free area, standing next to the railing and we started arguing. Mainly me trying to calm him down. He came towards me and I thought he was going to push me over the railing, he then spat so violently at me that my face turned, and I was covered in his gob. There were witnesses. They stood there frozen in shock, one girl even started crying and I just knelt down and got a face wipe and wiped my face. When we go to the check in queue, everyone could see that he was furious, he was sucking his cheeks in, shaking, with his hands in fists. He looked like he was about to nut someone. The worst part was, every time our lines passed he would say something to me. Something like I was disrespectful, or I "hope I was funny with my little friends", to stay away from him. But the way he said it, he had so much venom behind his words.

When we were boarding the plane, he came up behind me, talking in my ear saying we were done and like hissing at me. When we were boarding and going up the stairs

I was looking down at the ground thinking oh my gosh if he pushes me over this I will die. My main focus was getting safe on the plane.

When we landed back in the UK, he was texting me saying that he was coming over and I told him he wasn't welcome and that it was over. He said he didn't care- he would break down the door and drag me out of bed by my hair if he had to. Our conversation got more aggressive and so basically to cut a really long story short, he ended up coming over and we chatted through the door for a while, but he wouldn't leave so I let him in.

Once he spent £80 on my debit card, £80 that I never saw again, on booze and fags. He tried to drive me home from work, so I told him if he tried to get in the car I would tell security because he was so drunk and he wasn't listening to me and I was trying to protect him but also was so fed up of pussy footing around him. We had this blazing argument in front of loads of strangers and friends. Security had to separate us because we were squaring up to each other and another friend came and held him back from me because it looked like we were about to fight- which is hilarious because I wouldn't last 10 seconds.

I just get really proud and don't want to be backed into a corner. Like, I'd rather be punched and break my jaw than be bullied into submission.

I ended up going home and he got back before I did, he blocked off my driveway and wouldn't let me past until I agreed to speak to him. So, we spoke which quickly turned to arguing. He told me he was done with me for good. I was actually really

relieved, but knew it wouldn't last long. He went out clubbing that night, did loads of drugs and then came banging on my door, he was steaming drunk. He came upstairs, not speaking to me, got naked and fell asleep in my bed. I was laughing I couldn't understand what was happening. I told him that I wasn't sleeping next to him and I wanted him to leave.

Whenever I asked him to leave he would refuse.

So, I sat in the corner of my room just staring at him for ages. He eventually got mad that I wasn't coming to bed and got up and said if I let him walk out that door we were done. He was moving so slowly and kept delaying it by giving me "another chance" but I just sat still and quiet and that really pissed him off. He left- but that wasn't the last time I saw him that night.

The next morning, he would never remember anything, and I would always have to fill him in. He always acted like he was so remorseful and hated himself and that would always soften my heart so quickly.

Another time, same thing, he got angry because I went over to a friend's house instead of dropping my plans for him. He wanted me to leave, I said no, he accused me of putting no effort in and that I should actually fight for him- which I thought was hilarious because I didn't really want to be with him anymore, I was only staying *for him*.

I broke up with him that night and he started threatening me, again. I knew I was done. He came over and I refused to let him in the house, so he slept on my front lawn, it was freezing. I eventually went and sat in the front garden for hours with him, freezing cold, making sure he didn't die. He was vomiting and bashing his head to the ground and sobbing. I tried to drive him home, but he was so good at spinning stories. In the morning he was telling me he loved me. I felt really bad for him and really awkward, but I knew I was done. To sum up, we had this super emotional rollercoaster break up, he manipulated me, gave me ultimatums, told me he wouldn't survive, told me he was going to commit suicide, told me nobody would love me the way he did- all this bullshit. He tried everything in the book, but I made my choice and I'd be damned if I went back on it.

I felt responsible for him. He was this pained-tormented spirit and I wanted to help him.

In the months after the breakup he would call me, text me and write things on social media that would get under my skin and I went from feeling guilty and sorry for him, to despising him. He made *me* look like the cause of his depression. I would do everything with him. I practically acted like a sober sponsor for him while we were together. Most of his violence towards me came when he would be drinking. So, I felt really betrayed when I saw his social media posts.

I used to meet up with him for a drink or dinner just to see how he was and he was always on this downward spiral, always battling drugs and he would say things that would intentionally hurt me. He would leave me waiting for him for 20 mins. In a lot

of ways, it was blessing because it made me so sure of my decision- he had become all of the bad bits, and the good bits that I once knew had been lost.

Maybe he is different now- he had such a kind side to him, he could be a really wonderful boyfriend, I wouldn't have stayed otherwise. I do wonder if I ever really knew him.

I seem to go for people that are messed up and need me. After that relationship I went off men for a long time. I wanted nothing to do with relationships. I had been in relationships all my adult life. But I was sick to death of it. So unbelievably negative about relationships and men. I became a bit of a fuckboy if I can use that term? I just wanted sex, I wanted nothing with emotion and I was cold. But then I would feel guilty about it or end up liking them or being really turned off if they liked me. Literally, if anyone showed interest in me it was like alarm bells.

It was totally liberating to have nobody telling me what to wear, how to dance, who I could flirt with, how long I could stay out, if I was allowed to drink and I think I went a bit nuts. I was so sceptical and cynical of everyone- that whole experience has meant that I have all these insecurities now and I hate it because I used to be so trusting and free and pretty selfless and now I am this over cautious, selfish girl who is always worried that I am being taken advantage of. Especially when it comes to sex. I used to be quite wild and spontaneous and now if I think someone wants sex with me I'll get really weird about it and it almost turns me off.

I also have this really negative view of marriage and long-term relationships. I used to think that love could last forever and conquer all and my experiences have sort of shattered that. My parents have a really rocky relationship. Neither of them is good at communicating. I have witnessed over the years their arguments and it's been super tumultuous. There has been packing and unpacking, plates thrown, doors slammed and bitching, a lot of bitching. Or really passive aggressive ways of letting me know what the other parent has done. Basically, I just don't know any couple that has been together for more than 30 years that is still in love. I am cynical of marriage and relationships- it's a pretty bleak look at things.

I want to make it clear that I have cared deeply and loved but I do regret it. It was a lot of pain and really quite torturous. I gained a lot and shared some special moments, but also its caused a lot of damage towards me now in how I see relationships and my own worth.

I frequently think about the night he told me he used me for sex and that I meant nothing to him and he hated me. I feel so dirty. It wasn't the physical stuff that left me affected, it was the verbal violence.

**ORIGINAL
SCRIPT-**

AND

REVELATION

Gray, Francesca

Prologue

The stage is light with warm wash.

The actress enters from main studio entrance door.

She organises and pre-sets the props for Act 1. This includes a; chair, coffee table, tablecloth, notebook, makeup bag, mirror, toaster, marker pens and six litres of vodka.

She sits on the chair.

Interlude A

Warm wash snap to red backlight.

There is one Mouth speaking. With each new voice a new Mouth appears on the screen and joins the conversation. Each Mouth represents another storyteller adding to the dialogue.

- D)** I was lying on the floor and I cracked my head open. He was there, and I hadn't processed what had happened and he was so over me. He just wanted someone there, it didn't matter if it was me. He just wanted someone. I found out that he went and got with someone the night that I was in hospital.
- E)** I see it nowadays with the younger waitresses, the chef's will slowly walk past them brushing their hands against the girl's bums. Commenting on the girl's bra colours and trying to pull their skirts.
- F)** "I don't like that, stop!" You should make an effort to be understood. You shouldn't have led them on. You should make your comfort levels clear beforehand. Stand up for yourself.
- B)** When an argument gets too bad I cry and become really sad. Once I got so angry that I took a ukulele and smashed it over my head.
- A)** None of this is shocking is it?

B) No. None of it.

The Mouths disappear as an incomprehensible dialogue plays for a few seconds before returning to the Mouths.

The difference between murder and manslaughter is the distinction between intent and accident.

C) There's a difference between frustration and intention to hurt, they are very different things.

The Mouths disappear as the incomprehensible dialogue returns and plays for a few more seconds before returning to the Mouths a second time.

B) I think violence is innate because it's a defence mechanism, we recognise that we can use violence to get what we want, or to control a situation.

A) Do you think that you allow violence in your sex life more than you would in your regular day to day interaction with your partner?

C) Oh yea, definitely.

F) There is a lot of violence in sex.

The Mouths disappear as more incomprehensible sound plays for a few seconds before snapping back to the Mouths once more.

C) Having dreams and fantasies about shooting his mother and his sister in the face and in the head.

E) Luckily, I wasn't the only one my manager was trying it on with. He got caught on camera trying it on with one of the receptionist girls.

G) I had counselling for like the whole year. That's not as great as it sounds, they seemed to think I had an answer for everything. And I was like- I don't.

C) All these things that I didn't understand and now I do understand.

Self-destruct button and all that jazz.

B) I've kind of learnt a pattern and a behaviour that is destructive. My own mental health has probably declined because of... I just thought it was normal. I just accepted it.

C) The only way to know is by going too far, crossing that line and then reverting back from that line. Otherwise you wouldn't know whether it could be crossed or not.

D) "You can't be near her".

We weren't allowed near each other.

C) "no, no, don't forgive them!".

B) It hurts.

D) So, there isn't a time expiry on that?

E) No.

F) "It's none of your business"

I was just trying to understand.

All the Mouths have disappeared.

Red backlight snaps to warm wash.

Act 1

Warm wash.

So, bit of background context. My dad died at Christmas when I was 8, and my mum has always strived to please men.

She walks over to the paper roll and begins to draw stick people.

She has this thing where she likes to just move men in. I don't know if that comes from her having no father figure, or a violent father figure or what. Anyway, I've had a lot of step dads in my life. Every time mum's like "Oh he's the man of the house" and tries to force this relationship. I think she is definitely very very very insecure.

Oh, mum. God! Yea so, one of my earliest memories is waking up, looking outside and there was a police car. Turns out that was the first night stepdad number 1 or 2 hit mum and she'd called the police, but then the police got there and just left. So, by the time they'd got there, he'd talked her down.

This was my childhood, the whole cycle of "Oh I'm gunna call the police... Oh I'm not", and then a week later mum and stepdad were back together. She had these coping mechanisms, she'd always lie about it and say, "Oh yea, we are just friends, we are just friends", but then they'd be kissing and a lot of PDA.

She had, *has*, this really selective memory, another coping mechanism, like... She's very good at lying to people. She'll convince herself somethings not true.

I remember this instance where she'd had a massive argument with stepdad 2. He'd been violent to her again. I was at my child minders and he picked me up but hadn't told mum or the child minder, he'd just taken me. She shows up, I wasn't there.

Obviously, I had no idea, I had a fucking amazing afternoon, I got bought sweets and everything.

She is a nutter but, to be fair to her though, her dad was an alcoholic. He used to get drunk, beat her, her step mother was physically, verbally, mentally abusive.

I just don't understand her relationship with men. I think because her dad was horrible to her she strived for his love even more. Well, I know she did because she ended up going to live with him. Her step-mum came to my grandma's house and was like "we really want you back, your dad loves you". Obviously, she was so excited, but they actually just wanted her back to do the housework. Must be devastating- want to be loved, think you're loved, not be loved.

She does very much feel sorry for herself, that sounds harsh, but she does bring it up and say, "this is why I am the way I am".

I'm surprised she didn't turn into a bigger drunk. I mean, she's on a first name basis with Dr Smirnoff but we see him when she's going through a break up. She's a

wrongen'. When I was a kid I walked in on her in the bath drinking a bottle of Vodka. Hugging the toaster. I was like, "mum, if you want a sandwich, I'll grab the Hovis."

Incomprehensible sound plays.

Warm wash snaps to red backlight.

End of Act 1.

Interlude B

The Mouths reappear. Red backlight.

G) I want to stand up and defend myself, I'm not going to back down and he's not going to back down and it goes "bang!".

H) The female character is all nice hair, makeup, shaved legs, she probably smells like vanilla.

G) You always want what you can't have.

B) I think it's unfortunately a symptom of the patriarchal, western, monotheistic society, dominated by the fact that men sexualise women at any age. It happens. It happens all the time.

H) I don't know how what we had turned into that.

The Mouths disappear momentarily as the Inaudible sound plays.

C) He was 8 years old and he had been sexually inappropriate with his two-year-old sister and so the mother can't leave them alone in the same room. His two-year-old sister, and he is 8. Now, I'd like to think that he hasn't seen porn yet, but, the fact that he has this sexual and violent thing. The exact words were "the mother is afraid to leave them alone in the same room". He said that he's had dreams about shooting her in the head and when she was in the bath, he shoved his fingers down her throat.

Red wash snaps to warm wash.

Act 2

Red backlight snaps to warm wash.

Stevie Nicks 'Edge of Seventeen' plays.

I currently work in a restaurant. It's my first proper job. I got it because the big boss thought I was 'beautiful'. I took it as a compliment because I'm only 17 but I pride myself on looking my best, I'll always do my hair and makeup good.

Been there a while, but I'm still the only person under 20, only female, only person who can speak English fluently. Straight away they started giving me double shifts, 6 or 7 days a week. Within a week of working there I was already holding down the entire floor while my "colleagues" went out back to eat and smoke. They'd leave the floor with just me and the big boss.

Actually, I did have an awkward encounter when I first started which was, well basically, the big boss called me over and asked me to give him a "massage". I'm quite intimidated by him anyway because he has a strange sense of humour where he'll shout at you and say, "YOU'RE FIRED!" and then laugh, hug you and he won't let go until he's done.

So, I laughed off his request to be his personal masseuse, but he persisted. He said he was stressed, and it wasn't a big deal. I felt so awkward I ended up doing it. It was so uncomfortable.

Wait, it gets worse- when I finished he said for me to sit down to return the favour. I tried everything I could, but again, he persisted. So, I sat down, and he gave me the most intrusive massage. He was going all down my back, round to my stomach, my side boob and I kept trying to squeeze my arms against my sides to prevent him from going around any further and making jokes to diffuse my discomfort. It actually made it worse because I said things like “ohh did you go on a course or something”, ugh it was awful.

After that shift I went home and cried to my mum- I told her I didn't want to work there anymore. Actually, at the start it was like that a lot. Made me anxious every day. She said that I shouldn't quit at the first hurdle. Once I'd calmed down I agreed and realised I was overreacting- that it's normal, and I needed to suck it up to work in the “real world”.

I'm glad I decided to stay because I really fancy one of the more senior staff, he's not a manager but he gets treated like one. We have loads of great chats, we talk about relationships and global politics and whatever. Sometimes he comes up behind me while I'm doing cutlery and he'll play with my hair or stroke my neck and I freeze, get butterfly's, my face burns up. He's 10 years older than me. I'm not gunna lie, I've fallen head over heels.

The warm wash snaps to the red backlight for a second, then back to warm wash.

Ariana Grande's 'Dangerous Woman' plays as Kirsty dances around the stage.

I have updates. We've started seeing each-other, he's basically my boyfriend. I don't really know what the difference is between boyfriend and seeing someone, but it feels the same?

Kirsty gets up to address the audience more intimately.

It all started when he defended my honour. So romantic. Basically, being the only female, I get a lot of attention from my colleagues. They comment on my weight, my bra colour, if I'm not wearing enough makeup. It's a regular thing that they'll push up against me, brush my arse/tits.

Anyway, so last week one of the managers called me over to a group of them and asked about my sex life; if I had slept with anyone, how many I'd slept with, that I looked "virginal". What does "virginal" even look like? Because I had a cold they all said it was from sucking too much dick. So, I said well "which am I, a virgin or a dick sucker?" Their pride was hurt because a girl had stood up to them. So, they said it looked like I'd put on weight. BUT THEN, my knight in shining armour came over, shot them down and said, "that's not true Kirsty's perfect just the way she is, she doesn't need to change anything, she's beautiful." I smiled so big, they all shut up as he's like the most respected employee. After that we started flirting even more. One thing led to another and now we're dating.

The incomprehensible sound plays and is projected onto the rear wall.

Snap to red backlight for a second and back to warm wash.

Kirsty is sitting at the table and takes off her makeup.

Had some backlash since dating Ronnie- Ronnie, the knight in shining armour. Big boss doesn't like it. So, having some issues. Erm, yesterday, I was polishing cutlery, I do it with my left hand because I'm left handed, and he came in and decided he didn't like that. Snatched the cutlery out of my hand shouting 'WHAT ARE YOU DOING?'. He put the cutlery in my right hand and with force, moved my hands to polish the cutlery but held them near his crotch.

It's not an isolated thing, tonight there was another "incident". I don't know if I'm leading him on, I can be quite a flirt. Stopped wearing makeup to work, thought that might help. Seems to have made it worse. Erm. Yea, tonight. I was in the back, putting mugs away, it was late and dark, the big boss followed and trapped me in the corner of the room. Put his arms over my legs locking me next to his body. He went into kiss me. I told him, "go away" but he said he wouldn't leave until I kissed him. Leaning on me. Felt so heavy. His breath stank of coffee.

*The incomprehensible sound is played. It's played for longer. Warm wash snap to red
backlight.*

Interlude C

D) I've spent the last 8 years on and off self-harming. I've had a lot of severe depressive episodes in my life where I would justify anger and hatred towards myself because it's what I learned as a child.

A) I think human beings are good at killing each-other, good at hurting each-other. How many times does it need to happen, like Columbine- and they go "Ah, the killers had a Marilyn Manson poster, listen to Rammstein". My mum listens to Rammstein and she hasn't killed anyone yet.

D) We don't consider it until there are bruises or cuts or a black eye. I think that people don't want to say it's "domestic violence" and don't want to "waste" police time.

C) I haven't received any support for what happened. I know it affected me.

B) I haven't reported it because I don't think anyone would think I was telling the truth. It's also really embarrassing.

D) I wouldn't know where to go about or who could even help with it. I'm not saying there's no support- it's just, I didn't believe that there was, I just thought this is something that happens.

Red wash snaps to a cold wash.

Act 3

Kylie Minogue's 'Santa Baby' plays. Cold wash.

Sorry it's been a while. Had a rough 8 months. Quit my job, which is good. About to finish my first term of Uni. Psychology student. Don't really know what I want to do yet, but people interest me so, thought Psychology was, probably a good shout.

Erm, so I got with this guy. Ronnie and I broke up if you hadn't realised. Too complicated. Anyway, this guy is my age and also a Psychology student. His name's Niall. The relationship issssss dominated by the sexual stuff... Like even if stuff gets bad, the sex is still, well you know.

Something interesting we learnt this term is all about how people lie, manipulate or only admit parts of truth in order to present a version of an event that they're comfortable with. It comes from "social approval". They believe that they have to be unhappy or have suffered for their life to be validated. They're so desperate for approval they resort to lying about trauma to ascertain a sense of validation. They basically believe the only way people will like them is if they're a "victim".

She reads from her notebook.

And soooo, once we see them as a victim, we're a little bit more forgiving, a little bit nicer, more sympathetic. But that's not an impossible context, people use stuff as an excuse for why their fucked up.

Kirsty begins to put her makeup on.

Same thing with Freshers week- which was crazy. Loads of girls slept with guys and then felt slutty in the morning so “changed their minds”. Said these poor guys forced themselves. Don’t really get that, like nothings *forced*, you weren’t *forced* to go back, you weren’t *forced* to get drunk, you know? I met Niall in Freshers week, went back to his, did what Freshers do, and now were together. No problems.

Even when the accident happened I didn’t let it define me. I haven’t addressed it yet because I try not to let it be a big deal. But, I’m sure you’re very curious. Two weeks ago, start of December. We had been to a social, came back, did what we do best, and he was holding this pocket knife and- it was stupid I shouldn’t have been laying on him, especially because we’d been drinking. He didn’t mean to, but he dropped it. Next thing you know I have this cut across my face. Obviously, immediately I was freaking out and he was so sorry and assured me it was an accident, which obviously I knew it was.

Obviously, everyone noticed. I said that it was an accident.

At first, I was like, “why the fuck are you even playing with a pocket knife?”, but then, I just think men and women are different, you know. Men are generally more, primal? Let’s take sex, it’s quite a violent act, I mean the act of being penetrated is quite violent, you are being inserted by another part of someone else, it’s... Sorry, but like men want rough sex; choking, biting, scratching.

You probably think all I'm interested in is sex. I'm not. I want the romance too. Niall can be romantic, he said at Valentines he's gonna take me out and pretend like we are in a movie! And when I went to the hospital after the knife incident I did flinch a bit around him, so he's been doing everything he can to make me comfortable, like he bought me a locket with our initials on it!

It's not like I want to do it all the time. It's him who's got the high sex drive. He's constantly all over me, he wants it all the time. Yea, he's all over me and sometimes I'm like, just no. But, that can cause arguments, which I get. Nobody likes rejection. My friends say I'm lucky that he's so in to me.

When the knife thing happened, he wanted to look after me, he'd always be like "oh I'll take you home, I'll look after you." And then we'd get to mine. And he just wouldn't leave. He would just be there. Like he barely ever left my house.

The incomprehensible sound plays for longer. But the Christmas jingle drowns the sound out.

Cold wash snaps to red backlight.

End of Act 3.

Interlude D

Mouth C speaks. Red wash.

“You’re a fucking whore.

You are fucking poison.

You’re poison, you’re poison.

I hate you.”

“I’m calling the police.

I’m calling the police!”

You’re an awful mother.

You’re an awful person.

You’re fat.

You’re ugly.

No-one will ever want you”.

“it’s ok.”

Red wash crossfades to light the bathtub.

Act 4

Michael Bublé's 'It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas' plays amongst the incomprehensible sounds and the projection plays on the rear wall.

Kirsty drinks from a Vodka bottle and pours it into the tub.

Kirsty picks up the toaster and gets into the tub.

She continues to pour the Vodka into her mouth, over her head and around her.

She begins to bathe.

She drops the toaster in the tub.

The lights snap to the red backlight and the spots flash up and down.

End of Act 4

Act 5

Michael Bublé's 'It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas' plays on to finish.

House lights gradually come up shortly after the last projection is played.

Front of House usher the audience out past Kirsty's body.

End of Act 5.

Introduction

The animating research questions for this practice-as-research project constellate around an inquiry into how theatre might help to breach and disrupt the boundaries of public and private violence to invite audiences into a position of reassessment of societal and systemic violence. This thesis will closely interrogate the efficacy of form and structure in presenting narratives of violence as both intimate and extimate performances, explored by creating a portfolio of short theatre works that engage with ideas of physical theatre, digital and intermediality, one-to-one immersive work and long-form monologue. My methodology sought to create iterative aesthetic interventions which explore issues of violence through different approaches and perspectives instead of creating one ‘skyscraper’ piece¹. Using proximity, physical immediacy and temporal-immediacy in relation to social and cultural contexts, this practice-as-research portfolio considers the cascade effect of violence from state-sponsored conflict, to eruptions of social violence, workplace violence, domestic abuse and the leakage of violent pornographic tropes into personal sexual practice.

Against the backdrop of the #MeToo movements and accusations of sexual violence in the highest public institutions, this practice-as-research portfolio and thesis is unashamed in examining ‘gendered violence’, and patriarchal forces that transmit hyper-sexualisation of women and toxic masculinity as viable identities.

¹ Will Self, *The Guardian*, *Will Self on the meaning of skyscrapers- from the Tower of Babel to the Shard*,

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/mar/27/will-self-on-the-meaning-of-skyscrapers>, Published: 27/03/25, Accessed: 30/04/19. “skyscraper piece”

The feminist critique of architecture suggests skyscrapers are “monuments to capitalism” or “phallic” and this is an unintentional but resonant idea behind my method of making. The use of language such as “iterative” highlights my choice to create a landscape of shorter performances that progress out of the previous work and take a pluralised perspective on each topic instead of continuing ‘upwards’ in a monolithic direction, splintering the idea of dominant performance.

Specifically, this thesis examines how gendered-violence coerces a range of behaviours and shapes self-identification in accordance with consumerist mediated messages and the patriarchal archetype. For this thesis I define “violence” as any coercive force which removes autonomy or oppresses a person into a state of trauma or causes a splintering of identity. Coercive forces include, but are not limited to; emotional, physical, mediated, implied, cultural, social and systemic-political abuse which effect the (un/sub) conscious.

I perceive my practice-as-research portfolio as like an operating theatre, a simultaneously violent and remediating image, dissecting private perceptions on violence by creating an explorative public space to interact with theatricalised manifestations of violence. This research is inclusive of philosophical, sociological, qualitative data which will be used to creatively investigate violence and inform an artistic response which uses theatre as a dialogical tool to instigate reflection and discussion. This thesis is not looking to uncover the genesis of violence or give a socio-historical or psychological explanation as to why people are violent. Nor can the limitations of the format provide the full body of influences that have informed my practice, however, I aim to discuss a selection of theories and case-studies that upholds the rigour of my artistry and highlights the progression of my work.

Chapter One of the written thesis considers how systemic violence influences public and personal acts of violence. Further, it intends to identify the ‘overlays’ and symbiosis between violence in the workplace, domestic violence and pornography as an influential mode. I do not intend to prove or disprove whether pornography is a stimulus that instigates domestic abuse or violence in the workplace, rather, I seek to

highlight the mainstream pornographic narratives and image bank which might be linked to particular cultural patterns. I draw alongside this reflection ideas about pornography as personal empowerment and set these ideas against theorists who have identified it as problematic to the pro-sex movement. My research does not distinguish victim and offender on individual levels but underlines the physical and metaphysical violence in patriarchal and capitalist pornography which disseminates the male-gaze as the invisible accepted standard. My research examines specific sexual behaviours and practices which have transitioned to and are entrenched in ‘the mainstream’, surfacing in major movies, books and television, and which are subsequently reproduced in social encounters.

My practice-as-research touches upon violence in relationships, in its most common form, epitomise the patriarchal inequality of expectations on female and male ‘roles’, and my work incorporates ideas about how this is supported by institutional, governmental and generational messages. The work recognises that women can uphold patriarchal values consciously or through internalised oppression, and that post-feminist critics point to female empowerment through ‘erotic capital’ or the proactive adoption of ‘self-objectification’, such as sociologist Catherine Hakim’s assertion that “The sexualisation of culture affects public as well as private life. Beauty, sex appeal, social skills and the arts of self-presentation have increasing value everywhere, helping to sell ideas, products and policies. Popular culture especially valorises female erotic capital.”² Likewise, I identify how men can be potential victims of the patriarchy, in the aggressions they receive upon explicitly rejecting the heteronormative position or

² Catherine Hakim. Prospect Magazine, *Have you got erotic capital?* <https://prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/have-you-got-erotic-capital>, Published: 24/03/10, Accessed: 29/09/18

living miserably under a weight of expectations that sustain privilege to certain races, economic status, physical ability, and expressions of sexuality. Importantly, this is not an exercise in ‘kink-shaming’ or an attempt to deny people’s agency in choosing their erotic diet, contrarily, this work emanates from a place of celebrating mutual sexual appreciation, equality of libido and a playful and expansive inventory of sexual practices, rather, by asking who gets to choose, where that empowerment of choice comes from, and through considering how our visual and imaginative erotic palette is shaped by commercial mainstream mediatisation, this portfolio explores how repeated tropes of violence are common and connected across both sexual and domestic, private and public spheres.

This thesis should be read as an intent to consider how theatre communicates personal messages of subjective violence which are otherwise influenced or reinforced by objective and systemic violence. My critical and reflective writing demonstrates the iterative journey undertaken which highlights the interplay in the works across the portfolio. Furthermore, how this interplay corresponds with the theoretical analysis of how pornography, domestic and workplace violence might be considered as symbiotic. The first half of the thesis explores theoretical frameworks of theorists such as, Slavoj Žižek, Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault and Gail Dines. The reader can anticipate a shift in style and tone in the latter part of this thesis, whereby, subjective evaluation and self-discovery are extrapolated as research. My practice-as-research will add to the socio-political address of gendered violence and also promote my artistic growth in identifying the obstacles, ethical challenges and (areas for) development within my practice.

Chapter One.

'Power and violence are opposites; where one rules absolutely, the other is absent...

Violence can always destroy power: out of the barrel of a gun grows the most effective command, resulting in the most instant and perfect obedience.'

Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*³

In Arendt's 1969 essay *On Violence*, the political theorist demonstrates the phenomena of state violence as supported by bureaucratic systems as a loss of legitimacy and agency, that seeks to make subjects 'obedient' to the spectre of the 'gun', to 'disarm' the collective force by performative spectacularisation of violence. Whilst this thesis offers some critique of Arendt's theorisation, this chapter is informed by exploration of the tensions between power and violence, the political and the philosophical, the public and the private, the extimate and the intimate. If we align with Arendt's that "power and violence are opposites" and that the introduction of violence revokes meaningful and sustainable power, this raises questions about the proliferation and purpose of violent events and imagery. Arendt's examination in *On Violence* addresses the idea of 'manifestations' and 'behaviours' that legitimise violence, thus asking her reader to consider how violence 'performs' itself, and why the witness might simultaneously be seduced and revolted. The animating research questions in this chapter include, what are the private and public expositions of violence that influence social tropes? And how might ideas of proximity, modality and frequency in exposure

³ Arendt, Hannah *On Violence*, 1970. New York: Harvest Books

to violence persuade both victim and perpetrator to adhere to mediatised patterning of ‘behaviours’ (including simulated) despite the multidirectional attrition of violence.

Throughout 2017 we heard testimonies and witnessed an influx of global fervent responses that unite people in their adversity. Creatively, this is fertile ground for theatre to intervene. To use the inherent dialogical and communal nature of theatre to intervene as performative protest. With theatre’s ability to humanise reports which turn people into numerical identities, it is an appropriate ambassador for social justice. As the next chapter explicates, theatre donates avatars to anonymous stories and invites audiences into an intimate proximity that exposes them to flesh, breath and emotion in a tangible and present way.

Returning to the events that incited Arendt’s concerns, it was the immediate period after World War II that saw the proliferation of testimonies, from identifying the perpetrators in the Nuremberg and Frankfurt Trials, to the memorialised spaces for the victims to respond to the barbaric nature of the Holocaust, we have entered what Felman and Laub famously identified as the “era of testimony”⁴ where the recording and replaying of personal attestations to violence have grown exponentially⁵. Given the schismatic events of the past century, and our accelerated position of mediatised witness within it, academic philosopher and communist radical thinker, Slavoj Žižek has repeatedly returned to considering our genocidal “intent to destroy”⁶ and perspectives on violence:

4 Felman, S., and D. Laub (1991) *Testimony: crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history*. New York: Routledge.

5 Fassin, D., and R. Rechtman (2009) *The empire of trauma: an inquiry into the condition of victimhood*. Princeton, N.J.; Oxford: Princeton University Press.

6 Arendt, H. (1994[1963]) *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Revised and enlarged ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Opposing all forms of violence, from direct, physical violence to ideological violence, seems to be the main preoccupation of the tolerant liberal attitude that predominates today.⁷

Here Žižek sets his sights on the (neo)liberal preoccupation with opposing violence with often minimal connection to wider structural and political issues, and this project offers a small moment of resistance in attempt to bridge these. This thesis builds on Žižek's argument here that the foundation of much violence is born from institutional systemic violence which leads to subjective expressions of violence, denoted and typified as individualised issues within society. For Žižek, there is violence at the 'top', influential positions which set precedent and filter into our social conduct, whilst the predominance of 'fanatical' and 'evil individuals' divert our gaze away from the source:

...Is there not something suspicious, indeed symptomatic, about this focus of subjective violence – violence enacted by social agents... Doesn't it desperately try to distract our attention from the true locus of trouble, by obliterating from view other forms of violence?⁸

In Žižek's book *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, he highlights the systemic violence that remains hidden by the attention placed on subjective violence. The ubiquitous nature of violence uncovered in recent times, with private cases of sexual violence surfacing in the '#MeToo' movement and violence in the workplace⁹ being publicised and fomenting activism. These testimonies focussed a spotlight on individuals, Žižek's "social agents", that are being demonised for their actions, but this

7 Slavoj Žižek. *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Profile Books (2010)

8 Slavoj Žižek. *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Profile Books (2010), Pg.9

9 Laura Bates. *The Everyday Sexism Project*, <https://everydaysexism.com/>, Accessed: 29/09/18

focus also scrutinises the systems and structures in place that facilitate abusive behaviour. I align myself with both Arendt and Žižek here, that capitalist fibres that warp-and-weft our society are formed by a patriarchal hierarchy which protects those that abuse their positions of authority, and as evidenced in the ‘#MeToo’ testimonies, women’s dignity is often ‘collateral’ of preserving this authority; the rear-guard supporters of a would-be male ‘monocracy’¹⁰ casting complaint as a way to “gain attention”¹¹. Žižek defines this violence as a “fundamental systemic violence of capitalism, much more uncanny than any direct pre-capitalist socio-ideological violence: the violence is no longer attributable to concrete individuals and their ‘evil’ intentions, but is purely ‘objective’ systemic, anonymous.”¹² The ‘objective anonymous’ being allied to Arendt’s centrifugal spectre of the gun and its power to ‘obliterate’ perspective, moving the focus from systemic, to accentuate the specific ‘individual’ point of blame.

Now I shift the focus of this chapter to consider the current sociological data regarding violence in order to establish a quantitative framework in which to consider the severity of the problem. The Living Without Abuse¹³ organisation reports that in the UK 25% of women are affected by domestic abuse in comparison to 16% of men. Their statistical data highlights the continuing disproportionate effect of domestic violence against women. They report that on average around 110 women are murdered

10 *And Revelation* and *Porn Culture* are two of my original works both address issues of systemic violence which authorise individuated acts of violence. *Porn Culture* used vlogs and interview clips to create a soundscape of opinions and observations, including recordings of political figures such as Donald Trump being verbally debasing to women. *And Revelation* discussed how patriarchy co-opts systemic violence to overlook gendered attacks on a female employee by a group of male employees. Both these examples evidence an imbedded perspective on gender discrimination stemming from a long-standing structural power imbalance.

11 Latoya Gayle, The Daily Mail, *Furious women reveal what they REALLY think about the MeToo campaign in shocking confessions- as some blast it as ‘just an excuse to gain attention’*, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-5354031/Women-reveal-hate-MeToo-movement.html>, Published: 06/02/18, Accessed: 29/09/18

12 Slavoj Žižek. *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Profile Books (2010), Pg. 11

13 Living Without Abuse, *Statistics*, <http://www.lwa.org.uk/understanding-abuse/statistics.htm>, Accessed: 8/04/18

each year, compared with 30 men, furthermore stating “is approximated that 400 people commit suicide each year who have attended hospital for domestic abuse injuries in the previous 6 months, 200 of these attend hospital the day they commit suicide.”¹⁴ According to the 2016/2017 Governmental Health & Safety Executive¹⁵ statistics report, there is a recorded 642,000 cases of violence in ‘industry’ in England and Wales. Finally, when consider the relationship between pornography and violence, the international 26% average of women who watch Pornhub indicates the remainder 74% male consumers, though there might be social strictures in self-reporting. Nevertheless, given these weightings, my exploration will highlight the structural implications of being a woman in a patriarchal society, in comparison to the pressures that men face in the same environments, and will critique the ‘systemic violence of capitalism’ that protects, normalises, and endlessly reproduces this behaviour.

This chapter now turns to examine indirect effects of violence enacted in public spheres bleeding into private relationships, and how violence on a state level can create ‘impression’ and make ‘representation’ amongst the polis. Moreover, how this purposeful confusion of activity, imagery and memory is intended to transfer responsibility to individuals when the act of violence is challenged or termed socially unacceptable. In *Violence*, Slavoj Žižek uses the example of the 2005 Muhammad cartoon controversy¹⁶ to make example of how bold choices cause indirect impact, Žižek details that a “vast majority of the thousands who felt offended by and demonstrated against the cartoons had not even *seen* them”.¹⁷ And that perhaps “the

14 Living Without Abuse, *Statistics*, <http://www.lwa.org.uk/understanding-abuse/statistics.htm>, Accessed: 8/04/18

15 <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causinj/violence/index.htm>

16 Martin Asser, BBC, *What the Muhammad cartoons portray?* http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4693292.stm, Published: 2/01/10, Accessed: 14/04/18

17 Slavoj Žižek. *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Profile Books (2010), Pg. 50

Muslim crowds did not react to Muhammed caricatures as such. They reacted to the complex figure or image of the *West* that they perceived as the attitude behind the caricatures.”¹⁸

This thesis aims to creatively excavate any causal link, here highlighted by Žižek’s case-study, between the *image* that makes violence, as much as the *image* of violence itself, and how that performs itself in our behaviours. Arguably, the response of anger to the caricatures was the ‘trigger’, the inciting incident, whilst the deeper response, the subtext, was towards the attitudes the Muslim ‘actors’ to which Žižek refers, felt the West were exhibiting. Here, I would like to build upon Žižek’s central thesis to suggest that recreating and distributing produced *images* of violence may not be perceived to be a directly violent, as they are presented as ‘fiction’, but in making the image, we add to the archive of the permissible¹⁹, we create another social event that centralises, fetishizes and normalises violence.

Žižek asserts that freedom of choice is designated to every individual to present the prospect of autonomy. However, that freedom is conditional and expires once ‘abused’ - “you are given freedom on condition that you will not really use it.”²⁰ This theorisation inspires a creative and academic exploration in regards to pornography, where I explore through performance the meshing of the permissions created around certain modes of structural violence, the propagation of violent activity in adult consensual movies and the enactment of violence in social relationships.

18 Slavoj Žižek. *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Profile Books (2010), Pg.51

19 The ‘archive of the permissible’ or image bank was a concept that I found through discussion and practice. It also nods towards Derrida’s writings on the archive, and plays with the idea of the work of embodiment as a method of ‘making real’ in performance and reproduction.

20 Slavoj Žižek. *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Profile Books (2010), Pg.109

Activist and feminist scholar Catharine MacKinnon suggests that:

...if a woman says 'I didn't consent' and people have been viewing pornography, they believe the woman did consent no matter what she said. That when she said no, she meant yes... Pornography promotes these rape myths and desensitises people to violence against women so that you need more violence to become sexually aroused if you're a pornography consumer.²¹

MacKinnon's thesis earned recognition globally as women spoke out about rape occurring within their own marriages, and how in the workplace saying 'no' actually insinuates 'not yet'. This drive towards more people testifying to violence, and recognising the actions committed against them as such, is apparent in the personal interviews I have conducted. The argument expressed by MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin²² suggests an interchangeable violence between public and private spheres, including the 'force' of pornography. I would firmly suggest that the effects of pornography on male identity, as co-morbid²³ victims of toxic masculinity and heteronormative patriarchy. Anti-pornography activist Gail Dines expresses this in her book *Pornland*, whereby she reveals the average age boys first watch pornography is 11 years old.²⁴

21 Stuart Jeffries, The Guardian, *Are Women Human*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/apr/12/gender.politicsphilosophyandsociety>, Published: 12/04/06, Accessed: 5/04/18

22 Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon. *In Harm's Way: The Pornography Civil Rights Hearings*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England. (1997)

23 "Co-morbid" suggesting that women and men are both victims of toxic masculinity as they are simultaneously negatively impacted.

24 Gail Dines, *Pornland: How Porn has Hijacked our Sexuality*, Boston: Beacon Press Books, (2010) Pg. xi

The male porn-stars are often portrayed as unfeeling, soulless animals in subgenres such as rape porn and gonzo²⁵: “This porn involves sexual performance in which the male actor violates or appears to harm the female performer”. This identity has become a phenomenon in ‘Lad culture’ and is mirrored in celebrated statuses²⁶ such as being a “fuckboy”. An article in *The Mirror* effectively communicates this culture by ‘ex-lad’ Chris Hemmings who reflects on his university experience almost a decade later.²⁷

One game that became increasingly popular during my first year was called ‘Hot Leg’. Find a girl in a club, get her to dance with you then, when she’s grinding on your legs, you piss on hers. The aim of the game was to piss as long as possible until she noticed. Then, once she was enraged, to try and hold on to her. All the time, still pissing.²⁸

Encountering this research posed a necessary interrogation into whether (as harmful as the female role in pornography might be to female identity) the common ‘male role’ in pornography as ‘dominating degrader’ has a negative impact on male identity. This can be evidenced in the pressure to conform and align with sexual and gendered-violence, as influenced by pornographic tropes, in public scenarios. My creative exploration seeks to consider how patriarchal forces create gain in the tension between fetishization and simultaneous normalisation of violence, and how this might

25 David Rosen. Alternet, *Is the rise of filthy Gonzo porn actually dangerous, or are people overreacting?*, <https://www.alternet.org/sex-amp-relationships/gonzo-porn>, Published: 07/06/13, Accessed: 29/09/18

26 National Union of Students. *That’s what she said: Women students’ experiences of ‘lad culture’ in higher education*, <https://www.nus.org.uk/Global/Campaigns/That's%20what%20she%20said%20full%20report%20Final%20web.pdf>, University of Sussex, Published: 2012, Accessed: 29/09/18

27 Chris Hemmings, *Mirror*, *ashamed graduate reveals how his own ritual humiliation of women finally drove him to seek the death of lad culture*, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/real-life-stories/ashamed-graduate-reveals-how-ritual-11121437>, Published: 11/10/17, Accessed: 14/04/18

28 Chris Hemmings, *Mirror*, *ashamed graduate reveals how his own ritual humiliation of women finally drove him to seek the death of lad culture*, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/real-life-stories/ashamed-graduate-reveals-how-ritual-11121437>, Published: 11/10/17, Accessed: 14/04/18

affect interactions between men and women in intimate and professional environments. This chapter now turns to Dines as a major interlocutor in the wider discussion about pornography:

50 of the top-rented porn movies contained both physical and verbal abuse of the female performer. Physical aggression, which included spanking, open-hand slapping, and gagging, occurred in over 88% of scenes, while expressions of verbal aggression, calling the woman names such as bitch or slut, were found in 48%.²⁹

There is a direct correlation between Dines' findings and one of my motivating practice-as-research questions which addresses the widely circulated and corporately exploited messages of women being "always ready for sex and [being] enthusiastic to do whatever men want, irrespective of how painful, humiliating, or harmful. The word 'no' is glaringly absent from porn women's vocabulary"³⁰ and dovetails with the uncovered content of *Can We Talk*³¹ which uses verbatim testimony and recounts an experience that mirrors the culture of Gail Dines research:

He wanted to do anal... He said 'I want you to bend over and take it and if it hurts I don't want you to tell me to stop. That's the only way'... So, I did as he asked, and it hurt so much I wanted to cry.³²

This material and other correlative sources feeds into my practice to consider *Pornland's* description of heightened pleasure and orgasm being linked to the male partner's communication of contempt and distaste for the female partner, engaging in

29 Gail Dines, Jhally, S. *Pornland*, Northampton, MA: Media Education foundation (2014), Pg.xxii

30 Gail Dines, Jhally, S. *Pornland*, Northampton, MA: Media Education foundation (2014), Pg. xxiii

31 Original Script *Can We Talk*.

32 Transcript from Domestic Violence creative performance. Francesca Gray, Masters (2018)

calling her things like dirty or filthy. Moreover, women, perhaps in an act of internalised patriarchal self-abuse, or just following the ‘script’, might encourage these proclamations in an inculcation that their role in sex is linked to male satisfaction, even if they “wanted to cry”. Dines’ proposes that self-objectification has saturated our culture and begins to incrementally infiltrate personal expressions of sexuality, so the role of the “filthy slut”³³ becomes a performable option; self-debasement has a legacy on the psyche. Consequently, believing that the success of their sex life is contingent upon their “slut” participation perceiving this vocabulary and behaviour as a positive and pro-sex attitude.³⁴ Psychology academic Tiffany Hoyt study *The Object of Desire*, addresses this:

objectification theory purports that objectifying someone makes it easier to commit violence against that person and so an objectified partner may be subjected to more sexual pressure and even sexual coercion.³⁵

This reinforces the “hijacking of sexuality” that Dines contends is normalised, therefore perpetuating severely negative, unequal and subjugated relationships of violence and subservience.

This thesis aims to examine how ‘sexually liberating’ vocabulary in the bedroom might transpose into social contexts, including the workplace, and develop into socially violent speech. My practice-as-research intersects with concerns of double-standards that one behaviour is arousing and encouraged in a private space, but ‘offensive’ and ‘intolerable’ in a public space. My final creative work, *And*

³³ Gail Dines, Jhally, S. *Pornland*, Northampton, MA: Media Education foundation (2014), Pg. xxiii

³⁴ Barbara. L Fredrickson, Tomi-Ann Roberts, *Objectification Theory*, <http://www.sanchezlab.com/pdfs/FredricksonRoberts.pdf>, Published: 1997, Accessed: 14/04/18

³⁵ Tiffany Hoyt, *The Object of Desire: How Being Objectified Creates Sexual Pressure for Heterosexual Women in Relationships*, http://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1245&context=undergrad_rev, Published: 2013, Accessed: 14/04/18

*Revelation*³⁶, directly confronts the notion of ‘tolerable’ violence against the ‘intolerable’ and unpicks the politics that maintains this status quo.

Slavoj Žižek would argue, to protect ourselves we must reject concepts of tolerable and intolerable violence:

...to distinguish between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ violence: It is essential to define violence in such a way that it cannot be qualified as ‘good’. The moment we claim to be able to distinguish ‘good’ violence from ‘bad’, we lose the proper use of the word.³⁷

I asked interviewees how they would distinguish the ethical parameters of a sexual relationship and highlighted the problematics of sex being an individuated experience, to which, comfortability levels can vary and dislocate from the accepted standard of male gratification in pornography. Here I evidence the slippery ‘grey area’ around defining sexual appropriateness:

...everyone has their own perspective on it, everyone has their own want from it... I think it would be difficult to establish what's right or wrong. It would be a case of when someone does something that isn't acceptable- being like, no.³⁸

My creative practice examines the slippage of violent behaviour from sexual relations into platonic and professional contexts. I wanted my portfolio to question the percolation of pornographic narratives into the wider social forum, particularly in

36 *And Revelation* Script.

37 Slavoj Žižek. *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Profile Books (2010), Pg. 53

38 Original transcripts. Appendices.

workplace behaviours which I strongly allude to in *And Revelation*, which details a young girls' experience of sexual harassment at work.

An example of transitional violence³⁹ from representations in pornography to the re-presentation in 'real life' can be identified in the eroticising of professional relationships, where hierarchical structures are replicated as entitlement to sexualise employees, and where male power in professional environments often sees (younger) women as subordinate.⁴⁰ The narratives that eroticise the sexualising of professional relationships are ubiquitous in 'teen' porn genre:

...teen porn genre is full of sites with titles such as *Fuck the Babysitter*, *Gag the Babysitter*, *Babysitter Lust*, and *Banged Babysitter*.⁴¹

The perversity here corresponds with babysitting roles often being young girls' entry into employment. Previously I detailed original transcripts⁴² which feature multiple experiences of teenage girls being sexualised at work within a disproportionate female to male workforce and explores instances where as a result 'pack mentality'⁴³ formed, recording a group of male employees trapping and interrogating a girl about her sexual experiences.

2017 forms the backdrop of my practice-as-research, and it has been this past year that has seen the uplift in social discourse around sexual harassment, from the scores of women who spoke out about Harvey Weinstein, to the vast number of column

39 Fionnuala Ní Aoláin. *Political Violence and Gender in Times of Transition*, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/26c2/f83bf2f9a39f5cb88306862f017708a7a0a4.pdf>, University of Minnesota Law School (2006)

40 Sabi phagura, Daily Star, *Teen babysitter applying for job left horrified after crude sex proposal*, <https://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/435815/Teen-babysitter-applying-for-job-left-horrified-after-crude-sex-proposal>, Published: 10/05/15, Accessed: 14/04/18

41 Gail Dines, Jhally, S. *Pornland*, Northampton, MA: Media Education foundation (2014), Pg. 154

42 Original transcripts. Appendices.

43 Robert Evans Wilson Jr., Psychology Today, *Pack Mentality: Humans are as motivated by status as pack animals*, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/the-main-ingredient/200912/pack-mentality>, Published: 09/12/09, Accessed: 13/04/19

inches devoted to the topic, and the unpublished cases in my own research interviews, many societies in the global north have been pressed to reflect the prevalence of harassment, and how this manifests itself in the workplace.⁴⁴ With reports brought forward years after the incidents, one only need signal the thousands of citations uploaded to the *Everyday Sexism hub*⁴⁵, a catalogue of testimonies from named and anonymised sources detailing their accounts of sexism. For Laura Bates it denotes the rationalisation around sexually inappropriate behaviour as an unfortunate side-effect of patriarchal society instead of a prohibited and taboo event. Therefore, the principles of inclusion for my practice-as-research extend to an examination of the connective tissues between pornography affirming the image of women wanting to be sexualised at work, and behaviours externalised in real situations.

The interconnection of my practice-as-research is bound by the hypothesis that if sexual violence is unremittingly being normalised, we need a redefining of what is perceived as violent. Slavoj Žižek sympathises with this perspective in his treatise: “when we perceive something as an act of violence, we measure it by a presupposed standard of what the ‘normal’ non-violent situation is”⁴⁶ Consequently, the risks of normalising violence are evident in public and private spheres that interchangeably influence each other.

Pornhub’s ‘Insight’ page details data over 2017 and boasts about its “120 million video votes on Pornhub of which nearly 80% were positive. That’s a million

44 India Card. India’s Voice, *The Normalisation of Rape Culture*. <http://platformwomen.org/metoo/the-normalization-of-rape-culture/>, Published: 26/06/18, Accessed: 29/09/18

Parliamentary Business. *Sexual harassment and sexual violence in school*, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmwomeq/91/9105.htm>, Published: 08/09/16 Accessed: 29/09/18

45 Laura Bates, *the everyday sexism project*, <https://everydaysexism.com/>, Accessed: 29/09/18

46 Slavoj Žižek. *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Profile Books (2010), Pg. 55

votes more than were cast in the last U.S. Presidential election”. This association suggests to readers that pornography is ‘winning’ more or is engaging more successfully with people than politics.⁴⁷ This skewed presentation of people’s priorities, which presents a flawed comparison in regard to numerical data, indicates Pornhub’s agenda to convince readers that social priorities rank with pleasure-seeking above social enterprise. This provocation underlines the creative impulse for my work, that if powerful platforms such as Pornhub assert prioritisation of sexual needs over political then our current socio-cultural position mandates creative exploration. This paradigm nods towards the accuracy of Žižek’s observation of our social lens “obliterating”⁴⁸ images rather than surveying the implications of our socio-political structures, which allows systemic violence to survive.

My creative address is also underscored by compassion for the individual subject, when there can only be limited blame toward the ‘man on the street’ for such actions when the political powerhead of the Western world expresses ideological-oppressive and misogynistic attitudes.⁴⁹ Pornhub have also aligned their marketing to this skewed manipulation by reconfiguring and reclaiming the ‘#MeToo’ movement as a triumph of a ‘pro-sex’ mantra. “Women are feeling more empowered and they have found their voice.”⁵⁰ My question here does not deny this possibility, but rather critiques the commercial exploitation of the hashtag, the extent to which Pornhub allows women a ‘voice’ within their repository of image.

47 Pornhub Insights, *2017 Year in Review*, <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/2017-year-in-review>, Published: 9/01/18, Accessed: 8/04/18

48 Slavoj Žižek. *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Profile Books (2010), Pg.9 “Is there not something suspicious...” Vocabulary: ‘Obliterating’ suggests making something destroyed, invisible and indistinct which aligns with Žižek’s observation of systemic violence redirecting our attention to subjective violence.

49 Charlotte Higgins. The Guardian, *The age of patriarchy: how an unfashionable idea became a rallying cry for feminism today*, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/jun/22/the-age-of-patriarchy-how-an-unfashionable-idea-became-a-rallying-cry-for-feminism-today>, Published: 22/06/18, Accessed:30/09/18

50 Pornhub Insights, *2017 Year in Review*, <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/2017-year-in-review>, Published: 9/01/18, Accessed: 8/04/18

The post-feminist notion that pornography empowers women to be sexually liberated might be examined against the nature of mainstream pornography. Despite ‘textual’ assertions of choice, the representation focuses attention solely on male gratification, on oral pleasure for him, with the female subject enacting the trope of “asking the man to thrust harder and harder.”⁵¹ My research compelled me to orient my practice towards asking if this version of empowerment is focussed on the individual at the expense of a communal uplift for a subjugated gender. I examine the tension between the commodification and objectification of women, and the idea that pornography offers empowerment; between the promulgation of the narrative of underage girls coerced into sex acts, and the claim that pornography might offer liberatory sexual awakening. This exploration through my practice also extends to the impacts on the largest consumers of pornography, men, exposed to performative roles of toxic masculinity that exude heightened and unsustainable sexual achievement, against the possibility that private consumption of porn assists the wider socio-sexual equality. This queries the links between exploitation in mainstream pornography, and the value system inculcated in the male-dominated workplace where women are first a sexual entity and second a professional. My practice directly questions this tension between the competing claims for pornography, as systemic, proliferated violence, or whether empowerment might exist in performed pornography.

Looking to the thriving economics of pornography, it is a multibillion-dollar business, which has been reinvented and marketed as the posterchild for pro-sex, when the reality might be more pro-capitalism. Radical feminist Robert Jensen challenges

⁵¹ Gail Dines, Jhally, S. *Pornland*, Northampton, MA: Media Education foundation (2014), Pg. xxiii

the popular marketing tactic that markets pornography as catered to men and women equally, in his book *Getting Off*.⁵²

...it is clear that contemporary pornography predominantly reflects the male sexual imagination rooted in a dominant conception of masculinity: sex as control, conquest, domination, and the acquisition of pleasure by the taking of women. In my interviews over the past decade with pornography producers and sellers, I have always asked what percentage of their customers are men. The lowest figure anyone has ever given me is 80%.

Jenson quotes John Stagliano: “I worry that we’re creating art that makes people a little more comfortable with certain psychological things that should be uncomfortable because they’re bad.” Jenson elucidates the dangerous influence pornography can have by proposing that “the father of gonzo is concerned that the more extreme varieties of pornography could possibly reinforce and normalize attitudes that legitimate abuse.”⁵³

The aforementioned prompts an examination of the undercurrents of domestic abuse as a physical and psychological violence. Correspondingly, I point to philosopher Michel Foucault and his discussion of public violence in the reform of punishment in our legal systems in his seminal work *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault details how systems of punishment evolved to use subtler violence in acts of shame or humiliation. Hence, Foucault is suggesting a shift in punishment from physical violence to an attack

52 Robert Jenson, *Getting Off: Pornography and the End to Masculinity*, Southend Press, (2007)

53 Robert Jenson, *Getting Off: Pornography and the end of Masculinity, we are what we masturbate to*, Southend Press, (2007) Pg. 97-99

on identity through methods of degradation. Therefore, where violence becomes re-framed and re-connected with the personal, this conditions our perspective of violence as being a subjective individualised issue, instead of being symptomatic of political frameworks. This same framework can be applied to domestic violence sufferers who complicate feelings of physical safety with an internalised false sense of shame which deters them from seeking sanctuary. The nature of domestic abuse can be seen to align with other forms of violence examined in this chapter, the mechanism being to degrade, humiliate and attack the “soul”.⁵⁴ Accordingly, we must consider the definition of violence and the differences between physical and emotional violence:

...since it is no longer the body, it must be replaced by a punishment that acts in depth on the heart, the once and for all ‘Punishment, should strike the soul rather than the body’.⁵⁵

We might conclude here that a transition to abusing the ‘soul’ is the ultimate violence; whilst physical abuse strikes fear and physical subjugation, an attack on the soul splinters the personal identity. As proposed in the Introduction of this thesis, my interrogation on violence defines itself as ‘an exploration into the “splintering” of one’s person by means of physical destruction and by fracturing the mind and soul.’ Finally, I would suggest that these violences are inseverable.

The following chapter discusses the socio-cultural and political structures which outline different case studies of violence and inform my practice. I grapple with the ‘authenticity’ of violence in performance and how representation can be the only

54 Centre for Hope and Safety, *Words are Powerful*, <https://hopeandsafety.org/learn-more/words-are-powerful/>, Accessed: 14/04/18

55 Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish*. London: Penguin Books, (1991), Pg. 16

appropriate substitute to engage these tensions of 'real world' and theatrical displays of violence.

Chapter Two

Whilst art cannot stop a bullet, it can perhaps stop one from being fired in the first place.⁵⁶

In this chapter I will be discussing an intertextuality of cultural influences which have informed my research investigating violence, detailing some of the performance artists and practitioners who are using aesthetic interventions to explore similar themes and questions on intimate and extimate violence, who are making work that produces representations of the borderlines and fault-lines of taboo acts. These pieces and practices have directly and indirectly informed the shape of my portfolio works. Primarily, my four work-in-development pieces aim to: disrupt stabilities of representations of violence and sensitise audiences to enable interrogation into habitual behaviours which are socially, politically and commercially induced. My overarching research question in this chapter investigates the ‘productivity’ of various performance forms and their ability to communicate different public and private expressions of violence, and why different aesthetic forms serve specific narratives of violence more successfully. Nevertheless, the use of such subjective and freighted vocabulary such as ‘successfully’ and ‘productivity’ is problematic in regard to ideas of impact, efficacy and reception in performance; I am not looking to privilege hegemonic patriarchal tropes through dominating the emotions of others, and ‘obliterating’ critical social consciousness, but rather through increasing vigilance to the systemic factors. The latter asks that we prioritise bespoke

56 Andrew Stephens. *Can Art Stop a Bullet? Artists takes aim at the official violence feeding terror*, The Sydney Morning Herald, *Stanford Rape Case: To the swimmer who attacked a girl, I'm sorry. We have failed you with such a light sentence*, <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/can-art-stop-a-bullet-artist-takes-aim-at-the-official-violence-feeding-terror-20151106-gksk99.html>. Published: 13/11/15, Accessed: 04/01/18

connection and dialogue over the loudness of applause⁵⁷, we look again for the feminist form of accumulative relationships over ‘skyscraper’ prowess. These principles will remain critical to the paradigm of this investigation and this thesis. In my analysis, I look to subvert the words ‘productive’ and ‘success’, which are commonly identified as being defined by the responses to the work, and conversely, release those modes of measurement back to the artist, in line with their known intention. Such plurality is reflected in the breadth of my performance work, but I endeavour to critically survey the field in order to better understand tropes, patterns and synergies of practice. Consequently, this chapter will discuss works which have specifically influenced my own portfolio and how I have incorporated these influences to enhance the productivity of my own work. Finally, this chapter will evaluate if these influences were able to ignite an ethical dialogue post-performance and therefore sensitise audiences to the nuance around violent socio-cultural behaviours.

This portfolio of practice-as-research has personal imprint in the writing, directing, and performance, where each exploration into domestic violence, workplace violence and violence in pornography emanates from subjective, personal experiences. These personal experiences which have shaped some of the narratives in my portfolio coincide with an anthology of cultural influences and are further ignited by the recent media space given to the ‘#MeToo’ campaign which was at the forefront of feminist activism in 2017. Tarana Burke was not among those celebrities who graced the front cover of TIME Magazine’s Person of the Year in the December

57 Sedgman, K, 2018, ‘The Reasonable Audience: Theatre Etiquette, Behaviour Policing, and the Live Performance Experience’. Palgrave Macmillan. P.xvi

2017⁵⁸ edition which celebrated the impact of the #MeToo movement, whereas in reality it was long-time activist Burke who coined the phrase a decade earlier in a “a grassroots campaign to reach underprivileged girls dealing with sexual abuse”⁵⁹. However, it was the deployment of the hashtag by actress Alyssa Milano, encouraging victims of sexual abuse to tweet #MeToo to “show the world the magnitude”⁶⁰ of the problem, that the phrase took on renewed and rebranded performativity.

There is uncomfortable consideration around the fact that the ‘#MeToo’ campaign was propelled into a global spotlight after being adopted by Hollywood names, and consequently, when the “status” of the actors was associative with the campaign.⁶¹ Of course, this speaks to the power of ‘popular culture’, but also to the comparative power of the women acting as spokespeople for the movement⁶². That Milano, Argento and McGowan used their status and platform to amplify the shared-experiences of victims of sexual abuse and gendered-violence is admirable. They used their platform despite the criticisms from old allies such as Germaine Greer who declaimed their testimonies as “whingeing”.⁶³ Nonetheless, the marginalised and barely-heard stories is where my project enters the frame.

58 ‘Magazine celebrates anti-harassment movement by naming ‘The Silence Breakers’ on its cover after millions shared stories of sexual assault’

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/dec/06/metoo-movement-named-time-magazines-person-of-the-year>

59 Louise Burke. The Telegraph, *The #metoo shockwave: how the movement has reverberated around the world*,

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/world/metoo-shockwave/>, Published: 09/03/18, Accessed: 18/09/18

60 Ibid

61 Abby Ohlheiser. The Washington Post, *How #Metoo really was different, according to data*. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2018/01/22/how-metoo-really-was-different-according-to-data/?utm_term=.5acc308457b)

[intersect/wp/2018/01/22/how-metoo-really-was-different-according-to-data/?utm_term=.5acc308457b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2018/01/22/how-metoo-really-was-different-according-to-data/?utm_term=.5acc308457b). Published: 22:01/18, Accessed: 01/10/18

62 Though faced with rapists such as Harvey Weinstein, we can accept that his actions are the ultimate abuse of power. These women were all powerless in the moment of sexual violation and violence, but there are power differentials to note in the actions in the aftermath.

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/may/25/harvey-weinstein-latest-news-arrest-metoo-dam-burst-moment>

63 <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/world/germaine-greer-sparks-backlash-after-criticising-whingeing-metoo-movement-a3747406.html>

Time-Immediacy and Physical-Immediacy

“Art is a material act of culture, but its greatest value is its spiritual role, and that influences society, because it’s the greatest contribution to the intellectual and moral development of humanity that can be made”⁶⁴ said Dr Marcus Bunyan at the opening of an exhibition on the work of Cuban-American feminist performance artist Ana Mendieta in Salzburg. Bunyan’s postscript to her life and her unapologetic approach to recreating and representing current political issues, draws us to her 1973 work *Untitled (Rape Scene)*, a foundational work in shaping my investigation concerning the tracer-fire between systemic and intimate violence.

She invited her friends and fellow students to visit her apartment... Finding the door slightly open, the visitors entered a darkened room in which a single light illuminated the artist stripped from the waist down, smeared with blood and stretched over and bound to the table. Broken plates and blood lay on the floor beside her.⁶⁵

Rape Scene responds to the local rape and murder of student nurse Sarah Ann Ottens, as Mendieta bends over her own kitchen table, her underwear around her ankles, her body motionless for an hour as blood drips messily down her legs. Critic Adrian Heathfield argues that Mendieta’s “identification with a specific victim meant that she could not be seen as an anonymous object in a theatrical tableau. Her performance presented the specificity of rape”.⁶⁶ The directness and specificity of Mendieta’s performance art produced to commemorate one person as standing in for

64 Dr Marcus Bunyan. Art Blart, exhibition: ‘Ana Mendieta: traces’ at the museum der modern Salzburg, <https://artblart.com/tag/ana-mendieta-rape-scene/>, Published: 03/07/14, Accessed: 01/10/18

65 Amelia Jones, *The Artist’s Body: Themes and Movements*. (2012) Phaidon Press: London

66 Adrian Heathfield, *Live: Art and Performance* (2004) Tate Publishing: London

multiple other women experiencing similar sexual violence, “hoped to break the code of silence that renders it anonymous and general, denying the particular and the personal.”⁶⁷ It creates a powerful correspondence between the individual and the universal. This choice accents the style pursued within my final piece *And Revelation*, which offers the audience a central story from testimony and accompanied by a sea of other ‘personal’ stories that bubble up throughout the performance.⁶⁸

The confrontational and explicit imagery represented in *Rape Scene* forced the audience “to reflect on its responsibility; its empathy was elicited and translated to the space of awareness in which sexual violence could be addressed...hurling the deplorable act in the audience’s face.”⁶⁹ Similarly, my concluding creative performance, *And Revelation* leaves the audience overlooking the protagonist’s drowned, lifeless body, and directly inspired by *Rape Scene*, I did not move until the audience had left. This choice speaks to the elicitation of “responsibility” central to Mendieta’s performance, an interrogation into what it might mean to be a bystander to violence, looking at the tension between animating difficult questions in the mind of the viewer and keeping the ethical address to the witness.

Another influence emanating from *Rape Scene* was its immediacy, both in responding to recent events and its confrontational address to the audience. Mendieta’s *Rape Scene* places a co-dependency upon time-urgency and adversarial imagery that challenges passivity. Proximity, to contemporary events, to the boundaries of the body and the psyche, transgressing the actor-audience architecture,

67 Ibid

68 See *And Revelation* video evidence.

69 Melissa Sesana. *Violence and the body in Ana Mendieta and Chris Burden*, <http://reusingoldgraves.weebly.com/melissa-sesana/violence-and-the-body-in-ana-mendieta-and-chris-burden#>. Published: 16/05/15, Accessed: 01/10/18

was a force in many of my pieces, denying complicit comfortability to the audience. Mendieta's *Rape Scene* was galvanised from a gruesome attack which prompted her action within the same month, "she commented that the rape had 'moved and frightened' her, elaborating: 'I think all my work has been like that – a personal response to a situation'."⁷⁰ Mendieta attests to the power of private responses to public happenings, and where art can offer a space for reconsideration, and resonates with my theatre practice which fuses semi-autobiographical stamp and testimony amongst incorporations of fiction and aestheticised stylisation to restore the 'personal' back to the story to awaken empathy.

Sensitising and Desensitising Audiences

"We need a type of theatre which not only releases the feelings, insights and impulses possible within the particular historical field ... but employs and encourages those thoughts and feelings which help transform the field itself."⁷¹ Like many artists addressing socio-political issues, my work is intoned by Bertolt Brecht's above directive to not only 'release feelings' but also to 'encourage transformation' and to activate personal responsibility to "bring about more widespread and lasting modifications in culture and society."⁷² Furthermore, my portfolio of works aim to consider the correspondence with the wider ideological forces that *shape* society, and to cultivate a space where, as political theatre theorist Baz Kershaw identifies, "the micro-level of individual shows and the macro-level of the socio-political order might somehow productively interact."⁷³ And in considering the political *mise-en-scene*,

70 Elizabeth Manchester. Tate, *Ana Mendieta, Untitled (Rape Scene) 1973*, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/mendieta-untitled-rape-scene-t13355>. Accessed: 28/12/17, Published: 10/09

71 Bertolt Brecht. Baz Kershaw. *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*, Routledge (2002), Pg. xi

72 Bertolt Brecht. Baz Kershaw. *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*, Routledge (2002), Pg. xi

73 Bertolt Brecht. Baz Kershaw. *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*, Routledge (2002), Pg. 1

another foundational ‘work’ that interacted with my practice-as-research was the spectacle of the West’s role in toppling the “evil men” of “reckless aggression” and “dangers to peace and security”⁷⁴, played out as television drama at the beginning of the Millennium. As Jean Baudrillard contends in his seminal essay ‘The Gulf War did not take place’ the image-saturation and dense-repetition of pictures of brutality sustained and inflated levels of violence, “Promotional, speculative, virtual... The media promote the war, the war promotes the media and advertising competes with the war”⁷⁵. Baudrillard’s close examination of the ‘spectacularisation’ of Hussein can be drawn into parallel with Adam Curtis’ seminal documentary ‘HyperNormalisation’⁷⁶ which centres on the media’s fascination with Colonel Gaddafi. Curtis’ film montage technique reemphasises that online image circulation impacts our social sensitisation to violence and horror, with the endless echoing and everlasting life-span that those images have. President Gaddafi’s blood-stained face being trampled and dragged through a crowded street, Saddam Hussein’s public hanging⁷⁷, or villages razed, cities bombed, blood and body-parts, the macro political *mise-en-scene* prompts⁷⁸ the “micro-level of individual shows”⁷⁹. Therefore, the instant service of online imagery is accessible to anyone with access to a smart-device and its reach exceeds the momentary exposition of the nightly news. According to Žižek, the ‘good violence’ at the “macro-level” operates as a portal whereby visual information is habituated and inculcated into our threshold of acceptable violent imagery, where ‘good’ and ‘bad’ violence become fused together as morally

74 A transcript of George Bush's war ultimatum speech from the Cross Hall in the White House, 2003,

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/mar/18/usa.iraq>

75 Jean Baudrillard. *The Gulf War did not take place*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington Indiana, (1995).

76 Adam Curtis. *HyperNormalisation*, BBC Production, (2016)

77 http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/theeditors/2006/12/saddams_execution.html

78 Highlighting a parallel between macro-political issues of dictatorship and riots and the countering intervention of the micro-social in the form of political theatre, political theatre in my case, under the legacy of Brecht.

79 Bertolt Brecht. Baz Kershaw. *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*, Routledge (2002), Pg. 1

uncategorizable in filmed images. This indoctrination of the ‘normal’ and ‘permissible’ might draw us back toward Baudrillard’s interrogation of media where he proposes that, “our sense of the real world [has] largely been (re)defined by the explosion of mass media operation... we [have] entered into a new age of simulation”⁸⁰ Therefore, acknowledging that television and cinema is a part of our cultural digest of violent imagery, we must ask if “the mass media is on the side of power in the manipulation of the masses, or are they on the side of the masses in the liquidation of meaning? Is it the media that induces fascination in the masses or is it the masses who direct the media into the spectacle?”⁸¹ In Baudrillard’s proposal of cyclical spectacularisation, the mediatised images remain accessible in digital archives and in memory, giving life long after that life has been extinguished in valedictory performances. Therefore, I highlight the response to violent material depicting an innocent victim which we can site with Mendieta’s reproduction of Sarah Ann Otten’s death, in comparison with a person that might be deemed ‘evil’ or ‘deserving’, such as in the cases of Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein. These comparisons indicate our inconstant response to violence within varying contexts. We know that political prosperity is contingent upon the roles of ‘victim’ and ‘villain’ being replayed back to us with ideological inflection, and so to maintain hegemonic power structures, we are conditioned to recategorise violence carried out by the State as productive and affirmative. In turn, my portfolio of work and its depiction of casual violence prompts enquiry into this political manipulation and consequently asks if we become simultaneously sensitised and desensitised by these reproduced representations of violence.

80 Philosophical Society, *Baudrillard's Thoughts On Media*, philosophicalsociety.com/Archives/Baudrillard's%20Thoughts&20On%20Media.htm, Accessed: 02/10/18

81 Ibid

The Application and Problematics of ‘Authenticity’

Hermann Nitsch’s avant-garde brand of art-making, stemming from his association to the Viennese Actionists, sees him using a deliberately assaultive aesthetic. In his 2015 work *150.Action* Nitsch ‘actioned’ performers to dismember the carcass of a bull which hung from a frame in a warehouse, and then act-out a set of rituals and rites in the remnants of the animal’s flesh and 500 litres of blood. In 2015 Nitsch said, “I am a dramatist and a dramatist has to work with the tragic, with death. I try to show the death of animals, the slaughtering of animals.”⁸² With this case in mind, I would like to examine aesthetics in performance used to enhance the ‘authenticity’⁸³ of violence, of ‘slaughter’. Nitsch’s use of real blood and organs as opposed to paint or corn starch, left reviewer Clarissa Sebag-Montefiore recalling “Saturating the room is the stench of raw flesh”⁸⁴. Nitsch argues that he “was never interested in making provocation”⁸⁵ and that he had no concept of distinguishing good from bad, only to present what really “is”⁸⁶.

In 2015 the ‘Marina Abramović Institute’ produced a work entitled *Human Flesh (2015)*, an “exploration of the body’s limitations”.⁸⁷ During *Human Flesh* a performer smoked and burnt himself with cigarette stumps, whilst another hit and

82 Julian Morgans. *Things I learned watching people tear a bull apart*, Vice, https://www.vice.com/en_au/article/59zena/things-i-learned-watching-people-tear-apart-a-bull, Published: 21/06/17, Accessed: 04/01/18

83 Synonymous with geniuses and originality but these concepts are impossible to accomplish in theatre as everything is a regurgitation, assimilation or amalgamation of many influences. For a wider discussion of the problematics of authenticity in theatre please see Richard Schechner. *Performance Studies, An Introduction*, New York, (2006).

84 <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2017/07/done-to-death/>

85 Stephanie Convery. *Hermann Nitsch: I Show Everything That Is... I don't know what is bad or good*, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2017/jun/17/hermann-nitsch-i-show-everything-that-is-i-dont-know-what-is-bad-or-good>, Published: 17/06/17, Accessed: 03/01/18

86 Ibid.

87 Ulisses Carrilho. MAI, *Human Flesh*, <https://mai.art/terra-comunal-content/2015/5/1/human-flesh>, Published: 31/05/14, Accessed: 01/10/18

slapped herself until bruised. These works probe the veracity of non-illusionary violence happening in real time where body wounds and marks are discernible, yet the performers are under contract to complete the work as curated. An interview between Abramović and *The Guardian* columnist Sean O’Hagan documented Abramović’s response to the ‘authenticity’ of the violence in her shows, where she said:

To be a performance artist, you have to hate theatre... Theatre is fake... The knife is not real, the blood is not real, and the emotions are not real. Performance is just the opposite: the knife is real, the blood is real, and the emotions are real.⁸⁸

Abramović offers that illusory or “fake” reproduction of violence presented in performance art is the “opposite” of theatre and following the logic of this equation, that “real” violence equates to “real” or authentic emotion. Correspondingly, my focus centralises around the degree of entanglement between the emotions experienced by the performer and those of the spectator. For further perspective of the latter, I turn to British dramatist and academic, Dan Rebellato, who responds:

Just as with stage violence, a more usual reaction is to appreciate the fidelity of the representation... In my view the theatre isn't illusionistic at all, so in using a picture-box stage we run no risk of convincing anybody of the literal truth of what they see.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Sean O’Hagan. *Interview: Marina Abramović*, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2010/oct/03/interview-marina-abramovic-performance-artist>, Published: 03/10/10, Accessed: 04/01/18

⁸⁹ Dan Rebellato. *The Guardian*, *What’s so wrong with proscenium arch theatre?*, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2010/jul/19/proscenium-arch-theatre>, Published: 19/07/10, Accessed: 15/09/18

And so, in the frame of representational and reproducible violence, does the validity of the emotion, the effect and affect⁹⁰, depend upon a relationship to the ‘real’?

Rebellato would counter that producing what Abramović calls “true reality”⁹¹ is not the core aim of theatre, that the audience is aware of the ‘illusionistic’ context. And in using this debate as an influence for my portfolio of works, I was looking to explore practice around and in between Abramović’s ‘real knife’ and ‘real blood’ (upon the audience’s hands in the celebrated case of *Rhythm O*) and Rebellato’s espousal of the ‘literal truth’ in his secluded ‘picture-box stage’. Looking to the text *Intermediality in Performance* we see the notion of a necessary flexible contract between the production being presented and its viewer:

Audiences are aware, even during the most naturalistic of presentations, that they are witnessing a staged ‘reality’, not actuality itself. Self-reference and self-reflexivity are not only characteristics of the performance itself, however, but also of the perceiver who assumes the position of the spectator, of the audience⁹²

If we follow Rebellato’s analysis that the audience moves between moments of immersion in the performance- whereby they indulge in the performative reality but will inevitably realign themselves to the certainty of simulacrum, can this ‘liberate’ the artist in pursuit of portraying violence onstage, from the potentially damaging obligation of attaining authenticity, where instead “the aesthetic orientation

90 James Thompson, *Performance Affect*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, (2009)

91 Sean O’Hagan. *Interview: Marina Abramović*, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2010/oct/03/interview-marina-abramovic-performance-artist>, Published: 03/10/10, Accessed: 04/01/18

92 Sarah Bay-Cheng, Chiel Katterbelt, Andy Lavender and Robin Nelson. *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, Amsterdam University Press (2010), Pg. 32-33

facilitates a liberating confrontation with one's own experience, which is made perceivable through engagement with the aesthetic object"⁹³.

'Authentic' Violence in *Porn Culture* and *And Revelation*

Porn Culture is a 'physical theatre' work in my portfolio which intended to problematise, disrupt and cultivate questions around the audience's notions of 'pornography'. It sought to examine how pornography infiltrates into our wider culture through co-option into mainstream music, film and advertising.⁹⁴ My engagement with pornography is centred around the normalisation of problematic power dynamics, the habituation of enacted violence as a central part of the narrative, and the extreme objectification of performers (disembodied heads and genitals as a common feature)⁹⁵ in 'mainstream' pornography.⁹⁶ Here, I follow Dworkin⁹⁷ and others in the separation of mainstream, as organisationally scripted, culturally conventional, commercially-driven, mass-distributed work, as opposed to filmed acts of sexual intercourse which may be created independently⁹⁸, utilise socially 'aberrant' body-types, cater to specific practice, and may use techniques to share the 'gaze'⁹⁹.

Artificial synesthetic practice¹⁰⁰ to trouble the idea of 'authenticity' was adopted in *Porn Culture* with the spitting of artificial semen over the female actors.

93 Chiel Kattenbelt. *Intermediality in Performance and as a Mode of Performativity: In Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, edited by Kattenbelt Chiel, Bay-Cheng Sarah, Lavender Andy, and Nelson Robin, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, (2010). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46mwid.7>. Pg. 29-37

94 David Buckingham & Sarah Bragg. *Young People, Sex and the Media- the facts of life?*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan (2004)

95 Maria Chatzichristodoulou, Rachel Zerihan, *Intimacy Across Visceral and Digital Performance*, Palgrave Macmillan, Published: 23/10/12, Pg. 173.

96 See Chapter 1 on gender roles and formula of mainstream pornography themes that feed the male gaze.

97 Dworkin, A. 1987. *Intercourse*. London: Arrow.

98 Dworkin, A. 1989 (1981). *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*. New York: E.P. Dutton.

99 Mulvey, Laura. 2005, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (2nd Ed). London: Palgrave MacMillan

100 The use of synthetic substances made by me as opposed to the choice of practice that Nitsch uses with bodily materials from humans and animals. These synthetic materials "deliberately evoke or induce sensory joining in which the real information of one sense is accompanied by a perception in another sense through the use of a cross-modal mapping device." Artificial Synesthesia for Synthetic Vision, <https://www.seeingwithsound.com/asynesth.htm>, Accessed: 24/04/19

This prominent act directly attacks the cultural taboo of spitting and its associative connotations of deep disrespect. Sociologist Ross Coomber says, “spitting in someone’s face is probably considered one of the worst things you can do. It’s obviously a form of violence, very confrontational, perhaps the most violent you can be against someone without actually hitting them.”¹⁰¹ This violent intention was simulated within *Porn Culture*, but the materiality of the moment was authentic, and the impact on the actors and the audience was tangible. This instance was designed to trouble the acceptable limits of violence within different contexts, where taboo is translated into sexual practice that is endorsed as erotic and desirable. Similar to the aforementioned contextual difference of ‘permissible’ violence contingent upon circumstance, the semen and spitting here is dis-located from the screen to question and confront the situations in which we accept and reject violence.

To suggest that pornography holds an authority in our culture and has the ability to condition our behaviours is a confrontational suggestion, therefore, it demanded a cautiousness in my presentational approach to *Porn Culture*. Artists such as, ‘The Famous Lauren Barri-Holstein’, who also discusses issues of entropic hyper-sexualisation for women, take a more controversial approach. Barri-Holstein’s 2013 “choreographic masterpiece”,¹⁰² *Splat!* explores “various representations of the female victim”¹⁰³ but uses the method of ‘subversion’ (“the undermining of the power and authority of an established system”¹⁰⁴) to destabilise the mediated ‘normal’ of female probity and presentation. In doing so, it rejects the prospect of creating

101 Esther Addley. The Guardian, Here’s one in the eye, www.theguardian.com/football/2003/nov/06/newsstory.sport1, Published: 06/11/03, Accessed: 01/10/18

102 The Famous Lauren Barri-Holstein, *SPLAT!* <https://www.thefamousomg.com/splat>, Published: 2013, Accessed: 24/04/19

103 The Famous Lauren Barri-Holstein, *SPLAT!* <https://www.thefamousomg.com/splat>, Published: 2013, Accessed: 24/04/19

104 Oxford Dictionary Definition.

visually ‘pleasing’ work, Barri-Holstein arguing that she aspires for boredom as a response to her repetitive over-working of the orifices and boundaries of the body¹⁰⁵. *Splat!* was a useful springboard in my practice to consider ideas of approaching explicit material. Whilst my portfolio had fewer instances of explicit images, the method of subversion was used throughout as an ideological approach to tackle structural violence.

This chapter’s exploration into the problematics of representation, terms of ‘authenticity’ and aesthetic choice in performance bring me to discuss my methodology. In Chapter Three I endeavour to detail the artist’s “duty” to an audience and grapple with the nature of work-in-progress, and concurrently, how devising, scripting and all aspects of ‘process’ expanded my artistry. Furthermore, I will consider how the use of disparate theatrical form might enhance discussion or meditation around the chosen narratives of violence.

105 Lauren Barri Holstein in interview with Sarah Gorman <https://readingasawoman.wordpress.com/2017/11/09/interview-with-lauren-barri-holstein/>

Chapter Three

In 1872, the French novelist George Sand wrote that the artist has a “duty to find an adequate expression to convey it to as many souls as possible.”¹⁰⁶ referring to “it” as the pursuit of the most efficacious form to ‘convey’ emotional and ideological stimuli. Sand offers the writers of her generation and those after, a sense of permission for ‘the creative’ to seek methods of meaning-making that allows their subject matter to flourish. My portfolio works are contingent upon different modes of dissemination and inevitable experimentation which stems from a pursuit of connecting with other ‘souls’.

This chapter looks to elucidate my creative methodology which underpins the portfolio. Whilst some components were heavily rooted in text, using persuasive language in the form of verbatim script, others were dependent upon aesthetics, semiotics, somatics and digital display. The portfolio offers an approach to theatricalising the discourse on violence in private and public domains through a lens concerned with socio-cultural behaviours. Each practice-as-research work centralises on subjective ‘truth’¹⁰⁷, assembled through personal research. Consequently, the suite of works aims to create a cross-referential multi-perspectivism. Using diverse stylistic theatrical approaches and forms to ‘attend’ each performance narrative, offered insight into the limitations and advantages from the perspective of the artist. In this chapter, I will be considering various understandings of subjective truth and aesthetic intervention as they reflect on my practice, and specifically, the steps I took to

106 Jeff Goins. Goins, Writer, *Art Needs an Audience (Why Art for Art's Sake Doesn't Work)*, <https://goinswriter.com/art-audience/>, Accessed: 18/09/18

107 Vocabulary: “truth” being an issue of relativism, a subjective perspective on reality.

compile a portfolio of disparate practice-as-research pieces as a creative response to the materials and thematics presented above in Chapters One and Two.

Process

The research and development portion of my process began with distinguishing three areas of violence. Firstly, pornography as a cultural authority¹⁰⁸—a tool often substituted for sex education,¹⁰⁹ ¹¹⁰ and a platform that patriarchal cultivates violence. Second and thirdly, domestic and workplace violence as extensions of socio-cultural behaviours, systematically normalised by the actions and enacted paradigms of the dominant hegemony. I advertised my research on various social media platforms and asked for responses from anyone with an opinion or experience of violence to contact me. Given the nature of the information discussed in our interview, every participant was over 18 and the interviews were recorded from start to finish to protect both the interviewee and me. Consequently, I collected and transcribed testimonies from six different individuals which were used as verbatim in two performances. I compiled questions through research and statistical examination to inform the discussion in my interviews.¹¹¹ These transcripts and audio files were stored in a private password-protected place and participants were aware they could withdraw information at any time, keeping in line with the Data Protection Act (1998). There was significant ethical concern regarding how to select, edit, and script people's life stories with ethical care. I observed that each interviewee felt that they

108 Thomas Brorsen Smidt, *Pornography as Work Culture and Cultural Phenomenon*, University of Reykjavik, (2011), Accessed: 30/04/19. "cultural process by w[h]ich pornography slips into our everyday lives as a commonly accepted and often idealised cultural element" (Sørensen, 2003).

109 Pauline Oosterhoff. The Guardian, *Can Porn Be Positive For Sex Education?*, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/dec/21/porn-positive-sex-education>, Published: 21/12/16 Accessed: 18/10/18

110 Hannah Ellis Peterson. The Guardian, *Sex education should tackle pornography and sexting, says public*, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/feb/27/sex-education-should-tackle-pornography-and-sexting-says-public>, Published: 27/02/17, Accessed: 18/10/18

111 Interview Questions in Appendices.

had dealt with their trauma and demonstrably down-played their experience or appeared monotone in their delivery. Perhaps I was expecting interviewees to recount their experiences with emotional vocal tonality and therefore, I deliberated whether their delivery equated to an emotional detachment from the events, being ‘at peace’ with the past or maybe their unemotional delivery served as a preventative tool to avoid re-traumatisation through the retelling. My research informed me that emotions of shame and embarrassment can occur as a by-product of sharing past traumas: "to relive all those moments... you don't have to bring back the memories – they don't go away – but it is difficult to talk about them because of the shame you feel as a victim"¹¹². These meetings, these micro one-to-one performances coloured my approach to the work, my want to get their perspectives heard reminded me of Sand’s evocation of the artist’s ‘duty’.

Porn Culture:

A ‘Heightened Physicality’ and Intermediality Performance

Porn Culture, performed at The Hex¹¹³, attracted over fifty audience members across three shows. *Porn Culture* was a ten-minute “heightened physical language” piece, meaning “placing equal emphasis on movement as on text”¹¹⁴. The performance was stimulated by: articles, poetry, online testimonies, ‘#MeToo’ campaign, songs, TV and magazines.¹¹⁵ Heavily informed by Frantic Assembly’s practice, I was interested in using ‘physical theatre’ to examine the interaction between gesture and speech, to use the form’s complex and fluid interplay of

112 Amelia Gentleman. The Guardian, *Prosecuting Sexual Assault: ‘being raped all over again’*, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/apr/13/rape-sexual-assault-frances-andrade-court>, Published: 13/04/13, Accessed: 27/09/18

113 The university of Essex.

114 My definition: Emphasised movement that exaggerates normal gestures and uses all physical movement to enhance storytelling. Frantic Assembly, “The Violence”, *Othello*, (2008)

115 See appendices for resources used in workshop and workshop plan.

presence and absence, of exteriority and interiority to navigate a form that enhanced its communicative objective:

Movement has to earn its place in any production. We have to be sure that the decision to create a movement scene is based on it being the best way of telling the story... How can the crux of the matter be distilled and presented most effectively?¹¹⁶

Frantic Assembly's handbook was pivotal to informing my approach to 'physical theatre' - heightened physicality to externalise the internal monologue. This seeks to disrupt explicit imagery and subvert pornographic representations, to confront mainstream pornographic tropes¹¹⁷ without provoking assumptions of power and consumption in the 'gaze'. I used physical theatre tools during the workshop to inspire debate around the effects of pornography personally and in a wider societal capacity. My initial approach to *Porn Culture* was to disseminate the research findings gathered prior to rehearsals and embed them into a collaborative devising process that would see our company collectively choreograph an informed response. Conversely, I discovered that the intensity of the subject matter induced trepidation among the performers (two male and two female), and required me to choreograph the entire performance. I hoped this would alleviate the creative pressure, allowing the actors to focus on logistical elements: stamina, timing and familiarity. Once I began teaching choreography as opposed to stimulating improvisation, the energy and overall attitude towards became more positive.

¹¹⁶ *The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising*, Pg. 195

¹¹⁷ Chapter One- distinctions of mainstream pornographic tropes.

Porn Culture saw the ‘characters’ progress from childhood to young adulthood. This stemmed from my research considering how ‘porn culture’ has educated the ‘Millennial’ and current ‘Generation Z’¹¹⁸ who¹¹⁹ are an unknown quantity in this research, facing their own factions of social politics involving sexting and blackmail of image circulation, which disseminates an updated specification of sexual normalities, expectancies and gender narratives. However, both Millennials and Generation Z have an unprecedented access to pornography, particularly through the internet using social media and open access sites like Pornhub whilst in sexual immaturity. This knowledge informed my choreography process, alongside the concept of gender politics, and capitalist economic forces. To critique the overwhelming gender divide of mainstream pornography, the piece specifically presented female-submissive, male-dominant roles dictated to them by ‘gender-defined’ pornography and ‘pornified’ mediatised information. Thus, *Porn Culture* entailed various sexually explicit choreography, which asked the female performers to be subjected to roles of submission and objectification. The male performers had to adopt the role of dominant consumer and predator. The dramatic climax of the performance occurred when both male performers projected artificial semen over the female performers -directly mimicking porn films- who went on to lavishly bathe in the ‘semen’. As the liquid dripped from their faces and down their bodies the male performers celebrated their conquests. This specific moment generated the most feedback, the audience reported feeling “uncomfortable”¹²⁰, and the actors were anxious in rehearsals. In this instance, the performer communicates political messages instead of a character-based message which created problematic

118 Born since 1995.

119 Matt Burgess and Lait Clark. Wired, *Here’s What We Know*, <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/porn-block-ban-in-the-uk-age-verification-law>, Published: 08/04/18, Accessed: 18/09/18

120 Porn Culture feedback in appendices.

coexistence between ‘person’ and ‘performer’. Acknowledging their lack of character to ‘transfer’ negative associative emotions, and the demand to perform the explicit moment without becoming desensitised to the material offered a texturally and ethically complex outcome where the performers’ discernible unease fed the narrative of objectification.¹²¹

My approach to physical theatre predominantly focussed on imagery and less on spoken word. The objective was to encourage alternative interpretation, or at least ask the audience to reject the pre-eminence of word and focus on the magnified and decontextualised images from the playbook of porn to reveal a physical manifestation of socio-economic influences on heteronormative identity. Though there was no dialogue, I recorded a soundscape of interviews, vlogs, conference talks and material from video pornography which was scripted and edited together. This augmented the physical script, choreographed to interweave the intermediality¹²² of the performance style. Physical theatre has the potential to reduce linguistic restrictions and offer substitute communication when a subject faces uninterpretable content. It was regularly recorded post-performance that the audience felt ‘heightened physicality’ abetted a flourishing of narrative possibilities and intensified the focus on the positioning of bodies. Moreover, the audience recognised a complementary relationship between a physical approach and the ‘physical’ nature of pornographic material. The response to the sexual imagery created in *Porn Culture* evoked the word ‘universality’, this comment reflecting back the homogenisation of sexuality and expression that is delivered in the presentation of physical desire in mainstream

121 Chapter four analysis on the impact that lack of ‘character’ had on the actors emotional and mental ability to approach the choreography.

122 Irina Rajewsky. *Intermediality and Transmediality: Unbraiding Converged Theories*, http://www.uta.fi/lt/en/transmediality2016/materials/Rajewsky_Powerpoint_Helsinki_161101.pdf, Freie Universität Berlin, (2016)

porn. The ‘universalised’ sexual imagery in the performance of *Porn Culture* pointed to the capitalist engines that pump out identikit sexual positions and how this interplay endeavours to neutralise alterity through codifying and commodifying sexual interaction. The universality of the porn imagery reveals the commonly identifiable sexual interactions that are scripted to us through pornography and accordingly manufactures a universality between culturally diverse individuals.

The Actors’ Experience

I wanted the actors to operate as undesignated character profiles to reflect the interchangeable nature of porn characters. There was an observable tension between the content material, the ‘characters’ that inhabited my piece, and the actors’ autobiographical presence. In turn, this affected my directorial positioning on what I could ethically ‘solicit’ from them, albeit keeping my creative vision of the performance intact. Working in physical theatre vocabularies, and therefore drawing on the performance philosophies of Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba¹²³ who both saw the body as an endlessly mineable somatic tool in the service of expressing the inner psyche, I began the process with the paradigm that although the content would provoke a reaction in the audience, or might occasionally be antithetical to the performer’s personal beliefs, it was still ‘play’. That even though the actors are present and are mimicking activity that might be socially and publicly problematic, it is still a work of fiction. Furthermore, the interactions between performers were never motivated by the same sexual *intentions* as those that they were representing. Therefore, there would supposedly be an emotional disconnect with the impact of the

123 Barba, E. 1994. *The Paper Canoe: Guide to Theatre Anthropology*. London: Routledge

actions. Moreover, as fully cognisant and consenting actors, they simulated the scheduled activities routinely, but there was still tension present in their reported bodily and psychological feelings, linked with degradation. This notion directly speaks to one ethical consideration within my research which asks: how far must we neutralise or remove depictions of violence and shock in order to align the content with an ethical address? Consequently, I chose to have one major confrontational moment within the choreography (the semen spitting sequence) and left the rest as ‘suggestive action’. This was in attempt to reduce the depictions of violence, but not to the point of being entirely allegorical or reductive.

This artistic and ethical challenge offered valuable enquiry into safeguarding actors against complications when performing sensitive subject matter and was applicable across each portfolio work. Grotowski would counsel that, if the performer begins to map the character’s struggles or psychology onto their own person for longer than the duration of the piece, then there needs to be a rupture of association.¹²⁴ His philosophy contends that a performer should achieve a clear division between fiction and reality, and this mental distinction should provide the distance the performer needs in order to emotionally arm themselves. However, other philosophies of actor training ask actors to begin from a moment of personal recollection, ‘emotional memory’¹²⁵ in order to create rich association with the dramatic moment, and additionally, many proto physical theatre practitioners, such as Joseph Chaikin¹²⁶, might reference ‘emotional imprint’ on the body from work

124 Grotowski, J. 1975. *Towards A Poor Theatre*. London: Methuen Drama (Pg. 35)

125 Stanislavski, C. 2013. *An Actor Prepares*. London: Bloomsbury Academic (Reprint)

126 Chaikin, J. 1993. *The Presence of the Actor*. New York: The Theatre Communications Group

undertaken. He was not alone in recognising that many performers feel the ‘effects’ of a show post-performance and experience exhaustion as a response to the material.

The Audience

My opening portfolio performance, *Porn Culture*, used physical theatre as the principal form, but introduced projections and soundscapes of explicit and informative—but subjectively selected—information over the sound-system and asked the audience to promenade through a darkened room. The audience were submerged into a cacophony of breath, panting, classical music and ‘dirty talk’. They watched the performance through darkness, flashing projections and a performance area punctured by the harsh glare of phone lights. The audio was loud and intrusive which intended to suggest the immersion of a person plugged into their headphones, aiding the replication of a ‘private’ space where one might spectate pornography. This aesthetic tried to illustrate the atmosphere synonymous with night time. Research from Pornhub’s ‘Insight’ page shows that the most popular time to view porn is between 11pm-1am.¹²⁷ Along with the aesthetic landscape, there was an added sense of voyeurism due to the positioning and distribution of the audience. In the promenade format, not only did every audience member experience a different perspective resulting in divergent memories of the performance, but also the hustle and clamour to see created a heightened sense of voyeurism and objectification toward the performers, which in turn, formed a productive tension between the ‘individual’ and collective experience. This is particularly significant in comparison with the subsequent work which operated under a one-to-one basis and will be

¹²⁷ Pornhub Insights, *2017 Year in Review*, <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/2017-year-in-review>, Accessed:10/09/18, Published: 9/01/18

evaluated later in this chapter in regard to the audience ‘role’; spectator, spect-actor or anonymous audience member.

140 Waste:

A Digital Performance

140 Waste, the second work about pornography’s influence in our private relationships, took form in a film script.¹²⁸ This was my only wholly fictional work developed through free-writing technique and not directly based on testimonies. The format of the dialogue was influenced by Sam Steiner’s play *Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons*¹²⁹, and initially took form as a digital interactive performance. The research question at the forefront of *140 Waste* investigated whether this conception of digital theatre would cultivate a more resilient audience than a live audience in terms of boundaries around, and comfort with, violent content. *140 Waste* would be distributed into a private space of the viewer’s selection via online video sharing platforms which could be initiated and terminated upon the viewers choosing. In Patrick Lonergan’s introductory work, *Theatre & Social Media* he discusses the notions of proximity, tactility, viscosity and digital theatre. He suggests that “social media... blurs distinctions between solitude and intimacy, between the real and virtual, between the valuable and the worthless”¹³⁰ He theorises social media’s plurality and interactive community whilst simultaneously coexisting as a one-person-to-one-screen system. This experience contrasts the etiquette expectations of theatre, a public domain, which demands a socially acceptable responsivity, and an ‘exit’ requires a motivated and calculated action.

128 *140 Waste* Script in appendices.

129 Sam Steiner, *Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons*, NHB Modern Plays, (2015).

130 Patrick Lonergan. *Theatre & Social Media*, Palgrave, (2015) Pg. 3

140 Waste:**Scripting**

140 Waste's writing process began with a multiple-choice selection of scenes that the audience could vote upon and thereby tailor the story to their taste. The process commenced by experimenting with different filming styles: Point-Of-View, producing parallels with the popular pornographic category P.O.V which transfers the viewer from bystander to partaker, and a more traditional filming style had both characters in shot, placing the audience as a spectator once more.¹³¹ The script developed from an experimental rehearsal exercise which restricted our improvised script to the selected 'key words':

M: Hair, nice.

F: Thank you. Love shoes. Smart! Job?

M: Job? Enough. You?"

The original full dialogue was cut to the 'essentials' that we considered paramount to furthering the narrative. We implemented a word restriction, which intended to mirror the 140-character Twitter limit (at the time of conception). This generated a fragmented and dislocated environment to emulating the depersonalised pornographic narratives that ask actors to exist in a restrictive world where their personality is subordinate to their sexual function. This is highlighted in Scene Four "*The Expectations*" where both characters have run out of word-count and are only allowed to make suggestive sounds, limiting their ability to communicate or effectively consent:

"F: Ahhh, errr. Mmmmm.

¹³¹ *140 Waste* Video in appendices.

M: Ahhh, ughhhhhffffffffff.

Felicity's eyes are wide. She is moving her head side to side. Suddenly, a clear white substance is deposited across her right eye and cheek. Felicity looks shocked, then disappointed, The ooo and ahhhing has stopped."

Digital Footage Lives Forever

140 Waste provided the right conditions to explore how the removal of physical presence and immediacy impacted the performance.¹³² There were barriers in the production stage, whereby restrictions in film-making skills compromised the quality of the product. An inability to find actors comfortable with performing (and streaming) mock explicit content on camera, because of potential repercussions of an extended digital life, limited the performable narrative. This limitation speaks to a wider discussion of performative violence.¹³³ Recorded performance takes on a lasting and reproducible form- popular mediatisation such as Hollywood Blockbusters, television dramas and corporate advertising remains tangible and accessible, whereas acts of violence in live theatre reside in the minds of its audience¹³⁴.

Can We Talk:

One-to-one and Autobiography

132 See Chapter Two in reference to *140 Waste* and physical immediacy.

133 This is particularly true of early live art and performance art productions – thinking here of the work of Chris Burden or Stuart Brisley, but even as video capture became more prevalent, there are inadequate ways to capture the durational aspect of the work, or the complex layers of interaction with the audience.

134 Acknowledging here publicity stills, trailers and other marketing devices.

“In One to One performances the spectator is often invited to collaborate with the performer so that the two people create a shared experience – responsive and dialectic as opposed to imposed and prescribed.”¹³⁵

The chief form in *Can We Talk* was one-to-one performance with elements of site-specificity. Each audience member began their interaction by choosing their performance location, asked to pick A or B, which had an unknown space designated to it. They then ventured to either an office space, adopting the role of therapist, with duties to observe and analyse the patient, or a kitchen, with the role of ‘friend’, their duties simpler, to drink tea and help wash the dishes. With the script being autobiographical, I considered the environments in which I might share my story. ‘The Kitchen’ represented a friendly familiar setting, whereas ‘The Therapist Office’ provided a formal universe, a sanative¹³⁶ place for confession, admission, validation and healing. These pervasive themes spoke to the influential cultural movements, ‘#MeToo’ and ‘#HerToo’, which aim to unite and strengthen those whose trauma might have before resided in isolated suppression. Hence, this public statement of unity in ‘victimisation’ has been claimed as therapeutic. Notably, one interviewee who provided her story¹³⁷, reported after seeing *And Revelation* and reflected on her experience of sharing her testimony with me. She said, “Overall I feel glad that I spoke out loud about something so important and that I don’t feel as afraid as I used to feel to talk about something I’ve spent so long hiding away from.”¹³⁸ However, I wanted to seed in a layer of complexity around both performances, that the offer of

135 Rachel Zerihan, Live Art Development Agency, One to One Performance, http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/uploads/documents/OnetoOne_Final.pdf, Accessed: 10/04/18, Published: 2009. Pg.3

136 Definition: conducive to physical or spiritual health and well-being; healing.

137 More information on the process of sourcing, interviewing and working with story-givers is detailed in Chapter Three.

138 Private message.

help is often (painfully) just out-of-reach for the victim, and to problematise the idea of easy solutions through professional therapy encounters, as Dr. Rachel Zerihan reiterates in her writing, *Intimate Inter-actions*:

In One to One, consumerist formal anxieties are shot through with therapy culture's promise of a talking cure as the politics of power between one and other are tangled and tugged upon in this live autopsy of the inter-relationship between performer and spectator.¹³⁹

This sense of tension and un-resolvability in the performance was also informed by Pendzik et al's work *The Self in Performance*:

The idea that therapeutic practice correlates with the telling of personal stories has a deep hold on western thinking. But when does telling one's story have a liberating effect, and when does it become merely a recounting of one's misery and victimization? This question acquires further significance in the context of autobiographical performance, as rehearsal practices allow experiences to become more rooted in our bodies and brains, and exposure in front of an audience helps to validate them.¹⁴⁰

It was the final summation here of 'validation' that I sought to play against fears of 'misery' mining or 'attention-seeking' epithets that are often used to silence victims of domestic and sexual violence.

139 Rachel Zerihan. *Intimate Inter-actions: returning to the body in One to One performance*, <http://people.brunel.ac.uk/bst/vol0601/rachelzerihan/zerihan.pdf>, Accessed: 21/09/18, Pg. 2

140 Susana Pendzik, Renée Emunah and David Read Johnson. *The Self in Performance: Context, Definitions, Directions*, <https://www.palgrave.com/gb/book/9781137541536>, Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Chapter 1, Pg.2 (2016)

Each space commanded a different spectator-performer dynamic, but both claimed a high level of engagement. One-to-one performance can be relentless in its pursuit of the observer's involvement and attention, perhaps considering them as mutually involved, as Boal's "spect-actor".¹⁴¹ Here the viewer often has less opportunity to step back because the performer only has one direction for their address, and this was true within the framework of my chosen performance contexts. The therapist's 'role' offered analytical attention to the patient, whilst the friend context amplified engagement through its conversational tonality, which sometimes can be unproductive because the viewer might be more concerned with the expectation of their 'role'. Furthermore, the one-to-one relationship removes the 'group anonymity' of mass audiences. Zerihan encapsulates the feeling of 'heightened response-ability' that I have set out above.

One to One performance foregrounds subjective personal narratives...

Refused the inherent anonymity that traditionally structures the shield of mass spectatorship, in One to One we are lifted out of the passive role of audience member and re-positioned into an activated state of witness or collaborator, or more subtly energized into 'acting' voyeur... Heightened response-ability and intensified perceptual awareness personalise the complex layers of semiology imbedded in the politics of the performance event, stripping bare and simultaneously problematizing the relation between one and other.¹⁴²

Rehearsal Process

141 Augusto Boal. *Theater of the Oppressed*, London: Pluto Press, (1979 and 2000)

142 *Intimate Inter-actions: returning to the body in One to One performance*, Pg. 1

At their best, auto/biographical plays are profoundly philosophical; they probe and weigh what it means to claim a personal or national identity—to use the first-person pronoun and assert to make ethical choices that affect, or have affected, the actual lives of other real people... That they can do all this while also remembering individual and collective pasts or giving voice and embodiment to marginalized, forgotten, or devalued lives only adds to their significance.¹⁴³

Whilst *Porn Culture* was not contingent upon character development work, *Can We Talk* required the construction of a character. Being the writer first, and director second, I felt I should suppress my ‘claim’ of the character and story to allow the actor to bridge her own connections and understanding of the character. I felt that asserting my autobiographical bias might suffocate the ‘play’ process and stifle the opportunity of discovering something new in the character: “Your characters will begin to take on a life of their own that is separate from your initial intention. The play will be alive.”¹⁴⁴ Considering these ambitions, I elected to not inform the actress or audience of the script’s autobiographical nature. Subsequently, I experienced moments of discomfort and embarrassment when criticisms of this ‘unknown character’ surfaced during rehearsal but suppressed this discomfort in the service of the play’s larger objectives of provocation and frank engagement with the themes. Given this decision to remain anonymous from the actress and the audience, there were unescapable ethical tensions regarding how this troubled the network of power dynamics. Each choice, to remain anonymous and be in the position of ‘power’ over

143 Bonnie Marranta. Centre for Imaginative Ethnography, *Why Make Autobiographical Plays?*, <http://imaginativeethnography.org/why-make-autobiographical-plays/>, Accessed: 21/09/18

144 Bush Green Theatre, *The Student Guide to Playwriting*, <https://www.bushtheatre.co.uk/bushgreen/the-student-guide-to-playwriting-rewriting/>, Published: 27/05/14, Accessed: 21/09/18

the ‘truth’ of the story, or to reveal myself as source of the story and responsabilise the actress and audience with a ‘duty of care’ over me, led to a difficult decision as to the greater good. I made a choice to remain anonymous in an attempt to safeguard the freedom of response by the actress and audience of *Can We Talk* and waited to observe the ethical impact and tensions once the process was underway. I touch upon these observations in this chapter, from recording my own discomfort, to the emotional impression on one particular spectator, and finally, how the actress experienced a similar narrative in her own life. These instances provided valuable research for me as a theatre-maker on the (inter)textuality of autobiographical content but from such a singular experience, could not fully provide clarity on how to safeguard against such power imbalances in future work.

Looking to Bonnie Marranca’s evaluation of autobiographical writing, the themes of *Can We Talk* speak to a contested understanding of sexual power and abuse, and therefore how the “personal” morphs into a sense of “collective past”¹⁴⁵. The piece seeks to embody the “marginalized, forgotten, or devalued lives” that have not yet shared their experience but wish to, again capturing the essence of ‘#HerToo’¹⁴⁶, which speaks on behalf of those who are unable to. Ultimately, the writing and sharing of my testimony through *Can We Talk* is my artistic opportunity to let my experience be used to “situate a social context... relate[ing] to the world. It is the I in “the world”, not the “I” in its own world.”¹⁴⁷

145 Bonnie Marranca. Centre for Imaginative Ethnography, *Why Make Autobiographical Plays?*, <http://imaginativeethnography.org/why-make-autobiographical-plays/>. Accessed: 21/09/18

146 Tarana Burke and Alyssa Milano. The Guardian, *We created the #MeToo movement. Now it's time for #HerToo*, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/dec/21/we-created-the-metoo-movement-now-its-time-for-hertoo>, Published: 21/12/17, Accessed: 18/09/18

147 Bonnie Marranca. *The Self as Text: Uses of Autobiography in the Theatre*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4623765?read-now=1&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents, *Performing Arts Journal*, (1979)

In an unexpected development during the rehearsal process, the actor began to identify multiple nuances that resonated with her own experiences, the script becoming somewhat autobiographical to her own life. This raised ethical concerns when she voiced her struggle to practice at home as familiarity with the character's struggle had repercussions on her domestic situation. Rehearsal practice such as Meisner's systems might suggest that the actor's empathetic identification resulted from a successful bond with the character's journey. However, instead of channeling emotion into the character development, we fell into an unanticipated pattern of unpicking the text by discussing her personal experiences.

Comparing Rehearsal Processes

The Stanislavskian technique known as 'the magic if'¹⁴⁸ is commonly accepted as a rehearsal device used within a creative process whereby the actor considers how they might respond in that situation "if" it were them, and then transfers that 'emotional memory' into the scene. The primary objective within *Porn Culture* was to dislocate and fragment aesthetic provocations, as opposed to centering the piece around character journey, there was no procedural attempt to introduce the 'magic if' in rehearsal. In *Porn Culture* there were no stable characters; no 'character development' nor text concerning the impact of the narrative on characters, therefore it was interesting to consider how the persuasive hold of the 'magic if' manifested in the actors' moral and personal response to the provocative choreography. Whereas for the actor in *Can We Talk*, faced with the 'probing' personal details of this character, her ability to imagine "if" it had been her, was further underscored by her

148 Stanislavski, C. 2013. *An Actor Prepares*. London: Bloomsbury Academic (Reprint) (Pg.51)

ability to resonate with the storyline. The recourse back to emotional memory, to finding emotional and psychological affiliation with the material, might offer explanation as to *Porn Culture* performers' inability to 'transfer' the actions as *belonging* to their character, and subsequently, inhabiting the negative impact of the social narratives as representative of themselves.

Can We Talk and Physical Immediacy

The monologue performance confronted themes of violence and coercive control in relationships, using a conversational rapport to generate an environment of realism:

Transposed to theatre, this argument locates realism not as verisimilitude but as underwritten by the veracity of an experience, a recognition of a shared understanding that is at least partly found in an emotional response to a situation, which 'feels' connected to the experience of the spectator.¹⁴⁹

The Guardian's Lyn Gardner shares her perspective on one-to-one theatre and explains that its distinctness is rooted in "the idea that anything - or indeed, nothing - might happen during these encounters, that [is what] makes them so charged and interesting."¹⁵⁰ I chose to utilise the "the 'poetics of immediacy'" to incorporate an "urgency and connectedness that elicit an emotional response."¹⁵¹ because I wanted to revisit the idea of allocating an individualised 'viewer' with the autonomy to move past passive sympathy into active authorship. My drive for creating cross-disciplinary

149 Lib Taylor, *The experience of immediacy: Emotion and enlistment in fact-based theatre*, University of Reading, Intellect, http://centaur.reading.ac.uk/22120/1/The_experience_of_immediacy.pdf, (2011), Pg. 10

150 Lyn Gardner, *The Guardian, I Didn't Know Where to Look*, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2005/mar/03/theatre2>, Published: 03/03/05, Accessed: 08/04/18

theatre¹⁵² is to offer diverse modes and outlets which will erect a mirror between ‘viewers’ and cultural responses to violence which often possesses an absence of accountability. In the scope of this practice-as-research project, I am using cross-disciplinary approaches through various creative disciplines such as; film, live art and theatre. This choice stems from an understanding that interdisciplinary form can be utilised to pluralise my perspective on the variations of violence discussed above.

And Revelation:

Monologue in Testimonial Work

And Revelation utilised six testimonies in monologue alongside transmedia which used projections of mouths, inspired by Samuel Beckett’s *Not I*, to augment the protagonist’s story with extracts of similar, but individual, stories. Kirsty, the protagonist, shared stories of childhood trauma, adult trauma, workplace violence, relationship violence and parental abuse. The writing of *And Revelation* started with six individual transcripts that discussed predatory violence in domestic or workplace spheres. In *Verbatim Verbatim*, Robin Soans identifies that verbatim doesn’t give a voice to the voiceless necessarily, but more, offers amplification to the voice of the ‘other’.¹⁵³ He continues by contending that, “By choosing to put a subject under the theoretical microscope, the playwright is saying ‘There’s more to this than meets the eye’”.¹⁵⁴ This is why it was so important for me as an artist to choose all the testimonies and try to ‘voice’ every story entrusted to me. Initially, each transcript had its own presence within the play as individuated monologues. However, dramaturgically this meant repetition, a lack of story progression and problems

152 Vocabulary: cross-disciplinary meaning I am relating to or representing more than one branch of knowledge.

153 *Verbatim Verbatim*, Pg.32

154 *Verbatim Verbatim*, Pg. 19

‘ranking’ the stories. Henceforth, the second draft amalgamated the testimonies to make a composite character.¹⁵⁵ Subsequently, there was a negotiation between the ‘truth’ of the testimony and the considerations of storytelling. Again, nodding to the ‘poetics of immediacy’ and the relationship between the veracity of the story compared to the verisimilitude of narrative and performance presented to the audience, here we interleave with the rich and storied discussion as to whether verbatim theatre offers authenticity or the hallowed ‘truth’ in its final product¹⁵⁶. I would suggest that neither is wholly achieved, but that there is a ‘simulation’ of ‘realism’ in this meeting point between the ‘authenticity’ of verbatim and the subjective artistry of the fictive space. In Baudrillard’s seminal work *Simulacra and Simulation*, he suggests that: “the era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials. It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real.”¹⁵⁷

This process unearthed profound ethical problematics, where a ‘selection process’ was necessitated as to which testimony would have the leading presence in the script; a process which in many ways ran counter to my intentions of an inclusive methodology, but a sifting and a shaping that enabled me to condense, clarify context and solidify meaning.

Rehearsal Process

¹⁵⁵ *Verbatim Verbatim*, Pg. 42

¹⁵⁶ See the host of works on ‘truth’ in verbatim theatre such as Forsyth, A. and Megson, C., eds. 2009. *Get Real: Documentary Theatre Past and Present*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. Martin, C. 2010. *Dramaturgy of The Real on The World Stage*. Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Heddon, D. (2007) *Autobiography in Performance Performing Selves: Palgrave Macmillan.*, Martin, C. (2006) ‘Bodies of Evidence’, *The Drama Review*, Vol. 50 No. 3.

¹⁵⁷ Jean Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation: The precision of simulacra*. University of Michigan Press, (1994), Pg. 2

After assembling a monologue script for *And Revelation*, I felt it necessary to appoint an external director to the performance to minimise the strain of adopting several artistic roles and allow myself a focus on character process. Therefore, LLOYD Shankley was brought on board as director. Having previously worked on a monologue-based performance with LLOYD, I felt confident in his approach to the chosen form. During the rehearsal process we worked together, “methodically going through and exploring each line. [Which worked to] counter any tonal and inflective habits [I had].”¹⁵⁸ This exercise gave us the opportunity to discuss subtext which resulted in differences of interpretation. My familiarity with the interviews meant I sometimes felt I had a deeper contextual understanding of the script and a duty to each interviewee to present them and share their story respectfully. This sentiment echoes Max Stafford-Clark in his articulation of *Out of Joint*’s verbatim process “I think that the actors possessing the materials and feeling protective about the characters they’re playing is an advantage.”¹⁵⁹ Knowing the testifiers offered me invaluable insight into the style of speech, inflection of delivery and the somatic behaviours around the vocabulary, and equally, it presented an ethical dilemma in how much I ‘manipulate’ their stories in performance. Even in autobiographical theatre where the performer is ‘acting’ themselves, it is a “copy”, and the *act* of performance transforms the material through its delivery in an alternative space, time and context from the telling. Ultimately, the performer can never replicate the story ‘accurately’, disembodied from the original narrator¹⁶⁰. Theatre director, Max

158 Lloyd Shankley, *And Revelation*, Notes on rehearsal process, (2018)

159 *Verbatim Verbatim*, Pg. 55

160 British playwright, Alecky Blythe speaks of her approach to verbatim theatre and says that she uses headphones to condense the actor’s delivery of the line in aid of keeping it closer to its original delivery, because “the way the real person said them will always be more interesting... It is an actor’s instinct to perform: to try to make their lines ‘more interesting’ in an effort to project their character and make the person they are playing seem real.” The concept of delivering a line as close to its original format offers the prospect of accuracy and respecting the original form of the interviewee’s delivery, but is still problematic in the act of re-embodiment and the actor’s storytelling instincts – See Tom Cantrell’s *Playing for Real* for more discussion

Stafford-Clark suggests that actors should “not [be] doing impersonations of these people, but [try] to capture their spirit in some way.”¹⁶¹ The reference to “spirit” here, “the non-physical part of a person which is the seat of emotions and character; the soul”,¹⁶² underpins the notion addressed earlier involving the artist’s duty to ‘present’ and ‘express’ for the benefit of the audience, to sensitise and ‘humanise’ stories.

Transmedia

The filming of the ‘Mouths’ aimed to parallel the imagery of Beckett’s *Not I* and create an aesthetic design of entrapment and disembodiment, and so reflect the narratives of victimisation and the failings of society to support victims of violence:

Beckett present[s] the gaze of the “Other” as violent and subjectifying, [the] imagery of confinement, claustrophobia [and] paralysis ensures his characters’ vulnerability to observation... he allows their handicaps to keep them physically and emotionally confined—sentenced to remain partitioned from the world... Beckett whittles them down to their essence and invites the audience to imagine the scarcity of contact and incapacitation that his characters endure.¹⁶³

Each mouth recorded and digitally enlarged became like a fingerprint. The more I edited the ‘Mouths’, the more familiar I became with the uniqueness of their form. This served the script’s need to extrapolate the meaning of the words through anonymisation, and also the paradoxical necessity for words to *belong* to their

161 Verbatim Verbatim, Pg. 65

162 The Oxford English Dictionary, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/spirit>, Accessed: 27/09/18

163 Victoria Swanson. Confining, Incapacitating, and Partitioning the Body: Carcerality and Surveillance in Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame*, *Happy Days*, and *Play*, <https://journals.openedition.org/miranda/1872>, Published: 04/2011, Accessed: 28/09/18

speaker, to enhance the notion that these words come from “real” and “unique” people that share a similar story of predatory violence. To maintain anonymity of the ‘Mouths’, I largely selected non-performers to film, which produced a perceivable difference in process and product. Whilst the actors came with an aura of ease and responded to the material with various approaches, they sometimes entered territory of assuming knowledge of the original subject. Conversely, the non-performer group had a ‘plainer’ tonality and delivery but were able to access a less-inflected and emotionally-laden style since they were less concerned with the conventions of performance¹⁶⁴. For example, their delivery of the script didn’t translate to film and audio as expected because they were not breaking down the subtext of each sentence or taking time to consider the meaning of the words in the same way that an actor would. This resulted in the emphasis not always being placed on the words that I had expected. However, the non-performer did offer an unintentional positive in their unpredictable and original approach to the text that was not seen with the actor portion of recordings.

A revisited form throughout the portfolio is transmedia’s role in storytelling and its ability to heighten the narrative. Transmedia, or intermediality¹⁶⁵ uses a multiplatform approach to storytelling, “using different channels that complement each other to tell independent stories.”¹⁶⁶ Therefore, with digital and mediatised

164 With individuals who particularly struggled I went further than my brief overview description and ‘guided’ or ‘warmed them up’ with a conversational exercise. This entailed asking them questions about their character, what the subtext and meaning of their line was and treated them as a ‘character’, as if it were their own words, herewith suggesting they explore the ‘magic if’. This technique resembled the ‘Hot Seating’ procedure sometimes used in Drama. This seemingly provided a personal context to the line, making the words more comfortable in their mouths when beforehand they had felt too foreign.

165 Irina Rajewsky. *Intermediality and Transmediality: Unbraiding Converged Theories*,

http://www.uta.fi/lt/en/transmediality2016/materials/Rajewsky_Powerpoint_Helsinki_161101.pdf, Freie Universität Berlin, Published: 2016, Accessed: 18/09/18

166 Ágnes Bakk. The Theatre Times, *Transmedia Storytelling in the Performing Arts, a New Grammar to be Learned: An Interview with Belén Santa-Olalla*, <https://thetheatretimes.com/transmedia-storytelling-performing-arts-new-grammar-learned-interview-belen-santa-olalla/>, Published: 17/06/17, Accessed: 18/09/18

entertainment being the dominant form of pastime in our current climate,¹⁶⁷ it seemed appropriate to utilise common ground to present audiences with a familiar mode of communication. However, one audience member reported the ‘Mouths’ felt “intrusive”.¹⁶⁸ I would offer this ‘intrusion’ gives evidence to the audience members defensive action and protection of her emotional wellbeing against the “intrusive” material.

During filming the ‘drowning’ sequence, which was projected onto the wall¹⁶⁹, I experienced moments of alarm. I shot multiple videos in my bathtub with a GoPro camera and authentically struggled for breath as I delivered lines from the script. It became a physical and emotional struggle because I wanted the recording to be as long as possible for visual-aesthetic reasons. Thus, with each new recording I became increasingly faint, with moments recorded in the final performance which I genuinely struggled for breath whilst wrestling myself in order to capture an edit long enough for final cut. Whether this translated during the performance as a device to prophesy the imminent future, the looming suicide, I’m unsure.¹⁷⁰ Artistically it produced an eerie layer to the texture of autobiographical form already existing within the play.

Audience Interaction

167 Marketing Charts, *4 Insights Into How We Choose to Spend Our Entertainment Time*, <https://www.marketingcharts.com/industries/media-and-entertainment-82082>, Published: 24/01/18, Accessed: 18/09/18

168 *And Revelation* Q&A in video evidence.

169 *And Revelation* video evidence.

170 The suggestion that the suicide ‘looms’ over the audience is due to the audio recordings and visual projections of a drowning individual that were slowly introduced and filtered in throughout the performance. Consequently, the audio-visuals repeatedly point to a near future and to the inevitability of the character’s demise which is unavoidable due to the cemented restrictions of the script.

The monologue form chosen for *And Revelation* created a conversational tonality¹⁷¹, which was enhanced when I stood close to the audience, allowing me to address them individually. Robin Soans suggests that verbatim theatre spends “10% of the time [interacting] with fellow actor[s] on stage, but 90% of time is directed towards the audience”¹⁷² meaning the fourth wall is broken, and the actor addresses the audience to lobby them specifically. One audience member had poignant parts of her testimony consensually edited to fit the narrative; nonetheless, when standing close enough to the audience to make eye-contact, I found it difficult to hold eye-contact with her. On reflection, it may have stemmed from my fear of distorting her subjective truth. Comparably, when delivering moments of my own testimony in *And Revelation*, it once again became exceptionally uncomfortable to hold eye-contact or address those in the audience who were aware of my testimony. Perhaps, experiencing and conquering that discomfort is part of the process needed to address negative emotions associated with the memories. I would evaluate my discomfort was enhanced by an unnatural blurring of theatrical boundaries of ‘character’ and ‘person’, caught between empathy and identification, which is a similar problem to that of the performers in *Porn Culture* who also struggled to separate ‘character’ from ‘person’.

This chapter has concluded my methodology, interrogating the limitations and benefits of form on narratives of pornography, domestic and workplace violence. The next chapter aims to evaluate if these stylistic choices interacted with my research

171 Frantic Assembly’s book on Devising gives more clarity and context to the type of engagement I aimed to avoid and the style of rapport I aimed to achieve: “avoid the ‘ether effect’...[which] infiltrates many productions, both theatre and dance, and is by definition, the moment at which the performer... suddenly finds a point, usually between 12 and 20 inches above the audience [and]... adopts a glazed expression that they continue to hold throughout... The flip-side of this, is the ‘In Yer Face’ glare. This involves practically glowering at the audience... We were meticulous in detailing for ourselves a way to quite simply ‘talk’ to the audience to ‘see’ them rather than be seen ‘looking’ at them.

172 *Verbatim Verbatim*, Pg. 21

questions and efficacy in compelling self-reflection and communal discussion. I will further consider the effects of theatrical alienation and how this process has informed my artistic growth as a director, script-writer and performer.

Chapter Four

There are notable problematics in creating work-in-progress performances with peers under pressurised ‘making’ conditions, and producing a work deemed a ‘success’. The term ‘success’ also encompasses the negative feedback, the ‘unsuccessful’ aspects and limitations of the work which informed the precursor practice-as-research. Therefore, the shape of this project is contingent on its effectiveness to stimulate post-performance discussion and less about subjective criteria such as ‘like’ or ‘dislike’. Moreover, the portfolio development was conditional on becoming comfortable with myself as the qualitative assessor of my work, and not accepting the lowest common denominator response as definitive truth.

It is important to highlight each portfolio piece met similar complications with actors and their level of commitment which potentially surfaced as a consequence of the no pay agreement made between them and myself. Each work entailed an intensive process, testing how work-in-development might stimulate freedom in approaches to ‘making’ from the creative team, and cultivate a culture of responsivity with the audience. Ultimately, aiming for an exploratory audience placed in the position of co-authors in meaning-making, rather than a judgmental or critical one. As creator, I found the ‘work-in-development’ format reduced the pressure to ‘entertain’ an audience and instead granted me the opportunity to focus on the creativity and playfulness of the process.

On reflection, it seems that finished works authorise a definitive style of reflection, endorsing or rejecting the finished work based upon their value systems.

Conversely, work-in-progress framing encourages a tonality in feedback which is more accepting of ‘rough edges’, setting expectations at a realistic level for a work-in-development. I would hypothesise that work-in-development performances, which were free, authorised the audience to relish the creativity of the performance instead of entering the space as a critic measuring the value of the show.

Workshop:

Consent

This workshop was conducted at the beginning of the ‘research and development’ process. I collected qualitative data from the participants by verbal and written questionnaire. This data informed *Porn Culture*, a physicalised promenade performance, with ‘heightened physicality’ as the animating form. This choice emanated from the rich interpretations formed from somatic devising tasks during the workshop; “physical theatre allowed us to say things that words wouldn’t”¹⁷³. As an artist looking to create works which sensitise audiences to socio-political impacts of violence, I was keen to consider “what is ‘too far’ in exposing an audience to pornographic components in a theatrical setting?”¹⁷⁴ One participant said: “I don’t think you can know the answer unless you are exposed to it? What might be ‘too far’ for one person, may mean nothing to another. I wouldn’t like to see someone physically and actually beaten up or raped” The key word “actually”, suggests the participant would be comfortable experiencing representational abuse or rape. The overwhelming consensus from the workshop participants, audience members and performers stated that consent fulfilled all obligatory duties, “as long as there is

173 Post-Workshop feedback. Appendices.

174 Post-workshop questionnaire. Appendices.

informed consent, I'm not sure there is a limit."¹⁷⁵ Would it be "too far" if a consensual representation of rape was performed? The words 'consent' and 'rape' are used here to highlight the paradoxical nature of theatrical representations of violence. If consent is the defining variable and the theatrical context is transparent, is the 'comfort zone' penetrable? I would suggest people are disturbed by representations and theatrical 'fakery'. This participant alludes towards the "limit[less]" ability of theatre to offer representations of violence when consent is the principal social and ethical guard. However, this does not 'control' the instinctual emotional response when reaching personal "limit[s]" of durability. This speaks to the problematics of embodiment, when an actor consensually exposes themselves to a representational - albeit tangible- attack on their body. Furthermore, it highlights the potential negative repercussions that could affect the spectator as they digest visually enigmatic demonstrations of violence.

When considering the impact of embodiment in reproducing a representation of violence, the lens often focusses on the role of the victim. However, examples such as Jonathan Kaplan's *The Accused*, which portrayed a harrowing cinematic rape, records the impression made on actors in the role of 'predator'. Actress Jodie Foster who played the 'victim' said: "the guys were just a mess. They were devastated and uncomfortable."¹⁷⁶ This evidence chronicles the impact on both contributors invested in a complex scene, which I liken to the 'semen spitting'¹⁷⁷ in *Porn Culture*. This

175 Post-performance questionnaire. Appendices.

176 Rebecca Ford. The Hollywood Reporter, '*The Accused*' Oral History: A Brutal Rape Scene, Traumatized Actors and Producers' Fights to Make the Movie, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/features/accused-oral-history-a-brutal-rape-scene-traumatized-actors-producers-fights-make-movie-952>, Published: 05/12/16 Accessed:30/09/18

177 Porn Culture performance. Video.

scene met composite anxieties towards embodiment from both male and female performers during the rehearsal process.

There is a subjective and individuated threshold for visually digesting violence and the bar moves in accordance with the context of the narrative, form and delivery. Another participant stated their “limit” is reached before “there is a degrading act happening to a man or woman. Whether the actor is compliant, theatre cannot always [divorce] from reality fully and the actor could quietly feel embarrassed.” Again, addressing the ‘semen spitting’ sequence, which can be identified as both a degrading act and also a theatrical display which made the performers unhappy and the audience uncomfortable.

The workshop participants unanimously identified that characterisation made performance easier because it removed ‘personal’ decision-making, in substitution for ‘performance’ objective. This resurfaced in my discomfort performing autobiography in *And Revelation*, whereby the distinction between ‘self’ and ‘character’ were blurred once more. Therefore, it could be hypothesised that if the *Porn Culture* actors had an assigned ‘character’ to develop, they would separate their person from the uncomfortable socio-personal repercussions of performing sexually explicit content.

Physical Immediacy

Another prominent research question examined the impact of physical immediacy and proximity in live performance and audience’s ability to digest violence, and how mediated information operates as method of desensitisation through mediums such as: television, film, social media and written publishing. In

response I compared two original works which explored sexual violence: live performance (*Porn Culture*) and mediated form (*140 Waste*).¹⁷⁸

Porn Culture:

Alienation

Brecht's 'alienation effect' would suggest that exposing abusive actions of power structures can 'unlock' political engagement from the audience:

...catharsis as a means by which tragedy demobilises its audience and reinforces bourgeois ideology[.] Brecht used the 'alienation effect' as a means of distancing the audience and actors from a play's action to the point that critical reflection upon the play comes more organically than uncritical emotional involvement.¹⁷⁹

The umbrella research question here seeks to discern, "how far to neutralise or remove depictions of violence to align the form with an ethical address?"¹⁸⁰ As a practitioner who manoeuvres themes of violence, it is a regular occurrence to handle and distribute material that might cause negative associative emotions. Consequently, what is unethical? Something upsetting, stirring, uncomfortable?¹⁸¹ These provocations correspond to my earlier address concerning Nitsch's *150. Action* work which was presented in the annual Dark Mofo arts festival. Dark Mofo's artistic director, Leigh Carmichael proposes that: "Asking people to push themselves out of

178 Post-workshop questionnaire. "Performing sexual acts live – if it's on video, live or recorded, there is a barrier there and it therefore feels more acceptable to expose to an audience."

179 CrystalBluffMadonna, *Brecht, The 'alienation effect' and Mother Courage*, <https://petejcrawford.wordpress.com/2015/07/10/brecht-the-alienation-effect-and-mother-courage/>, Published: 10/07/15, Accessed: 24/09/18

180 Research questions of thesis.

181 Stephanie Convery. The Guardian, *Hermann Nitsch: "I show everything that is... I don't know what is bad or good"*, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2017/jun/17/hermann-nitsch-i-show-everything-that-is-i-dont-know-what-is-bad-or-good#img-1>, Published: 17/06/17, Accessed: 14/07/18

their comfort zone is core to [their] ethos,”¹⁸² If this is a “core ethos”, when does responsibility of ethical care become actioned? I would suggest that exposing audiences to themes of ‘violence’ can simultaneously dilute empathy and sensitise audiences to socially sensitive issues, in turn, constructing a coexistence between unethical and ethical.

Within *Porn Culture*, there was a spectrum of comfort among the audience with the violent sexual content. Some felt the audio intrusive, others the choreography, whilst some were comfortable with the content through being accustomed to hearing and seeing such things. Therefore, the ethical address in *Porn Culture* became about the performer’s limits. Initially, my ethical address in *porn Culture* focussed on creating conditions to reduce ‘triggers’ for the audience but then realigned to concentrate on the actors’ struggle with embodiment. Therefore, the representation and replication of violence had to be ‘set’ in accordance with the ‘lowest tolerance’.

Feedback

One spectator suggested that physical theatre as a theatrical form was “normal and realistic”¹⁸³ when approaching the discussion of porn culture. Whilst I would contend the vocabulary of this analysis as problematic, I offer that the spectator is trying to articulate how physical theatre might suggest the ‘reality’ of our complex inner world and the daily traffic of our hinterland, whilst lacking presentational realism. Furthermore, whilst there is a divorce from presentational realism, the

182 Tim Stone. The Art Newspaper, *Despite protests, Tasmania gives Nitch his biggest-ever audience*, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/despite-protests-tasmania-gives-nitsch-his-biggest-ever-audience>, Published: 19/06/17, Accessed: 24/09/18

183 Porn Culture, feedback.

physical imagery achieves or encroaches upon an ideological realism. Though *Porn Culture* did not offer a realistic presentation, it was less abstract than other works in the canon. For example, when Lauren Barri-Holstein slices tomatoes with a knife positioned in her vagina¹⁸⁴ or Milo Moiré squeezes an egg out of her vagina¹⁸⁵ they create canvasses of imagery which nod to wider discussions of hyper-fetishization and sexualisation of female form through metaphor and imagery. Themes of pornography in other modes of theatre might become more stylised in attempt to censor or subvert the content, Lauren Barri-Holstein's work often uses heightened physicality and non-sensical physical endurance activities that test the acceptable boundaries of the social presentation of the body, and subverted language. By 'subversion techniques', I imply an unconventional poetry, a disruption, an offering of unpleasant aesthetic, something displeasing to the senses, but which offers an alternative autonomous presentation of ideas. Therefore, the use of subverted physicality or dialogue distorts the verisimilitude and dislodges our preconception of the meaning of the image, the 'sexy' becoming 'catastrophic'. Whilst *Splat!* may be controversial as it garners feelings of repulsiveness, bewilderment and abasement, it achieves its political punch.¹⁸⁶ In my workshop I exposed participants to the *Splat!* trailer. One participant reviewed her objective to claim back autonomy of the female body¹⁸⁷: "I guess she succeeded because I didn't get a boner off that." This feedback offered notable artistic consideration to divorce from 'usual' objectives to create 'well liked' or 'pleasing' work and re-navigate my outlook to communicating an underlying statement or discussion at the expense of the original aims.

184 Lauren Barri-Holstein's *Splat!* (2013)

185 Milo Moiré's *Plop Egg* (2014)

186 Matt Trueman. Review: *Splat!*, Barbican Centre, <http://matttrueman.co.uk/2013/04/review-splat-barbican-centre.html>, Published: 05/04/13, Accessed: 25/09/17

187 Matt Trueman. Review: *Splat!*, Barbican Centre.

140 Waste

140 Waste interrogated themes of gender defined roles and the socio-cultural expectancies married to new relationships. Presented as a digital short-film which departed from an interactive performance, intended to nod to the ‘darkness’ of the online world, introducing delicate relationships of choice and control connected with anonymity of the ‘dark web’, which allows viewers to engage in extreme voyeurism and offers a measure of control in contexts of violence¹⁸⁸. The narrative would be dictated by each spect-actor, including potential sexual exploitation of the actress if chosen— however, every scene variation would be scripted, staged and filmed beforehand, removing the agency of the audience choices. I was interested to interrogate the problematics of each viewer consenting to the unknown, the unpredictable, to participating in co-producing a story of sexual violence. These ethical contractions stretch the margins of consent in asking participants to add to the repository of violent gender socialisation. Consequently, their choices demonstrate their relationship to violence, whilst having their evolutionary disposition towards curiosity manipulated. The digital piece risked ‘preaching’ and punishing the audience for participating, therefore, it was modified into a film script which observed a relationship poisoned by the expectations placed on heteronormative relationships within a pornographic and hyper-sexualised society.

188 Greg Callaghan. The Sydney Morning Herald, *the dark web: uncovering monsters (and myths) in the Net’s ‘evil twin’*, <https://www.smh.com.au/technology/the-dark-web-uncovering-monsters-and-myths-in-the-net-s-evil-twin-20180307-p4z39d.html>, Published: 10/03/18, Accessed: 30/09/18

Since *140 Waste* was not filmed in full, there is only feedback from the artistic perspective and not any audience or spectator feedback to reflect on. Whilst the prospect of *140 Waste* addressed major research questions, it was invaluable for my artistic growth with a work-in-progress repertoire, to detach from a performance and prioritise the completion of the overall project.

Can We Talk:

Spatial Impact

Can We Talk, a site-specific, autobiographical monologue-based play, performed in two spaces, compared the differences in performer and audience response. It tested the effects of each setting on the narrative.

During *Can We Talk*, the spectators were told they could interact with the actor, ask questions if necessary and were instructed to listen. In the video evidence¹⁸⁹, the spectator as ‘therapist’ asked lots of questions, requiring the actress to exercise her improvisatory muscles and answer the spectator whilst remaining as close to the original script as possible. The actress and I had rehearsed specifically in preparation for this likely eventuality, when an audience member would threaten to throw the course of the performance off as a result of their investment to their role as ‘friend’ or ‘therapist’. We practiced improvisation by performing in dissimilar locations to break continuity and comfortability as I interrupted with various emotional and conversational responses to distract or ‘hijack’ the direction of the conversation. The actress then worked to navigate back to the direction of the script by engaging her improvisation skills. It is noteworthy to compare the different

189 Can We Talk. Evidence.

proportions that spectators engaged with the actress and took on their ‘role’. The participants performing as therapists tended to interact more than the viewers in the kitchen setting. The ‘therapist spectators’ perhaps interacted more because of the assumed archetype of therapists and the setting which fostered appropriate conditions: “I was assigned to be a therapist. It enhanced my concentration” and “I would’ve been quieter had I been given a different role... My task made me an active, concentrated participant.”¹⁹⁰ were two therapist reflections. Furthermore, majority of spectators said they wanted to “chat” or “comfort” the character, which confirmed the efficacy of theatre to stimulate necessary conversations and empathy to socio-cultural narratives of violence.

Both intimate site-specific landscapes aimed to create conditions for ‘spectators’ to engage in eye contact and other proximate behaviours for longer than might ordinarily feel comfortable. Considering the autobiographical framework, my decisions stemmed from both directorial and personal imprint. The space needed to foster attention and reduce distractions- for example, only natural light and no ‘costume’ applied.

Therapy

In One-[to]-One, consumerist formal anxieties are shot through with therapy culture’s promise of a talking cure as the politics of power between one and other are tangled and tugged upon in this live autopsy of the inter-relationship between performer and spectator.¹⁹¹

190 Post-performance feedback.

191 Rachel Zerihan. *Intimate Inter-actions: Returning to the body in one-to-one Performance*, <http://people.brunel.ac.uk/bst/vol0601/rachelzerihan/zerihan.pdf>, Accessed: 21/09/18, Pg. 2

Can We Talk offered an unanticipated personal therapy when collecting feedback post-performance in the form of questionnaire and discussion. There was a range of responses, from tears, to anger and those who couldn't articulate their feelings. One audience member knew the story's origin because they had been present during several of the events; they remarked on the uniqueness of experiencing second-hand trauma: "The shocking parts were the emotions behind the facts. The stuff I didn't know already, I was reliving it through her eyes."¹⁹² This individual experienced discomfort in hearing a play, (in which they had been present), from a performer that was unaware of their 'part' in the inciting story. The idea of dramatizing this trauma felt unsettling because of their 'role' in it, both theatrically and in memory:

My friend was really worried for me, I could tell because she kept asking me if I was ok and staring at me from the passenger's seat. I insisted that I was fine.¹⁹³

The narrative being reintroduced within a theatrical framework, provoked listening, observation and reflection, which overwhelmed this individual. She exited the performance in tears and hugged me for a very long time, as she verbally registered her guilt, confessing her regret at not doing more: "as a friend, what more can people do to help"¹⁹⁴. She said it was therapeutic to revisit the events and have insight into my assessment of the happenings. Rachel Zerihan's description of a "live autopsy of the inter-relationship" is poignant here in my removal from the visual and verbal storytelling, allowing a dissection of her relationship to the actress as an avatar. *Can*

¹⁹² Post-performance feedback. Appendices

¹⁹³ See *Can We Talk* Transcript. Appendices.

¹⁹⁴ Post-performance feedback. Appendices.

We Talk was an emotive experience for each spectator, as evidenced in the feedback¹⁹⁵, which speaks to the power of one-to-one as a form which creates “shared experience”¹⁹⁶.

Feedback:

Cross-Pollination

The one-to-one of *Can We Talk* diluted opportunities for collective audience discussion, and subsequently meant there was less opportunity to influence each other’s opinions. However, this ‘uncontaminated’ meditation may have been compromised by the viewer’s desire to provide an ‘appropriate’ answer, given the murmurings around the autobiographical nature of the piece. These findings correlated to existing research concerning social desirability bias, which occurs when “a respondent provides an answer which is more socially acceptable than his / her true attitude or behaviour.”¹⁹⁷

I think social desirability will always play a factor. In a group setting, not only are the audience adhering to the hive mind of the collective, but also to the conventions they’re accustomed to in the theatre. I believe these social responses are irremovable in a modern audience. Perhaps, there will be less social desirability with a more intimate performance, such as one-on-one work, but I believe the participant will still feel a social responsibility to “make the piece work” for the performer.¹⁹⁸

195 Post-performance feedback. Appendices.

196 Rachel Zerihan, Live Art Development Agency, *One to One Performance*, http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/uploads/documents/OnetoOne_Final.pdf, Accessed: 10/04/18, Published: 2009. Pg.3

197 Olena Kaminska and Tom Foulsham. *Understanding Sources of Social Desirability Bias in Different Modes: Evidence from Eye-tracking*, <https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/research/publications/working-papers/iser/2013-04.pdf>, University of Essex, (2013), Accessed: 30/09/18

198 Workshop Feedback.

I wanted to play with this idea of “the hive mind of the collective” in post-performance feedback, which shaped my decision to hold a Q&A after *And Revelation*. I hoped this would create an atmosphere of debate and shared reflection between audience members on the topic in question and that discussion would focus on the ideological and socio-cultural themes within the piece. The reality of the post-performance feedback bled into an editorialising process from the audience on the quality and presentation of the work, and any ‘cross-pollination’ occurred between their suggestions, as one person’s feedback would inevitably influence and prompt others. The Q&A resulted in a ‘hive mind’ with most people agreeing, but also a valuable collective response.

And Revelation

My final portfolio work performed as a multi-testimonial, monologue and transmedia studio performance interrogated the application of ‘live’ representational violence and verbal violence in the form of storytelling through a digital mediated form.

And Revelation sought to engage with issues of speech and how vocabulary fails our need to communicate, how words are smothered in subtext, sub/unconscious meanings, tricks and lies, which is fertile substance for creative approaches to writing and making.

Lack of Debate

I purposely offered an open format to the feedback session in order to respond to the mood and preoccupations of the audience after the performance and placed less emphasis on directing the discussion to alight on specific points. The editorialising of the quality of the work and the ‘improvements’ offered at the Q&A for *And Revelation*, highlighted an avoidance of discussing the political and social nuances which underscored the performance. The restricted pool of feedback could stem from the audience’s apprehension in discussing troubling themes, issues of domestic and workplace violence, especially if they suspect semi-autobiographical context which had become a staple across the portfolio. This response emphasised the silencing around violence as a systemic and systematised act. This may provide explanation to why the audience were not grandstanding about themes pervading the ‘war of the sexes’, and more familiar discussing dramaturgical or aesthetic issues in this context. However, amongst the editorialising, there were worthwhile suggestions to develop the performance.¹⁹⁹

Feedback

The penultimate and final act of *And Revelation* intrusively and abruptly terminates the communication offered to the audience. It suddenly shuts the audience from the story and evolves into a voiceless conclusion of the character’s life and thus the performance. Upon this, the audience is ushered past the dead body of the character who they got to know over the previous 27 minutes: “I knew it was over because Megan [the usher] looked back, stood up and went to the door and I was still sitting there staring at the stage forgetting to applaud because I found it so

199 Q&A in *And Revelation* video evidence.

shocking”²⁰⁰. The audience feedback divided between those who felt the jump from Act Three to the suicide was too unexpected, juxtaposed with those who felt they needed no convincing of the character’s demise: “With suicide sometimes there is no in-between. It can literally be that abrupt... I thought you really captured that”²⁰¹ My intention as the writer was to highlight the unpredictability of suicide²⁰². Therefore, I decided the ending didn’t need to be earned or follow logical progression that the audience would predict. I did however agree that the nuances drip fed throughout the play, and the gradual downfall of the character’s emotional and mental wellbeing was subtle. Her fate was inescapable from Act 1²⁰³, the words spoke volumes, but her delivery and physicality diverted the audience from anticipating a suicide. Her physicality was open, a smiling face, a light and assuring tonality, again, reiterating the unsuitability of words as communication.

Conclusion

Creating a work-in-progress portfolio, my criteria was contingent upon addressing socio-cultural and political messages of violence with clarity in order to encourage self-reflection and continue necessary debates around both historical and current issues. Recognisably, each performance has the capacity to be developed and improved, moving towards ‘polished’ performance. Conversely, I recognise and choose to align my appreciation with the power and provocation intrinsic in unfinished, unrefined works. Arguably, work-in-progress theatre inherently produces a quality of open-ended discussion and opportunity to “reappraise work in progress

200 Post-performance feedback in Q&A video evidence.

201 Private message feedback.

202 Q&A footage.

203 *And Revelation* Script.

... representing an opportunity to communicate and identify.”²⁰⁴, and offering further review and discussion, insofar as not closing conversations with the conclusion of a polished performance.

²⁰⁴ Baz Kershaw. *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance*. Edinburgh University Press, (2011), Pg.125-132

Conclusion

I contend that each performance piece that constituted my practice-as-research portfolio this year interrogated a narrative of violence, starting with the exploration of pornography and progressing into narratives of domestic abuse, coercive control and workplace violence. Each work added to the wider discussion of inter-exchangeable violence and to the negotiation between private and public displays of violence. My research worked to underscore the dynamic and symbiotic nature of violence and how it feeds from and breeds into itself. This directly spoke to my research title in exploring and identifying how disparate forms might affect the display and reception of specific narratives.

This thesis sought to creatively and intellectually develop a portfolio of work-in-progress performances that would interrogate social and cultural influences and patterns of violence. My artistic aim was to aid and further the discussion around violence in intimate and extimate modes in order to highlight the connectivity between overdetermined individual behaviours and under-scrutinised systemic violent acts. Therefore, the creative formula of each work was thoughtfully chosen to enhance and serve the narrative of the performance as effectively as possible, and consequently, instigate attentive debate around societal, cultural and habitual violence. This resulted in a cross-disciplinary portfolio which harnessed presentational and aesthetic tools, such as the use of a 'heightened physical language', site-specific one-to-one performance which enhanced the intimacy of private storytelling in a public form, and finally, a testimonial-transmedia theatre performance which broadened the scope of storytelling to enforce the pervasive nature of violence.

As an artist, this debut of works has allowed me to tackle sensitive and troubling subject matters, concerning socio-cultural and political messages, and disrupt the normative narratives, and concealed stories of violence. A measurable amount of the creative process has been informed by my own experience and understanding of coercive control, sexual violence and harassment. Therefore, this research has assisted me as an artist to use myself as the instigator and to disrupt the boundaries of private and public information. In line with current anti-violence movements such as #MeToo, vocalising personal trauma to engage public solidarity has introduced me to performance art, and the effectiveness of using my person as my creative catalyst to instigate discussion on a wider scale.

Interestingly, the core focus of theatre's interplay between affect and effect on the potency of narrative has significantly shifted from its initial objective. My practice-as-research project was interested in the impacts released through experimenting with dramaturgy, aesthetics, theatrical devices and manipulating the performing body. Inevitably there was a variety of responses to each of my practice-as-research performances, the effect on some audience members was a feeling of passive spectatorship, for others it took form in an emotional resonance, whilst some left certain performances feeling troubled. The effect also divided between those that reflected inwardly into their own lives, behaviours and stories, and those who reflected outwardly, projecting their responses onto their own beliefs of the social landscape and political, cultural and communal state. My objectives for the practice-as-research ultimately fall under the same umbrella; to stimulate thought and inward reflection (the private) which affects the outward response and a change in how we

participate in social environments (the public). This was a leading focus throughout the practice and thesis; to highlight the slippage and interchangeability between public and private spheres.

Furthermore, with each creative progression the practice-as-research became less concerned with categorising the audience responses and began to align more on the impact of form on the creative teams' ability to serve the narrative. By tackling complex social narratives, the research became heavily involved with the problematics of 'sensitive' subjects and the performers wellbeing. During the process of this practice-as-research project, my own evaluation of efficacy, the criteria of 'success' has moved from an image of adulation and emotional response as measures of impact and quality, towards a more devolved, collaborative and contemplative measure which prioritised conversation, shared understanding and a willingness to advocate for social justice. This shift was discovered through and *because of* the work and my close interactions with participants, story-givers and audiences.

When considering the validity of feedback, which in theatre settings is often qualitative, and as previously argued, based on the dominant discourse of templated images of 'success', this leads me to consider my own criteria for the 'success' of my research and how I validate or measure its success. My criteria sought to attain healthy debate, to experiment with form outside of my artistic skillset and use testimonial material effectively to engage the 'personal messages of subjective violence'.²⁰⁵ With each of those criteria met, my artistic objectives have, for the most part, been fulfilled.

205 Slavoj Žižek. *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Profile Books (2010)

However, research questions concerning pornography as material of empowerment and the influence of 'image' remains tentative. Whilst I would suggest each portfolio work tackled the notion of representation and image dissemination, it remains ambiguous as to how theatre should handle these questions best.

Furthermore, the political and social questions that transpire in response to the central theme of violence creates equally subjective and unquantifiable feedback. The versatility of theatre and its adoption of stylistic diversity allows inanimate stories to become re-humanised, to share the echo of social narratives through the detailing of individuated stories. With this, I would assert that theatrical tastes will continue to challenge theatre to address these issues in order to provide art that can communicate with the masses. I remind the reader of the artistic duty to present to the audience something they can interpret and meditate on, according to George Sand.

When reflecting the Workshop at the beginning of the research and development process, the taboo around these subjects was more palpable and the discussions more indecisive. Now, I would suggest that myself, amongst the other individuals involved with this process on any level, are able to articulate our subjective truths more coherently. The animating research questions for this practice-as-research project was to breach and disrupt the boundaries of public and private violence and invite audiences to reassess societal and systemic violence through the mode of theatre. In turn, each performance gained feedback from spectators and performers alike, which adds to the body of knowledge evolving theatre as a dialogical tool, and hence creates a richer inter-personal understanding of public and private displays of violence.

Finally, I would reflect that creating time-conscious work that speaks to current socio-cultural narratives of tension and political unrest, created fertile conditions to engage audiences. Whilst these issues concerning violence remain potent, the debate on pornography's authority in our private and social standings continues, alongside the questions of systemic violence enacting violence and the conditioning of habitual social responses. Therefore, the conversation regarding violence's interplay between private and public domains continues and further perpetual research is needed alongside social engagement to refuse complacency in protecting future gender, social, cultural and political narratives.

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