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VOLUME 1:

First person theatre: how performative tactics and frameworks
(re)emerging in the digital age are forming a new personal-as-political.

by
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Abstract

This study sets out to explore 'first person theatre' as a means of opening the individual to the problems of contemporary capitalism and its increasing pervasion of the personal in an era of embeddedness enabled by networked pervasive technology. Firstly setting out key definitions and a theoretical analysis of the problems of being in the digital age in chapter 1, and then setting this against the history of interaction in performance in chapter 2. The study then goes on (in chapters 3-5) to investigate three key aspects of first person performance as personal-as-political; sound and the city, play and games, and interactive theatre. In the final chapter, *The Umbrella Project* develops a piece of first person theatre as practice, a method of investigation that is vital to a thesis that discusses politics, late capitalism, and the means to resist the message-sending of private interests as fundamentally only to be understood *in practice*. For this reason, too, chapters 3, 4 and 5 are supported by key case studies discussing other first person theatre practice.

By placing the participant at the centre of the world-constituting process of theatre – in the hot space between *what is* and *what if* – this study suggests that first person theatre is able to open the contemporary individual to an *inbetween* where they might re-see, reflect and react to *what is*. To imagine and, if wished, act upon a *what if*. In an age of the disrupted near and far, the vanishing of the interface, of the false rhetoric of choice of 'personalisation', and the often false rhetoric of agency at the end of the era of broadcast, first person theatre offers the subject a route to individual agency, an understanding of the urban environment as construct, and to their relationship with the subjective other – something which this thesis suggests is a personal-as-political practice to rival the Spectacle of late capitalism.

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Introduction

This thesis intends to investigate 'first person theatre' as a new manner of engaging with the personal-as-political in the digital age – indeed, it will propose first person theatre¹ as a manner of and site for resistance against the infiltration of contemporary or late capitalism.

To begin, this introduction will set out how each chapter investigates first person theatre in the digital age, it will then end by setting out initial definitions for the key terms that the discussion necessitates a close understanding of; 'politics', 'community', 'contemporary capitalism' ('the Spectacle'), as well as what is understood by the term 'theatre'. This thesis investigates first person theatre through both written theory, and a piece of practice-as-research: *The Umbrella Project*. It was felt absolutely necessary that this study co-evolve from both theory *and* practice, indeed, as chapter 1 in particular so thoroughly describes both politics and community (as a politically important route to the *other*, embodiment, and a functional context in the digital age) as *practices*, it would hardly be possible to express these theories independent of their practical application – to invite the reader to experience the theory devoid of its application. It is for this reason also that interview-based case studies will play a substantial role in the wider thesis. They are a manner of approaching a personal-as-political practice through first person theatre as practice-informed theory, as well as theory-informed practice.

The first chapter will stand as a theoretical context for the more detailed considerations of first person theatre in chapters 3, 4 and 5. Although greater and more detailed analysis and exploration of the themes touched upon in chapter 1 will occur in those chapters, chapter 1 will begin by setting out

¹ Defined on p.23 as 'theatre that in some way situates the player (audience) as protagonist, placing them at the centre of the work, activating or navigating it in some way'.

overarching definitions and threads of theoretical engagement, noting other key theoreticians whose work is relevant (but beyond the scope of the study), and set out an idea of the contemporary context of what 'the digital age' signifies against which first person theatre can be seen to be emerging.

Chapter 1 thus begins with further initial definitions, a detailed theoretical section dealing in 'digital culture', and then a 'resistances' section. Which will look at the potential for a new politics-of-the-personal in first person performance, using the theoretical lenses of the Situationist International and phenomenology.

Chapter 2 is a brief and select summary of shifts in the audience and performance relationship throughout the 20th century. The intention is not to present a whole or time-line version of a history of interaction and the audience throughout that time. Instead, this chapter intends to trace pertinent examples of the shifts in theories about and of the audience throughout the 20th century, and how this has shaped on-going attitudes to interaction and the audience. It will also consider the significant shifts in politics, technology and/or society that these emerging techniques are reacting to, set against, or determined to address. This chapter, then, will serve as a context for the wider part of this thesis, which tends to focus on work that has occurred (for the most part) in the 21st century. It is a manner of acknowledging the heritage of current techniques of audience interaction, as well as tracing a strong lineage of politics and technology's effect on how performers and theatre-makers think about their relationship to their audiences.

Chapter 2 will start with the Futurists and Dadaists at the very beginning of the 20th century, then consider Artaud and the Theatre of Cruelty, before moving on to the community-based audience relationship of the British Radical Theatre. This chapter will also consider the different approaches of the American Avant-Garde (particularly the Happenings and the dissolution of the art/life divide by John Cage) of the same time (60s and 70s), before moving

through the increasing presence and influence of the media age – and eventually digital technology – that brings us through MUDs*² MOOs*³, CDROM, telepresence art, to virtual reality and immersion. The chapter will finish up at the mixed reality *transmedia* experience of work like Blast Theory's 1999 *Desert Rain*; here considered a watershed moment in terms of the maturity of work using digital platforms and syntaxes; and its use of the form and manner of games in particular.

Chapter 3 is the first of three case study supported chapters. These three chapters look at the urban environment, play and community, and interactivity and the subjective other in theory and practice. This first case study chapter sets out to address the 'soundwalk' form of first person theatre as a potential site for resistance for the individual-in-the-urban-environment of contemporary digital technoculture. 'Soundwalk' is a term used herein to describe a particular sub-genre of audio-based first person work that is typically delivered via headphones to an individual, which places the individual at the centre of the story-experience (a closer definition of 'soundwalk' can be found in chapter 3). Soundwalks are used to augment the visual reality of the individual participant, and while not always set in the urban environment they are particularly considered here in an urban context for their power to re-present the city space. The chapter will begin by engaging more generally with the context of the contemporary digital city, moving on to discuss use of sound, and the act of walking in particular, before finally studying the specific detail of two case studies. The first case study looks at the *Subtle mobs* made by the international arts collective Circumstance, and the other the group-based 'headphone shows' of Leeds-based theatre company Slung Low. Furthermore, as the practice-as-research for this thesis is formed of three soundwalks, the theories explored herein will also be of great relevance to chapter 6's discussion of *The Umbrella Project*.

² Multi User Dungeons – early text based online role-playing game-like experiences.

³ Object Oriented MUDs, which allow users to use a specific object-oriented programming language to change as well as interact with the game.

Chapter 4 aims to consider the influence of gaming and play on first person theatre as a potential route to the personal-as-political in the digital age. In the terms of the definition set out in chapter 1, political empowerment consists of the ability to *reflect* on the socio-political systems in which one is implicated, to be able to *conceive* of an alternative, and to *act* in a manner that might bring that alternative about (*reflect, re-see, react*). In this context pervasive games are considered in four personal-as-political aspects; the practice of pervasive games as a manner of accessing the inbetween of space and digital technology, games as a route to community through the encounter with the subjective other, game systems as a manner of reflecting on systems outside the 'magic circle' (play space), and the game player in embodying agency. In addition to touching on notions of community, the phenomenological body/world interface, and the theories of the SI set out in chapters 1 and 3, this chapter will bring in the thought of Boal and a little Brecht as additional theoretical lenses, drawing out the idea of the spect-actor. The second half of this chapter will then look at the use and influence of games on the work of Hide&Seek and Invisible Flock. The game design company Hide&Seek represent the more 'mechanics' approach to games in an arts context, and are particularly interesting regarding hacking urban space, whereas Invisible Flock are presented as much more recognisably 'games-influenced theatre'.

Chapter 5 will consider interactivity and the (re)revelation of the subjective other. Particularly using the lens of phenomenology set out in detail in chapter 1, chapter 5 will consider most directly the implications of emerging (and re-emerging) tactics of immersion and interaction, and how interactive theatre in particular is able to reconcile the subject with their primary 'vehicle for being in the world' (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 94). That is, to offer the participant a practice that is able to recover bodily agency, as well as speaking to how – in conjunction with the other – they inscribe the political with their daily actions. The first section of this chapter will deal with some additional definitions – particular the difference between 'immersive' and 'interactive' theatre – and then look at how first person interactive theatre is able to re-place the body in time, environment, and in the context of others (and the implications of these

reconciliations in the context of the digital age). The chapter will then move on to consider 3 main case studies of 'interactive theatre' which use different 'levels' of interaction as a manner of responding to and interrogating contemporary being. These case studies will be the work of Coney, Non Zero One, and Ant Hampton.

Then, finally, chapter 6 presents a consideration of *The Umbrella Project* as a means of enquiry into first person theatre as a personal-as-political theatre for the digital age. A full account of *The Umbrella Project* – from the conception of the idea, through development, and the process of collecting material, reflecting on that material, and writing and producing the soundwalks – can be found in appendix b, and the final scripts and audio recordings appendix c and d respectively. These appendices are available on an accompanying DVD archive available on request from Loughborough University.

The thesis will sometimes refer to niche areas of online culture and technology that may be outside the experience of the reader. For this reason there is a glossary provided at the end of the thesis. Each term that appears in the glossary is marked with an asterisk, and on its first appearance with an initial footnote giving the glossary definition. From that point on the term will be not be footnoted and the glossary can be referred to. Also worth noting is the use of bolding on words other than in section headings – this is to draw attention to new terms introduced by the thesis, to pull out moments that set them in context and further develop their definitions.

An additional methodological note should be made about the selection of the case studies detailed above which make up a major part of the thesis. They have been chosen for two reasons - firstly because they represent work being made and experienced within the past 10 years (the majority of it within the timescale of the writing of this thesis), and thus have been constructed amongst the most recent socio-techno-economic landscape identified by the thesis, and secondly, because they have been directly experienced by the writer. This is vital to a *whole* understanding of the work – both bodily and

theoretically⁴ – and for writing from an appropriately reflexive academic practice: practice affecting theory affecting practice (e.g. The Umbrella Project). There are many other practitioners whose work is highly relevant (for example: Platform, Graeme Miller, Lone Twin, Janet Cardiff), many of whom are highlighted by other academics cited in the thesis, however their work hasn't been directly experienced by the writer, and so hasn't been included in detail.

Likewise, in methodological terms, the manner of use of key philosophical theories – those of Nancy, Merleau-Ponty and Debord should be made explicit. Though there are additional and more up-to-date theorists on performance in the context of digital technoculture, the combination of these three marks an attempt to return to a phenomenological perspective updated by a more recent conception of the politics of shared space (via Nancy and Debord). This is an attempt to move towards an embodied aesthetic practice, and away from a discourse weighed upon by specific technologies and new-technology worries. The use of Merleau-Ponty's theory-of-a-practice, combined with Debord's practice-as-theory aims to return to notions of the embodied self, as well as the experience of this (tempered by McLuhan) in a networked age and also in the context of a shifting and re-defining 'community' (Nancy).

This is by no means an exhaustive philosophical study, and in staking a bold claim for a renewed phenomenological embodied aesthetic practice there is nuance missing that there might be room for in a philosophy thesis. For example, though Merleau-Ponty is in many ways interested in a meta-structural embodiment (aside from pre-conceived structures of meaning construction and being), and so could be seen to be contradicted by Debord's call to de- and re-construct meaning in the context of a pervading Spectacle (i.e. renewed attention to persistent and not momentary situation), they are combined in order to produce a theory of an embodied *and* aesthetic practice.

⁴ Some examples of the practitioners' work discussed have been experienced in unfinished 'scratch' versions, or it is another main work (i.e. A Small Town Anywhere) and in that case a greater amount of review material has been used to discuss the effect of the work.

This is done so as to progress the relevant ideas at the heart of the theories with regards to the contemporary problems of digital technoculture, not to thoroughly take on the entirety of the philosopher's respective bodies of work: therefore this is philosophy as seen in practice, as opposed to a full philosophical thesis.

Having said this, it is worth noting a few of the many more contemporary theorists who are relevant to the ideas of this thesis – and also worth (very) briefly explaining how a return to a phenomenological embodied aesthetic practice might respond to aspects of the thought of other important theorists. Namely, Jon McKenzie and his critique of liminality (i.e., that performance is, indeed 'aside' enough from the pressures of the Spectacle so as to be able to create fissures in it.), Nicolas Bourriaud, and his formulation of a relational aesthetics (coming from a fine/plastic arts perspective), the work of Jill Dolan (the problems of spectatorship and the subjective other), and Auslander's notions of the 'live' (as a critique of Peggy Phelan's notion of non-mediated performance as a resistant practice).

Jon McKenzie's *Perform or Else* is a careful and thoughtful critique of the liminality of performance – crucial to his argument is his alignment of the notion of 'performance' in other spheres with that of Performance Studies (which contains theatre and play, but to which this study does not refer when it talks about 'performance', see later definition in the Introduction). McKenzie likens the discourse around performance in 'performance management' (business management) and technological 'performance' to that of Performance Studies, suggesting that 'the term 'performance' [...] has been radically reinscribed, reinstalled, and redeployed in uncanny and powerful ways' in the context of contemporary capitalism (2001, p. 13). Throughout his study he develops the notion that united in a military, academic and industrial conception of cultural power, cultural performance, performance management and technological performance are united by a common drive for 'efficacy, efficiency, and effectiveness' that makes them fundamentally anti-disruptive practices (2001, p. 135). McKenzie identifies liminality as a key notion put

forward by Performance Studies as evidence for its potential 'efficacy'⁵ but in identifying and likening the drive towards efficacy in cultural performance to other strata in the 'perform, or else' socio-economic spectrum, he suggests this liminality is a false resistance – still absorbed by a productivity which is fundamentally subsumed by the Spectacle. McKenzie thus suggests that performance itself becomes an imperative 'or else!' in an era of late capitalism. Crucially, one tied up in a digital-technological context, and just as Debord bemoans the Spectacle's occupation of leisure as well as work, McKenzie identifies a problem for 'cultural theorists and activists' who in the context of this,

[Face] something shocking: *the separation of labor and leisure is disintegrating* [...] work activities have entered the home, the car, the street, and even the family vacation. Similarly, the emphasis on creativity, pleasure, and personal expression by Performance Management threatens the separation of labor and leisure' (2001, p. 93)

This forms a reasonable critique of the assertions of the Situationist International (SI) used in this thesis: the idea that the Spectacle masks, but there is a Real to be found underneath through an artistic practice undertaken by all (see later for more detailed consideration of the SI). However in this study this critique is answered via application of Matthew Causey and Marshall McLuhan (see chapter 1). In this thesis it is suggested that a new kind of masking has occurred – a corruption of the data flow of reality – an encryption for which there is still a key, but which projects an even greater 'seamless inevitability' (Plant, 1992, p. 12). Whereas McKenzie is right to identify the prevailing 'or else' rhetoric of performance in an era of 'reality TV' and pervasive technology*⁶, this study does not suggest that the liminality of

⁵ 'liminal rites of passage gave theatre scholars a *functional* model for theorising the transformational potential of theatre and other performative genres.' (2001, p. 36)

⁶ 'Pervasive technology' is used as shorthand for 'pervasive digital technology', and it describes the tendency for contemporary mobile technology (the mobile phone, the smart phone, the MP3 player, the digital cameras etc.) to travel alongside an individual, to *pervade their lives* and to bring in new immaterial fields to material experience. Pervasive technology is most truly pervasive in places such as the UK, the US, and other developed Western countries, where cellular and data networks are available to connect mobile devices forming a world of 'ubiquitous computation' and 'telecommunication' (LaBelle, 2006, p. 258).

performance is key to creating fissures in the Spectacle of late capitalism – rather it seeks *play* and *interactivity* as a manner of re-seeing the systems and community in which we are implicated, and re-seeing the self as pervaded by technology. Thus it is not *perform* but *play* and play is always a voluntary activity (see definitions in chapter 4), there is no ‘or else’, there is always just a decision to take off a badge, put down a playing piece, press ‘stop’ on an mp3 player⁷. This, too, is the reason immersive theatre is rejected as a politically empowering tactic (see chapter 4, again), and the reason it is highlighted that instead of a drive for efficacy, effectiveness, efficiency, games are in their very form composed of obstacles undertaken for *no good reason*, they are not ‘anti serious’ but *aside from seriousness altogether* (again, see chapter 4). Games-as-activism also often play with the rhetoric of efficacy, effectiveness and efficiency – exposing the human desire to *win*, or to not question instructions, or to not consider how small actions play out within a wider system. Thus this study does not suggest that first person theatre is a *liminal experience*, but in McKenzie’s terms, is a manner of resistance as ‘destratification’:

Destratification begins by boring deep into the performance stratum in order to follow the fissures, the disjunctive joints between performances and performatives, paradigm and paradigm, stratum and stratum. It is by eroding the seals between different belts and layers that the process of destratification on faults, and by amplifying the cracks and flows we begin to approach a non-stratified atmosphere. (2001, p. 199)

Games and play enable a constant holding of both the real and the playful at one and the same time – the holding visible of many layers – in this way ‘first person theatre’ (definition to follow) can create a small yet resistant friction. Not ‘perform or else’, but ‘play, and what?’.

Following on from McKenzie, it is necessary to deal with an additional critique of Debord and of technology in art via Nicolas Bourriaud’s *relational aesthetics*. Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics is a ‘theory of form’ (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 19), that is, it is not a result or end point (not about an art work in and of itself) but a notion of the artwork as a ‘social interstice’ – as a thing that happens

⁷ The pressure to continue when other players are present is certainly felt, but this is key to the re-revelation of implication in social systems. It is well enough understood that play is not ‘serious’ – and taking it ‘seriously’ itself is a revelatory behaviour.

between people. As such relational aesthetics relate to a form that works with intersubjectivity. Bourriaud writes about relational art as

[...] an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space [...] (2002, p. 14)

He goes on to suggest – through detailed reference to late 20th Century contemporary art – that certain artworks have the ability to produce an encounter with inter-subjectivity which pertains to an attempt to learn ‘*to inhabit the world in a better way*’ (2002, p. 13). While this aspect of his work is relevant to the overall aims of this thesis, Bourriaud, however, talks mainly about the fine arts, not performance, theatre, play, (or dance for that matter) which are more interested in the body – more able to be – and it is for this reason this thesis combines body-oriented art with body-oriented theory and practices (phenomenology, the SI) updated with an inter-subjectivity informed by Nancy’s notions of community.

There is also a strong critique of technology in Bourriaud’s theory, he explains in *Relational Aesthetics* that:

[...] the emergence of new technologies, like the Internet and multimedia systems, points to a collective desire to create new areas of conviviality and introduce new types of transaction with regard to the cultural object. The ‘society of the spectacle’ is thus followed by the society of extras, where everyone finds the illusion of an interactive democracy in more or less truncated channels of communication. (2002, p. 26)

Like in the case study chapters of this thesis, he writes of the rise of a false rhetoric of choice and ‘democratisation’ that is spreading with the advent of user-centered interactive technology (see chapter 3 in particular), and suggests that art work which is interested in the *form* of technology (its aesthetics) as opposed to its use as a tool, is the only artwork that can begin to address it. Within this thesis this idea is developed using Matthew Causey’s reading of Heidegger, combined with a McLuhan and Baudrillard-informed notion of The Real and the individual in the context of ‘extending’ technology.

This thesis, aligned with Bourriaud, argues that we ‘must thus learn to ‘seize enhance and reinvent’ subjectivity, for otherwise we shall see it transformed

into a rigid collective apparatus at the exclusive service of the powers that be' (2002, p. 89), however from an embodied 'first person' perspective first and foremost. Additionally, as this is not an exhaustive philosophical study, Bourriaud's addition of Deleuze and Guattari begins to make the philosophical discussion too unwieldy and is another reason to not thoroughly include his theories.

Finally, Bourriaud's critique of the Situationists' lack of development on intersubjectivity should be noted. Bourriaud explains how

[...] the Situationist theory overlooks the fact that if the spectacle deals first and foremost with forms of human relations (it is '*a social relationship between people, with imagery as the go-between*'), it can only be analysed and fought through the production of new types of relationships between people [...] The idea of 'situation' extends the unity of time, place and action, in a theatre that does not necessarily involve a relationship with the Other [...] the *constructed situation* does not necessarily correspond to a *relational world* (2002, pp. 84-5)

However, this is also tackled in my thesis, by the addition of the phenomenological 'social web' of Merleau Ponty and the community of Jean-Luc Nancy. Phenomenology, with its focus on experience as a starting point, thrusts the self back into the body, only in order to re-see its social, relational context.

Alongside a thesis which makes a key point around ideas of the relationship between 'the subject' and the other, and of 'intersubjectivity' as a practice, there is a necessary caveat to be given – and which is also developed on a little more in a subsection on Accessibility and Witnessing in chapter 4. This caveat is around the notion of a blank 'everyman' subject. Jill Dolan can be picked out as constructing a useful critique of this ideas – one which can be levelled at both phenomenology (as Dolan does) and play theory (which this thesis focuses on).

For Dolan, writing in *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, phenomenology 'is a science of subjectivity that places man (the generic is used intentionally) at the centre of the universe.' (2012) She continues to explain that phenomenology

[...] does not allow for the consideration of individual subjects, each shaped by a different set of historical and cultural circumstances [...] that influence how they see what they see [...] a phenomenological perspective implies that there are stable texts with immanent meanings that can consistently, rightfully be grasped. (2012)

She suggests by way of application of this, that some incidences of contemporary and avant-garde performance (using Richard Foreman as an example) while formally (re)inventive, though rejecting traditional forms tend 'to abdicate responsibility for perpetuating or attacking dominant ideology' (2012). The unexamined idea being perpetuated by these performances is that a freeing environment for one subject is the same freeing environment for all – that anything created in a 'new' space is free of any dominant ideology, if it is free of one (here, linear forms). This is indeed problematic – and something that the interactive practices detailed herein are not immune to – big budget video games, for example, are now a massive perpetuator of a dominant ideology around women, people of colour, and through invisibility: disabled, trans, queers, and other marginalised individuals and communities.

However it is in the inbetween sought throughout this thesis – the holding of both reality and playspace – we find a beginning of a solution. Play and interaction as examined herein is a practice which is able to both play *within* a new space, and *acknowledge the baggage we bring to it* from the old. Foreman's work, for Dolan, suggests that 'ideology can be detached from perception [...] that there is a pure, universal way of looking' (2012) – and an uncaring approach to subjectivity could begin to suggest this too – but games fundamentally look at perception and subjectivity *in play*. Games are a systemic playing out of our (inter) subjectivity in a reflective form – and in the most generative forms first person theatre each playing out of the rule set is a different reading of it, created together. There is no 'stable' text in first person theatre, except the many, many ways a rule set can be interpreted. The very form is instability, built of the tension between rule and play, *what is* and *what if⁸*, player and game system, subject and other. Quoting Judith Newton and

⁸ More detail on this terminology later.

Deborah Rosenfelt, Dolan explains that 'Ideology... is not a set of deliberate distortions imposed on us from above, but a complex and contradictory system of representations [...] through which we experience ourselves in relation to each other' (2012) – in applying intersubjectivity (via Nancy) to phenomenology, and by opening up a place of careful instability through first person play, this thesis attempts to outline a practice that is continually reflective and resistant – is able to re-reveal the systems of representations which pervade ourselves and our relationships to others. How the space is held by those devising the game or play system is, in this case, key – there needs to be room for a player to *intentionally* retain the frame of their representational apparatus (see Coney's use of a badge/hat system in chapter 4, or the manner in which the reality of the city is forced to butt up against a 'what if' of a non-linear form and slow taking on of an 'other' view of it in *As If It Were The Last Time* in chapter 3). Play makes this muddy multi-subjectivity possible when it creates a space where you are allowed to carry both *what is* and *what if* lightly.

And as a final theoretical caveat – although Phillip Auslander's well-known *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* is often referred to in studies considering digital technology in performance, this study is not interested in a discussion of liveness vs. mediatized performance. Through the application of McLuhan, Baudrillard and Causey the study discusses the context of the digital media age, but Auslander's study is too bogged down in tackling the liveness debate to enhance this study. Auslander in *Liveness* sets out to tackle the contradictory claim by Peggy Phelan (similar to the 'liminality' critique of McKenzie) about the capability of the 'liveness' of performance as a resistant practice. Auslander sets out mediatized culture as a way of *being* against which performance emerges, not just a way of *presenting*, he suggests, therefore, that if

[...] live performance cannot be shown to be economically independent of, immune from contamination by, and ontologically different from mediatized forms, in what sense can liveness function as a site of cultural and ideological resistance [...] (1999, p. 7)

While this study would align itself with Auslander's argument that digital media's pervasive presence, and role in weaving the subject into the Spectacle (and vice versa), it does not agree that performance is therefore inextricable from the Spectacle in the manner which he dismisses Phelan's ideas. Auslander highlights how Phelan extends her analysis of performance as (as McKenzie might term it) 'liminal' practice

[...] into the political realm by arguing that performance's disappearance and subsequent persistence only in memory makes performance a privileged site of resistance to forces of regulation and control. (1999, p. 112)

Though this thesis does not suggest that it is liveness itself which provides a space to resist the Spectacle (rather a practice of aliveness-among-others), it does believe that the reflective (not liminal) space of art is a key starting point from which to build an embodied agency-among-others. Likewise, a large part of Auslander's theory denies the possibility of communality in theatre – considering only a traditional and formal notion of 'theatre' he writes that the idea of theatre as a route to communality 'misunderstands the dynamic of performance, which is predicated on the distinction between performance and spectators. Indeed, the effort is to eliminate that distinction destroys the very possibility of performance' (1999, p. 86). This closed-down vision of theatre and performance also makes Auslander and Phelan's debate less relevant to the thesis.

Instead of a physical division between performance and spectator first person theatre asks the participant to hold performance and 'reality' alongside one another, in their active body – communality is found in the very situation – in the holding amongst others a space of action and belief; not one side holding action, and the other belief. Auslander's argument is so tangled in dismissing a rhetoric of liveness vs. mediatisation, that it is not useful for a study that intends to move beyond that debate. Indeed, this thesis is explicitly a discussion of *theatre in the digital age*, it is not interested in the *specific use* of digital technology *in* theatre. Although some of the case studies put forward (and indeed *The Umbrella Project* practice-as-research) may use digital technologies, the interest is in *first person tactics and frameworks* that are

characteristic of the digital, and how these are being used (returned to sometimes) in performance. It is the *form* that is important, not the specific technologies; the wider implications of how contemporary being is shaped by shifts brought on by instant global communication, pervasive technology*, and how the data stream of contemporary life is potentially used and corrupted by private interests.

Likewise it is also useful to state the problems of discussing anything in the context of 'the digital', which shifts and evolves so swiftly that reflections are often very quickly out of date. Steve Dixon resists any attempt to form an exhaustive study of digital technologies in theatre in *Digital Performance* with the observation that as 'Sarah Sloane has joked, books on computer technologies generally have the shelf life of a carton of milk' (2007, p. 33). For this reason, too, this study does not set out to deal in specific technologies and their use, aware that no lasting impact⁹ can be sought in such a discussion, and instead attempts to draw observations about *trends* rather than *artefacts*, backed up with contemporary examples where possible.

Definitions: Politics

The understanding of 'politics' in this study (which goes on to look at how certain techniques can be seen to be 'politically powerful') is built on a reasonably general notion of the ability to *understand* and *take action* within a social system. This then becomes a more detailed discussion in terms of the *politics* of the urban environment, community, and the self and the subjective other. Politics here does not refer just to the specific operations of government, or to the actions of the political classes (that is those employed in some form of national or local governance). Nor, indeed, is the definition quite so general as Aristotle's 'things concerning the citizens' (Aristotle, 2010) (though few definitions of politics could escape this). This study instead refers to 'politics' as a reflection on *power* within a given community or society. In this context a politically engaged individual is a *member of a society or*

⁹ That is to say 'ongoing' impact, as histories of technology in theatre and performance are certainly valuable.

community with the ability to reflect on that society or community, and draw personal conclusions about how they wish themselves and others to participate in it, give credence to it, and/or affect change within or without it. A politically active individual is one who is able to act on those conclusions. In this context politically powerful performance, is work that offers a participant or audience member the ability to reflect (on their own terms) on their place in a global, national, local, or hyper-local community or society, together with evoking the empowering notion that whatever conclusions one might come to, one might also act upon them and affect change. 'Politics' is thus a reflection on systems of influence and power, and the individual's place within them. This notion of a 'system' is perhaps too general, but is so termed as to encompass both the constructs of private interests, socio-economic constructions, and the more elusive praxis of community – of the relationship between the subject and the (subjective) other.

The 'politics' and 'political systems' identified in this thesis are also, importantly, *a process* – one bound up in and expressed through how we relate to one another and thus inherent, too, in our ideas of 'community' and 'communion'. The political implications of the Spectacle of late capitalism, for example, are systemic – they are continually revised and pervasive, making and remaking themselves daily. The capitalist system is so effective precisely because of its ability to adapt and thus to continually resist (or, more typically, subsume) practices which might attempt to oppose it. The idea of both politics and community as practice is explored in much greater detail in the 'community' definition section (next), but for now we might consider pertinent Jean-Luc Nancy's notion in *The Inoperable Community* that 'the political is the place where community as such is brought into play' (Nancy, 1991, p. xxxvii). As Nancy implies, it is in systems of power and influence (the political, as previously termed) that communities are inculcated, created, influenced. This thesis will suggest that though the political is where community is brought *into play*, it is also through the summoning of community that politics might be *played with*. Politics is inscribed in community – and so through the lens of the arts and a collective agency encouraged by first person theatre, politics might

be considered, revisited, revised. Likewise, if politics is concerned with systems of power and influence that essentially work with human beings as their contents, then the rules of these systems might be examined and *corrupted* by new memes, new viral transmissions of the praxis of relationships and existence, through *first person theatre* (definition to follow).

One might situate the 'systems' of politics more usefully in terms of 'ecosystems', which are less about a focus on an *essence* (ruleset) or a *result*, but rather the on-going interdependent *process* of co-existence. One can find a useful parallel in the emergent systems that can result from a simple ruleset in games theory¹⁰ – the complications that arise from the *playing* cannot be predicted from the initial ruleset.¹¹ For this reason the intention to disrupt, resist or reclaim politics and community must be done in playing out their consequences – not in an attempt to pin them down. 'Pinning down' is impossible, for it is at that point – the attempt to pin it down – that a system ceases to exist. This 'pinning down' is when the language of politics (inscribed by the actions and reactions of human beings in conjunction) attempts – and fails – to speak that which cannot be spoken. It is the limit. This 'limit' of community is what Nancy identifies in the 'limit' of communication between the subject and the subjective other. In this meeting, Nancy finds 'that way of destining ourselves in common that we call a politics, that way of opening community to itself, rather than to a destiny or to a future' (Nancy, 1991, pp. 80-1).

It is for this reason the political is precisely a praxis; not a system considered as a 'product' or specific end (systems of control might aspire to this, but stationary systems are always defeated by the realities of complexity, entropy; the laws of motion that govern all systems in our universe), but a self-defining and constantly re-worked inscription of political inhabitation and relation. Nancy might be seen to describe this view of the political within his 'literary communism'; a communality written by and of a community. There he finds a

¹⁰ See chapter 4 for more.

¹¹ Conway's *Game of Life* is a classic example of this.

limit 'at which all politics stops and begins' (Nancy, 1991, pp. 80-1). It is a 'limit' because it is the point at which community is constantly made, practised. At once born and dying, always, in order that it might live – situated in the impossible communion between the subject and the subjective other. It is a recognition of the same in the different; a notion of habitation in something which one can never inhabit. In this constant flux, this *inbetween*, we find a potential political resistance. The mainstream media are palpably eager to simplify complicated *presence*; they often pressure politicians into producing black and white representations, and non-sound-bite-oriented collective resistances (such as the Occupy movement of the early 2010s) are dismissed as 'having no aims'. While it is precisely in the movement's *occupation* – complicated and persistent presence – that it finds its power, and that signifies their on-going resistance, *especially* to the media.

Politics is a process. A practice. Politically powerful performance, this thesis suggests, is that which is able to recover a sense of agency for those who practice it, as well as speak to how we inscribe the political with our daily actions, and together build and maintain the systemic.

Community

This leads quite naturally to a specific engagement with the notion of 'community' already begun above and important to the above definition of political empowerment. Again, the definition is built simply, but with more complicated qualifiers in practice. A useful starting point is Raymond Williams' definition of 'community' used by Baz Kershaw as part of his study of British Radical Theatre and its political effectiveness. In discussing community theatre, Kershaw quotes Williams' conception of community as the 'medium of face-to-face interactions through which we transact ideological business with the wider social structure' (Kershaw, 1992, p. 29). This thesis abides by the notion that community is what arises from the interactions between people (that it is in fact, a medium of the *inbetween*), and in that fact is the basis of a transaction between the individual and the wider social structures in which they are implicated. 'Ideological' here stands for all manner of social, political,

religious and philosophical relationships that are created, maintained and disrupted in the space of community. This thesis, however, rejects the notion that a community need be a 'face-to-face' experience. Community can also be built out of non-proximate relationships – online relationships, for example. Community is fundamentally a *social* practice, though, and as Victor Turner explains in Richard Schechner's *Ritual, Play and Performance*:

The social world is a world in becoming, not a world in being [...] That is why I am a little chary of the terms 'community' or 'society,' too, though I do use them, for they are often thought of as static concepts. (Turner, 1976, p. 98)

Like the political, and Turner's notion of the 'social world', community should be recognised as a 'world in becoming', a practice, not a 'static concept' (ibid). Community is of particular interest to this thesis because it is within that relationship between others that the political comes into play. Within the community one can be enabled to recognise the wider social structures in which one participates.

There is a slight difficulty, then, in the context of this 'world in becoming', with the use of the word *transaction* in Williams' definition – the exchange of one thing for another – as the community does not trade necessarily in finite artefacts or ideas, and the process of 'exchange' here is a complicated one. Although the community can be said to *arise* from the finite (or at least the experience of finitude), it is the muddy, complex impossibility of finitude that the community characterises. Rather than the offering of one thing for another it is the hot space inbetween finite things: exchange-space, (not the items or ideas being exchanged). Again we turn to the thought of Jean-Luc Nancy in his *Inoperable Community*, tempered with contributions from Blanchot's *Unavowable Community*. For these two theorists community is a route to (and arises from) the encounter with the subjective other, a relationship that fundamentally brings the subject to a relationship with their own finitude. In the community, the subject's own being becomes revealed as fundamentally tied up as a function of others', and community becomes an experience of impossible empathy. The subject is made aware of their edges in the moment

they attempt to transcend them. Nancy highlights the extremity of this realisation of finitude in being present at the death of the other, but Blanchot also highlights the same *impossible communion* to be found between lovers. The drive to unification that is the heart of love, and the impossibility of accompanying someone on their journey to death, both speak of impossible limits that *delimit us*, and allow us to recognise the subjective in others.

This is the key point for our definition of community – the recognition of the subjective other that is explored in Nancy and Blanchot’s complicated thoughts on community. Christopher Fynsk’s foreword to Nancy’s work explains it in the context of the death of the other, describing how in the very impossibility of *conceiving of the experience of ending* from the context of our own *persistent existing* we are presented with an ‘impossibility of representing its meaning’. This impossibility ‘suspends or breaches the possibility of self-presentation and exposes us to our finitude. [...] this exposure is also an opening to community: outside ourselves, we first encounter the other’ (Fynsk, 1991, pp. xv-i).

This is the impossibility of community. Let us develop this a little. In Pierre Joris’ introduction to Blanchot’s text, he suggests that ‘the community takes upon itself and inscribes in itself the impossibility of the community’ (Joris, 1988, p. xiii). Joris is tracing in this impossibility the *limit of the self* and the *limit of community* that arise from the relationship between the self and the other. The community is impossible because *it can never be completed*, a destination is never reached – it is fundamentally a state of being *in between*. This is what this thesis understands by the ‘impossibility’ of community; thrust into conjunction with the other we are simultaneously thrown back. As Joris continues to say, a ‘community is the presentation to its members of their mortal truth [...]. It is the presentation of finitude and of excess without possibility of return that founds the finite-being’ (Joris, 1988, p. xiii). This is the community as a manner of encounter with the subjective other, and through journeying with them to their limits (finitude), the self is able to discover its own limits.

Also, crucially, (to return to Williams' original definition) the community is not *defined* by ideology; ideological notions might arise from it (as he states), but a community is built moment-by-moment in the interactions between people. This means that communities must be understood not, in Joris' words as 'the restricted form of a society', nor as one part of a larger social function (a 'social cell'), because community 'does not allow itself to create a work and has no production value as aim' (1988, p. xiii). For Joris community does not 'achieve itself' (to borrow a phrase from Daniel Watt's discussion of theatre in the context of the work of Deleuze and Guattari (Watt, 2009, p. 93)). It is, to reiterate, a *practice*. If we leave behind the idea of a 'transaction' (with its economic baggage), we find a practice that is not a producer of a product (or 'creator of a work' as above), but one that arises from a relationship with the other that is inhabited moment-by-moment. This is the political implication of community – that when defined in terms of the encounter of the *inbetween* at the limits of the relationship between 'self' and 'subjective other' it is able to shake off superstructural capitalist 'productive' ideologies. This community does not create a work, it achieves nothing and is constantly rebuilt – and there we might find a manner of being that is able to resist the constantly rebuilt, all-subsuming force of capitalism (to be defined next). We return, then, to Nancy's politics of community defined not in terms of any possible *resulting ideology*, but instead in finding 'a limit, at which all politics stops and begins' (Nancy, 1991, pp. 80-1). Nancy finds in community 'that way of destining ourselves in common that we call a politics, that way of opening community to itself, rather than to a destiny or to a future' (Nancy, 1991, pp. 80-1).

Opening community to itself – the self to the other – is the potential political power of community. Community, in its constantly remade experience of the *inbetween* of self and subjective other is for Nancy, an inscription of 'infinite resistance' (Nancy, 1991, pp. 80-1). Finding our self *in the other*, and the impossibility of our self *as the other* is of interest to this thesis, because there lies the root of the political power of performance that works with community: in re-presenting ourselves as part of a constant mutual inscription *on* and *with*

the bodies of our selves and others. Inscription is key in the context of understanding community *in practice*, which Nancy begins to touch on with his notions of a Literary Communism and invocation of the *logos*. Community is unavowable, unspeakable, and inexplicable, *except in experiencing it*. This is at the heart of first person theatre; its ability to communicate on a different level the problems of the socio-political, through an evocation of the *experience* of politics and community, their *practice*.

This is found in theatre that invites the participant to *do*, not to listen or watch. In first person theatre the audience aren't shown a 'truth', they are asked to find their way through an experience. Just as for Nancy in community there is 'nothing to possess', in the practice of the experience of first person theatre, the 'inscription' by the bodies of the participants is illegible to all but those who inscribe it. What is inscribed is not a final or universal 'truth possessed, appropriated or transmitted [...] it is, absolutely, the truth of being-in-common' (Nancy, 1991, p. 40). When the politics of community are discussed herein, particularly with reference to play-based and interactive theatre, this is the community with which this thesis is engaging; the *inbetween* of the *what is* (self) and the *what if* (other) inoperably combined, held together, lightly, like the weight of the universe (finitude amongst infinity). Community is *experienced*. And so should be the theatre that attempts to engage with it. To echo Nancy:

Perhaps we should not seek a word or a concept for it, but rather recognize in the thought of community a theoretical excess [...] that would oblige us to adopt another *praxis* of discourse and community (Nancy, 1991, p. 26).

Community, then, is (in this thesis) a simple premise complicated by the understanding of the experience of community as *praxis*, as explained by Nancy. Community arises in the *inbetween* of the self and the subjective other when thrown into conjunction. And so to replace Williams' original 'medium' with the word 'practice' (Kershaw, 1992, p. 29), then, *community is the unavowable practice that arises in the encounter between the self and the other, through and of which arises all of politics and ideological foundations*.

However, as a final note, in dismissing the ‘face-to-face’ requirement of Williams’ first definition, can a subject truly encounter the *finitude of the other* (as required by Blanchot and Nancy) when the relationship between them is *not* face-to-face? Is there room in this definition for the non-proximate communities of the web, for example? Fynsk (in his introduction to Nancy) explains that

[...] part of the devastation wrought by the technical organization of advanced capitalist societies (state or private capitalism) lies in the isolation of the individual in its very death [...] (Fynsk, 1991, pp. xv-1).

But the isolation of the individual from its death is overcome in the relationship between the self and the other – in the recognition of the self *in* the other. This is not necessarily only to be accomplished in the bodily presence of the other. The digital is now a plane across which people live their lives; it is a *cultural space* (Adams, 2011). It is a space where people communicate, where friendships and loving relationships are built and maintained. Relationships are not necessarily interrupted by technology, and if the impossible communion of lovers can be found online, so too can community.

Contemporary (or) late capitalism and the Spectacle.

This thesis will make frequent reference to ‘private interests’ and ‘late’ or ‘advanced’ capitalism, sometimes just using ‘capitalism’ for shorthand. There is no room here for a full exploration of the theories and history of contemporary capitalism (that would be a thesis in itself), but in its focus on new ‘personal-as-political’ practices the thesis must acknowledge that the abiding political mode of contemporary being is driven by pervasive, Spectacular capitalism. This thesis is specifically interested in capitalism and the Spectacle in the context of the digital age, and further thought on the political implications of the digital will be developed later in chapter 1 and throughout the thesis. However it will do well to touch on this thesis’ understanding of ‘capitalism’ and the Spectacle of late capitalism, as conceived by Guy Debord and the Situationist International (SI).

Capitalism is first and foremost understood here as an economic system based on private ownership of the means of production, and the purpose of production for profit of these private concerns. This is then coloured with the *effect* of the implementation of capitalism, which is concerned with production and profit, and the effect this has on the people implicated in its systems. This includes the inequality upon which it thrives and which it produces, and its manner of manipulating message-sending mediums in order to ensure its preservation. To begin, we turn to Marx's theories of alienation (particularly highlighted in conjunction with Situationist thought in Sadie Plant's *Most Radical Gesture* (Plant, 1992, p. 11)), which consider the individual in the capitalist system. For Marx, the capitalist system – in its drive towards greater and more efficient (profitable) production – creates processes of work that ultimately result in the worker's alienation from the product they create a part of. Plant introduces the Situationist International's notions of capitalism by quoting Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, explaining that under capitalism the individual

[...] 'feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He feels at home when he is not working, and when he is working he does not feel at home.' Alienated from the products of their labour, their time, and their own selves, workers produce and reproduce alienated relations between themselves and things and between each other. (Plant, 1992, p. 11)

In the capitalist system, the alienated individual is found *once removed* – the worker is part of a larger system, and their work does not result in a *whole* that is visible and tangible, or fulfil the needs of the worker and their community. Rather their work is exchanged for money (the ultimate once-remove). In this system, their time is now sold and they are alienated from the final product of their labour, just as they are alienated from themselves in the hours that they work for the production of an unknowable whole. This is matched with a *commodity fetishism* (ibid) required by capitalism to drive the demand for products, and in turn drive the worker to participate in the system. This further alienates the workers from their needs and 'reproduces alienated relations' between themselves and things (now reduced to monetary contexts) and other people (as the individual alienated from themselves is no longer the subject, and is thus unable to truly encounter the subjective other). These are

the damaging effects of ‘capitalism the economic system’ referred to in this thesis, which might also be called ‘capitalism the socio-economic system’, where the economics of capitalism shape social relationships and expectations in ways that limit the political freedoms of the population. As such, and within the terms of this thesis, it forms a corruption of the agency of the individual.

The Situationist International (SI) is addressed in the Resistances section of chapter 1, but it’s worth noting here that their conception of the ‘Spectacle’ (once developed through the lens of a new digital contemporaneity) is a key addition to this thesis’ definition of ‘capitalism’ – particularly in the detail of the corruption of the political agency of the individual (the freedom to understand and to choose to act with or against their current circumstances). Andrew Hussey in *The Life and Death of Guy Debord* explains that Debord (the main proponent of the SI) used the notion of the Spectacle ‘as a way of describing how modern life reduced individuals to a state of passivity in which they lost all sense of full human potential and became spectators of their own lives’ (Hussey, 2001, p. 114). In *Society of the Spectacle* Debord explains that the ‘Spectacle is the moment when the commodity has attained the *total occupation* of social life. Not only is the relationship to the commodity visible but it is all one sees [...]’ (1977, p. 38) – the worker is no longer able to escape alienation, as all of life is reproduced as a commodity. Capitalist interests corrupt leisure time, and all those mediums not previously driven by profit, and this pervasion is enabled by the reach of capitalist influence through new message-sending mediums (e.g. television). Whereas ‘nineteenth-century capitalism built its geographical empires’ – shaping *space* and the *movement* and *physical experience* of people – twentieth-century capitalist forces were, in their need to constantly create new markets, driven to ‘extend their grasp to the very intimacy of people’s every day lives’ (Plant, 1992, p. 11). The pervasiveness of the Spectacle is what maintains it and late capitalism; the ‘society of the Spectacle’, as identified by the SI, is a world where every moment of life has been transformed into a function of capitalism and the alienation of the modern individual is presented as fundamentally inevitable. For Debord the Spectacle was ‘a metaphor for the way in which the forces of

state, capital and media denied the individual control or participation in his or her daily life' (Hussey, 2001, p. 114). This 'denied participation' is another form of 'alienation' (in fact it is explicitly a removal of an individual's agency), and at its root is the degradation of desires 'into needs' – as Debord writes in *Society of the Spectacle* the 'Spectacle is a permanent opium war which aims to make people identify goods with commodities and satisfaction with survival [...] (1977, p. 49). This means (as Griel Marcis goes on to explain in *The Long Walk of the Situationist International*) that:

If society is organized around consumption, one participates in social life as a consumer; the Spectacle produces spectators, and thus protects itself from questioning. It induces passivity rather than action, contemplation rather than thinking, and a degradation of life into materialism. [...] Desires are degraded or displaced into needs and maintained as needs. (Marcis, 2004, p. 8)

Marcis focuses on this degradation of desires into needs that blurs the edges of the Spectacle. The Spectacle is a world of images which frame everything as a commodity; by pervading the lives of the individual's social as well as work life all is encountered in terms of consumption, and alternative ways of being are hidden. This protection against questioning is at the heart of the problem of resisting the Spectacle, its pervasion and commodification of areas that previously were *for themselves* (leisure, culture) leaves little room for resistance (true questioning is only possible when we can see *alternative answers*). As characterised by the SI, the Spectacle is the corruption of the data of the *inbetween*; that is, the spaces *between* work, now become a small part of a larger work (a *lifestyle*), and one from which the individual is further alienated: implicated in a material rather than holistic understanding of being.

The proponents of the SI, though, still thought resistance possible, and sought to reclaim that *inbetween*. They explored the anti-productive nature of art-for-arts sake, purposelessness, the re-inscription (and concurrent re-revelation) of the message-sending of the Spectacle and the radical unwork of *play* in order to expand the space that, as Sadie Plant explains, is 'between life as it is and life as it could be'. A space they believed 'preserved regardless of the Spectacle's insistence on its own seamless inevitability' (Plant, 1992, p. 12), indeed, Debord's language uses imagery of 'mask' and 'hiding' – implying that truth

could yet be uncovered '[b]ehind the masks of total choice, different forms of the same alienation confront each other, all of them built on real contradictions which are repressed' (1977, p. 59). The SI sought to bring the proletariat – whom they defined as 'all those who have no control over their own lives' (Plant, 1992, p. 15) – into conjunction with the possibility of 'life as it could be', the *what if*. The SI wanted to enable people to not just spectate, but *participate*. To live in the cracks they were able to generate in the Spectacle of contemporary capitalism, widen them.

However, if the individual-as-consumer is the problem of the spectacular society, the problem of the individual-to-be-consumed – as data to be bought, sold and stolen – is the reality of the age of the digital Spectacle; it is a much deeper rooted corruption. This is the political problem of digital culture explored later in this chapter.

Capitalism, then, for this study, is fundamentally a corruption of the data flow of the individual. It characterises the infiltration of the *whole* lives of contemporary individuals with message-sending intent upon the reproduction of alienation and commodification in the name of profit for a few private interests. This thesis is interested in how new performance tactics and frameworks (re)emerging in the digital age form new, powerful political tools, tactics and approaches. In the context of capitalism this would mean tools which re-reveal the truth of being (and *being with*), and which enable the individual to regain the agency to change their situation if they wish. The political challenge of the digital age (which the personal-as-political practice found in first person theatre begins to tackle) is the rediscovery and inhabitation of the *inbetween*. First person theatre, this thesis will argue, is able to rebuild a relationship to those things implicated in the *deep* commodification of our society – to uncover and reconnect the contemporary individual with the raw data of the spaces that attempt to shape us (the city), of a practice of community (the community as unwork), and in the *self* situated in relation to the subjective other.

Theatre (and ‘performance’)

‘Theatre’ is herein defined quite simply as ‘live play’ – this does not necessarily need to be proximate, is not negated by the use of recorded material, and does not necessarily take place in a theatre building, or indeed involve actors – but it *is* the communication or navigation of a story or experience to some degree played by bodies.

It is important to emphasise the separation of ‘theatre’ the verb (the practice of theatre) from the noun ‘theatre’ (its buildings). The definition of theatre that is used in this thesis is that which is formed of ‘live play’ and can happen outside of theatre and arts buildings. This leaves the definition open to the performance studies point of view – as set out by Schechner in *Performance Studies, an Introduction* – where ‘any action that is framed, presented, highlighted, or displayed is a performance’ (2006, p. 2). However this study (though using ‘performance’ as a term alongside ‘theatre’, to describe the act of ‘doing’ theatre) rejects this view of performance studies – not as fundamentally *wrong*, but just not of interest to the work herein discussed. This is because whereas Schechner offers many types of performative ‘frames’ (ritual, sport, popular entertainment, everyday life, etc.) the work considered in this thesis is set very firmly within the particular frame of ‘the arts’ (including the return to theatre’s playful heritage discussed in chapter 4).

If ‘theatre’ is to be defined as a form of ‘live play’ navigated in some way by ‘bodies’, what is it that is played *with*? Cormac Power’s *Presence in Play* here offers some useful clarifications of what theatre might be once the frame of the stage is removed. Discussing theatre in terms of *presence*, Power suggests that ‘theatre is a place where different levels of presence are manipulated and played with—rather than an (essential) attribute’ (2008, p. 175). To follow on from this notion of ‘levels of presence’, this study proposes that theatre is fundamentally an art of the *inbetween*, it is that which holds simultaneously the presences of the ‘what is’ of reality and the ‘what if’ of play (a phraseology introduced to this thesis in an interview with Tassos Stevens, looked at in particular detail in chapter 5), inhabiting both in order that they might reflect each other. This makes a definition of ‘theatre’ more compatible with an

exploration of the digital and growing pervasive message-sending mediums. Indeed, as Power goes on to suggest:

In the age of mass media, theatre perhaps realises its potential as a viable art-form when it asserts itself, not in terms of presenting the 'live' real or the purely fictional, but as a site where reality and unreality overlap to reveal their mutual instabilities. (Power, 2008, p. 174)

It is for this reason that theatre and performance are here situated within the reflective frame of 'the arts'; the conscious 'presentation' that characterises the arts (as opposed to Schechner's many other characterisations of performance). This is because it is in the *reflection* through the re-presentation of reality and potentiality that one is able to access the *inbetween*, key to the political effectiveness of first person theatre. Additionally, problems of the 'live' and 'reality' in digital and televisual contexts – their ability to corrupt the data of the 'truth' of reality – provide an argument for the use of theatre to particularly explore the aesthetics of the digital, and the digital as cultural space. Though this study is not focussing (as set out earlier in this chapter) on the specific *use* of digital technology in theatre, it *is* interested in how the 'digital age' is shifting and altering the day-to-day experience and perception of the individual, as well as understanding digital technology as a cultural platform across which theatre *should* take place and explore. As Tim Etchells explains (here quoted in Susan Kozel's *Closer*):

[...] you have to think about technology, you have to use it, because in the end it is in your blood. Technology will move in and speak through you, like it or not. – Tim Etchells, *Certain Fragments* (2007, p. 73)

The use of digital technology is fundamentally shaping the lives of everyone in the world (even if it is through existing on the non-digital side of the 'digital divide'). It is changing our notions of 'live' and 'real', and is becoming a space where relationships, communities, politics, businesses are built, thrive, and die. Also, as Forest Fringe Co-Director Debbie Pearson explains in an interview conducted for this study, artists make work about our lives, of which – in the western world at least – the digital is simply a ubiquitous part. It would be strange for performance to *not* reflect this.

[...] if you ask me if I make [...] art that deals with technology, or digital technology, I would say 'no'. But thinking about it I have, loads of my work has

actually dealt with that stuff, but it is just now becoming so much a part of our DNA... It's like asking if you're an artist who is particularly preoccupied with you arm, you're like 'no, but actually I use my arm all the time'. (Laughs), so, I'm not like an arm artist, but I am an artist with an arm who uses it all the time, and I think that digital technology is now our arm, it's like our new arm. (Pearson, 2012, p. 424)

There are further challenges to this definition in terms of the digital – for example if the bodies playing the narrative need not be proximate, would an MMORPG¹² be classified as theatre? How different is playing an online game from some forms of puppetry? The definition is purposefully fluid, however, and this thesis does not set out to provide a concrete answer to the 'edges' of the theatre question, indeed, they must constantly shift in the context of lives that face radical and escalating rates of change.

Finally, to address the (re) which is integral to the title of this thesis; 'performative tactics [...] (re)emerging in the digital age'; it used is because first person theatre and non-broadcast forms of performance can be easily traced back to the ritual of religion and tribe, or likened to Commedia dell'Arte, and medieval Passion Plays. Likewise interactive and immersive experiences can be traced past the VR¹³ experiments of the 90s, the Happenings and Fluxus movement of the 60s and 70s, Artaud's Total Theatre, and the Futurists in the 1930s, all the way to the 3D 'topographical' replicas of holy sites in the Ottoman Empire (one of the 'the first optical mass-medium[s]' (Grau, 2003, p. 42)) and perhaps beyond. For this reason, chapter 2 sets out to trace the legacy of interaction in theatre that first person performance picks up on, through considering specific movements in twentieth-century performance history.

Similarly it's worth noting that a lot of the more interesting recent explorations of interaction between the embodied subject and digital culture have come from the world of dance: Susan Kozel's *Closer* (2007) and Johannes Birringer's *Performance, Technology & Science* (2008) are examples of a dance

¹² Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game – a role-playing game that is played online with many other remote players. Well known examples include Everquest or World of Warcraft.

¹³ Virtual Reality - computer-generated immersive simulated environments, in which a player or viewer can be placed and explore often using head mounted displays (HMD*) and other human-computer-interface (HCI) devices.

focus on technology and the body referenced throughout this study. One might suggest that this is because dance is a medium which, more traditionally than in the theatre and visual arts, *begins with the body*. Theory from this area is taken where relevant throughout, but it seemed appropriate to highlight this medium's anticipation of current trends.

Chapter 1: Theatre of the inbetween. The digital age, removal of the interface and the personal-as-political.

Following the introduction to the intentions, structure and initial definitions of the thesis, this first chapter intends to stand as a theoretical context for the more detailed considerations of first person theatre set out in chapters 3, 4 and 5. It will also set out the idea of the contemporary context ‘the digital age’, beginning by defining ‘first person theatre’ itself. In discussing first person theatre as a form of resistance to contemporary capitalism it is also necessary to consider *sites* for modes of resistance before (in the rest of the thesis) going into specific detail of how first person theatre might inhabit them. As such this thesis is particularly focussed on the sites and modes of resistance to be found in three key aspects of contemporary being:

- 1) The urban environment,
- 2) Play and community,
- 3) Interactivity and the subjective other.

This chapter, then, is formed of two main sections: an initial definition of ‘first person theatre’ with a more detailed theoretical section exploring the definitions of ‘technology’ and ‘digital culture’; followed by a ‘resistances’ section, looking at the possibility in performance for a new politics-of-the-personal through first person theatre. This second section will consider the active inhabitation of the *inbetween* using the theoretical lenses of the Situationist International and phenomenology. Other theorists and theoretical ideas will be important throughout, for example de Certeau in chapter 3, and games/play theories and Boal in chapter 4. However their specific relevance means that they will be woven into the relevant chapters, rather than being set out as initial overarching theories.

First person theatre

Having defined ‘theatre’ in the introduction, we now look to what is meant by the term ‘first person theatre’. The seed for the term is to be found in the form

of 'first person shooters' (FPS*¹⁴), a genre of games popular since Doom was released in the early 90s (though games aficionados will more often turn to Wolfenstein 3D as the true progenitor of the genre's mainstream presence). FPS* were (and are) games that situate the player as protagonist – the playing view is from the point of view of the main character. This thesis has thus coined the term 'first person theatre' to refer to theatre that in some way situates the player (audience) at the centre of the work, activating or navigating it in some way. This is as opposed to observing the work in what might be termed the tradition of 'third person' theatre. The player-as-protagonist and the different levels of interaction via which an audience member might become a participant are explored in chapter 3 (looking at the navigational experience of the city augmented with sound), 4 (considering the experience of play and pervasive games as theatre), and 5 (exploring what 'interactive' theatre is, and its manner of exploring the *inbetween*). As a final caveat, it should be stated that this thesis is not claiming that 'third person' theatre is an irrelevant form, rather it seeks to argue for the current and growing relevance of first person theatre, the relevance of theatrical forms is not a zero sum game.

Technology

'Technology' (especially the digital variety) has often been considered the antithesis of that which is 'natural' or 'live' in theatre, the arts, or wider life.¹⁵ This thesis sees 'technology' simply as the practical application of knowledge; tool making. Technology shapes how we see the world by introducing new ways of being, but it is always shaped by use and intent (in making it in the first place), *not the tool itself*. In this context digital technology is the most recent application of human knowledge resulting in a new set of tools, which in turn are re-shaping ways of living.

In this 'tool-making' context, it is useful to briefly return to the origins of the word 'technology' which is to be found in the 'techne' – artistry (application of)

¹⁴ FPS or First Person Shooters are a genre of video game that typically situates the player in a first person perspective – viewing action from the eyes of the central character.

¹⁵ Despite the fact that the word 'technology' could be just as easily applied to a fork as to a laptop.

– highlighted by Martin Heidegger. Heidegger situates the potential of ‘*techne*’ as a form of *uncovering*, something which Dermot Moran in the *Phenomenology Reader* calls a ‘disclosure [...] The essential and original meaning of *techne* is then that of ‘making manifest’ (Heidegger, 2002, pp. 43-4). This re-confirms the notion of technology as the making practical (the practical application) of knowledge (making it manifest).

However in referencing Heidegger, it must be noted that he is keen to resist aspects of the *blind progress* of technology, which he considered too often to position people as ‘resources’ to be consumed (Alderman, 1978, p. 47). In his 1953 talk on *The Question Concerning Technology* Heidegger makes a distinction between technology as human artistry, and technology that posits human beings as a cog in a wider piece of machinery. In the latter manner, technology can be seen as a fundamental tool of capitalism; that which allows private interests to build the systems that alienate individuals from the means of production. Cast thus, technology is a potential enemy of true community and subjectivity, where ‘technological economies’ turn us away from our finite existence and being-in-common (Nancy, 1991, p. xli). These are just a few of many views which see technology as a fundamental challenge to human freedom and agency, but again, this challenge is easily situated within the bounds of the definition being set out here – it is not the tools, but *the uses to which they are intended and/or put*, which are the problematic aspect. Indeed, an *investigation* of new technologies, an engagement with them – *especially* if they are intended to be used in ways that are problematic – is fundamental to an ability to challenge them. This thesis suggests that the reflective ‘frame’ of the arts is able to offer this challenging function. Indeed, as Matthew Causey’s reading of Heidegger’s *Question...* in his study *Theatre and Performance in a Digital Culture* suggests:

[...] reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology, and on the other, fundamentally different from it. Such a realm is art. (Causey, 2006, p. 30)

The problematic potential of the pervasive development of certain technologies is exactly why they should be confronted and explored. The arts,

as Causey suggests, in their ability to re-present our manners of living for examination (this notion is expanded on in a phenomenological context shortly) and theatre in particular, in its ability to inhabit the *inbetween* of ‘what is’ and ‘what if’, are key to unravelling the increasingly pervasive presence of communications and digital technology in our lives. That is, to examine the *digital technoculture* that has resulted from the increased pervasiveness of *digital technology* (at least in certain parts of the world).

Digital (techno)culture

The ‘digital age’ of the title of this thesis is characterised by the technoculture than has arisen and continues to arise out of the increasingly pervasive presence and use of digital technology in our lives.

For example, in 1993 Tim Berners Lee’s World Wide Web was released to the public (for free) at the CERN research centre in Europe (CERN, 2003). Later that year the first graphic user interface web browser, Mosaic, was released. This was the first browser that allowed a person to navigate the web in a way we would recognise as contemporary – through the use of a UI¹⁶ that rendered information into pictures and text (Vetter, Spell, & Ward, 1994). In 2011, the first people in the UK who *had never lived in a world without the web* became adults. In years since the popular usage of the web there has developed what Mark Pesce calls ‘a new tool kit’ (2011). People’s lives have developed to accommodate (perhaps require) a level of ‘hyperconnectivity’ – super connectivity (where there is access and literacy) that doesn’t rely on proximity or time (email, telepresence, social media). This has reconfigured people’s psychological understanding of the ‘size’ of the world; notions about time and ‘live’ events; the way families, personal relationships, businesses and economies expect to function. The hyperconnectivity of the web also leads to a ‘hyperdistribution’ of information, a flood of information that requires new

¹⁶ UI or User interface, in this case a GUI, or Graphic User Interface. A means of allowing a person (or user) to interact with a piece of programming – when ‘graphic’ it means representational or visual, in a way that usually aims to allow a layperson to operate a program.

tools to filter, which can become too noisy to manage, which has meant people have entrusted filtering to new organisations or peer networks, altering notions of 'truth' and 'knowledge'. This hyperdistribution in turn (for Pesce) leads to 'hyperintelligence', which is not just the access to an amount of knowledge, but the rate of the development of that knowledge in an open source culture where information and processing is shared – collaboration on a global scale. In this context Pesce describes the web as causing a revolution that makes 'the agricultural, urban and industrial revolutions seem, in comparison, lazy and incomplete' (ibid). He goes on to describe how:

Twenty years ago none of this toolkit existed nor was even intimated. Twenty years from now it will be pervasively and ubiquitously distributed, inextricably bound up in our self-definition as human beings. We have always been the product of our relationships, and now our relationships are redefining us. (ibid)

Pesce's confidence in the ubiquity of the eventual distribution of digital technology (and its advantages) is perhaps a little ambitious. This 'revolution' in communications technology is not reaching everyone¹⁷, but it nonetheless has an effect, even on those it leaves behind.

There are, of course, other digital technologies (mobile computing, video games, the advent of quantum computing – which will have massive military and security implications) shaping our lives, but the web (beyond the advent of computing itself) is perhaps the largest driving force behind current shifts in 'digital culture', because it is a *meeting place*. It is fundamentally a communications medium, like print, radio and television before it. These are, historically, the driving forces behind massive shifts in message-sending across our societies. As such Jean Baudrillard and Marshall McLuhan's ideas on

¹⁷ As Steven Dixon sets out in his study *Digital Performance*:

[...] the television set is markedly more widespread than the computer console, which is currently estimated to reach no more than 5% of the world's population. [...] The Internet also happens to be considerably *more* global if you speak, and spell, American English. The inequalities of 'the digital divide' between the industrialised nations and the 'Third World' are even more startling when the essential skills of literacy becomes part of the equation. (Dixon, 2007, p. 158)

the effect of the media on society are a useful starting point for an understanding of how everyday lives are being shaped by new communications technology. And by then updating their thoughts through the 'embeddedness' that Matthew Causey finds in the digital at the turn of the twenty-first century, this study will highlight several key aspects of what might be seen to characterise digital technoculture moving forward from now, and the implications this might have for theatre and performance.

Baudrillard's theories on media and mediation arise primarily out of the televisual age. His key theories surround the idea (and problems) of 'simulation' in a media-soaked *broadcast-based* society. Baudrillard is concerned primarily with the pollution of reality by the messages of the media. That is, he suggests that a point has been reached where the two are indistinguishable, inseparable. In *Simulation and Simulacra* he thus introduces the notion of the hyperreal:

Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. (1994, p. 1)

Baudrillard's hyperreal is beyond the simple 'reflection' – the re-presentation of reality received in previous forms of communication and storytelling, a double that references (through framing) something 'real'. The 'hyperreal' is all style, no substance; it is a mask that suffocates the wearer. For Baudrillard the 'real' has disappeared and the media itself has become reality, self-serving and self-generating. This is a less complicated notion if one thinks of the example of 'reality television' that Baudrillard draws on (the early 70s 'reality TV' family the Louds). In this example 'reality' is totally removed from the equation, the show was called *An American Family* and was hyperreal on many levels – as not only is the family a stand-in for a hyperreal notion (*An American Family*), it is a constructed and framed reality, and the family who are filmed 'as if the cameras aren't there' are being filmed *by cameras that are there*. The construct *is* the reality, the construct attempts to reflect a reality that does not exist.

For Baudrillard, instead of the Situationist Spectacle that obscures or masks the real, the real is lost and has been replaced by 'a simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference' (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 6). In the context of an extensive broadcast media, Baudrillard sees the messages it sends becoming endlessly recursive; not representing the real, not masquerading as 'real', not hiding a missing reality, but instead a place where there is nothing but the mask – and where the idea that a mask ever hid anything has gone, too. In concluding the section on the Louds, Baudrillard suggests that the fact is that:

The medium itself is no longer identifiable as such, and the confusion of the medium and the message (McLuhan) is the first great formula of this new era. There is no longer a medium in the literal sense: it is now intangible, diffused, and diffracted in the real [...] (1994, p. 30).

For Baudrillard the medium and the message are now the same thing. He is claiming that the media no longer 'mediates' reality in 'the literal sense' (ibid), the media is no longer an intervention, but something that is irrevocably tied up in contemporary life and people's manner of perceiving and conceiving of the world around them. This presents a problem that Baudrillard claims is different to the one presented by the SI's Spectacle, that the individual is not doomed 'to invasion, to pressure, to violence and blackmail by the media [...] but to their induction, to their infiltration, to their illegible violence' (1994, p. 30).

It is this 'illegible violence' that is of particular interest here – the violence is unreadable because it is not *outside* the subject, something they look at *from* a place in the real, but instead the messages of the media pervade and corrupt perception to a point at which the real is forgotten. The battleground is no longer in front of the subject, but throughout. At the beginning of the 'information age', in *information itself*, Baudrillard saw a form that 'devours its own content' (Baudrillard, 1994, pp. 80-2). Information pretends to be a form (and the content) of communication, but in the information age Baudrillard finds information exhausted in its own staging (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 80). In talking of 'radio call ins' he says: 'you are the event', and the event is more real

than the real (its supposed content) (ibid). The information isn't 'real' unless it is staged – the content no longer matters, it is the staging – and thus the content is exhausted. Think, today, of news coverage of the 7/7 bombings in London, built as pictures, shaky mobile phone footage – this was most people's experience of the event, but also the people actually experiencing it, through their mobile phones. Consider people who attend events and watch their favourite band play through their phone camera. 'Pics or it didn't happen' was the internet phrase de rigueur of the mid-late 2000s, as club nights thronged full of people with frozen smiles and best angles directed at the cameras recording the event for Facebook, tagged with the location data, date, time, people present – verified by face recognition software and GPS satellites. Baudrillard saw in the 'encoded' real the 'hyperreality of communication and of meaning. More real than the real, that is how the real is abolished' (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 81).

And then for Baudrillard, this pressure of information weighs down and 'destructures' the social; if only information makes an event, an event is not made between people. If the medium and the message are the same thing then for any message (for communication to exist) it needs to be mediated. As Baudrillard explains in *Simulation and Simulacra*:

That means that all contents of meaning are absorbed in the only dominant form of the medium. Only the medium can make an event – whatever the contents, whether they are conformist or subversive. (1994, p. 82)

Baudrillard sees in the information of the information age a 'hyperreal nebula' (1994, pp. 81-2) and a stellar collapse of medium and message; content-less, meaning collapses in on itself. But, despite this implying an 'illegible violence' that is practiced within human perception and against the social, Baudrillard does not, in the final moment, mourn the loss of the real. Much like the simulacrum forgets what it simulates, and therefore cannot miss it, Baudrillard writhes with joy in the nothingness of a world where there is 'no more hope for meaning' (1994, p. 164). With a hint towards the dream of 90s VR* culture, Baudrillard finds the transcendent, the immortal in the end of meaning, and he turns to the shell, to the image, to 'appearances' as to him they 'are immortal,

invulnerable to the nihilism of meaning or of non-meaning itself. This is where seduction begins' (ibid).

Although Baudrillard rejects the Situationist conception of the Spectacle, he is highlighted herein as useful in terms of *updating* an understanding of the Spectacle's in the latter end of the televisual age (this especially in the context of the problems of pervasion, and the shift of the site of occupation to the *act of perception*). Matthew Causey puts this usefully (the shift to and possibility of a resistance against 'embeddedness' will be tackled shortly) when in *Theatre and Performance in a Digital Culture* he suggests that 'Western culture' is 'at a new stage of 'the era of the Spectacle' where the site of power has shifted from the exterior screens of simulation to the interior body of the material subject' (Causey, 2006, p. 179). This will be further developed shortly in the context of the implications of pervasive technology* and the change from broadcast data to peer-to-peer and shareable data. For now it is just worth pointing out that it is perhaps because Baudrillard writes from the broadcast age that he sees no violence strong enough to be worth resisting; it isn't personal, it isn't targeted.

But the conclusions of the SI and Baudrillard are not that different¹⁸, it is their reactions which separates them; the postmodernist call to submersion, playing in the waters as they wash over them, and the Situationist call to play *within* but also against the tide. Baudrillard saw nothing left beneath and nothing left inside, and therefore satisfied himself with 'playing with the pieces' (Plant, 1992, p. 154). But this is a political decision, a *choice* to take no action, not a solution. As Sadie Plant explains in *The Most Radical Gesture*:

Baudrillard is content to take the Spectacle at face value [...] it has no mysteries, no secrets, and no underlying realities. [...] mediations no longer

¹⁸ Hussey's more contemporary reading of the SI brings their theories to a similar observation about dispersal, and the shifting of the point of encounter from *in front* to *throughout* the subject:

[...] in the modern world alienation is the result of living in a society which is characterised by its fragmentary, disperse nature. Human beings in the modern world have no sense of purpose or any tangible feeling of authenticity and are 'separated' from themselves and their products. This is because everywhere and in all spheres of human activity reality is consistently being replaced by images. These images then become reality (Hussey, 2001, p. 216).

stand between the subject and the world but circumscribe all meaning and reality. 'Playing with the pieces – that is postmodern'. (Plant, 1992, p. 154)

Plant suggests that the postmodernists were content to let themselves be tricked, that they found greater pleasure there. She suggests that:

[...] postmodern philosophers are the sold-out Situationists who wander without purpose, observing recuperations with a mild and dispassionate interest and enjoying the superficial glitter of a spectacular life. (Plant, 1992, p. 150)

Baudrillard, in his notions of the media shift from representing events to becoming the event themselves, offers a key insight into the problems of the beginnings of digital culture. As media becomes constitutive rather than inter-medial, its power to shape our perception and interfere with our agency and understanding of the social becomes both much greater and much harder to identify. Rather than 'playing with the pieces' (ibid, 154), however, we can renew our perception. Indeed, by working on the site of the perceiving subject through augmenting rather than transporting the participant, first person theatre seeks a hyperreal, but one which is laid out as fundamentally as a construct of the subject. A hyperreal that travels in the opposite direction, one which re-situates eventhood in the bodily experience of the individual, that re-reveals the illegible violence of the diffused and diffracted media. It is still a mediation (and is still to some degrees a manner of manipulation), but one which attempts to be hyperpresent. The anti-postmodern project of first person theatre is the reunification of the whole, of the embodied perceiving subject: it is the sticking back together of subjectivity.

This brings us to the theories of Marshall McLuhan, whose work is fundamental to a study of shifts in society wrought by new communications technology. If McLuhan is correct, then the rate of change of technology – of the media in the digital age – is such that there is now a thread visible with which to unpick it. If one is to recuperate eventhood and find a way of decoding a hyperreal for which there is little remaining referent, then pulling at this thread is vital. And not impossible, as (this study ultimately suggests) in the embodied experience of theatre, one might find a Rosetta Stone for decoding the Spectacle.

McLuhan's work and key ideas, such as the 'global village', have been so pervasive that they have been taken on into general parlance in the internet age. His fundamental claim that the 'medium is the message' (or 'massage') gives further credence to this thesis' approach in terms of a larger focus on the shifting *aesthetics* of web-era and peer-to-peer technology (first person theatre, interactivity) in theatre, rather than a focus on the use of specific technologies. McLuhan sets out with great clarity the idea that our media function as extensions of ourselves, and with each material addition of technology into our lives there is a 'new scale' introduced, which has fundamental 'personal and social consequences'. This is what McLuhan means by 'the medium is the message' (McLuhan, 1964, p. 7). For McLuhan the medium contains its own message, its own assumptions and contexts, beyond the implications of its contents. In terms of his specific observations at his time of writing (the mid 60s) there are two particularly useful observations with regards to this thesis. The first, found in *Understanding Media*, is that the 'essence of automation technology [...] is integral and decentralist [...] just as the machine was fragmentary, centralist, and superficial in its patterning of human relationships' (McLuhan, 1964, p. 8). This is an important notion with regards to the contradictions that have developed out of the shift into the 'internet age'. On the one hand there is the notion that we are being fragmented as a society (and in a 'centralist' manner, where we all drive towards the same ends, but those that are not our own), that our machines have played a role in separating us, alienating us. On the other hand, the *automation* that is an important part of *digital* technology, that is the technology that *vanishes*; the search engine optimization that skews search engine rankings, the algorithms*¹⁹ which take usage data and decide how best to *personalise* those search results, the cookies*²⁰ which deliver information on what adverts to show you; this technology is integral and de-centralist.

¹⁹ Algorithm – an algorithm is a set of rules used as part of a computational process.

²⁰ Cookies – in terms of the web, cookies are small pieces of data stored in the web browser of the user, they are used to gather information from the visits of that user to a specific website. They can, for example, store preferences, as well as shape features depending on whether and how the user has accessed a certain web page before. Their use is very common.

Here the relationship becomes two-way. Here we find the origins of the beginning of the end of the broadcast-dominant medium. If multiple strand processing can be automated then the message can be reactive. In connecting many people together in two-way relationships (instead of a pushed, broadcast, one-way message) the message is distributed and multi-authored. This doesn't, however, necessarily imply *choice* or *intentional influence* over the message or its contents. For example, while peer-to-peer networking can enable opt-in sharing of information, there is much invisible exchange in the wider web that involves a large degree of foreknowledge to *opt-out*.

The second notion of McLuhan's that is particularly useful is the idea of media as an extension of our 'human senses', particularly with regards to how this necessarily numbs our perception of the presence of technology as medium. As he explains, numbness is a survival technique born out of our need to separate ourselves from their reflection, something McLuhan discusses in the context of the myth of Narcissus:

To listen to radio or to read the primed page is to accept these extensions of ourselves into our personal system and to undergo the 'closure' or displacement of perception that follows automatically. It is this continuous embrace of our own technology in daily use that puts us in the Narcissus role of subliminal awareness and numbness in relation to these images of ourselves. (1964, p. 46)

McLuhan draws out a specific detail about the implications of 'electric technology' in this context: if we use these 'electrical technologies' to extend our minds and bodies into space, we are much more exposed, much more disseminated and interrupted in time and space than ever before. McLuhan says that we 'have to numb our central nervous system when it is extended and exposed, or we will die' (1964, p. 47) – and it is here he finds a root for the apathy and lethargy that he sees characterising the contemporary individual. McLuhan talks about how we must relate to the technologies into which we extend ourselves as 'servo-mechanisms'; that is as extensions of ourselves, we must serve them as they serve us. He draws the example of the 'Indian' and his canoe, the cowboy and his horse, but one might also consider the businessperson and their smartphone today.

However in externalising ourselves thus, there are two problems; either we numb our selves too extensively, as the medium extends far further and far deeper into and out of ourselves, or because the *rate of change* is so swift, the contemporary individual is no longer able to numb *quickly enough* to make the interface or medium vanish (though as we will come to, the vanishing of the interface is still very much an urge in contemporary technology). Unable to wholly engage, serve as we are served, and constantly jolted, made anxious by the presence of something we can't quite see. McLuhan suggests this too is part of the root of our modern anxiety. Additionally (in fact part of), this modern anxiety is the fact that in a hyper-connected 'global village' there is the additional problem of a 'social' consciousness to deal with. McLuhan uses the term 'field-awareness' – a new level of perception brought to us by our implication, suddenly, in a much more apparently interconnected system. He explains that 'subliminal life, private and social, has been hoicked up into full view'. The further we extend ourselves into a 'global village' and the further we extend our field of awareness of the world, the greater the amount of information that is thrown at us, and the greater the amount of numbness or apathy required to survive it. This is not an information age, it is a noise age; data without context is noise, and stripped of context by a greater dispersal through networks and technology, information is harder, not easier, to find. That is why the late 2000s were the age of the dominance of the search engine. McLuhan, again:

Thus the age of anxiety and of electric media is also the age of the unconscious and of apathy. But it is strikingly the age of consciousness of the unconscious, in addition. With our central nervous system strategically numbed, the tasks of conscious awareness and order are transferred to the physical life of man, so that for the first time he has become aware of technology as an extension of his physical body. (1964, p. 47)

Therefore, another thing that might need to be dealt with in an age of electric technology and the 'global village', is how we might *inhabit* the global village, how we might engage with its implications – the potential pain of being implicated in it. McLuhan puts it thus: '[i]n the electric age we wear all mankind as our skin' (ibid).

Furthermore, because the material this technology works with is *no longer finite* – that is the technology no longer ends at the *edge of the tool* – it exists differently in time and space. This new technology largely *immaterial*, it and its presence in our lives are far more liable to corruption, far more integral to us when stolen. McLuhan urges us to become aware of the new fields in which we exist, to shake off the anxiety of not keeping pace with the rate of change through *conscious* perception of its implications. This thesis might add that urgent, too, is coming to an understanding of how we fit together in our ‘global village’ – how we discuss the responsibilities to and relationships between one another. And then, that the modern individual uses renewed perception of the extension of their selves outwards (and digital technology *into* their bodies and lives) to arm themselves against possible corruption. At the moment a medium alters our environment it not only becomes pervasive but also it also becomes invisible – it takes *re-presentation* to re-reveal its constitutive effects. This needs to happen somewhere *like* the media in question – a place of representation – but one that also asks us to look, to see, that engages a level of attention directed at the interface, the *inbetween*. Such a medium is art. McLuhan, identifying media as “make happen’ agents, but not ‘make aware’ agents’ (1964, p. 48) also finds a solution in the arts. At the outset of *Understanding Media* McLuhan states that:

The effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alters sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance. The serious artist is the only person able to encounter technology with impunity, just because he is an expert aware of the changes in sense perception. (1964, p. 18)

Through the re-framing ability of the arts, the artist is able to impart the ability to reflect on changes in our sense perception. However, it is through the body that we perceive; it is our bodies through which we are embedded in the world, and with which we ultimately practice our agency. As such, the arts should seek to work with the *bodies* of the audience, as well as their extensions and projections into the wider world. Such a practice is first person theatre, which can offer the opportunity to explore the constitutive effect of digital technology in our lives, its roots in our bodies, and the manner in which it

branches out into the wider world. This, at the same time as grappling with our implication in new, much more distributed and atomised communities.

Finally, developing the above consideration with Matthew Causey's articulation of the notion of *embeddedness* brings us almost up-to-date with the influence of media, this time specifically the digital, and its implications for our social and political agency. Causey's study *Theatre and Performance in a Digital Culture* articulates (as previously mentioned) the key problem of the 'territorialisation' of the site of the self by the media (2006, pp. 52-3). Causey suggests that 'the site of power has shifted from the exterior screens of simulation to the interior body of the material subject' (2006, p. 179). Using the example of the contrast between the 'problems of illusion and representation' that he sees present in the televisual presentation of Gulf War I, and the 'problem of materiality and embodiment' of embedded war reporting in the more recent Gulf conflict, Causey draws out a key recent development in message-sending (2006, p. 151); *embeddedness*. For Causey, the Spectacle hasn't given up, but it's no longer simply obscuring something real (as the Situationists identified), nor masking the real, or simulating a new reality without referent (as Baudrillard would have it). Rather, through *embeddedness*, it has found a new manner in which to corrupt the data flow of everyday life. Through a pretence to 'liveness', which has been the guiding 'real-time' style of recent media presentation, the Spectacle (that is, the dominant messages seeking to manipulate the individual) is able to present itself as *raw data*, data before reading: contextless. Causey calls this 'embeddedness', 'infecting the real from within' (ibid). And certainly, as Causey begins to identify growing trends in ubiquitous and mobile computing – as technology becomes increasingly *pervasive* – so it becomes harder to differentiate the material from the immaterial. Causey suggests that 'mediatized and technologized cultural systems' are no longer attempting to simulate the real to mask the real, but are instead 'drawing attention to a reconstructed material *truth* and ocular proof that seeks to coerce through a type of *shock and awe*' (2006, p. 151). In an era of embeddedness the forgotten mask is now worn under the skin, warping it. The Spectacle is an *embedded* presence that attempts to directly corrupt the data flow of reality, as Causey

suggests, '[e]mbeddedness alters simulation's masking of the real with a dataflow that can inhabit the real itself and alter its essence' (2006, p. 152). This, however (this thesis suggests) is a matter of *encryption*, all is not lost. There is still a key, the equivalent of a string of prime numbers somewhere (different each time, as the speed at which technology now progresses demands constant evolution) that will provide the means of decrypting the real. The contemporary individual, in order to regain their ability to act with true political agency must set out on the task of the cryptographer, wading through vast amounts of noise data to find the one unifying principle that brings it all into focus. If the site of occupation is now the material subject, then it follows that this site might also form a site of resistance.

Causey finds the contemporary subject interrupted by technology. He suggests that 'the body and its subjectivity [...] has been extended, challenged and reconfigured due to its position in the space of technology' (2006, p. 29). In answer to this problem, Causey presents performance as a route to the *void*, found in the particular presence of doubling in theatre. The double of performer and performed, thrust into conjunction in the space of performance, is one that dances with death and impossibility. It is not the endlessly repeatable, replicable double of the digital, but rather an embodied impossible double, the 'what is' and 'what if' held together.

The void, the space between, is of particular interest to Causey, for if a route back to the spaces inbetween can be found, the world is no longer one great data flow, but a series of discrete nodes, which can identify infiltration more effectively. In the inbetween, the *void*, the subject can be nothing but itself, forced back into completeness, the only other option is non-being, total dissipation. Causey, again: '[t]he void requires control from the state of things. This unhinging or interruption of the state of things as they are, which reveals an invisible impossible thing, is the vent of a truth' (2006, p. 193).

In first person theatre the 'vent of truth' that is discernable in the inbetween is encountered not at one remove, but at the site of occupation itself – the body of the participant. As well as embodying the experience of the *inbetween* of theatre; the space between 'what is' and 'what if'; first person theatre explores

the *experience* of embeddedness itself, through a question of bodily presence and material, finite embeddedness. Additionally, it does this particularly through the language and/or the artefacts of the technology that are allowing the infiltration into our lives.

To take these theories of Causey on, we might suggest that in actual terms what characterises the currently 'embedded' trend of contemporary digital technoculture is the progressive **removal of the interface**, of **personalisation**, (mobile) **pervasive technology***, and the **beginning of the end of the broadcast** medium. The next section will provide context on these shifts and how they are spilling over into first person performance, before looking at the material resistances that first person theatre might begin to offer.

The removal of the interface

In the reconciliation of the split subject that first person theatre can provide, we also see echoes of the actual shifts in digital technology. Particularly relevant is the shift from a fascination with immersion and the HMD*²¹ in the 90s, to the proliferation of the HUD*²² augmented/embedded trends of contemporary digital technology. The removal of the screen, and the augmentation of *everyday* life with digital data and graphics looks towards an urge to vanish the interface – to reconcile our technological and bodily lives. Increasingly touch-based technology removes the mouse and stylus interfaces from our contact with computing; the Kinect, the Wii Remote, the iMove allow players to play games using their natural movements. Car dials and measurements are projected onto the windscreen of cars, ocular implants wired into the brain help regain sight for people with macular degeneration,

²¹ HMD or Head Mounted Display – A head-mounted computer display device that typically aims to obscure the participant's view of reality and replace it with a view of a computer-generated virtual reality. This device is largely outdated now (popular in the 80s and early 90s), and has been replaced with 'head up displays' that augment – as opposed to replace – reality. HMDs were used particularly in early experiments in virtual reality, matched later with the addition of the 'data glove' that allowed users to inhabit and interact with a virtual reality.

²² HUD or Head Up Display – where the user's vision of reality is augmented with an overlay of information, sometimes a graphic user interface.

and 'Google Glasses' offer people the opportunity for hands-free day-to-day vision augmented with the data and functions of their choosing. Digital technology is sold on its ability to be 'intuitive', to vanish in its use. The interface still exists, of course, but is *vanished* – made see-through. In the context of the network, the artefacts of technology are increasingly seen as a window.

The removal of the performer (or rather an inhabiting of their role by the audience) that is inherent in first person theatre can reasonably straightforwardly be seen as a removal or vanishing of the interface between audience and performance. The *craft* of the work is still present, but bodily experienced rather than viewed. In chapter 3, sound-based performance augments the everyday buildings and streets of cities (Duncan Speakman, *Non-Zero-One*). In chapter 5 the auto-theatre work of Ant Hampton attempts to level the power balance between performer and audience by using the audience as unrehearsed performer/s (*This is Not My Voice Speaking, Etiquette*). And the playful frameworks devised by companies such as Coney and Invisible Flock (chapters 5 and 4 respectively) invite participants to directly inhabit questions about community, the worth of art and the demands of macro-economic decision making (*A Small Town Anywhere, Art Heist, The Agency*).

These can all be construed as removals or re-presentations of the interface – a drive for closer connection, and visible reaction, with the images-about-the-world the arts show us. What the removal of the screen marks is a *confluence*, an urge to *experience*, to *reconcile* one's increasingly screen-based existence with the embodied reality of our lives. This is at the same time utopic and problematic. It is not the longed-for transcendent posthuman (the mind in the computer or network), but it does represent a certain embeddedness that can lead to the kind of corruption of concern to Causey. However, as Johannes Birringer states in his study *Performance, Technology & Science*, the performative – in its ability to frame, re-make, and help us to re-see our

cultural, physical and sometimes digital bodies – can allow us to interrogate the edges, cracks and layers that are being vanished from our lives.

The convergence between performance and technology reflects back on the nature of movement and behavior, and particularly on the nature of ‘body’ and our understanding of its objecthood or identity; its organisation and augmentation; its physical-sensory relationship to space and the world; its immediate, phenomenological body but also the inseparability of its embodiment from the technical. (Birringer, 2008, p. xxii)

As the *aesthetics* of the realities of our digital world (the removal of the interface) are explored in performance, our understanding of the relationship between our bodies, their ‘objecthood or identity’ and their relationship to ‘space and the world’ (ibid) helps us construct and understand the embodied ‘I’ in socio- and techno-culture. That is, how it is we relate to other people through our actions, and how this is shaped through wider society and technology.

The near and the far

The complication of the ‘near and far’ is an idea that crops up often in considerations of the contemporary digital age, but perhaps most usefully put by Michel Foucault (quoted here in the context of Deleuze and Guattari’s writing on deterritorialisation, by Russell West-Pavlov):

We are in the era of the simultaneous, of juxtaposition, of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the scattered. We exist in a moment when the world is experiencing, I believe, something less like a great life that would develop through time than like a network that connects points and weaves its skin (*The Essential Works II*, 175) (West-Pavlov, 2009, p. 18).

In the context of the *network* of the internet age, the ‘near and the far’ that Foucault picks up on here takes on a non-spatial relationship, or rather, space (and the time it takes to travel it) is challenged in the context of hyperconnectivity. When the time it takes the subject’s communications to travel great distances is reduced to a level that might be counted by the millisecond, near and far collapse in on themselves. Data is not a *distance* away, it is a coordinate, and the experience of a networked society therefore becomes one of interconnection – of inbetween. When all points are

equidistant, maximum entropy is reached, there is nothing driving in a particular direction, there is no energy imbalance left, and linearity collapses.

Likewise, in the cascade of data of the information age, time becomes complicated too – everyday lives are more and more characterised by the need to ‘multi-task’, to run things side-by-side. Actions online are ephemeral – made in the moment, as part of a conversation, in the context of other inputs and responses – and *recorded*.²³ The experience of the web is not a linear one, but one of multiple interwoven paths. In a ‘global village’, the space between people is reduced and the notion of mediation vanishes (the removal of the interface, or embeddedness), our experience of space-time is complicated. In this world of the near and far, the constant re-building of relationships over time and space, there is the danger that the contemporary individual finds themselves homeless in a manner that is not joyous (like the wanderings of the *Body without Organs* of Deleuze and Guatarri), but that provokes anxiety. Or perhaps, as Michel de Certeau puts it in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, individuals become ‘immigrants in a system too vast to be their own, too tightly woven for them to escape from it’ (1988, p. xx). Johannes Birringer brings up an important point about how performance might react formally to these shifts in message-sending and receiving, talking about the possibilities for durational (and in this context, immersive) work in better allowing the contemporary individual to negotiate the new ‘near and far’ within which they find themselves. Birringer explains that:

[...] artists are working in a field of constant (dis)integration, and continuous re-constellation. [...] This raises the question of where the viewer positions herself in relation to such a space-time, the long ‘duration’ of the ephemeral, and how these many fleeting perspectives can be integrated in to the world we imagine as our digital future. (2008, p. 177)

Art works in the early decades of the twenty-first century are working in a constantly reshaped space-time. Formally – in order to interrogate the implications of this drastically new manner of communication (compared to

²³ Though often not functionally accessible – much of the web is not indexed by search engines and so is *functionally invisible*, if the URL isn’t recorded anywhere.

the centuries of linearity since [McLuhan might suggest] the introduction of the alphabet and the written word) they must look to new forms that inhabit time and space differently. Pervasive first person work in particular (covered in chapter 4) begins to tackle this question of homelessness, of the near and far, of how we move across and exist in time and space. Finally, from a more political point of view, so too might such work (work which is durational, or that pervades and foregrounds complications of space and time within digital technology, which much of the work considered herein does) enable individuals to identify the spaces between the nodes, and the point at which space-time is corrupted by spectacular intervention.

The beginning of the end of broadcast

The simplest and easiest to demonstrate change in contemporary society, which can be seen to be shaping interactive and immersive responses in theatre and performance, is the shift from broadcast to conversational media forms. Indeed, as John B. Thompson explains (as far back as 1995):

We must see [...] that the use of communication media involves the creation of new forms of action and interaction in the social world, new kinds of social relationship and new ways of relating to others and to oneself. (1995, p. 4)

As Thompson suggests, the massive shift in our daily communications marked by the so-called 'internet-age' fundamentally changes how we interact with the social world and how we relate to one another. This change is a shift away from the broadcast medium of previous enculturing technologies (print, radio, television, single-authored artworks), and the notions of 'authority' that the eventual control of these mediums entails. As Birringer explains, 'the Net implies [...] an interactivity that is not a one-way communication (as in broadcast media) but an engagement involving reciprocity and feedback' (2008, p. 474). The way in which access to the web gives one an unparalleled access to send, receive *and edit and resend* information, for free, to anyone else who also has access, is rapidly reshaping how we expect to interact with art, information and other people. We are at the centre of an individual media universe, and as the growth of mobile and pervasive technologies continues, it

is more and more a universe that we take with us, bodily augmenting our experience of the world and the social relationships we experience in it. Indeed, it has become such a fundamental and on occasion visibly disruptive force that the UN has called for government-led disconnection from the web to be considered a violation of human rights (Kravets, 2011).

Of course it could be argued that this phase of the Internet as *two-way* space is just that: a phase. Most communications technology – before it has been regulated and control over it sought by military and political interests – was first used more playfully by ‘early adopters’; for example the ham radio community, highlighted in Frances Dyson’s *Sounding New Media*, which enjoyed great freedom before government and commercial forces began to take control of radio frequencies. Dyson describes how, in ‘a foretaste of the commercialization of the Internet, the increasing control of radio coincided with claims by prominent theorists of communications media regarding its utopian potential’ (2009, p. 49).

As the UK government sets out to extend surveillance powers to information exchanged online (Beckford, 2012), ‘sponsored links’ and SEO*²⁴ ‘corrupt’ search results, and repressive regimes limit or totally cut off internet and mobile access, we see censorship extending beyond countries like China and Iran to the UK and US under the guise of child-protection. Governments in these countries are also demanding censorship of search results from ‘black listed’ (typically copyright infringing) sites (Moody, 2012). The web is by no means reaching the ‘utopian potential’, set out for it in the early 90s, and that is what Dyson above likens to the beginnings of other technologies, before they began to be commercialised and legislated. However, there is some hope in the web being more tenaciously disruptive – born out of its *pace* of change. Resistances wrought by the speed of (and access to) information that the interconnectedness of the web allows can be constantly revisited, one step ahead.

²⁴ SEO or Search Engine Optimisation – optimising a website for increased prominence in search rankings – using tags, mutual links, meta data – sometimes piggybacking on irrelevant but often used search terms.

An example might be Tor^{25*} and Darknets^{26*}; places beyond the reach of government snooping – created using personal p2p²⁷ or ad-hoc connections or routing activity through alternative (proxy) IPs* that mask the source of the connection and the activity that occurs over it.

While the web still is available in its current state, it is fundamentally shaping what we expect from our encounters with the world, and our experience of power. It is an experience that is in stark contrast to that of mainstream political power. As Andy Field, Co-Director of Forest Fringe explained in an interview for this thesis, there is a clear sense that politics is increasingly brittle, unreflexive and completely disconnected from people's lives:

[...] about a million people can march on London to prevent an illegal war, and it can have a fuck all effect because they have already told us what is going to happen, because that is how broadcast works [...] politics becomes increasingly about the way in which you deliver the decision you have already made. (2012, p. 331)

Now, given a taste of agency (or at least the appearance of it), through highly real-time and interactive media, people are beginning to question this construction. The interview with Field focuses on his experience of the shift to one-on-one, intimate and interactive work through his programming of Forest Fringe, and wider experience of the performance and live art sector. In the interview he speaks very clearly of this shift away from broadcast, and how intimate and first person work – in his view – forms a direct reaction to it:

[...] the Internet, as it becomes more widely accessible [...] become accessible by people beyond the compliant middle classes, [...] there is a reordering, or a potential reordering taking place. And I think there is a degree to which one-on-one experiences and those kinds of performance encounters may become a means of testing your own relationship with power. [...] A] discourse that is taking place around the question of finding a new means of engaging with

²⁵ Tor is a piece of software that uses a series of users' internet connections to re-route an individual users' internet traffic, making their activity effectively untraceable (the re-routing is protected through a series of levels of encryption).

²⁶ Darknets are peer-to-peer filesharing networks where each user is a trusted peer, and traffic does not move outside that network. Darknets use specific protocols, avoiding the sharing of IP addresses (the unique internet protocol address of a specific machine on a specific network).

²⁷ Peer to peer. In this context, a web made up solely of known and trusted users.

structures of power that stopped listening to us about 50 years ago. (2012, p. 332)

This is an important context against which to consider the direct political power of first person performance; playing with differing degrees of our own agency, hot in the 'what if', we find a crucible for questions of the construction of power, and our own place in it. Put this in the community and/or embodied context so often exemplified by these works, and first person theatre becomes a potentially powerful tool in re-seeing and remaking our *embodied* and *reconciled* relationship to contemporary being, and contemporary culture, playing out the physical and real implications brought by shifts in the digital.

The age of personalisation (the false promise of the capitalist individual)

Stuart Moulthrop, in his contribution to the 2004 collection *First Person*, 'From Work to Play', discusses the implications of the shift from broadcast to 'participation'. He explains that:

In the turn [...] from interpretive to configurative practices, we find ourselves in a new relationship to media. Since configuration requires active awareness of systems and their structures of control, this turn allows us to resist the assertion of invisibility or transparency in communications systems – a danger that seems particularly pronounced in these new wars of the 24-hour news cycle. (2004, p. 57)

Moulthrop is suggesting that the recession of 'authority' in information that a shift from interpretation to configuration marks (or the 'gamification'^{*28} of storytelling) encourages 'active awareness of systems' and their power over individuals. This is certainly true to some degree, and forms a strong argument for part of this thesis (particularly chapters 4 and 5 on pervasive games and interactivity), but the Spectacle is always aiming to recoup losses made, and eight years after Moulthrop made this statement it's possible to identify the dangers of gamification* and emerging personalisation that configurative

²⁸ A term most widely used in the games and entertainment industries, in some areas pejoratively, to describe the act of making something game-like. When not used pejoratively it can mean learning from and applying the behavioral and interaction design lessons that games offer to typically non-game situations and experiences. When referred to pejoratively it is typically in the context of lazy 'pointsification' or the use of other game-like mechanics to encourage an individual to engage more actively (to provide the illusion of agency and choice) with the story, image or message that is intended for delivery. This is tackled in more depth in chapter 4.

practices pose. Particularly the dangers of the personalisation of the web, and its implications for the potential of the medium to either shift or maintain current power structures.

Battles over methods of communication are a battle for an *authorial voice*, for lexical control in the conversation of our society. An urge for control of the authorial voice of culture which the web fundamentally threatens to undermine. And yet, nothing corrupts the disruptive capability of a medium like capitalist interests. Four years ago, Johannes Birringer was able to suggest that if 'Walter Benjamin lived today, he would not study the boulevards and passages of nineteenth-century Paris, but the interminable flows and sitings of the World Wide Web' (2008, pp. 170-1). In the four years since, this has become an out-dated sentiment. Benjamin might well have been by equal turns fascinated and appalled by strolls on a Darknet*, through 4chan*²⁹ culture, or longed for the possibility of truly strolling the Deep Web*.³⁰ But as we witness the increasing *personalisation* of our web experience, it becomes more and more difficult to truly encounter things outside our pre-existing experience (history) and interest (derived from our history, and of those of the people we share with and connect to). Driven by the monopoly of social networks and trusted search brands, it has become very easy and increasingly common for our browsing, communication and purchasing data to be used to alter our search results, and target advertising and recommended sites directly at an individual. Idly browsing a favourite clothing store will result in adverts for the exact items you lingered over appearing on apparently unconnected sites. Google results now rank according to previous personal searches, as well as those of people with whom you are 'connected' online. As Causey suggests in his warnings about embeddedness, and Slavoj Žižek has written (quoted here in Birringer's *Performance, Technology & Science*):

²⁹ 4chan is an English-language imageboard originally created in order to discuss manga and anime. Users are able to post anonymously, and aside from being the site responsible for the creation and propagation of many internet memes, they are also known to be the source of a great deal of internet subcultures, including that of Anonymous. 4chan is notorious online for its 'anything goes' anonymous board /b

³⁰ The forgotten web; sites not crawled (and therefore, indexed) by any search engines.

Immersion into cyberspace can intensify our bodily experience [...] but it also opens up the possibility for the one who manipulates the machinery which runs the cyberspace literally to steal our own (virtual) body, depriving us of the control over it. (2008, pp. 27-8)

At the very least one might suggest that commercial interests are depriving us of our control over our virtual journeys, insidiously polluting our online experiences; commercial interests pervade our digital activities in an attempt to alter the actions we take in digital space. When private interests colonise online space they are on desktops, in pockets, they monitor taps and keystrokes, they spread into social space and idle time. In order to interrogate this 'personalisation' and resulting corruption of the notions of choice and free will, it needs to be revealed, observed. Žižek, in Birringer, again explains that it is "crucial to maintain open the radical ambiguity of how cyberspace will affect our lives: this does not depend on technology as such but on the mode of its social inscription" (2008, pp. 27-8). *Social inscription* is a key idea. Interactivity, peer-to-peer community, the vanishing or removal of the interface, all of these things are inscribed on contemporary lives lived in the context of digital technology – to examine this as an *aesthetic*, or here, *mode*, is vital to the contemporary individual's ability to keep *open* the 'radical ambiguity' (ibid) of new technology. A contemporary activism might, in this case, reveal true agency by pushing against constructs of agency. This might be approached through examining the social inscription of 'choice' on daily lives, re-revealed in a life slightly set aside or bracketed. This might be discovered through an embodied *praxis* that plays with agency – true lexical control – in order that it might be distinguished from simulated semblance of it.

We will look back, briefly, to the dissolution of the life/art divide of the 60s and 70s which set out to resist the commodification of art. The movement in contemporary music that ran alongside the Happenings and Fluxus, and which is popularly characterised by the work of John Cage is covered in much greater detail in the next chapter, but for now, consider Brandon LaBelle's description of Cage's redefining

[...] the notion of the composer as a form of agency against delivering up an overt musical message based on saying *something*; he aims for renewed

listening, beyond the noise of consumption, as a mode of absolute individualism, and toward the silence of a 'quiet mind' that is 'free of its likes and dislikes' (2006, p. 12).

This tacit rejection of 'likes and dislikes' is a rejection of the rhetoric of choice – a mind quiet of the *either* and *or*, that reconciles itself to the *radical ambiguity* of existence and social relationships, that does not just speak, but listens too. Cage is interested in an art that moves beyond the messages (meaningless data, noise) of consumption, beyond individualism and towards embodied intersubjectivity. In other words, to inscribe on the body – in the language that only experience can understand – a renewed attention to the practice of living. First person performance (in its removal of the interface, its play with *agency*, and embodying of questions of space, place and community) is a form that allows us to 'provoke questions about human beings, subjectivity, perceptual systems, and how we re-envision and reconfigure ourselves through technology' (Birringer, 2008, p. 145). It provides the contemporary individual with a tool to resist the embedded, the pervasive, the personalised attacks of capitalism, and to therefore overturn tired, irrelevant models of politics.

So, how does first person performance discover resistances to the problematic aspects of digital technoculture (or at least the use of it by others intent on corrupting the political agency of the individual)? This final section of chapter 1 intends to set out through the lens of phenomenology and the theories of the Situationist International a theoretical basis for first person performance as political resistance – as a manner of inhabiting a new personal-as-political. In this thesis this personal-as-political is sited in three main places: in the individual in the urban experience (the body in the city – chapter 3), in the individual and the subjective other (the body and community – chapter 4), and in the reconciliation of the split subject (the embodied agent – chapter 5).

Resistances: the body

The arts are a fundamental space for reflection and as such offer a key area of resistance against capitalist infiltration. They enable the contemporary

individual to reflect on current constructions and also (particularly in the *configurative* practice of first person theatre) find new manners of construction. To continue with Cage's ideas about the power of configurative practices in the arts (for there the act of perception is framed and interrogated, and is much more resistant to corruptive personalisation or cynical gamification*), we can look to his idea (quoted here in Dixon) that the very basic purpose of art is 'not to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply to wake [us] up to the very life we're living' (Dixon, 2007, p. 663). This notion of re-revealing the experience of being-in-the-world is key in regaining personal political agency. A line between this notion, and the phenomenological route to the whole subject (embodied, reconciled, in context) is vital in theorising the potential of first person theatre. As Dermot Moran in his introduction to *The Phenomenology Reader* explains, 'phenomenology was the first movement to focus on the specific conditions of human embeddedness in an environment, and to make visible the phenomenon of the environment itself' (2002, p. 5).

In phenomenology we find a philosophy we might term the original philosophy of the human/world interface, of the experience of the *inbetween*. For years popular philosophical understandings of the subject were divorced from the carnal and base realities of the human body. In phenomenology, philosophers sought to reunite the two.

The beginning of phenomenology is, for most, situated in the theories of Edmund Husserl. Working around the turn of the twentieth century, Husserl sought to re-reveal the *objective truth* of experience through seeking an experience outside of the 'natural-attitude' (Moran & Mooney, 2002, p. 61). Husserl saw the route to the *objective truth* beyond the natural attitude as 'constituted in and through *subjective acts* of consciousness' (ibid). For Husserl, the route to the truth of experience was only to be found in the embodied subject. One is required to turn the gaze upon the world-constituting act of perception, where 'act', here is the 'intentional act' – the act of deliberate and directed attention.

Husserl's phenomenology is a process that aims to break out of the *natural attitude* – from the political point of view of this thesis, the aspect of (as the Situationists would have it) subscription to the Spectacle *as* life. In order to break out of the natural attitude, a person can convert their 'natural attentional focus into the phenomenologically reflective one' (2002, p. 128). Instead of making the theme of reflection objects and the world *only*, one can turn the 'flowing consciousness' into examination of the *subject-in-the-world*, and thus make 'the infinitely multiform world of phenomena at large the theme' of consideration (ibid). The phenomenologist, for Husserl, would turn their attention from the artefacts of the world, to reflect on the interfaces of perception. As Hannah Arendt in 'Existenz Philosophy' explains, 'Husserl sought to re-establish the ancient relation between Being and Thought, which had guaranteed man a home in this world, by a detour through the intentional structure of consciousness' (2002, p. 346). In the context of a complication of time and space that is wrought by the hyperconnected manner of contemporary communication, the urge to return to the body as a key marker in the experience of consciousness offers a solution to the sense of 'homelessness' arising from displacing potential of disruptions in time and space. Arendt in *What is Existenz Philosophy?* expresses this feeling of 'homelessness' as one of 'things torn out of their functional context' (2002, p. 346) – phenomenology is a manner of re-uniting consciousness with its functional context. This is achieved through the body, which despite the hyperconnected world, still currently persists in space and duration. As Arendt goes on to explain:

In its description of consciousness [phenomenology] grasped precisely these isolated things torn out of their functional context as the contents of arbitrary acts of consciousness and appeared to connect these up again with man through the 'stream of consciousness.' (Arendt, 2002, p. 346)

Resisting the Cartesian mind/body divide, the phenomenologists sought this 'stream of consciousness' as the flow of experience in which the subject was embedded via the body. Discovering the *act* of perception (the *inbetween* of the world and the subject's perception of it) the perceiving subject is able to reconcile themselves with the object through which perception is enacted: the

body. This is an apolitical act, but one which has political power in the context of the premise of this thesis – that in the return to the perceiving embodied subject, to the *act* of perception as a manner of re-revealing the truth of being-in-the-world – the individual is able to discover an ‘inbetween’ that re-reveals possible infiltration and manipulation by private interests. As Petra Küppers explains in *Performance and the City*, the body in time and space is a political place:

The body [...] reasserts itself as always already there – not as something ‘brute’ or ‘hindering’ or ‘essential’, but as something that takes part in the act of watching, essential to the participation in culture. This physicality, the inertia, the being in time and space, can be an insertion point for resistances and re-inscriptions. (2010, p. 66)

Though the perceiving subject cannot wholly leave behind the world, it is possible, Husserl proposed, to ‘bracket’ an act of intention, so as to examine *being* aside from – and yet nevertheless still embedded within – context. This is a state that, for Susan Kozel (and in line with this thesis), ‘is essential for us to be able to conceive of change’ (ibid). Set aside from the imposed or developed ‘experience error’ of the contemporary Spectacle, the act of perception is foregrounded and examined in its embodied context.

Indeed, this is Bert O. States’ main thesis in his study of phenomenology in the theatre, that theatre and the arts more generally form such a bracket (States B. O., 1985). For States ‘art is a way of bringing us home via an ‘unfamiliar’ route’ (1985, p. 22). It is this sense of the examination of the nature of embeddedness and embodiment that is so important to examining the political power of first person performance. As the world is re-made through theatre – as experienced not aside entirely as it is on a screen, but aside *within context* and crucially (within first person performance) on an individual level – we find the detour ‘through the intentional structure of consciousness’ that Arendt expounded on (Arendt, 2002, p. 346).

Husserl’s phenomenology centres on the individual’s conception of the being-in-the world. Heidegger’s *Dasein* took this notion further with key developments on reconciling (as Arendt discusses in her reflections on Heidegger) the embodied subject with *being there* – that is in time and space,

to recover them from the contextlessness of contemporary networked existence. In introducing Deleuze and Guattari's theories on space, Buchanan and Lambert begin with Heidegger, explaining that:

[...] *Dasein*, there-being, [...] is effectively an attempt to think through this problem by dissolving the underpinning separation – or what Deleuze and Guattari term 'disjunctive synthesis' – of ourselves and place. [...] Heidegger was arguing that man is a place-being, not a being in a place. (2005, p. 1)

With the concept of *Dasein*, or *being-there* (a being in – and made by – time and space, which was later developed in his ideas of 'dwelling') Heidegger focussed much of his attention on language as a route to 'reminding ourselves of what, unexperienced and unthought, underlies our familiar and therefore outworn notion of truth' (Clark, 2002, p. 22). It is the intricacies of his approach which are the most useful here; in his idea of *Geschichte* or 'deep-history' he approaches the Greek roots of words not as a kind of ur-meaning, but rather as a reminder – a re-revelation – of how meaning shifts in the transmission of meaning itself.

Recalling this chapter's previous consideration of Nancy's radical inbetween of community, we can also consider how Heidegger sought the radical inbetween of language as a route to re-revealing how meaning is constructed and practiced. Just as community and politics can only be discovered and discussed in their practice, Heidegger wrote that the only way to avoid 'writing *about* language'³¹ is to bring 'language to language as language' (Clark, 2002, p. 88). In the space between thought and communication *is* language, it is the *inbetween* of being-in-the-context-of-other.³² One might describe this language as 'impossible' or 'incomprehensible', sought so as to access the space in between, that which enables world-building, re-revealing language in an

³¹ That is, for this thesis, replicating the world of the Spectacle, or specifically for the phenomenologists, replicating the 'experience error' which is the use of previous experience to 'fill in for' current experience – more on this in a moment.

³² Through his examination of the act of language Heidegger sought 'not the surface phenomena of language, the communication within the already open space, but with the way language makes possible that space itself, its attitudes, attunements – the sort of world disclosed there' (Clark, 2002, p. 74).

examination of what enables experience error – through a study of its deep history, original meanings, the journey it took and the implications of how it has been shaped. Heidegger seeks a language before language, the interface of perception in understanding the perceived object; this is a ‘mode of disclosure, not a mode of re-presentation’ (ibid) and is therefore crucially a *practice*, active. Heidegger understands that a true conception of *being there* can only happen moment by moment, here and now. He also found in the arts a mode of disclosure that operates in a similar way. Clark, again:

The art work [...] brings into existence something new that needs to be understood only in its own terms: ‘The truth that discloses itself in the work can never be proved or derived from what went before. What went before is refuted in its exclusive reality by the work’ (PLT: 75).’ (2002, p. 101)

First person performance strategies can be seen as both encompassing both Husserl’s focus on the interface of perception as well as Heidegger’s attempts to un-conceal within a search for the truth (reality) behind (intentional) acts. As first person performance builds a new reality through a participant’s body, they are able to see how their person-in-space or *being-there* is a construct in the first place – ‘if I stand here, re-constituted’ the participant can say, ‘I begin to see the Lego blocks of experience and environment of which and in which context I am made’. This is politically powerful because it thwarts the experience error³³ on which all masking, simulation and replication is built. And it does so at the site which in contemporary capitalism it is practiced (embedded).

As digital technologies intersect with our selves and our lives on a daily basis these phenomenological methods of re-being and re-seeing are vital tactics in examining a world more and more dominated by a digital technoculture that

³³ Merleau-Ponty elucidates on the problem of the ‘experience error’ in *Phenomenology of Perception*, where he explains that instead of building our perception moment by moment, we

[...] make perception out of things perceived. And since perceived things themselves are obviously accessible only through perception, we end by understanding neither. We are caught up in the world and we do not succeed in extricating ourselves from it in order to achieve consciousness of the world. (2002, p. 5)

has methods of constructing a Spectacle which can be too fast to follow. In this context the re-contextualising – that is disclosive on a parallel plane, rather than mimicry of the same – aspect of the realm of the arts makes them an invaluable tool in the decoding of the Spectacle of contemporary capitalism. As, in the context of Heidegger, Clark explains, the ‘art work is not just something that comes into the open, next to other things, it changes the Open in which it appears’ (Clark, 2002, p. 44). Theatre and performance is the act of playing at a *world constituting practice*: in seeking the inbetween of experience and perception at the site of the body, the subject finds a route back the fundamental experience of being-whole and being-here.

The reconstructed human (the embodied subject) – Merleau-Ponty

In the post post-human age, it is not the mind-machine but the augmented body which is the source of future dreaming; contact lenses with inbuilt HUD* (Roberts, 2011), other wearables^{*34} that monitor health, movement, provide personal area networks, or just simply perform aesthetic functions. The Quantified Self^{*35} movement (Fleming, 2011) – the practice of using pervasive technology* to closely monitor and manage health and fitness – is filtering into the mainstream. These movements are enabled by apps that track your sleep patterns, exercise, barcode scanners, and huge databases that allow you to track your calorie intake and exercise input with impressive accuracy. The post post-human is re-configured, augmented by technology – the prosthesis is out-dated – these are no longer attachments, replacements, improvements, but *layers*, often see-through. The augmented human is, crucially, a *networked* human. Not only a human, but a human-among-others and a human-among-data; the network applies layers that allows data to work together, at the same time as connecting users to other users.

Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of reconciled subjectivity is extremely pertinent here. Bodies are vital to phenomenological theory and practice, not in-themselves but as the undeniable interface that we have with the world. For

³⁴ Digital technology woven, networked, or otherwise applied to clothing and/or accessories. Wearable technology.

³⁵ Quantified Self is a practice whereby an individual uses pervasive technology* to closely monitor and thus manage weight, exercise, blood pressure, other health measurements, as well as sleep patterns and mood, relative happiness and stress.

the subject to examine the effect that they might have on the world and others, they must tackle not just the intention, but the act-making interface. As Merleau-Ponty explains 'I have no means of knowing the human body other than that of living it, which means taking up on my own account the drama which is being played out in it' (2002, p. 231). There is no means of understanding this interface except by using it. It can be theorised, but in order for it to be taken up on the individual's 'own account', to discover the responsibility and facticity of agency, these theories must be practiced.

Typically, reference to the body in immersive performance and art has been in the direct context of the digital, the VR* of the posthuman; and thus a language (seen also in Deleuze and Guattari) of *washing away* or *transcendence* from the body has persisted. Current trends in performance, however (in light of new dreams of the digital self) are reconciling this split, and in doing so, re-revealing other ruptures in the seams of the world. This is an alignment to the phenomenological notion of 'truth' that 'does not 'inhabit' only 'the inner man', or more accurately, there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself' (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. xxi). In first person theatre this new reconstructed human is an embodied audience, their practice of living augmented by the narrative framework, game mechanics, or navigable story in which they are invited to participate. This work admits the fundamental impossibility, which Merleau-Ponty highlights above, of separating our conscious acts from our physical bodies; we are both *in* and *of* the world.

In performance that lays the world-constituting responsibility on the body as well as the mind of the participant (or group of participants), suspension of disbelief is not an act that allows something to exist *over there*, but rather a sphere (magic circle, as game theorists would phrase it) in which the participant/s are implicated. Participants *are* the sphere, they are both of and in (as Schafer puts it) the universe. Both mind and body are appealed to, and the split subject is reconciled. Humans are bodies before they are words, and they are beings before they learn to articulate themselves. Theatre has most

often started with words, and when it brings in the body of the actor, it is the body of the *other*, which the subject sees. The actor is an object because it is understood outside the subject – who is here cast as mind-watching, body vanished in darkness – inter-subjectivity is thwarted. Watching puppets speaking words, the subject sees only the objective *what if*, and is rarely asked to look for the simultaneous subjective *what is* – the fissure in which interactive work is interested. Phenomenology is the science of the fulcrum of perception. Husserl's original focus on the noesis and noema suggests that each perceived object has a mental correlate '*no noetic moment without a noematic moment specifically belonging to it*' (Husserl, 2002, p. 144), the two sides of perception – the object and the objective correlate. In the centre is the act of perception – what Merleau-Ponty tells us is that this fulcrum is *inherently embodied*. First person theatre re-replaces you at the fulcrum of world-constitution. The point at which *what is* becomes *what if*.

The context of art is of one of active attention, and particularly in theatre, one of suspended disbelief – a suspension of previous experiences in order that new ones might be imagined. Merleau-Ponty's embodied version of this bracketed attention is to be found most powerfully in first person theatre. It re-replaces the body at the fulcrum of perception and acts, and reconciles self to world. It is a route back to both body and world. The body is placed in context – in place, time, amongst others – and invited to play with agency, the tension between what is and what if, in order to get at notions of 'truth'. To exist, or to understand one's existence phenomenally is to inhabit the *inbetween* of re-revealed perception, as Merleau-Ponty emphasises:

[...] the body is not an object. For the same reason, my awareness of it is not a thought, that is to say, I cannot take it to pieces and reform it to make a clear idea. Its unity is always implicit and vague. It is always something other than what it is, always sexuality and at the same time freedom, rooted in nature at the very moment when it is transformed by cultural influences, never hermetically sealed and never left behind. (2002, p. 231)

Finally, Susan Kozel's reading of Merleau-Ponty (in her study of dance in a digital age, *Closer*) is particularly eloquent on the contemporary political relevance of this phenomenological point of view. She takes Merleau-Ponty's

suggestion that to 'perceive is to render oneself present to something through the body' (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 459), and looks towards a phenomenology of performance – its ability to re-reveal the body in context. Kozel writes of an embodied exploration of the wider nature of performance in a world in which identities shift and are changed and exchanged through digital technology in addition to being traded as capitalist commodities:

In capitalist economies performance is a stick held over the head of both disenfranchised and highly regarded workers; as Jon McKenzie indicates, 'Perform – or else' [...] Economies perform, cars perform, computers perform, animals perform, actors perform, and all of us perform in our lives [...] Performance does indeed have the power to ignite, not just spaces, but also an ontological substratum of being. Fundamentally, performance is not only about *acting* differently, but also about *being* different, or existing in an emergent state. (2007, p. 66)

In a phenomenological theoretical framework we can see the potential of new performative techniques in un-concealing how we are embedded in the world, re-revealing our world-constituting role, and reconciling us with our bodies that we may see our effect on these worlds, whole. It marks a return to lived, embodied, experience, and one which is politically vital if one is to decode the truth from the contemporary capitalist Spectacle.

Resistances: the city and play (urban ideologies and community)

Finally, in the theories of the Situationist International we find theories of the city and the ability to playfully recoup it that are of key significance to this study.

From 1957-69 the Situationists developed a new radical reading of the commodification of Western capitalist society. Their thought was born out of the fiery nihilism of the Dadaists and the irreverent playfulness of the Surrealists, and examined contemporary capitalist society. Tom McDonough in his introduction to *Guy Debord and the Situationist International*, explains that they concluded that the:

[...] alienation which in the nineteenth century was rooted in production had, in the twentieth century, become rooted in consumption. Consumption had come to define happiness and to suppress all other possibilities of freedom

and selfhood. [...] Everyone was first and foremost a member of an economy based on commodities' (2004, p. 3)

The Situationists identified a transition from the Marxist state of alienation, to a once-removed state of spectacular illusion. This 'Spectacle', they suggested, transformed every inch of their lives into an insubstantial capitalist dream, maintained through the mutation of desires into needs. However the Situationists also believed that the image of society *as it is – truth* – was still intact. The Situationists saw it as necessary to set about attempting to break the illusion, and they saw art as the way to go about this. McDonough explains how the SI suggested that:

'Just as the nineteenth century revolutionary theory arose out of philosophy' – out of Marx's dictum that philosophy, having interpreted the world, must set about changing it – now one had to look to the demands of art. (2004, p. 11)

The Situationists proposed a kind of art practised by every member of society, an art that ceased to be art and became a continually revised *way of seeing*.

[...] a common language must be rediscovered no longer in the unilateral conclusion which, in the art of the historical society, always arrived too late, speaking to others about what was lived without real dialogue, and admitting this deficiency of life but it must be rediscovered in praxis, which unifies direct activity and its language. (1977, p. 183)

The Situationists (though they didn't credit it) might even be said to be summoning the phenomenological idea of 'bracketing'.

The SI's theories were centred on the *urban* experience; one which Nicholas Whybrow writes in the introduction to *Art and the City* is now the prevailing experience³⁶ (2010). As of 2010 more people *globally* lived in urban areas than rural (ibid). Whybrow also writes that 'the body has not been replaced at all but *re-placed*, wandering en masse into the space of the city' (2011, p. 8). And in the control of space and architecture exerted by private interests the city enables a degree of message-sending which extends beyond the communications media into the very fabric, the construction of the city itself. Whybrow, again:

³⁶ Though it is by no means a homogeneous one.

And whilst cities obviously contain bodies, bodies also contain cities. In fact, the city itself functions as an 'ecological' body, one that *facilitates* the circulation of particular socio-economic and cultural discourse whilst also thereby *delimiting* them. (2011, p. 8)

Infiltration of the city is also infiltration of the citizen. The SI saw the political implications of this, and through their practices sought to enable the subject to commit 'political acts which aim to reinstate lived experience as the true map of the city' (quoting Hussey 2002: 218) (Whybrow, 2011, p. 15). In order to understand how the Spectacle infiltrated the subject through the city, the SI considered that each person should remake their world daily, using *ubiquitous art* in order to reclaim public space and leisure time. They intended to use this art-practiced-by-all to deconstruct the Spectacular way of seeing, and reconstruct playful new ways of being that operated on an individual's terms. The tools which the Situationists put forward to tackle the Spectacle's image of itself were the *détournement* and the *dérive*. (Almost) drawing on the existential phenomenological idea of *bad faith*, the Situationists paint a picture of how people who subscribe to the Spectacle's unattainable promises fundamentally occlude their own freedom. Crucially, though, and differently from *bad-faith*, they sited the drive of and solution to this occlusion within the Spectacle itself. The Situationists sought to *détourn* or reclaim these images in order to highlight and ridicule the way the Spectacle presented itself. This was presented as a radical (though playful) reclamation of news footage and advertising, as well as the ridiculing of stars and celebrity, and the subversion of print material from popular culture. In this way the Situationists sought to highlight and thus enable bracketing of experience outside the socio-cultural corruption of the Spectacle – to use its own language against itself, diminishing its power from within.

As well as attacking the Spectacle on a cultural level, the Situationists also promoted a kind of *unitary urbanism* – they wanted each individual to augment their own *environment*. They wanted individuals to re-reveal their environment as space, potential, and not a means-to-an-end, a journey to work, the supermarket, or a transaction in time. They wanted to reclaim architecture and urban space by subverting its use and design, and to also rediscover the street as a place *in its own right*. They proposed this be done

through the *dérive* – reclaiming being-oriented rather than commodity-oriented experiencing of the environment. The Situationists declared that:

The role of the ‘public’, if not passive at least a walk-on, must ever diminish, while the share of those who cannot be called actors but, in a new meaning of the term, ‘livers,’ will increase. (Debord, [1957] 2004, p. 47)

The Situationists were radical, didactic, and sought revolution – a revolution built on the reclamation of individual selves from the Spectacle of capitalist society. They recognised that the political function of the arts is to provide people with a vision of the way the world is constructed, and they offered tools to deconstruct and rebuild it in our own images. They saw that this could be achieved by releasing art from ring-fenced and sanctioned spaces like galleries and theatres, reclaiming its political power in everyday spaces. Their ideas reached their culmination with the events of May 1968, but, as McDonough concludes:

If the situationist idea of general contestation was realized in May 1968, the idea also realized its limits. The theory of the exemplary act [...] may have gone as far as such a theory or such an act can go.’ (2004, p. 18)

However as the Spectacle of contemporary capitalism finds new pervasive routes into our lives and living spaces (to be discussed in detail in chapter 3), valuable lessons can be drawn from the Situationists in finding a way back to the subject in contemporary urban space. Fundamental to the SI’s theories was the conception (more nuanced than Baudrillard’s) of the Spectacle as a *world*. Griel Marcis’ *Long Walk of the Situationist International* explains that:

The Spectacle is not merely advertising, or propaganda, or television. It is a world. The Spectacle as we experience it, but fail to perceive it, ‘is not a collection of images, but a social relationship between people, mediated by images’ (2004, p. 9).

The solution to re-revealing the truth beyond the Spectacle can therefore be read as restoring an unmediated social relationship between people. Something which in the terms of this thesis might be called a *community*, for the playful tactics of the SI have to be a route to the practice of ‘unwork’ that

Nancy and Blanchot suggest it arises from. As Nancy explains in *The Inoperative Community*,

[...] community cannot arise from the domain of *work*. One does not produce it, one experiences or one is constituted by it as the experience of finitude [...] Community necessarily takes place in what Blanchot has called 'unworking,' referring to that which, before or beyond the work, withdraws from the work, and which, no longer having to do either with production or with completion, encounters interruption, fragmentation, suspension. (1991, p. 31)

The search for the subjective other is at the heart of all of these theories and practices; from the urgings of Merleau-Ponty to rediscover 'the social world, not as an object or sum of objects, but as a permanent field or dimension of existence' (2002, p. 421), and through the radical *unwork* of the community discovered through play, which must exist outside the sphere of productivity. These theories remain potent in the digital age, where the search for the subject's place in the 'flesh' of networked existence forms the basis of a modern 'homelessness'. If the contemporary individual is, in the thrall of the Spectacle, only a worker and consumer, no longer capable of desires as they have all been 'degraded' into needs, then a route back to the thrill of desire the SI demand (that which must drive a radical playfulness) is to rediscover agency, the actor, not the enactor. Through the un-work of community and play (neither are the *opposite* of work, but are places aside from it) the contemporary subject discovers an *inbetween*.

Chapter 4 will develop a detailed examination of the political power of allowing playful tactics to re-inform performance, and there the SI's theories of play as a powerful manner of inhabiting the inbetween of the city will be updated to tackle the contemporary relationship between private interests and public space. For now, though, it is important to touch on the importance of play, or at least, playing *with others*, as through its radical unwork the community is convoked, through community the subject meets the subjective other, and through play both are implicated as active agents in poetic space, world makers or 'situation' makers, as the SI would have suggested.

The SI sought the inbetween in the city-subject. McDonough explains that 'their urban ideologies were devoted to reshaping the subject, to, in fact, envisioning an empty subject modelled by the influence of their surroundings' (2004, p. xii). The empty subject undertaking a *dérive* is one who exists in the *inbetween*, the inbetween of the body and the city-as-Spectacle, it is the poeticisation of movement through urban unspace. To wander in an age of efficiency and direction is to inhabit places cast otherwise as corridors, to fall between the cracks, to play with an inbetween. An inbetween which foregrounds how the city builds us, and how we are built into the city. As Brandon LaBelle suggests in *Performance, Technology & Science*, to 'make the perception of space a conscious act' is to not only subscribe to a certain phenomenological observation or analysis but, in turn, to articulate, through cultural practice, a 'politics' (2006, p. 159).

The theories of the SI, and key phenomenologists, support the proposition of enframing and unworking the Spectacle through the arts practiced at the site of the self. This thesis will now move on to suggest throughout the chapters 3, 4, and 5 that first person theatre is a route to the perceiving embodied subject and the search for (the reconciliation of) the subject in the urban environment, the active subjective self, and the subjective other. Chapter 2 will situate first person theatre amongst a select history of the shifts in the performance and audience relationship throughout the twentieth century, and chapter 6 will present *The Umbrella Project*, a pervasive storytelling experiment set across the city of York, as a manner of exploring the thesis through practice.

Chapter 2. A select history of interaction in performance.

This chapter is a brief and select summary of shifts in the audience and performance relationship throughout the twentieth century. The intention is not to present a whole or time-line version of a history of interaction and the audience throughout that time; that study would be a full-length thesis in itself. Rather, this chapter intends to trace pertinent examples of the shifts in theories about and of the audience throughout the twentieth century, and how this has shaped on-going attitudes to interaction and the audience. It will also consider the significant shifts in politics, technology and/or society that these emerging techniques are reacting to, set against, or determined to address. For this reason the chapter will attempt to draw a picture that at times, will be broad, and will be unable to consider each movement in the depth and wider reading that a focus solely on the history of interaction in performance would demand. This chapter will instead serve as a useful background and context for the wider part of this thesis, which tends to focus on work that has occurred (for the most part) in the twenty-first century. It is a manner of acknowledging the heritage of current techniques of audience interaction, as well as tracing a strong lineage of politics and technology's effect on how performers and theatre-makers think about their relationship to their audiences.

This chapter will start with the Futurists and Dadaists at the very beginning of the twentieth century, then consider Artaud and the (some suggest Surrealist) Theatre of Cruelty, before moving on to the community-based notions of audience of the British Radical Theatre. This chapter will also consider the different approaches of the American Avant-Garde (particularly the Happenings and the dissolution of the art/life divide by John Cage) of the same time (60s and 70s), before moving through the increasing presence and influence of the media age – and eventually digital technology – that brings us through MUDs*, MOOs*, CDROM, Telepresence art, to virtual reality and immersion. The chapter will finish up at the mixed reality *transmedia* experience of work such as Blast Theory's 1999 *Desert Rain*, here considered a watershed moment in terms of the maturity of work using digital platforms

and syntaxes (its use of the form of games in particular) to explore the politics of the contemporary experience of Gulf War I.

Finally, a note should be made on the cross-disciplinary nature of the majority of the movements selected, including musicians, painters, live artists, and those moving for the most part to performance from the fine or 'plastic' arts (painting and sculpture). These non-theatre movements are driven (for the most part) to theatrical aesthetics by a greater desire to challenge and activate the spectator, and to bring the artist into a direct relationship with their audience. This thesis continues to confidently situate all of the work here discussed as forms of theatre – though the term 'performance' is also used in this context. The practices of live artists, the progressions to live encounters of the plastic artists, propagandists, and the work of the inter- and mixed-media practitioners are considered 'theatre' when they employ 'live play'. This does not necessarily need to be proximate and is not negated by the use of recorded material. It does not need necessarily to take place in a theatre building, or indeed involve actors as a separate entity to the audience at all – but theatre is, here, the communication or navigation of a story or experience to some degree played by bodies.

There is a new challenge presented by some of the work referenced in this chapter; namely that which occurs solely online: MUDs*, MOOs*, hypertext. Though these are important shifts in the relationship between author and audience (or indeed the melding of the two), and therefore have been included, they are not considered 'theatre' within the terms of the study; rather they should (this thesis contends) be considered an extension of the definition of literature. It is worth stating, however, that they are, without a doubt, performative, especially with regards to a brief return to a performance studies point of view, highlighted in the introduction (p.18), and as expressed by Schechner in his *Performance Studies, an Introduction*:

Performance must be construed as a 'broad spectrum' or 'continuum' of human actions ranging from ritual, play, sports, popular entertainments, the performing arts (theatre, dance, music), and everyday life performances to the enactment of social, professional, gender, race, and class roles, and on to healing [...] the media, and the internet [...] The underlying notion is that any

action that is framed, presented, highlighted, or displayed is a performance. (2006, p. 2)

In fact, as this thesis focuses primarily on performance in the arts (and underlying and related notions and experiences of play), Schechner's theories of performance studies illustrate precisely why the definition 'theatre' is necessary – to set it within the use of the very particular frame of the arts (and theatre's associated playful heritage). It should be stated that the definition of theatre used herein is also consciously and fluidly redefined in an age where the performative nature of technology and the media are being made problematic by a vanishing (or more and more fluid) interface.

There is also a notable exclusion of the history of the field of dance, which, although certainly important to much of the work discussed³⁷, has such a strong and different progression throughout this time (never, for example, beginning with the struggle to free itself from the frame of the canvas or the text that so pervades the included examples) that it didn't seem right to deal with it as if only a periphery concern (which was all that could be accomplished within the current chapter). Instead the history of dance and interaction/audience is left to be dealt with by other studies.

Just as chapter 1 of this study set out the twenty-first century experience of digital technology as characterised by the erasure of the interface, the age of the ARG³⁸, augmented and pervasive technology*, so, too, can the changing relationship between the art work and its audience throughout the *twentieth century* be set out as the progressive challenging of various artist-audience interfaces. In terms of theatre, seven interfaces can be set out:

- Text

³⁷ Merce Cunningham's importance to the American Avant-Garde for example, or the many examples of dance's more natural progression into the body-question of digital technology and virtual reality, as seen in the work of Susan Kozel in the 90s.

³⁸ Alternative Reality Game – a kind of real-life role playing game, where the playing board is all of life, and players are versions of themselves, but in a slightly alternative reality. Players allow the magic circle of game play to augment their daily lives. ARGs usually play with the mystery solving or treasure hunt game forms, and leave clues and game artefacts online and in 'real life'.

- Form (formal expectations of what performance *is* – that, for example, a play will have a beginning, middle and an end.)
- Environment (where it happens, and the art/life divide)
- Performer and the performed
- Performer and the audience
- The art (frame) interface (including the subdivision of high/low art)
- The body of the audience/spectator/participant

Each movement or key practitioner herein considered can be seen to be challenging or redefining at least one of these interfaces, and thus the relationship between the artist and the audience. These themes will thread throughout the chapter, before finishing on a final consideration of the heritage that can be seen to result from the twentieth century's playing with the seven interfaces. So, where to begin? As Patricia Falu eres writes in *A Theater Without Theater*,

Any analysis of the relation between the arts and theater in the twentieth century must start with this inaugural stripping-down of discourse that opens the first manifesto of the theater of cruelty: 'the most important thing is to end theater's subservience to text' (Falu eres, 2007, p. 30).

We begin with movements at the turn of the twentieth century proposing to end theatre's subservience to text; Dada and Futurism (though obviously moving to discuss the originator of the above quote, Artaud). Dada, centred in Zurich (and, later, Paris) from the mid-1910s, and the Italian Futurists (who announced themselves in their 1909 manifesto), approached theatre and performance from the world of the plastic arts. They brought to theatre a visual (as opposed to literary) language, which marked a fundamental de-literary-isation of theatre. A de-literary-isation which eventually makes room for greater interpretation and thus interaction by the audience, and sets out the beginnings of a *subjective* rather than *objective* audience; an audience which *does* rather than is *done to*.

Futurism can be set out, as Christina J. Taylor suggests, as containing two main phases; firstly of an originating interest in 'painting, literature, and politics' 1909-1915, progressing into 'profuse and original theatrical activities' from 1916-1929 (1979, p. 29). Though their propositions as to the theatre are of particular interest, so, too, are their beginnings in challenging the

audience/artist relationship in painting; '[w]e shall put the spectator in the centre of the picture' Carrà wrote (Apollonio, 1973, p. 16). Through the use of specific techniques (the portrayal of the same leg in several degrees of movement, the use of *force lines*) as Taylor explains, the Futurists sought to:

[...] transport the spectator to the center of the canvas, to involve him in the action of the painting and thus to awaken in him a resonance with the painter's vision [...] The spectator, drawn into the center of the painting by technical innovations, then becomes a participant in the action of the painting and share sensitivities with the artist. (Taylor, 1979, p. 22)

This urge to bring the audience into greater and more integral sharing of the 'sensitivities' of the artist was driven by the wish to truly affect the viewer with the principles of the movement. Principles that they hoped to express in both content, and, crucially, form. The Futurists considered that the act of the viewer 'filling in' the gap (between the implying 'what is' and the 'what if' held in the painters' intentions) meant that they would traverse the gap, be thrown into movement, and into a greater communion with the artists' intention of creation. Instead of the passive consumption of purely representative work, the viewer of the Futurist painting was thrust into conjunction, or perhaps contention, with the live moment of creation. The immediacy and momentum of these moments of creation were highly prized by the Futurists. Their founding principles, for example, proclaim a:

[...] love of danger [...] exalt aggressive action [...] beauty of speed [...] except in struggle there is no more beauty [...] Time and Space died yesterday [...] We will glorify war [...] we will destroy the museums, libraries, academies [Le Figaro Feb 20 1909] (Marinetti F. , 1973, pp. 21-2)

The Futurists despised all sense of history, of preservation, of anything but the immediate and the visceral. They revelled in the new industrial age, the age of the train, of the airplane, of *speed* and *noise*, and they glorified the machines that delivered it. Their calls for the destruction of museums, libraries and academies, their declaration that time and space were dead, their glorification of war (the ultimately victorious party of which is always the killing machines) and insistence that there is only the forever-now, all speak to this.

Well-known for their reasonably successful aim of becoming a vehicle for fascist propaganda (for this reason a great deal of their work was censored by the Italian government following WWI (Taylor, 1979, p. xi)) their attempt to activate the spectator in this way was politically motivated. For the Futurists, their movements towards a kind of interactive painting marked an intention to immerse the viewer in the point of view of the artist.³⁹

This drive towards immersion also characterised the Futurists' approach to theatre; being a fundamentally anti-history movement, they rejected the literary repertory theatre in the same terms as they rejected the museum, gallery and academy. The Futurists declared their intention 'to replace the 'psychological, sentimental, logical, causal, developmental, symbolic' theatre with a new theatre which would be aggressive, involving and original (Taylor, 1979, p. x). Rejecting the text, the form, and the straightjacketed performer/audience relationship of the traditional contemporary theatre of the time, the Futurists instead glorified in the Variety Theatre, their affinity for which they announced in the 1913 *Variety Theatre Manifesto* – their first manifesto to deal specifically with theatre (Taylor, 1979, p. 30). Marinetti wrote that the 'Variety Theatre is alone in seeking the audience's collaboration. It doesn't remain static like a stupid voyeur, but joins noisily in the action' (1973, p. 127). From the privileging of the visual invitation to movement, to the active provocation that the live event could offer, the Futurist obsession with the Variety Theatre was an anti-art, anti-history, and anti-narrative one, as well as pro-propagandist in its call to use the most popular common mediums for spreading the fascist/futurist message.

[...] The Spectacles provided by the Variety Theatre existed in and of themselves, irrespective of what preceded or followed each segment of the performance. There was no necessary order of appearance, no thread or narrative carrying a spectator from one to the next. (Taylor, 1979, p. 35)

As Taylor writes, where before the 'force lines' were the invitation to fill in the gaps and create momentum towards the intentioning artist, the live form

³⁹ It should be pointed out that this artistic or propagandist approach is not unprecedented – consider the militaristic intentions of the state-sponsored *Battle of Sedan* panorama (Grau, 2003, p. 110) of several decades previously, for one small example.

instilled each action with immediacy; momentum was embodied, not implied. The here-and-now (in and of itself) presence of the theatre released the Futurists to develop new forms that challenged the primacy of text and the boundaries of the performer/audience relationship. Their Sintesi drew from the Variety Theatre the lack of narrative thread, the segmented performance, and presented a distillation of action, noise and provocation. The Sintesi were intentional distillations of life, an alchemical – or perhaps more appropriately industrial – process which reduced the ‘psychology’ (Taylor, 1979, p. x) and literature of theatre to brief moments, something more akin to the increasingly fractured experience of contemporary life; life lived at a pace greater than that of walking. The Futurists’ ‘Synthetic Theatre’ therefore intended to ‘compress life itself, to synthesise the sensations ‘present for a moment in a tram, in a cafe, at the station, and which remain film on our minds as dynamic, fragmentary symphonies of gestures, words, noises, and lights’’ (Taylor, 1979, p. 53).

[...] the Sintesi were short, space, episodic works which challenged both the space of the theatre and role of the audience – and were intended to activate and provoke the audience. (Taylor, 1979, p. 36)

The short, unconnected Sintesi were again about leaving the gaps between the representation to indicate where the audience should ‘intuit’ or fill in, bringing them into closer conjunction with the work.

The environment of the theatre also came into question; there were specific manifestos dedicated to scenography, and the audience/performance divide was infiltrated by both design decisions and ‘plants’ placed in the audience to encourage contention and dissent, even the ‘light quality’ was specified by Marinetti ‘who wished to use the lights to ‘erase the old distinctions between areas, compartments of people’’ (Taylor, 1979, p. 41). As Taylor goes on to note, this was a conscious attempt to break down the divide between the audience and the performer. A desire that was expanded on in the 1933 Total Theatre Manifesto:

We propose to circle the spectators around many circular stages in which several diverse actions are unfolding simultaneously within a vast spectrum of graduated intensities. This will be enhanced by a corroborating organisation

of cinematography, radiophony, telephone, electric lights, neon lights, aerial painting, aerial poetry, tactilism, humor and smells. (1979, p. 72)

Total immersion seemed to be the aim.⁴⁰

But all this was done in order to shock, provoke, offend, not engage; the greater contact with the audience, the intention to immerse, was so as to provide the opportunity to mount an assault. It is not an invitation to interact on equal terms. Indeed, Marinetti declared that 'Futurists must teach all authors and performers to despise the audiences' (Goldberg, 2001, p. 16). Following the Synthetic Theatre Manifesto principles, the Futurists suggested actions such as chasing the audience, making them sneeze, booking several tickets for a single seat, making unbearable nonsense noise, or ruining the patrons' clothes. For the Futurists, true beauty was in visceral and dangerous conflict. Thus they developed a form of theatre that encapsulated in its *form* as well as its *content* the beauty they found in machines and war – ruthless, inevitable and dangerous.

And so at the turn of the twentieth century, we find the Futurists challenging the primacy of text, of narrative, of theatrical form, of environment, all to fundamentally alter the relationship between the intentions of the artist and the (now activated) audience member. However, the barriers between the performance and audience were blurred, not removed, because at the heart of the Futurist project was the propagandist intention. The Futurists' politics drove them to plunge the audience into an alternative and (in their eyes) inevitably contemporary manner of seeing, thinking, being. The expectations of time, space, narrative form and place were disrupted in order to kick the ground from under the audiences' feet so that a new one might be inserted; a new state of revelling in the chaos, the noise, the anger, the groundlessness – one that offered no room for the audience to choose to meet them on equal terms.

⁴⁰ Again we re-visit the encircling images of the panorama – intended to remove critical distance – but we have the addition of simultaneity, a form that would be later be a key tenet of the Happening.

Dada was another movement present at this time in Europe, emerging out of the plastic arts and into the form of live performance. It was centred in Zurich from 1916 (in the Cabaret Voltaire), before spreading across Europe to Paris in 1919 with Tristan Tzara and (the more accurately termed surrealist) Andre Breton (Melzer, 1994, p. xv). Dada, too, was reacting to a Europe in flux – to the terrible destructive capability of man armed with machine – and while ‘common elements are to be found in dada and futurist performances’ including the brevity of performance, the use of simultaneity, noise and an urge to agitate the audience (Melzer, 1994, pp. 49-50), Dada was either anti-fascist (proponents such as Hugo Ball) or embodied a nihilistic rejection of politics and meaning altogether (see Tzara). Indeed, as Annabelle Melzer suggests, the ‘Zurich melange of Germans, Rumanians, and French, who, though almost entirely apolitical [...] were surely against the war’ (1994, p. 53). In a Europe inextricably bound up in or in-between two monumental conflicts, Dada could not avoid war; the movement’s only option was to reject reality, reject the possibilities of signification, and reject the notion of communication, of art altogether. As Melzer explains, while ‘futurism urged a ‘daily spit on the altar of Art,’ dada went a step further and rejected the concept of Art entirely’ (1994, p. 53).

The Dadas were anti-art; the beauty and permanence that art was supposed to embody were impossible in such a Europe as in which they lived. The work they made recycled media images and propaganda posters, it took place as demonstrations on the streets, it recycled and mangled thought and language. The Dadas turned to noise and nonsense – not through joy, but through despair at there being no alternative. Not interested in a ‘total’ theatre, early Zurich Dadaist Hugo Ball looked instead to Kandinsky for ‘a new theatrical style’ (Melzer, 1994, p. 17), joining him in a rejection of the Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk (and likewise the Futurists’ transposition of his ideas – though the two parallel movements were never really in close contact) for its tendency to ‘unify by external means – never really aiming at true fusion’ (Melzer, 1994, p. 17). Ball didn’t want to create an immersive whole to

transport the audience; he was interested in fusing the acts of the performer with the originating environment of the audience. Though similar to the Futurist tactic of evoking intuition through the sparseness of the *Sintesi*, Ball's interest in Kandinsky's urge for the reduction of the work of art to 'essential acts' separated by 'blank spaces of time' was instead in search of an 'inner necessity', as opposed to an outer imposition (Melzer, 1994, p. 17). Ball didn't want to drive the audience to clash with the creative mind, but to offer the space for the audience to rise to meet it. As Kandinsky phrased it: 'I always find it advantageous in each work, to leave an empty space; it has to do with not imposing' (Melzer, 1994, p. 17). Here the audience is invited to inhabit the space between 'what is' and in the sparseness of (re)presentation the manner in which it is cut up, rearranged, re-revealed as illegible to become the 'what if' of Dadaist art.

In their rejection of the art object, of the meaning-ability of history or possibility of permanence, and their interest in chance and spontaneity, the Dadaist turned towards the 'valuing of 'process' [...] above 'product'' (Melzer, 1994, p. 59). This made live performance and the theatre a highly suitable sphere for their investigations. Indeed, Hugo Ball wrote in his diary that:

Only the theater is capable of creating the new society. The backgrounds, the colors, words, and sounds have only to be taken from the subconscious and animated to engulf the everyday routine along with its misery. (Melzer, 1994, p. 24)

Ball saw the space of theatre as a place where spontaneity could arise and become embodied, and the confused messages of colour, words and sounds 'engulf' the audience. There was no attempt to use or impose any form of text, the Dadaist theatre was another anti-literary theatre and they made enthusiastic use of simultaneity, seeing in the tactic everything that was anti-text. As Melzer explains, they sought

[...] a structure which is the 'opposite of narration,' which represents 'an effort to retain a moment of experience without sacrificing its logically unrelated variety.' (1994, p. 35)

This 'logically unrelated variety' is similar to the 'fragmentary symphony' of the Futurists in form, but again in this case underscored not by creating a

wholeness (symphony) or totality, rather by exposing the uncontrollable role of chance, the inability to pull together any whole out of an unconnected series of events. The Dadaists were fascinated by chance, and other forms that hinted at the impossibility of human control. Their theatrical presentations contained phonetic poems, words and sounds were heavily weighed upon, repeated until their meanings broke. Their performances set out to impress this on the public through a 'theatrical communion'. In a foreshadowing of the Theatre of Cruelty the Dadaist theatre required:

[...] a change in attitude on the part of the public. The passive consenting spectator must give way to a hostile participant. Provoked, attacked and beaten by author and actors. (Melzer, 1994, p. 43)

The provocation is not the vicious one of the Futurists, whose end is violence, but rather a challenge to creatures that rely on pattern recognition to recognise that the patterns of meaning and signification on which their civilisation is built are so easily made meaningless. The provocations were from nonsense, the attack was upon language, and the audience was beaten with their own notions of what theatre, in narrative and form, *should be*. And at the same time the act of performance was as much – and often more – for the artist as the audience, because, as Melzer concludes: 'only by playing could the dada discover who he was' (1994, p. 53). The audience, thrust back from the performance, were intentionally provoked. The simple act of Walter Serner reciting the anarchist text *Final Dissolution* with his back turned to the audience made this clear – *these words are not for you, only their sounds, quiet and incomprehensible*. The audience reacted with a near-riot:

Madness had transformed the audience into a mob [...] During the 20-minute intermission which followed, the audience 'gained in self-awareness.' The rage subsided and in its place emerged the realization not only that Serner's provocatory acts had partaken of the inhuman, but that the audience's rage had been inhuman as well. Performers and public had found some kind of meeting ground. (Melzer, 1994, p. 84)

This madness is the meeting ground that the Dadaist sought – a space where the audience were able to realise (as the Dadaist does through performance) that people are simply creatures governed by the vicissitudes of chaos, not by order of their own making. A space where they discover that the definition of

'human' they have built for themselves is flawed and groundless – as (the some say surrealist) Artaud was to say only a few years later – we 'are not free and the sky can still fall on our heads' (1999, pp. 59-60).

The Dadaists' theatrical tactics and innovations were primarily formal, however, aiming to 'engulf' their audiences, they were not interested in submerging them *alongside the performer*. As Melzer writes:

For all their innovative work in performance, the dadas still guarded the line that separates actor from audience. It was not the proscenium that they protected [...] but [...] a stage which allows the performer at times to address his audience directly and then again to withdraw to a position where the audience must regard him as separate from itself. (1994, p. 61)

The stage and its audience/artist divide are preserved so as to provide a play-space for the Dadaist. As is found in the Futurist theatre, the audience are ultimately a body which things are *done to*, not *done with*. The Dadaists' innovations were built around the rejection of the text. Although Dada employed similar tactics to the Futurists, the Dadaist attitudes to the media of the day, and to the possibilities of representation, meaning and signification are the more contemporary. Their tactics were an attempt to demonstrate the deconstruction of meaning in language and representation, and to make an audience feel its loss. Unconcerned with the removal of the interface between the artist and the audience, the Dadaists levelled their best attacks at the interface between audience, artist and the idea and implications of *art itself*.⁴¹

⁴¹ It is also worth noting the presence of the Surrealists in this picture, as so many of the Dadaists came to also identify as surrealist, and Artaud is sometimes placed as one. It was in the late 1920-30s that key Dadists such as Andre Breton came to identify themselves as *Surrealist*. Surrealist art also used collages of media images, was anti-art, and recycled other forms kinds of art and language but they also focused more on creation via chance methods such as automatic writing, than the rearrangement of current images and ideas, and degradation of notions of art. Melzer, again:

The language of surrealism was to aim at reducing reason, at persuading the imagination to surrender before the enticing images of the marvellous. It allowed a new freedom 'for' rather than the dada freedom 'from'. (1994, p. 182)

However the movement doesn't offer enough of an innovation following Futurism and the Dadaists to warrant deeper consideration in this chapter.

It was Artaud, then, who brought the bodies of the audience into the equation. Not progressing to theatre from the plastic arts, rather arriving at the question of theatre through its potential to *embody poetry*, to develop a kind of *poetic being*. Artaud presented a fundamental challenge to the bodily language of signification in the theatre and included in this was how theatre affected the body of the audience. His clearest ideas on this were presented first in the collected work *The Theatre and its Double* published in Paris in February 1938 (1999, p. 103). Although again these shifts in theories of the audience were phrased in terms of 'cruelty' and violence, as Susan Sontag suggests, this violence was different from the

[...] anti-theatre of playful, sadistic assault on the audience which was conceived by Marinetti and the Dada artists [...] The aggressiveness that Artaud proposes is controlled and intricately orchestrated, for he assumes that sensory violence can be a form of embodied intelligence. By insisting on theatre's cognitive function [...] he rules out randomness [...] Theatre, he remarks occasionally, must be 'scientific' [...] must embrace a wholly serious, ultimately religious purpose. (Sontag, 2004, p. 90)

This is a complicated notion, but one which is an important bridge in thoughts about the audience in the twentieth century, and indeed one which has echoed throughout almost every theatrical practice where the relationship between the audience and the theatre artist comes into question; from the American Avant-Garde right up to the discussions of a 'total theatre' that characterised some 90s VR*art. There are four notions it is useful to unpick in this summary of Artaud's audience theory: theatre as **sensory violence**, an arising **embodied intelligence**, theatre's **cognitive function**, and the possibilities of a scientific (that is, considered and deliberately evoked) '**religious**' **experience**.

To begin with the violence, the violence that Artaud proposes is not a direct violence for its own ends (as for the Futurists) or a violence of expectations denied or disrupted (as for the Dadaists). Rather it is violence as a *process*, and violence not against the audience member's body or their expectations, but a *total* violence. It is a violence of the tearing apart of the barely sutured wound that is the body and meaning. Artaud talks in *The Theatre and its Double* about theatre in terms of the plague:

Such a complete social disaster, such organic disorder over-flowing with vice, this kind of wholesale exorcism constricting the soul, driving it to the limit, indicates the presence of a condition which is an extreme force and where all the powers of nature are newly rediscovered the instant something fundamental is about to be accomplished. (1999, p. 18)

He thinks that it is necessary for theatre to be something that shakes people viscerally, bodily and to the core – and also something that does the same to societies. This is the ‘**sensory violence**’ Artaud seeks. The Plague is total and inescapable, even those who it does not harm physically are psychologically and socially disrupted by it – it is a violence, an intensity that acts against the body of the individual and the body social and drives both to their limits, to an intensity like heat where things warp and are reshaped. In this hot liminality the ‘**embodied intelligence**’ Artaud seeks for the theatre is to be discovered; a condition evoked through sensory violence, through which one is returned to the ‘powers of nature’, a kind of *fundamental being* unobscured by the barriers of order and language and society that we have built for ourselves. This is being-before-obfuscating-signification, a discovery of a *physical language*.

Artaud’s is an anti-text theatre, a theatre that recognises that it is first and foremost a ‘tangible, physical place that needs to be filled and it ought to be allowed to speak its own concrete language’ (Artaud, 1999, p. 27). In these terms when Sontag talks of Artaud’s vision of theatre’s ‘**cognitive function**’, she is highlighting the search for this concrete language of bodies-in-meaning-space. A language-before-language, physical; a language ‘aimed at the senses and independent of speech, [that] must first satisfy the senses’ (ibid). In the Theatre of Cruelty, Artaud seeks ‘poetry for the senses just as there is for speech’ (1999, p. 27). The use of the term ‘cognitive’ is perhaps confusing in relation to the search for an *embodied* language; ‘metaphysical’ is perhaps a more apt term. Artaud calls for a theatre that acts on the mind, bypassing language as we understand it in everyday life, using the distinct capabilities of the embodied and yet poetic space of theatre. Artaud sought to replace the text with language-as-incantation (1999, p. 35), a ‘spatial poetry’ that had the capability to provoke a ‘**religious experience**’ (Artaud, 1999, p. 28), an

experience of first principles, of the fundamentals of being, addressed to that through which we have access to the world; our perceiving bodies, our senses.

It is composed of everything filling the stage, everything that can be shown and materially expressed on stage, intended first of all to appeal to the senses, instead of being addressed primarily to the mind, like spoken language. (Artaud, 1999, p. 27)

Artaud saw this quality present in the Balinese theatre.⁴² Artaud witnesses a rarefication of signification, describing the performers as 'moving hieroglyphs' (Artaud, 1999, p. 27). Artaud sought embodied-meaning-before-signification for his audience, and thus proposed a Theatre of Cruelty:

Theatre of Cruelty [...] has nothing to do with the cruelty we practice on one another [...] but the far more terrible, essential cruelty objects can practise on us. We are not free and the sky can still fall on our heads. And about all else, theatre is made to teach us this. (1999, pp. 59-60)

Artaud's intention was to re-reveal how we are tied to and created by signification – language – just as theatre had been shackled to the object of the text. In seeing there were other forms theatre could take, discovered through other methods of signification and feeling their effect, other forms of *being* might also be able to emerge and be communicated. We might see that we are not free, that the meaning we use to hold up the skies of our world might not be sound, and that to really understand it we must see how it might be without it. Artaud lived with the cruelty of this (and was tormented by it). It was this cruelty that he thought necessary to communicate in the meaning-space of the theatre. Thus he set out to create an experience that was *total*, beyond the text:

[...] we want to bring back the idea of total theatre [...] One cannot separate body and mind, nor the senses from the intellect, particularly in a field where the unendingly repeated jading of our organs calls for sudden shocks to revive our understanding.

Thus on the one hand we have the magnitude and scale of a show aimed at the whole anatomy, and on the other an intensive mustering of objects, gestures and signs used in a new spirit. (Artaud, 1999, p. 66)

⁴² Though of course he is certainly guilty of Orientalism, his ability to see the work of the Balinese performers as somewhat free of obfuscating signification was due to the fact that he wasn't embedded in the traditions and language signifiers of that particular culture. This is key to his experience, even if it isn't expressed in his explanation.

This is the first time in the twentieth century that we find the beginnings of a consideration of the wholeness of the being-on-stage, *as well as* the wholeness of the perceiving subjective audience. Indeed, Artaud specifically stated, 'the audience is in the centre in the 'Theatre of Cruelty' [...] the show takes place around them' (1999, p. 62). This was not the surrounding entrapment of the Futurists, but the active and intentional inclusion of the body of the audience in the theatre play-space.⁴³ In order to draw audience members to a heady space between 'what is' and 'what if' Artaud intended to erase the stage/audience divide. He explained that:

Direct contact will be established between the audience and the show, between actors and audience, from the very fact that the audience is seated in the centre of the action, is encircled and furrowed by it. (1999, p. 74)

This 'direct contact' would – if the stage is a place where meaning is made, and re-made – mean that a dream state (plague state, metaphysics or religious experience) could be shared, allowing 'audiences to identify with the show breath by breath and beat by beat' (Artaud, 1999, p. 95). In his metaphors of the plague, Artaud talks of the erasure of any sense of inside and outside subject and other, in his attempts to place the bodies of the audience at the centre of a new embodied language of the theatre, Artaud is seeking what Derrida calls an 'infused spectator':

[...] the infused spectator can no longer *constitute* his Spectacle and provide himself with its object. There is no longer spectator or Spectacle, but *festival* (TD: 85) [...] The festival of cruelty lifts all footlights and protective parries (2004, p. 40).

⁴³ For Artaud work should be aimed at the 'whole anatomy' of the audience (both sensory and intellectual, the latter through the former), and on a scale that is able to immerse the viewer in a different form of signification. Artaud sought 'to produce a kind of total creation *in real terms*, where man must reassume his position between dreams and events' (1999, p. 71). In theatre Artaud wanted to produce signification as it is in dreams, not a direct replication of reality as it is perceived, but spoken in a different language – one of incantation where reality shifts and slips from our grasp. He sought a level of signification where the heart of us is no longer lost in translation, where – as in dreams – it can also torment us with slippery, vanishing visions.

The tactic of the blurring of the theatre/audience boundary and the rejection of the text for an embodied active language for the theatre, seek a state from which the audience member cannot parry the usual intellectual arguments. In this total theatre, the audience is implicated, 'furrowed', heated up. This is half the state required for interaction; the half that Artaud never reached was the extension of agency, the completing gesture, and the space for a response.⁴⁴

The Theatre of Cruelty sought to destroy the subject, but did not seek to offer identification with the subjective other. Artaud sought a *legible* total theatre (unity of thought) – something to be processed as if reading (the language of which traditional theatre is a part), though delivered through experience and feeling. As De Certeau, and Deleuze and Guattari all later conceived: embodied understanding is never received, it is felt, acted.

Artaud may not have achieved his Theatre of Cruelty in the poetry of his texts and theatrical experiments, but it is important that he began to think of a relationship to the audience which was affective, and which thought of them as active bodies, not just a mass on which one has an effect. In terms of the interfaces set out at the beginning of this chapter, his work represented a redefinition of what 'text' might mean for the theatre, he demanded a shift in the environment in which theatre was received, a vanishing of the barriers between the performer and the spectator, and sought to have a visceral effect on the body of the audience.

It is twenty years later, in the community aspects of the British Radical Theatre movement and the American Avant-Garde, that we finally find the missing invitation to act, and an early version of audience agency beginning to appear.

⁴⁴ Derrida, too, saw this contradiction. Edward Scheer writes that:

Derrida identifies two coexistent but contradictory trajectories in Artaud's work: one which would restore to language the unity of thought, object and sign in the flesh of the speaker, hence the theatre, and the other, an acknowledgment of the impossibility of achieving this pure presence form within the system of representation of which language and theatre are part. (2004, p. 39)

While the American Avant-Garde was interested in creating a truer interaction between art and life, and artist and audience, the British Radical Theatre of the 60s-80s was interested in *community*⁴⁵, the relationship between the subject and the subjective other. The latter offered truer agency, but the former a greater formal reinvention that equipped theatre with a language more suited to tackling the problems of being, doing, and seeing in the twenty-first century.

First, we consider the British Radical Theatre, born out of the counter-culture of the 60s and 70s, and a Britain that had emerged out of the Second World War: shaken, in a state of dire austerity, but determined to produce a fairer society. Baz Kershaw, in his study of *Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*, explains that the British alternative theatre of this time saw 'theatre as a service to the community', a sense that was 'derived by analogy from welfare state institutions' being put into place just before or during this time (1992, p. 144). Kershaw explains in the introduction to *Radical Theatre...* that:

Always their starting point was the nature of their audience *and its community*. The aesthetics of their performances were shaped by the culture of their audience's community (Kershaw, 1992, p. 5).

This is the first substantial movement of the twentieth century that can be seen to *begin* with its audience, and sees its audience as fundamentally affecting and shaping the performance outcomes. However, British Radical Theatre was not an *aesthetic* experiment, only a *social* one (more on this next).

The vast variety of radical companies of this time were united in the view of theatre as '*cultural intervention*' and that cultural intervention can only be sustained after the point of intervention if it is *transformative* (Kershaw, 1992, p. 6). They saw the process of theatre as a process of transformation, and so invited specific communities (as proponents of culture) into it. This marked a move away from the literal and broad brushstroke techniques of Agit Prop

⁴⁵ The definition most useful here is the initial one introduced earlier, that of Raymond Williams, highlighted in the context of British Radical Theatre by Baz Kershaw. Where Williams 'conceives of community as the concrete medium of face-to-face interactions through which we transact ideological business with the wider social structure.' (1992, p. 29)

radical theatre, a tradition of the industrial towns and cities of Britain and mainland Europe, to a more complicated and contemporarily transgressive carnivalesque and community-led theatre.

This shift enabled radical theatre makers to more adeptly address the political situation of the 1960s and 70s, 'conditions of cultural pluralism produced by political consensus, relative affluence and the ameliorating force of the mass media' (Kershaw, 1992, p. 80). Agit Prop techniques struggled in this context because (as Kershaw continues) 'in a pluralistic society the 'enemy' to be attacked is not easy to identify' (1992, p. 80). Radical theatre rejected the simplicities of a theatre 'against', and sought a theatre of 'with', a coming-together to ask the question 'where next?'

The companies of the time sought not to put the traditional relationship between the artist and audience in jeopardy, but rather cultural ideologies. It sought to do this in practice by varying levels of audience involvement. Firstly companies attempted to embody counter-cultural and radical politics demonstratively in their making process; this was marked by a rise in democratic devising techniques, by the inclusion and casting of any and everyone who wanted to be involved, and by working carefully to understand and embed the company and its work in a place. Secondly, community work sought to challenge cultural ideologies in the content of the work: challenge which stories are seen to be important by telling historical or locally-based tales, or challenge the specifics of local politics through the use of music-hall style satire. Finally, the radical theatre of the 60s-80s challenged the cultural imperialism implied by the 'official' cultural institutions of the time: radical work was almost always constructed and performed embedded in a community and outside the mainstream theatre infrastructure (often including the funding infrastructure). The movement also attempted to be popularist to be able to challenge cultural ideologies without being wholly rejected. It was therefore necessarily a formal, rather than aesthetic, revolution in theatre techniques, and the artists bringing the work to a community saw their roles most often as facilitators of process, not presenting an overt challenge-as-

product. The process was the focus, but this time not just for the artist (as for the Dadas), *with* the audience. Kershaw explains that this is effective because

[...] it is the *ludic* nature of the audience's role that allows it to engage with ideological difference, that allows rules to be broken (via authenticating conventions) while rules are being kept (via rhetorical conventions). (Kershaw, 1992, p. 28)

The play-spirit in which art is conceived and developed is extended to the audience in community theatre. The radical theatre makers of the 60s-80s understood, as Victor Turner expresses, that the 'social world is a world in becoming, not a world in being' (1976, p. 98); it is constantly made, and is only be understood in doing, amongst other people. In wanting to challenge existing ideologies of the social world in which politics is conceived and enacted, radical theatre makers invited the audience into the play-space, a place where normally solid rules can be broken *together*. In the act of *re-making* in a safe place, the theatre can act as a socio-political laboratory where one can observe and test.

That the revolutions in artist/audience relationship were non-aesthetic,⁴⁶ meant that the work was more able to accommodate the audience as authors – the price paid for this is always less control over the overall 'vision' of the piece. However this doesn't mean that aesthetic factors weren't considered at all; in fact the decision to eschew arts buildings meant a whole host of new and necessary decisions about how and where a piece would work. As Kershaw explains, theatre makers at the time came to realise that:

How the audience gathers for a performance, and disperses when it is over, may be as important to its ideological reception of the show as, say, the style of the performance itself. (1992, pp. 23-4)

And there was still room for radicalism in presentation, just as long as some rhetorical conventions were preserved. Ann Jellicoe, for example, writes of the creation of a promenade performance that was also set amid a community carnival-style space (Kershaw, 1992, p. 190). Jellicoe combined this with Aristotelian storytelling, strong heroes, and the 'in character' performers

⁴⁶ Indeed, they utilised traditional 'rhetorical conventions' (traditional narrative structure, characterisation, use of a text) and forms (carnival).

constantly onstage and visible, as present reminders that nothing takes place in a vacuum. The separation between reality and performance was hazy; the playspace bled in to the real, and the real into the playspace. The implicatedness of the process is extended to the product. This represents a huge shift in the idea of authorship and the interface of 'art'. This is no longer immersion of an audience in an environment or piece of work, it now very much resembles contemporary definitions of *interactive*, and the development of what Steve Gooch called a 'conversation between equals' (Kershaw, 1992, p. 64).

However, this popularist urge began to clash with an urge to experiment in more aesthetic terms, and a split between the radical touring devising companies (Hull Truck, Joint Stock, Gay Sweatshop, the Women's Theatre Group, etc.) and the more traditional stories presented by the community text-based work (e.g. David Edgar and Ann Jellicoe) began to pull the radical theatre movement in different directions. A movement forced to divorce the ideological from the aesthetic could not sustain the dream of a grassroots-driven counter culture that would grow large enough to displace the dominant culture of late-capitalism.⁴⁷

This is a very short and select view of a large and varied movement that happened across three decades, but for the purposes of this study we are able to recognise British Radical Theatre briefly for the particular innovation in

⁴⁷ John McGrath, writing in 1979 identified three main areas of concern for radical political theatre during the 60s-80s:

[...] firstly, the struggle within the institutions of theatre, against the hegemony of the 'bourgeois' ideology within those institutions; secondly, the making of a theatre that is *interventionist* on a political level, usually outside those institutions; and thirdly and most importantly, the creation of a counter culture based on the working class, which will grow in richness and confidence until it eventually displaces the dominant bourgeois culture of late-capitalism. (Kershaw, 1992, p. 149)

The latter aim was the least achieved, partly because of the lack of aesthetic experimentation which meant that the British Radical Theatre lacked the new *forms* needed to challenge the increasingly *implicit* message making and sending of the media age arising in the 80s, and partly because the previous two aims required a *local* theatre, heavily community-specific, which, if done properly, should resist expansion.

terms of audience interaction that it offered. Namely, a close awareness of the value of involving the audience member in the *process* of making, and by extension the invitation to participate in a playspace which allows an audience to actively and bodily inhabit the spaces between 'what is' and 'what if' and step into a world of 'becoming' (Turner, 1976, p. 98). And all this with implicit political intent, as a manner of getting at the active construction of socio-political ideologies within communities – to actively empower members of that community to de- and re-construct these *on their own terms*.

Boal is another practitioner for whom this was a key innovation, his *Forum Theatre* was developed in the early 70s parallel to the community theatre work of the British Radicals – but the relevance of Boal is developed throughout the wider thesis and therefore not included in this twentieth-century interaction and the audience historical supplement.

In terms of the interfaces set out at the beginning of the chapter the British Radical Theatre (at least the community theatre from which this chapter draws its examples) is notable for its playing firstly with the interface of art and who authors it; secondly the environment, playing with the 'inbetween' of the carnival, and setting work outside of established theatre infrastructure; and finally the erasure of the interface between the performer and the audience. Here, the audience *is* the performer, though there are also still spectators.

During the same time period in the US a very different radical theatre emerged. An Avant-Garde theatre driven much less by any notions of community or political intervention, and instead focusing on formal and aesthetic reinvention as a response to escalating materialism, consumerism and the 'cult of the self' that characterises Western late-capitalism. Late-capitalism took hold first and most strongly in post-war America, and the split in theatrical experimentation can be seen as expressive of this split in post-war cultures between Europe and the US. Arnold Aronson explains in his history of the American Avant-Garde that

[...] while Europe and Asia had to confront the severe physical destruction, economic upheaval, and moral implications of World War II, the United States, despite its own significant losses, was relatively distanced from the most immediate effects and ravages of war. In the midst of unprecedented postwar prosperity, in fact, the sense of meaningless and alienation for Americans came not from the devastation of war and genocide but from rampant materialism [...] (2003, p. 76).

Mainland Europe and the UK were still struggling with post-war austerity, the legacy of collaboration and genocide (which resulted eventually in efforts to build a closer continent), and in the UK the welfare state was being built, all of which spoke of how citizens of nations are bound inextricably. The American view, meanwhile, was of the skyscraper, the highway, advances in technology, the shopping mall and the supermarket, devices and changes which spoke of great riches, of divorces between production and product and the freedom seen in individualism. This split resulted in two very different approaches to the same question of the artist and the audience.

The American Avant-Garde herein discussed is another arrival in the field of theatre and performance from a 'plastic arts' point of view,⁴⁸ although this time combined with the theories of John Cage who taught university classes with many of the Avant-Garde's main exponents. Characterised by rejection of the art/life divide, which led to the rejection of conventional ideas about audience and the art object, there 'was also a desire [...] to subvert the commodification of art' (Aronson, 2003, pp. 156-7). As a demonstrable response to the economics of post-war America, 'artists stepped out from behind the canvas [...] thereby substituting process or action for a tangible product that could be bought and sold', their art-of-the-process can be seen as a response to the supremacy of product.

The majority of the American Avant-Garde work is not interactive in terms of inviting the audience to affect the art, rather it represents the vanishing of the border between art and life and audience and performer, bringing the space of 'what is' and 'what if' in much closer conjunction. If the British Radical Theatre of the same time was interested in exploring the world of 'becoming' that is

⁴⁸ Often centred as emerging out of the 'action painting' of artists such as Jackson Pollock, and the increasing focus on the power of process over product (Phelan, 2004, p. 21)

socio-political ideology through communities, the American Avant-Garde was built to discuss the 'becoming' of the individual.

The American Avant-Garde was a rich and varied movement, with many different and divergent practices, but of particular interest to this study are the Happenings, the theories of the art/life divide of John Cage, and the 'crisis of the subject' (Finter, 2004, p. 51) that marked a shift to performance and body art. This, although rarely 'interactive', gave the audience a new role, that of witness. Michael Kirby in *Happenings and Other Acts* explains how

Cage advocated the elimination of boundaries between art and life. The acceptance of chance is an acceptance of the laws of nature; and life, as illustrated in 4' 33', always participates in the totality of the perceived work of art. [...] Performance and audience are both necessary to have theatre. But it might be thought that it is this very separation of spectator and work which is responsible for an 'artificiality' of the form, and many Happenings and related pieces have attempted to 'break down' the 'barrier' between presentation and spectator and to make the passive viewer a more active participator. (1995, p. 43)

Cage's famous 4' 33' minimalist composition of active, intentional silence allowed an audience to direct at the 'noise' of everyday life the same manner of attention that they would any other music. His interest in chance, the 'noise' of information and mathematics, wasn't like the Dadaist interest in a world on which you can have no effect, but was rather an interest in admitting how we are implicated in continually affecting environments. Cage's audience theories (again, with echoes of the Dadas) were built around activating the audience through allowing them space to rise to interpret. In an interview with Cage by Michael Kirby and Richard Schechner, Cage explains that:

[...] the less we structure the theatrical occasion and the more it is like unstructured daily life the greater will be the stimulus to the structuring faculty of each person in the audience. If we have done nothing, he then will have everything to do. (1995)

What Cage describes is not *interactive*, but *active*, the application of the 'framing' aspect of the arts in order to re-reveal that to which we have become numb in our surrounding environments. The activation of a 'structuring facility' or (as the phenomenologists would put it) a 'bracketing' of the real in order to consider how and of what it is constructed. This was an art of the

'inbetween', and it was amongst these new ideas that Happenings emerged. Michael Kirby explains that:

Happenings might be described as a purposefully composed form of theatre in which diverse allogical elements, including nonmatrixed performing, are organized in a compartmented structure. (1995, p. 11)

The Happenings were another rejection of a theatre defined by literary text, rather the focus was on the process of performance. In a Happening, an audience would be presented with unconnected 'allogical elements [...] in a compartmented structure' (anti-narrative content) and non-matrixed performance (non-representational acting). They were emphatically *authored* however, and this is at the root of Kirby's 'purposefully composed', which is a rejection of accusations that these events were 'just' improvised.

Alan Kaprow also wrote in detail about what he considered key elements of Happenings, and to select the two of most relevance to a consideration of the relationship between art and audience: firstly, following on from the theories of Cage that *'The line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps indistinct, as possible'* (Kaprow, 1995, p. 235), and secondly, that *'audiences should be eliminated entirely*. All the elements – people, space, the particular materials and character of the environment, time – can in this way be integrated' (Kaprow, 1995, p. 240). This integration of art, audience and environment took the audience out of the art space, but asked them to bring the 'framing' aspect of art with them to apply to everyday life. It is not the art of the inbetween of 'socio-political constructions amongst a whole community working together' of the British Radical Theatre; instead it is the art of the inbetween of the *environment* – a tool to examine a place increasingly infiltrated by the message-making and sending of a mass media. The term 'intermedia' is applied (Schechner, 1995, p. 228), which can in more contemporary terminology be defined as the advent of 'mixed reality' performance in the later twentieth century.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Though the realities being mixed are those of art and life, as opposed to technology and life *as art*.

Happenings moved out of defined space entirely; the non-matrixed performers broke down the interface between performer and performed, and made a problem of the suspension of disbelief. Instead the audience member was 'activated' by the work (as per Cage's theories) in places which contained the everyday.⁵⁰

Though rarely driven by an explicit political intent, the Happenings were developing a language with which to interrogate contemporary being; there were no 'master' narratives, performers weren't *being* characters, but *playing* roles, and the notions of the Real, of simulation, came under fire. There was no Real in a performance where 'audience members would not have the certainty' of whether something was intentional or 'happening anyway'. Everything should be considered a possible construct. Everything is a definite construct, but because the audience constructs it they also have the ability to re-construct their reality. Though the Cagean intention was not revolution-in-doing but revolution-in-seeing; he wanted audiences to see everything artistically.⁵¹

As such, these were still heavily instruction and rule-based experiences, and problems were frequently encountered when participants didn't 'follow the rules'. Much of the later performance art view of participation was related to ritual, and just as rituals have their priests or shamans, the overview of the artist still held utmost authority. This meant that the relationship between

⁵⁰ For example, Ramond Sender's explains how his collaborative piece 'City Scale' played with the 'in between' of their chosen environment:

We decided to use the city environment as totally as possible, to create a trip out of which more or less controlled elements would emerge. Many of the events were purposely ambiguous so that audience members would not have the certainty of knowing whether a given incident had been planned or was happening anyway. (Dewey, Martin, & Sender, 1995, p. 173)

⁵¹ This attitude to environment also resulted in the Performance Studies view that there is no such thing as the 'empty space', key component Richard Schechner suggests that "non-theatre' venues are in fact sites of multiple performances. Prisons, refugee camps, hospitals, etc., are not empty of theatre nor do they only experience the theatrical when a social theatre project is staged' (2006, p. 320), though, again, in terms of this study a definition of performance that covers every aspect of life is unhelpful and expressive of an inherent 'gaze' which is ethically questionable.

performers and audience was still an unequal one as long as the performers were in possession of a greater knowledge of what might happen.

[...] the failure of the audience to participate according to the 'script' points up a fundamental problem with audience participation and ritual-style [...] theatre. [Theatre, here] is a presentation by actors to an audience [...] the performers still approach the text with different knowledge, training, beliefs, and understandings than those of the spectators. (Aronson, 2003, p. 101)

The notion of authorship in Happenings can be linked back to the form's aesthetic roots. This meant that instead of providing a rule-set which both parties understood, the audience of a Happening would always be a subsidiary party in the experience.

The work of the Fluxus artists, offers a small addendum (and beginnings of a solution) to this consideration of the American Avant-Garde and audience/art interaction. Fluxus was another anti-art movement of the American Avant-Garde, led for the most part by George Maciunas (though his leadership was largely self-proclaimed). Dick Higgins describes Fluxus as bringing 'a much-needed *spirit of play* into the arts' (1998, p. 225) – Higgins also traces Fluxus back to parlour games (1998, p. 226), and Maciunas describes Fluxus as composed of 'good, inventive gags' (Miller, 1998, p. 196). This play-spirit can be seen in the *instruction* form that much of their interventions took. For example part of Yoko Ono's instruction based works exhibited at MoMA in 1970 included the directions 'draw an imaginary map... go walking on an actual street according to the map' (Goldberg, 2001, p. 154).

Fluxus work also often invited art-experience out into the 'real' environment⁵², but this time the power balance was equal; there was a set of rules that both artist and audience (now as agent) had equal knowledge of. This was a shift in the balance of power. As RoseLee Goldberg explains in *Performance Art...*

Such works were intended to change the viewer's perception of the museum landscape as much as the urban one, and to provoke them to question the *situations* in which they normally viewed art. (2001, p. 155)

⁵² Though many of the Happening artists were suspicious of Fluxus, and dismissed it for its ability to be repeated, having emerged more directly from music, and aiming to be 'musical' in a sense of being represented in instruction-form 'to allow others to realise the work' (Friedman, 1998, p. 250)

This is art of the *situation*; of how we construct and represent it, how we move through our cities, and what it means to take the perception we bring to a museum to the streets, and vice versa.

Fluxus drew from play techniques which enabled a truer agency on the part of the individual audience member, but both Fluxus and Happenings were art of the *inbetween*, using and blurring the frame of art to interrogate the increasing mediatisation and consumerism of contemporary being. Though perhaps not yet agents experiencing high-level interaction (the instruction-based form is touching on navigation interaction, c.f. the four forms of interaction as set out in chapter 5) the audience has been turned into a vital part of the performance, activating it, allowing it to happen, willing it to, even. Their role has been complicated into that, at the very least, of *witnesses*.⁵³

This art of the *inbetween* developed by Cage, the Happenings and Fluxus is about inhabiting the *inbetween* of the 'medium as message' – re-revealing those spaces between 'what is' and 'what if' in our everyday environmental and social lives. Though not an explicit political aim, it can be seen very much as a reaction to the growing prevalence of the capitalist media machine in post-war America. Art of the *inbetween* 'is a question of giving form to the myths which are ours, while falling prey as little as possible to the alienating mechanisms of the image-making industry' (Lebel, 1995, p. 272).

If, as Baudrillard has it, there is no longer any such thing as the Real, 'the primary problem of today's art has become *the renovation and intensification of perception*' (Lebel, 1995, p. 282). This is what the art of the *inbetween* offers, a new question of perception. In order to approach it, the audience have to be

⁵³ As Tim Etchells explained several decades later the witness, as opposed to the spectator, is 'engaged in a vibrant relay between experience and thought, struggling in a charged present to accommodate and resolve the imperative to make meanings from what we see' (Heathfield, 2004, p. 9). The audience as witness is drawn in ethically, to a temporal and visceral encounter compared to contemporary mediated visions of experience, and challenged to really see, be, hear through a question of 'eventhood' (ibid).

brought in, body and mind (as in the Futurists, Dada and Artaud), social-being (as in the British Radical Theatre) and also *environment* – the key interface broken down between audience and art by the American Avant-Garde. This question of perception and the Real is intensified in importance as the message-sending capability of the media becomes more thoroughly and more pervasively distributed. The success of America in exporting its media technology and materialist culture meant that their crisis of the individual subject became that of the entire developed West, particularly in the context of the world-view-monopoly represented by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the ‘failure’ of communism.

A history of increasing interest in the media image can be traced clearly out of the American Avant-Garde of the 60s and 70s to the 80s, via practitioners and companies such as Richard Foreman, Robert Wilson and the Wooster Group. Their work was characterised by their treatment and collages of the language and material of mediatised (specifically televisual) culture. This thread of questions of the Real, perception and how we are bound up in virtuality is recognisable as it progresses into a digital avant-garde in the late 80s and 90s. Steve Dixon writes that digital performance is an avant-garde in itself:

Such work is avant-garde in relation to key definitions, such as Russell's understanding of ‘a *vanguard* art’ and Peter Burger's definition as ‘the attempts to organise a new life praxis from a basis in art.’ (2007, p. 8)

The inclusion of media and digital technology in performance presented theatre with a new ‘life praxis’ to explore, challenge and investigate.

Foreman's Theatre of Images was deliberately slow, and didn't present images as they are when painted but as ‘frames’ of action, as if cut out of a reel of film. Wilson's later experiments in performance art following the Avant-Garde of the 60s and 70s returned to an almost Wagnerian total theatricality – no longer anti-text, or anti-narrative, Wilson wanted the *scale of the cinema screen* washing over the audience. Aronson also situates their work amongst a ‘post-Einsteinian’ universe; emerging notions of chaos and the quantum, along with

a shift in time represented by the recorded, the notions of 'live' and the ability to play things on fast forward, slow motion, rewind, pause. As Aronson writes:

It challenged post-Renaissance (i.e. modern) understandings of time and space within theatre [...] fragmenting both the viewing frame and the arc of the production, thereby forcing the spectators to re-examine their own notions of performance and their own perceptual processes. (Aronson, 2003, p. 102)

This work doesn't particularly address the body of the audience, or the environment in which it happens (indeed both these practitioners moved work back into the theatre buildings), but as Aronson suggests, the use of the language of time and space that is found in the construction of the media-infected universe on stage, focused the attention on the 'perceptual processes' of the audience that are in play when this manner of message-delivery isn't re-presented. Goldberg writes of a generation raised on:

[...] twenty-four-hour television and a cultural diet of B movies and 'rock 'n roll', performance artists in the 1980s interpreted the old cry to break down barriers between life and art to be a matter of breaking down barriers between art and the media (2001, p. 190).

The Wooster Group most brazenly used media technology directly in their performances, not just video, but audio visual amplification, the split subject appearing both onscreen and onstage, allowed to examine itself. The performances were structured more like collages; more, in fact, like the experience of life in a burgeoning 'information age'. Indeed, by the late 80s the performative forms developed by the early to mid century avant-garde were no longer strange and disruptive, they were beginning to become a fact of life. Indeed, as Aronson points out,

[...] the century-long project of the avant-garde to undermine structures of linear thought, objective imagery, and psychological associations has been accomplished rapidly and almost effortlessly by technology and has been adopted almost casually by society at large. (2003, p. 202)

The media and its bombardment of messages became a text which 80s performance artists made into collages, and attempted to re-reveal the assumptions present in our new praxis of life, our new acts of perception. The media, however, is an illegible text inscribed on our flesh, and soon theatre and

performance went in search of a form that more directly dealt in the changing praxis of perception. The advent of VR* technology presented new challenges for the perceiving subject, and new opportunities for the infiltration of it. Naturally, theatre makers approached this new medium and began to make art of and about it. This, interestingly, can be sited as a return to the plastic arts for theatre (though perhaps 'silicone arts' is more apt); the sculpting of virtual environments and experiences became a focus of 90s VR* art.

In the 90s, the crisis of the self became the crisis of the disembodied subject, and the spaces between the media and self that performance had been attempting to interrogate suddenly became a lot thinner. N. Katherine Hayles in her book *How We Became Posthuman* explains that a key component of late capitalism is that 'durable goods yield pride of place to information' (1999, p. 39). She continues that, in a world where the pervasion and distribution of information appears to have been made *immediate* and *global*, 'it is a small step to perceiving information as more mobile, more important, more *essential* than material forms. When this impression becomes part of your cultural mindset, you have entered the condition of virtuality' (1999, p. 19). The era of virtuality is one of a global information network that doesn't stop at the skin of the individual. In the encoding of DNA, in genetic modification, CT scanning and ability to monitor and change minute internal operations, the body, too became made up of information. The end of the twentieth century marked the blurring of the spaces between material world and information culture, and VR* technology was expressive of this.

The era of virtuality of the late 80s and 90s presented new challenges for performance, as new conditions of perception (virtuality) began to re-write our cultural and social practices. Ken Hillis writes in *Digital Design Sensations* that technology

[...] is not only gadgets, mechanisms, and tools but, increasingly, also sets of social practices depending on distributed knowledge and skills [...] 'Instead of talking about the 'impacts of technology' we would talk about the co-evolution of technological and other social practices' [Quoting Miles and Robins, 21] (1999, p. 34).

Notions of communication and perception shifted with the advent of the 'digital age'. People's relationship to computing changed; computers were no longer tools, but a field, a platform on which culture *occurred*. People met, fell in love, had arguments, shared stories, consumed messages. The digital was no longer something you *used* but somewhere you *went*. And as these spaces became part of the wholeness of contemporary (western, affluent) experience, the space between the media and the individual became smaller and smaller. The HMD* developed by virtual reality pioneer Ivan Sutherland 'sought to go beyond technical limitations of conventional film and TV that necessitate a space between the technology and the viewer' – to remove the sense of an interface altogether (Hillis, 1999, p. 9). But it is far from an unmediated, or less mediated, experience, there is no real removal of the frame of the body, nor of mediation. Hillis again:

VR's promise of interactivity is based on a twofold process. The iconographic virtual worlds represent the conceptions of military, commercial, and scientific interests along with those of the software designers who interpret these conceptions and then write the programs [...]. The technology's immersive quality then combines with its vivid visual imagery to give the impression that it offers an experience of unmediated sensation [...] when in fact it presents a highly mediated series of conceptions or ideas. (1999, pp. 69-70)

As Hillis sets out, just as the cult (and commodification) of the self that emerged from the consumerism of post-war America provoked art that examined the divide between art (as representation, image-making) and life by embedding the art-experience in everyday environments, the art of the era of virtuality needed to develop new tactics. In the era of VR* the audience was now an individual; not a community, nor an individual-among-many, or an individual with a piece of information (set of instructions, for example) that they could choose whether or not to apply. The VR* experience via an HMD was typically a solo one; the experience became about a communion with the self, and the body seemed vanished in an attempt to reach the inner perceiving mind. VR* art of the 90s responded by using the medium to return to the *natural*.

Brenda Laurel, pioneer of human-computer interaction and author of *Computers as Theatre* saw the space of VR* as 'ultimately one of return: a place

to ‘reinvent the sacred spaces where we collaborate with reality in order to transform it and ourselves’ (Dixon, 2007, p. 368). Laurel’s work on VR* artwork in the early 90s was marked by a visual and design aesthetic of a return to nature, as well as the invention and use of many natural metaphors to describe actions taken in cyberspace (surf, mouse, web). But in a world suffering increasing overpopulation and environmental damage, VR* was seen by some to allow a *truer* communion with nature, unspoiled and un-hemmed-in by the physical limits of cumbersome reality; in VR environments an individual could fly as a bird, or swim as a fish.⁵⁴ No longer interested in the point of meeting – the interface – cyber theatre attempted to re-unite the body with a sense of unmediated existence. VR* art removed the interface of the performer, environment, text and art-as-frame altogether and this – for the first time – was an attempt to develop an environment in which the audience had total agency (albeit one which is disembodied and alone). However, true audience authorship in the VR environment is impossible, and the interaction offered is still only navigational. In the contemporary digital world ‘[p]eople are both readers and authors’ (Schechner, 2006, p. 5), indeed, a digitally *augmented* reality, as opposed to total *virtual* reality, became much more likely a future towards the end of the 90s. Steve Dixon writes that:

Rather than VR’s search to eliminate the interface and become a converged, transparent window into pure experience, it is the opaque scattering of multiple computational devices throughout the environment that presents the most compelling model for future human computer interaction: ‘Digital designs intersect with our physical world; they cannot escape into pure cyberspace.’ (Dixon, 2007, p. 393)

Dixon is writing in 2007, just following the explosion in mobile and pervasive technology* in the mid 2000s, since then this ‘scattered’ experience of virtual technologies interspersed amongst our ‘physical world’ has certainly come to pass. However, the increasing privatisation of that physical world and the increasing surveillance possible through pervasive technology* are the flipside

⁵⁴ In the 1995 landmark work *Osmose*, Char Davies designed a world that portrayed unspoilt natural beauty that the (now-termed) *immersant* could navigate via the inhalation and exhalation of breath.

of a transcendental escapism into, or scattered convergence with, a digital play-space. As Thomas Henry Jenkins explained in 1998:

We are on a collision course between technologies that encourage collaboration and full participation in cultural production and economic and legal structures which are pushing to further privatize our culture. (Schechner, 2006, p. 267)

VR* art was a very short burst of interest in both the arts and wider culture (limited by the fact that it was often prohibitively expensive) but what it did bring into much sharper focus were the *problems* of immersion, questions of embodiment and perception in the information age. Theatre makers began to explore notions of authorship – of the ‘collaboration and full participation’ that Schechner rightly highlights as key markers of digital culture and what it might mean for their audiences. The potential of audience authorship is much more fully explored in the more literary forms of emergent digital performance. Just as (ironically, perhaps) VR* marks a return to a plastic art of environment sculpture, the hypertext, MUD* and MOO* marked a return to text-as-theatre, though in both cases now activated and authored by their audiences.

Experiments in hypertext saw the advent of a rhizomatic wandering audience member, co-collaborator (in the eyes of many theorists of the time) with the author. Though it, again, still only allows a piecing-together (activating) role and a barely navigational level of interaction, at the time it was a milestone in the experience of an audience member. The hypertext was also certainly seen as a form of theatre, as, for example, Gabriella Giannachi writes, ‘hypertext is action’ (2004, p. 19). Indeed, Giannachi doesn’t just claim hypertext as a ‘performative medium’, but claims that it surpasses all other mediums:

[...] by including the viewer in the work of art [...] in it the viewer is able to combine the performance of both text and metatext – narrative and critical theory [...] In hyper text, narratives never end and viewers, themselves transformed into HTML, become just another hypertextuality waiting to be read by someone else. (ibid)

The hypertext, in which links could be followed to any location in the text, changed both how narrative was experienced, and how the artist saw that it

might be constructed. A viewer could choose to follow any thread, a narrative was mapped out like a cloud of electrons that any moment the energy of the viewer could leap to: images, clues, video, all could be left for the viewer to put together. Hypertext works made use of a tangled form that nonetheless always pretended to a linear path (you always experience only one node at a time), and for that reason were able to express complex notions of contemporary mediated experience. For example Stuart Moulthrop's 1991 hypertext 'novel' *Victory Garden* where the 'text functions like 'a maze' and the war is represented as a 'hyperreal event'' (Giannachi, 2004, p. 17), re-presented the experience of following news events in the muddy, confused way individuals do in cyberspace.

Giannachi suggests that the choices made by the viewer constitute a performance, both of the author's work (the text) and their construction of it (the metatext). The work is both wholly out of time and persists constantly in it. As such, the hypertext represents a new formation of time and space much more akin to quantum theory's principles of the implications of observation and collapse. But the power and importance of the experience of a hypertext is by Giannachi (and often elsewhere in the field of literature) wholly overstated. What does it mean to be 'transformed into HTML'? How does one become a markup language? Where is the other reader (the 'someone else') in the equation? What mark can others have possibly left? It is more than a little hyperbolic. Nevertheless, what it *did* revolutionise was the artists' conception of themselves as co-producer. The hypertext (before VR*) and the age of cyberart changed all previous notions about authorship (beyond that of community art which had since tended to become an anomalous 'special interest'). As Giannachi explains:

One of the most important characteristics of cyberart is 'the participation in the work of those who experience, interpret, explore, or read it', which does not just amount to their participation in constructing meaning, 'but rather, their coproduction in the actual work' [Lévy, 2001: 116]. (Giannachi, 2004, p. 4)

True coproduction became an aim – beyond simple navigation or the 'construction of meaning' – and this can be seen as much better fulfilled by the

MUD* and MOO* play-spaces of the same era. Born out of basic user-generated text adventures (and operating much like one), and then in the MOO* becoming somewhat visualised, we find something akin to a very early user-authored MMORPG*. At this point it is worth stating that this study sees neither MUDs* MOOs* nor MMORPGs* as theatre, rather that they mark the transformation of literary culture into gaming. But they *were* part of theatre-makers' thoughts at the time, and therefore *are* important in terms of the shift in authorship and the audience. In MUDs* and MOOs* there were story universes created and traversed by users that weren't even initiated by artists, or where *everyone* was a creator. This was not a shift in artistic practice, but in expectations of how audiences themselves wanted to encounter narrative. The audience was experiencing a creative act *between the subject and the subjective other*; the individual was not a receptive or active node among many or a lone navigator-collaborator, but a co-collaborator. Digital culture and the version of authorship it offered the audience liberated them from the artist, and unlocked their relationship to the person next to them: the subjective other.

Closer to notions of theatre (though typically unimaginatively used to simply transfer theatre to cyberspace) was the 'telematic' or 'telepresent' theatre, which reached a height at the very end of the twentieth century. Indeed, as Steve Dixon writes, 'during the years 1999 and 2000, with the sole exception and stage productions using digital projections, *The Digital Performance Archive* recorded more telematically related events than any other form of digital performance' (2007, p. 423). Work that simply took place elsewhere and was fed live to the Internet is of little interest here; it simply replaces the proscenium arch frame with the screen frame. But the attempts at *interactive* online telepresent theatre are interesting when they used IRC*⁵⁵ to gather *instructions* from an audience. Dixon explains that:

[in] this type of interactive network theater, the Spectator's role is changed from passive viewer to interactive participant. But equal significance to the event is the fact that the IRC audience it is not simply engaging in dialogue with the performance, but with each other (2007, p. 508)

⁵⁵ Internet Relay Chat – instant messaging in today's parlance, where users exchange text-based 'chat' messages online in real-time.

Dixon highlights *Chameleons 3: Net Congestion* by The Chameleons Group, a live-scripted event that took its directions straight from the IRC* log. Dixon discusses how people in the chatroom were much more likely to comment on the action, or talk to each other, than attempt to affect the performers. This suggests that the chatroom action was in fact much more immediate and satisfying than making telepresent performers into puppets. It is the *subjective other* that is of interest to the audience member, not the vessel or the representative. Telepresent theatre struggles to offer any innovation in terms of the altering of the relationship between the art work and the audience, more often than not simply replacing one frame with another, and relying too much on the 'live broadcast' being interesting in and of itself. Performers who promise to do whatever they are instructed are normally requested to do the ridiculous or the obscene, this could be seen as the childishness of being given 'no limits' or accountability, but could also be argued to be a search *for* limits; a pushing until the audience member feels a push back. A search, in fact, for the subjective other behind the screen analogue.

CDROM art also bears mention. Though again often succumbing to the supplanting of one stage or frame for another, the form has occasionally been used to interrogate notions of perceived 'freedom' in online spaces. It is easy to forget the militaristic and government interests in a space where one feels like an author. Easy to forget, too, that the presentation, from the choices shown right down to the language it is written in, is *all constructed*. Forced Entertainment's 1988 *Nightwalks* is an example of the CDROM performance format used to reveal a sense of this – and marks a strand of digital performance which exploits the tendency for these experiences to feel uncanny or unsatisfactory (much CDROM art was a photorealistic and usually much less well-funded 'artistic' version of a point and click*⁵⁶ game). *Nightwalks* invites the player into a night-time city. The player is able to

⁵⁶ Point and click games are almost always clue and puzzle based games played in the 3rd person, the story is built through exploration, rather than driven by action, and is therefore much more akin to slower burn literary story forms, as opposed to the fast paced action influence of film. In point and click adventures players are rewarded for curiosity and invention

progress through the streets by clicking to move in certain directions or look around, much like a contemporary Google Earth experience. Each screenview is constructed of a series of photographs which create a wrap-around view of the street where the participant 'stands'. The viewer moves through the frozen photo-view of the city, a world in which someone has hit the 'pause' button: constructed, frozen, captured, and delivered to you on a disc. Giannachi explains that it is the

[...] dream-like quality of the experience, that renders the experience of *Nightwalks* so uncanny. As Adrian Heathfield suggests, '[t]his is a city found after almost all the humanness has gone, remaining only the still figures that haunt the space and the material residues of long-forgotten actions' (2004, p. 36).

The foregrounding of the uncanny is important. It is the re-revelation of the digital media's attempts to satisfy the audience's search for the subjective other, wandering a night-time city, knowing that it is forever dead, haunted by the possibility of others. *Nightwalks* is an interactive story about the limits of digital representation. Giannachi, again:

What's important about the role of the spectator here and the use of space is that the freedom to roam that you are ostensibly given is shown to be prescribed, to be an illusion. Again the spectator meets the limits of representation (2004, pp. 38-9).

As Giannachi suggests, the viewer is reminded that there are edges to the world, as there must be when something is *constructed*. It is a reminder that in any form of representation there is *always an interface*. It also reminds the audience that in the continual node-view of the virtual-digital, one screenview is delivered at a time and where a collection of information portrayed is always formed of same fundamental material (bits, zeros and ones) on which, unless otherwise instructed, no trace of what went before will be remembered. Indeed, as Giannachi writes,

Nightwalks does not allow the viewer to find a narrative other than that which is encoded in the act of viewing itself [...] Just like the 'real' the virtual world of *Nightwalks* is embedded with traces of narratives that escape holistic interpretation (2004, p. 37).

It is when digital and cyberart re-reveals the edges of representation that it is able to unpick the Spectacle of late capitalism from our daily lives, and its infiltration of our manner and expectations of perception.

A final example at the very end of the twentieth century finishes our progression through landmarks of changes in audience/artwork interaction. Blast Theory's 1999 *Desert Rain* was a watershed in terms of interaction in performance. *Desert Rain* constituted 'what in Gabriella Giannachi's words is 'one of the most complex and powerful responses to the first Gulf War to be produced within the sphere of theatrical performance'' (Dixon, 2007, p. 616). The work (importantly to this study) drew on the language of *video games*, to investigate the notion (popular at the time) of the new 'mediated' war – images flooding television screens, web browsers and newspapers. The war was reported closely and vividly in a way that war had not been before, and a war that was carried out by the West mostly remotely – via aircraft. What was the Western experience of the Gulf War? How can and should a Westerner experience and attempt to understand the implications of conflicts carried out in the name of the countries to which they belong? What about the growing popularity of war games set in contemporary times, and the role of the military and government in funding many technological innovations? *Desert Rain* set out to ask these questions. Blast Theory's Matt Adams explains that *Desert Rain* 'attempts to articulate the ways in which the real, the virtual, the fictional and the imaginary have become increasingly entwined' (Giannachi, 2004, p. 116).

In *Desert Rain* participants are invited to interact across several different mediums. In the first instance, after handing over their coats and bags, participants play a video game, where they are invited to seek out a 'target' in a dusty desert region. The screens for the gameplay images are fine sheets of cascading water. The instinct to play to win kicks in and the ambiguous targets (are they to be saved or killed? Does it make a difference to the playing experience?) are sought out by the player. Just as they are located, a performer steps through the sheet of water and proffers the player a swipe card. The

player must then walk through the screen of water. To complete their journey across the space beyond they climb over a mountain of sand, and then find a hotel room where they can place the keycard into a slot to play a piece of video. This video, their 'target' (it is presumed), shows one of several people talking about their experience of Gulf War I. The soldier, the news reporter, the westerner, the Iraqi civilian all talk about their 'real' experience, and often how unreal it felt. Later, on or after leaving, the participant discovers that their bag or coat pocket now contains a bag of sand. One grain, a note explains, for every Gulf War I Iraqi civilian casualty. Only after the event does the casual and faintly annoyed way the participant struggled over the mountain of sand suddenly now seem callous – obscene, even. Giannachi writes that by moving

[...] from one media to another, from the real to the virtual, from the fact to the performed, *Desert Rain* attempted to destabilise the viewer's position continuously, in relation both to the practice of 'conflict' [...] and to that of making theatre, thus inducing the viewer into finally questioning the perceived relationship of real and virtual as well as their own participation in and experience of the piece itself. (2004, p. 116)

Blast Theory's *Desert Rain* is a piece of theatre about recovering the *inbetween*, about the blurring of the interfaces that pervade our contemporary world; it is an early *transmedia* work. The *intermedia* that was the Happening was about the blurring of the boundaries between life (the real) and art (representation). The problem of the late 90s was that it was becoming increasingly impossible to separate the real from the representational at all. In the act of telling one story (or rather, attempting to represent a kind of experience) across several different forms and platforms (*transmedia*) Blast Theory were able to, as Giannachi describes, 'destabilise the viewer's position' (ibid). In doing this, the work was able to create cracks in the surface of the Spectacle, to find a way back to recovering a critical view of the interfaces weaving throughout our world, a route back to an inbetween, in fact.

The use of the video game experience is a comment on the war game trend, but it is also absolutely vital to the success of the piece in making the participant feel implicated. True interaction through the offer of genuine agency means that the work *cannot go on* without the specific and selected actions of the

audience. The content of the experience is decided by their actions; the artists have designed the environments and chosen the frames and the story that will be inhabited, but it is the actions of the audience member themselves which create the filling. This audience aesthetic is then *extended* into the physical world, the screen suddenly becomes a visceral experience of walking through water, the mountain of sand must be traversed. The shock of being asked to move from the virtual to the physical, and then watch a recording of a 'real' person talk about their experience, leaves the participant watching from an inbetween, a contrast of physical experience and remote agency. The audience experience is here interactive and embodied in manner that is vital to the ability of the piece to challenge and explore contemporary being, doing and seeing.

There is no '**text**' in a traditional sense in *Desert Rain*. The **form** of theatre has become transmedia, the **environment** shifts from screen-based, to constructed 'real' environment and then is carried out of the art-space in the pocket of the participant. The **performer** is removed, and the fact that the participant 'plays' a role in searching out a target sites the interface between the **performer and the performed** in the body of the audience member. The **frame of art** is challenged by the inclusion of the 'low' form of video games, the 'realness' of the targets, and the pervasive experience of the sand-in-the-pocket and the very fact that it is an audience-initiated process. Finally the **body of the participant** is made vital, present, challenged. As Giannachi writes:

In interactive art, the difference between the viewer/observer, the environment and the world dissipates [...] Jeffery Shaw argues that '[a] new aesthetics comes to the fore. The art-work is more and more embodied in the interface [...] In this way interactive art is not merely constituted by the object or the viewer, but by the encounter between the two. (2004, p. 27)

The history of interaction and the audience in the twentieth century is one of an attempt to challenge the interface, to inhabit the inbetween. To, come together in the space between 'real' and 're-presentation'; interaction is about (as Giannachi puts it) 'the encounter between the two'. To respond to the increasingly pervasive and complicated message-sending that builds our

culture and communities we have seen the Futurists, Dada and Artaud challenge the interface of 'the text' and expectations of theatrical form. The community theatre of the British Radical Theatre movement understood that *where theatre happened* was important, and audiences should be given bodily agency in order to truly inhabit the problems of the socio-political landscape. The American Avant-Garde's John Cage, Fluxus and Happenings acted to blur the frame of art, and challenge notions of 'performance' and 'environment' further. Finally, the increasing prevalence of digital art and influence of interactive digital culture⁵⁷ solidified notions of co-authorship and audiences playing amongst themselves, as well as with the art/ist. Finally, at the turn of the century there was a form (video games) that could deliver whole new levels of interaction, agency and world-inhabiting, as well as be used as a *language* to augment, challenge and re-presented environments. Interfaces can never be removed, but it is important that they are challenged; this is the heritage upon which first person theatre builds.

First person theatre is an art of the inbetween. It is certainly *still theatre* because it is about, created and held together by the active tensions between 'what is' and 'what if' that is the definition of the play space. That it is able to offer such a powerful experience of the subjective other, of the environment, of the embodied self, and the possibility of agency, of a true dialogue with all of these things – is absolutely fundamental to any art form which wishes to address itself to the contemporary problem of being. We return, at the last, to Cage, who wrote that:

[...] we must arrange our art, we must arrange everything, I believe, so that people realise that they themselves are doing it, and not that something is being done to them. (LaBelle, 2006, p. 16)

⁵⁷ Moving forward into the early 2000s to be influenced by the ultimate experience of ARG* such as *The Beast*, and the resurgence in parlour-game style playing in the first pervasive gaming festivals in 2006 and 2007.

[...] 'theatre' – having been co-opted and institutionalised effectively by a privileged, complacent constituency of society – needs to be both re-situated and sought (or encountered) on the street. (Whybrow, 2011, p. 17)

Chapter 3. First person theatre, sound and the city.

This chapter sets out to address the ‘soundwalk’ form of first person theatre, as a site for resistance for the individual-in-the-urban-environment of contemporary digital technoculture. ‘Soundwalk’ is term used herein to describe a particular sub-genre of audio-based first person work that is typically delivered via headphones (sometimes live broadcast and mixed, sometimes just live broadcast, or sometimes wholly pre-recorded), which places the individual at the centre of the story-experience. The soundwalk might involve instructions, be triggered by GPS or other position data, be delivered to an individual, a pair, or a group, but the ‘walk’ element denotes some form of navigational interactivity (see chapter 5 for a full definition of levels of interactivity). Soundwalks are used to augment the visual reality of the individual participant; they are not solely set in the urban environment, but are particularly considered here in an urban context for their power to represent the city space. For their ability to allow the participant a route to community in-and-with-the-city, to a bracketed encounter with the spaces and situations structured by private interests, and as a route to the personal-as-political in the polis itself. The chapter will begin by engaging more generally with the context of the contemporary digital city, moving on to discuss use of sound, and the act of walking in particular, before finally studying the specific detail of two case studies. The first case study looks at the *Subtle mobs* made by the international arts collective Circumstance, and the other group-based ‘headphone shows’ of Leeds-based theatre company Slung Low. Furthermore, as the practice-as-research for this thesis is formed of three soundwalks, the theories explored herein will also be of great relevance to chapter 6’s discussion of *The Umbrella Project*.

Urban living in the digital age

The individual in the urban environment is set out in chapter 1 as one of three ‘key aspects’ of contemporary being where one might seek sites of resistance against contemporary capitalism. Though of course the urban experience – even when in common – is thoroughly varied, urban living in and of itself is

now the predominant mode of living. This is noted in chapter 1, using the evidence put forward by Nicolas Whybrow in *Art and the City*, which suggests that the year 2007 was the point at which the proportion of the global population living in urban areas began to outweigh the rural (Whybrow, 2011, p. 7). Whybrow goes on to explain that if current trends of migration and population remain steady, by '2030 five billion out of a global population of just over eight billion is projected to be made up of city dwellers' (ibid). Although the experience of (for example) the slums of Mumbai, the 'model' city of Pyong Yang, or the dying retail centres of smaller English cities (where large chains relocate to cheaper outlying areas and footfall becomes tyre tread) might vary widely, the urban environment can currently be described as the predominant mode of living. While it should be stated that the 'urban experience' primarily addressed in this chapter is that of the advanced capitalist western world (the one where the 'digital age' is being most keenly felt), all urban experience can be united by the notion of unprecedented scale – of architecture and proximate humanity. Whybrow quotes Pearson and Shanks' assertion that it is now 'the urban, the congregation of strangers, which defines our contemporary situation' (2010, p. 1), but there is an unease felt by the individual among this great congregation of strangers, an unease that Tim Etchells writes about in *Eight Fragments on the City*:

There are these strange intimacies in the city – those moments on the escalator, those others in the lift, in the subway, or those moments when, stopping at the traffic lights, we glance to the car opposite and are close enough to speak, even touch. The fascination of these moments is simple – that our machines have brought us together and held us apart. (2010, p. 38)

Etchells is describing a sense of atomisation and separation that suffuses the contemporary (western technologised) urban experience; his 'strange intimacies' speak to a confusion of scale, where a humane encounter is surprising. The 'machines' Etchells talks about build the city but alienate its citizens from one another. In this context there is a feeling that the contemporary urban experience is almost violently vast – on a level that is beyond the grasp of the individual subject, resulting in 'strange' incomplete meetings – missed intimacy. This is connected to how the urban environment is built; much of it driven and shaped by the private interests of capitalism and

in that way is founded on a principle of alienation. David Harvey, in *Rebel Cities*, describes cities as a manner of bringing together workforces in the industrial era and now, in the context of contemporary capitalism, explains that capitalism needs:

[...] urbanization to absorb the surplus products it perpetually produces. In this way an inner connection emerges between the development of capitalism and urbanization. Hardly surprisingly, therefore, the logistical curves of growth of capitalist output over time are broadly paralleled by the logistical curves of urbanization of the world's population. (2012, p. 5)

McLuhan observes in *Understanding Media* how the past technologies of the industrial mechanical age were fundamentally fragmentary and centralist – these are the notions observed by Etchells – pulled apart by the technology of lifestyles sold to satisfy the surplus that the people have been brought together to produce. The capitalist-driven urban environment of the mechanical age that Harvey picks up on is therefore one of increasing alienation, first of the worker from their product, and then (in line with the SI's Spectacle of late capitalism) of the individual from their leisure time. In the context of the Spectacle, desires are degraded into 'needs' (Marcis, 2004, p. 8), pleasures are subsumed by 'lifestyles', and the radical inbetween of the city – the streets which are the spaces between work, between private property and commerce – are degraded into a transaction in time and space, a sum, a *product*. This urban experience is less and less a meeting place, and instead a place of passing through, something Ian Buchanan and Gregg Lambert term in *Deleuze and Space* 'a new generation of spaces that do not confer the sense of feeling of being in a place, [...] frictionless passageways designed as conduits or simply so vast or alien they have lost contact with human proportion' (2005, p. 7).

From the mechanical technology of the automobile which precipitated a move away from a pace and place at and in which one is able to encounter the other, to the 'distracted state of the mobile phone user [that] precludes any possibility of *immanent* social interaction' (Whybrow, 2011, p. 65), the scale and technology of the (western, developed-world) city evicts the individual from the 'there' of 'there-being', producing a kind of 'homelessness' previously highlighted in chapter 1 (Arendt, 2002, p. 346).

Devoid of the 'there' of 'there-being', torn from a 'functional context' (ibid), the contemporary citizen is unable to identify themselves as implicated in a system. The interface between the Spectacle and the spectator that is formed (in the city) by situations (places in time and space) controlled by private interests is vanished. Unable to discover their limits through an encounter with the urban context (with the strangers of which the city is made), the potentially manipulative interface is made invisible, and is replaced with a sense of benign 'passing through'. This is a corruption of the radical potential of the inbetween of public space; in the removal of the meeting place of the inbetween the subject is refused connection with the subjective other, and the politics of community are occluded. The urban, then, is the dominant mode of existing, as well as a dominant mode of potential exploitation by the messages of late capitalism. It is for these reasons that the individual in the urban environment is set out herein as one of three 'key aspects' of contemporary being. Firstly that it is increasingly the experience of the majority; secondly that it is a site of occupation and shaping by the Spectacle of late capitalism (and technology to those ends); and thirdly that it is a place where the personal-as-political might (still) come into play – the city is fundamentally an *inbetween*, and public space is a manner and point of encounter with the other.

The task then becomes to reconcile the experience of the city with human proportion – to bring forward the discussion of community from the introduction – it is in the impossible communion of the self and the subjective other than the human discovers their finitude. In this moment community arises, and so too does a scale – a functional context. Out of a beginning and an end, a middle is visible, inhabitable – there lies community, and there too a manner of reconciling the individual with human proportion – there is, to continue with the language of Nancy and Blanchot, an impossible communion of 'being' with 'here'. The community to be found in the city de-limits both, and re-reveals how one makes the other. In the limit one discovers how one is connected to, and fundamentally separate from, the city (and the private interests that seek to shape the citizen through it). A personal-as-political

practice in the city must therefore discover a route to the other in the city, and the other *of the city itself*.

The route to the encounter with the other in the city is also a route to the radical *inbetween* of shared space. The streets have long been a place of gathering, an *inbetween* that has the potential to belong to no one – a place of action, change and agency, a political place, in fact. Enframed by the radicalism of the *inbetween*, the contemporary citizen in urban space can meet the other, and rediscover in that encounter their finitude, the edges of themselves, and their implication in larger socio-political structures; the places where ‘bodies make cities and cities make bodies’ (Whybrow, 2011, p. 8).

In this return to their functional context the contemporary individual is politically empowered, able to reflect on the systems in which they are implicated, which is the first step to taking agency over them (thereby approaching political empowerment). The scale of the urban experience is only insurmountable when the subject is alone; one is only homeless when one cannot site oneself. In the contemporary city of the ‘global village’ and the ‘near and far’, the site cannot be one of concrete space, and so it must be found in the vicissitudes of the impossible community of subject and subjective other.

So, what of the task of the personal-as-political in the urban space of this ‘global village’, the ‘near and far’ of the digital age? In the digital age, pervasive technology* and ubiquitous computing makes the *inbetween* even harder to access. As technology extends into human bodies, and individuals project their selves outwards (as McLuhan suggests), it does the same for the city, which reaches into individuals. And so as the human and the city begin to trade in the same immaterial ‘stuff’ (that is digital data, information) the city and the body of the individual are increasingly intertwined. In the context of an ‘information age’ the problem of the individual as consumer becomes individual-to-be-consumed – the new battleground is the Spectacle of the quantified self. The *inbetween* vanishes. Henri Lefebvre, here quoted by Whybrow in *Art and the City*, describes how:

[...] a neo-capitalist organisation of urban space 'no longer gathers people and things, but data and knowledge. It inscribes in an eminently elaborated form of simultaneity the conception of the whole incorporated into an electronic brain, using the quasi-instantaneity of communications' (1996: 170) (2011, p. 20)

To follow McLuhan, previously mechanical and industrial technologies were centralist and divisive, they brought people together, whilst keeping them apart. The new electronic technologies are decentralist and integral (McLuhan, 1964, p. 8) – that is, they are characterised by a disruption of the *near and far*. They pervade and *personalise* data harvesting and application, and as such message-sending mediums now pervade bodies, not just space. Ubiquitous computing and pervasive technology* is, as William J. Mitchell explains in *Soft Cities* (here quoted in Brandon LaBelle's *Performance, Technology & Science*), challenging 'the very idea of a city':

'Transurbanism' can be described as a shift away from the material city to the immaterial flow of information, from traditional views of location to the greater 'flows' of globalization. 'In a world of ubiquitous computation and telecommunication, electronically augmented bodies, postinfobahn architecture, and big-time bit business, the very idea of a city is challenged and must eventually be reconceived.' (2006, p. 258)

This 'transurbanism' is the new reality of contemporary urban living. Mobile networked technology in particular has played key role in developing the characteristics of transurbanism which directly parallel the significant shifts in the 'digital age' as set out in chapter 1; the age of the near and far, the end of the age of broadcast, personalisation and the vanishing of the interface. This (networked) pervasive technology* instils the simultaneous **near and far** in daily lives; in being continually connected and able to send and receive data, the conversational (as opposed to **broadcast**) manner of media communication is constantly enabled. The companion device is deeply customisable, and reacts to the data it gathers from its owner (by opt-in or opt-out methods) enabling greater and better-informed levels of **personalisation**. The technology that travels as part of a contemporary individual almost constantly means that the notion of the technology as an **interface begins to vanish** – it is not a conscious act, a mirror, but rather window technology that enables digital technology to *pervade*. Pervasive

technology* does not produce a virtual world, but rather an augmented version of the real in which the contemporary individual is embedded. And so pervasive technology* is a message-sending medium that extends itself both into the self and out into the world (here, city), but *also* beyond, into a new field of data-networked space. This digital field is what introduces *transurbanism* to the citizen; an additional field of existence that pervades both city and citizen, and which plays a large role in a new sense of unease – predicted by McLuhan. A sense of unease uncovered when the extension of our selves into our technology thrusts us into a ‘global village’; an even wider scale without functional context. As digital technology becomes increasingly connected and pervasive, the self is torn between the hyperlocal (the personalised) and the globally networked. The individual, stretched and exposed, is required to numb themselves against the implications of that ‘global village’.

Consider the contemporary headphone wearer walking through the city or sitting on public transport; this ubiquitous figure is creating their own private *functional context*. Michael Bull (quoted in a study into headphone use and privacy in public space by Fan Ho Ki) explains how ‘The use of a personal stereo ‘drowns out’ geographical space and places her [...] ‘into a room of her own’ by ‘closing her ears and shutting her eyes’ to the space occupied but not inhabited’ (2007). It is not the silence that the headphone wearer protects against, it is the noise (the data out-of-context that threatens to overwhelm the individual in the city) that forces them to encounter the implications of the near interrupted by the far of the ‘global village’. The headphone wearer creates only a ‘far’, and is able to evade the ‘near’ noise of the city. However, this is a vanishing of the interface, of the inbetween of individual and communion with the other and the city. The individual cannot discover his or her own finitude, and thus the Spectacle erases the impossibility of a divide – an inbetween of this new field – maintaining the erasure of the old. Also erased is the political agency found in the opportunity to discover, reflect on, and take action within the functional context of the city and community.

This is the transfer of the site of occupation from the 'exterior screens of simulation to the interior body of the material subject' (Causey p.179) – the shift of the site of occupation from the presentation to the *act of perception*. As set out in chapter 1, the Spectacle is the corruption of the data of the inbetween – the spaces between work in order to seal capital's power over production and consumerism. The digital Spectacle is the deeper still corruption of the inbetween – and it is this that vanishes the interface of city and citizen. This corruption not only disables the political power of city space, but also obstructs the possibility of the act of reconciled perception that is a route to that political power. For example, Whybrow talks of mobile phones and CCTV as illustrations of how 'technology has 'selfishly' redirected, if not stolen, the attentive, responsible, even antagonistic, gaze in public space' (2011, p. 65). Likewise Brandon Labelle draws attention to this notion of the 'selfishly' redirected gaze and voice:

Mobile phones [...] create public monologues, half-conversations announced and hidden in the technologized instant of connection whose process makes strange the voice inside the public domain. (2006, p. 268)

What both of these examples find 'selfish' is the exclusivity of understanding. The people around the mobile phone user are denied the context of the conversation of which they can only hear half, and thus all it can ever be is *noise*.

It is the context, the situation, the *inbetween* that the contemporary citizen needs to rediscover, in order to reconcile their being with here, in the context of the other. But in the digital age this cannot be a return to an older context that just consists of being solely *here* and *now*, to do so is blame the tool, rather than its use (and is to fail to address the changes that are happening to being in the digital age, whether or not an individual wishes to 'opt out'). Instead, one might seek new practices which engage with the near and far of the transurban experience. Practices which re-reveal the interfaces and reconcile the self to the situation – the individual in and of the urban networked environment – in order to quell the pain of implication of the electric age, where, according to McLuhan 'we wear all mankind as our skin' (1964, p. 47). The alternative is the

hyper-personalised space of the internet troll, the ultimate postmodernist, who gleefully ‘plays with the pieces’ and has not so much lost the sense of the other, but rather of self, of their finitude, or functional context (Plant, 1992, p. 154).

Political empowerment in a transurban context, then, requires a route to a renewed perception of our extended selves (and the message-sending in *both directions*) in order to guard against corruption and take non-corrupt action. By working at the site of the perceiving subject, first person theatre seeks a hyperreal *as a construct* of the participant, one which travels in the opposite direction to the hyperreal of the Spectacle, re-situating (instead) eventhood in bodily being-here, *now*, and *with others*. It is also able to re-reveal the illegible violence of the spectacular, diffuse media. The soundwalk operates across the transurban experience, from the use of headphones, the co-option of the form of the flashmob (see the Subtle mob), to (in the case of *The Umbrella Project*) reconciling a ‘near’ of the individual to the ‘far’ voice of the other-in-the-city (what’s more in an audio-space that normally removes the other). First person theatre in the city is able to re-present embeddedness in the Spectacle through the pervasive technologies through which this embeddedness is enacted. Through corrupting the data flow of reality inside the frame of art, perception is heightened while it is embedded in a functional context; a *situation*, rather than a passageway, is created. In inhabiting the re-present inbetween of ‘what is’ and ‘what if’ in the city, a way of seeing is provided⁵⁸ – a key for decrypting the real is discovered at the site of occupation, and the material subject is rediscovered as a site of resistance. The soundwalk provides a route back to the ‘radical ambiguity’ – the hot inbetween – of both the streets and the technology that connects us like never before.

Two political modes can therefore be set out in how first person theatre might engage with the problems of the contemporary citizen; to disrupt the infiltration of the Spectacle (re-reveal the truth of being) and to empower the

⁵⁸ One could call this (in terms of McLuhan) ‘field awareness’ – a new level of perception that might reconcile the individual with the implications of the transurban.

individual to take control of these spaces, both physical and digital. This requires a re-revealing of the technology, or technologised aesthetics, that pervade public spaces, *in* those public spaces. And importantly, to do so *in practice*, as the city is not a rule set, but a game in constant play, a community that will never 'achieve itself' (Watt, 2009, p. 93). In augmenting the city with sound, the soundwalk enables a renewal of perception at the point of potential occupation – the interior body of the material subject (Causey, 2006, p. 179). The soundwalk, takes the enframing aspect of art and applies it to the embedded quality of pervasive technology*, creating a hyperreal that the subject takes *active part in creating*. As set out in chapter 1, this begins to resituate the event in the bodily experience of the subject, re-revealing the illegible violence of the Spectacle (which destroys the social by making the media the event), and embedding them in a functional context. This functional context is a being-there written with the body of the individual and the subjective other in the space of the city.

The radical act in the city: walking.

The ultimate practice of the material inbetween, indeed, the ultimate route to one's functional context in the city, has been set out by several theorists as the act of walking. From the *dérive* of the SI, to Benjamin's Flâneur and de Certeau's Wandersmänner, these practices allow the citizen (in sound-artist Graeme Miller's words) 'a chance to name places and make contact with each other'. Miller, quoted in Carl Lavery's article on the 'Politics of [Miller's work] Linked', goes on to explain how:

[...] humans need to mark their lives against a real space and other people. When they cease to walk, the real spaces become less plausible than the centralized reality of the media and are increasingly witnessed as a passing blur from a car window. They become abandoned, the haunts of the disturbed. (2010, p. 153)

The SI (introduced as a theoretical lens in chapter 1) described the Spectacle as a 'social relationship between people, mediated by images' (Marcis, 2004, p. 9). To disrupt these images one must seek an unmediated encounter with other people. This is what Miller writes about; walking is the movement least

mediated and most able to encounter the other.⁵⁹ And to these ends, the SI presented the practice of the *dérive* – a kind of ‘drift’ that invited the practitioner to open themselves to the affecting flows and energies of the city. The SI sought to re-reveal the ‘what-if’ of city space, they talked of increasing the share of the city for ‘those who cannot be called actors but, in a new meaning of the term, ‘livers,” (Debord, [1957] 2004, p. 47) – a practice that rediscovered the actor (‘what if’ held within the ‘what is’) over the ‘enactor’ of the Spectacle (the ‘what if’ degraded into ‘what is’). The SI particularly emphasised play and the unproductive movement of the *dérive* as a manner of discovering what might be termed the radical *unwork* of the inbetween – that which opposes the enacted life-style of the Spectacle, and provides a space for ‘what if’ through an embedded and embodied re-presentation of urban experience.

Through the construction of situations as intentional acts, the SI set out to uncover how urban space makes one *feel* – how space is part of an individual’s context – in order that the individual might be able to resist or re-construct it. This psychogeographical practice has at its heart the intention of un-covering contemporary capitalism’s mediation of the citizen’s physical and psychological daily existence. The Situationist practice also took playful and artistic techniques out into the city, arguing for the end of the ‘sanctioned’ arts space or practitioner. Indeed, the move out of the sanctioned arts space is not to be underestimated, not least because it means that the arts are able to tackle the embedded Spectacle in-situ. It also removes the arts from being a ‘work’ in and of themselves. The SI offered art practiced or experienced, as opposed to exhibited, and crucially *by all*. And so the playful activities of the *détournement* (playful re-presentation or disruption of media images) or the *dérive* – were forms that could and should be approached by anyone. Lavery, again, this time in an article on the SI, describes how Debord argued that:

Art that has renounced the page, stage, and gallery has the potential to be a revolutionary practice, [...] because, in an age of abundance, cultural

⁵⁹ Walking is here used to discuss a particular pace, a pace that enables original human encounters. The use of this word is problematized in the context of people with mobility issues, but is used for want of a better term.

production is more important than economic production. In a post-industrial, service economy, the crucial nettle is for the mind of the masses (2010, p. 163)

The *walking* practices of the soundwalk place the individual at the heart of the world-constituting process; the body of the participant moves through the streets as they move through the narrative – and the act of perception in the ‘mind of the masses’ is foregrounded. The sound experience asks their body to write their experience with its actions. The joining together of the representing power of art with the un-covering act of walking without pre-known purpose – all within the context of urban space – forms a powerful psychogeographical tool. The soundwalk could be seen to be a psychogeography of perception in and of city, technology and body. Likewise the augmenting of message-sending in the city with a new self-constructed message is a *détournement* of the world of the Spectacle (and bodily experience of it) itself. In an age of embeddedness one requires a psychogeography of the subject in the city.

The *dérive* allowed the practitioner an access to the radical inbetween of city space, and was tracing a history of walking in the city as a manner of representing it. Benjamin’s *flâneur* is a notable earlier example, which went in search of the same empty subject alive to the vicissitudes of the city. Benjamin, in *The Arcades Project* (a reaction to the organisation of space towards the end of the industrial era), describes Paris, for the *flâneur*, as a ‘landscape’ or, [...] ‘more precisely: the city splits for him into its dialectical poles. It opens up to him as a landscape, even as it closes around him as a room’ (1999, p. 417). The *flâneur* is a wanderer of the *inbetween*. Though the *flâneur* has been criticised in the context of the more politically intended acts of the SI that followed as too ‘ironically detached’ (Whybrow, 2011, p. 15), this study considers the *flâneur* as directed at a manner of understanding of the city deeper than that of the *dérive*. The traces of the *flâneur* are freer (through not being set in a purposeful *opposition* to certain construction of the city). It is a different route to re-revelation; rather than a wading upstream in order feel the force of the water, the *flâneur* floats downstream, starting from a manner of understanding, rather than opposition. Benjamin explains that:

[...] in the course of flânerie, far-off times and places interpenetrate the landscape and the present moment. When the authentically intoxicated phase of this condition announces itself, the blood is pounding in the veins of the happy flâneur, his heart ticks like a clock (Benjamin, 1999, p. 419).

This language of 'intoxication' is useful. There is a deeper sense of history and time to be found in the figure 'intoxicated' by the city. The flâneur empties themselves, and so can be filled by the liquor of experience. The flâneur gives themselves over to a dream city, a place where 'far-off times and places interpenetrate'. In that manner, Benjamin suggests, one is able to:

[...] walk out your front door as if you've just arrived from a foreign country; to discover the world in which you already live; to begin the day as if you've just gotten off the boat from Singapore and have never seen your own doormat or the people on the landing... —it is this that reveals the humanity before you, unknown until now. (1999, p. 427)

It is, in a way, in the moment of waking from the dreamcity – the simultaneous 'what is' and 'what if' – that the flâneur seeks 'humanity' (we might say, community), in the encounter of the pre-known for the individual who has set themselves adrift from pre-knowledge. This paddling in the 'near and far' of space and time can be drawn into the context of the technological 'near and far' of the digital age. The soundwalk is able to conjure this same space between the 'what is' and 'what was' of a city, to re-reveal the traces of other wanderers, the hands that construct the cultural and social object of the city itself. *The Umbrella Project Soundwalk 3, Commute*, for example, follows the traces of the other through the city. *Commute* asks the walker to inhabit the footfalls of people of other ages, from other stories; it visualises the traces across a city as fine gossamer thread, and in inviting the participant to physically leave a trace for another to discover makes solid the 'what if' of the subjective other as potential discoverer. Where the *dérive* offers a psychogeography of the near, Benjamin adds the 'far' into the equation. And finally – in the expression of the city not just as space, but one built with and of the other – de Certeau perhaps comes closest of the three walking-characters mentioned in this chapter (flâneur, *dérive*, wandersmänner) to a true functional context, to the inoperable community in urban space. The other two practices inhabit the inbetween and find little to tie one to the reality of the

subjective other. In the 1988 *Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau discovers an inoperable inhabitation of the city that opens the inbetween of urban space as a place created by the self with the subjective other. Talking in the language of lovers (the same imagery Blanchot employed in his discussion of community) de Certeau discusses the impossibility of understanding the city in any way other than as a shared practice:

The ordinary practitioners of the city live 'down below,' below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk – an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it. These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other's arms. The paths that correspond in this intertwining, unrecognized poems in which each body is an element signed by many others, elude legibility. It is as though the practices organizing a bustling city were characterized by their blindness. The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other. (1988, p. 93)

This is a truly embodied experience, the wandersmänner is embroiled in a functional context, and it is the functional context of the *other*. The Spectacle relies on delivering images, but the reactive image can never truly rival the impossible community – destroyed and remade every moment it is practiced. With the wandersmänner we find the true inbetween of the act of walking, and the notion that through the act of walking in the city the subject connects with the subjective other to form a whole. An illegible, inoperable community of a city, not one defined by boundaries, or one that 'produces' anything other than itself. Again, there is a similarity in language to that of Blanchot and Nancy as the literary metaphor of 'illegibility' reoccurs. In the context of the digital age de Certeau's vision of the wandersmänner offers a level of experience (of inscription) that resists the map view, the 'far' of technology removed from the context of the 'near' (Google street view, GPS, and CCTV). The soundwalk, in presenting a whole to be navigated and activated by the movement of the individual reconciles the 'far' of pervasive technology* with the 'near' of lived experience; one is both risen through the frame of art, invited to perceive a whole and also offered an embedded, holistic experience, a vision of 'what if'

woven from the fabric of 'what is'. In the context of de Certeau, Lavery writes that to:

[...] get to grips with everyday life, we have to be a part of it, to experience it, engage with it. Walking permits this type of embodied knowledge, this form of concrete participation, because it compels the walker to be physically present in the space s/he observes' (2010, p. 153)

Walking is a political act. To actively inhabit the city, one must discover the inbetween – of the city and subject, and the city as interface with the subjective other – and to discover this the experience must be encountered through the encounter of the body (the ultimate near) and the limit of the other (the far). The soundwalk re-presents our selves as part of a constant material inscription on and with the bodies of our selves and others. This means that the city becomes the inbetween of the 'what is' (self) and 'what if' (other), a place where reflection and bodily action can occur, a place, in short, where the political comes into play.

Phenomenologically speaking, the soundwalk is the re-placing of the individual at the fulcrum of world constitution, in the inbetween where 'what is' teeters towards 'what if'. The return of the perceiving embodied subject to the *act* of perception returns the individual to uncorrupted data of existence. The art experience embedded in the city brackets the city experience and allows one to examine it *in practice*, through the fundamental interface of the body. Additionally, Heidegger's 'deep history' of language is recalled by the 'dream city' of Slung Low's work and *The Umbrella Project*. Both offer an uncovering of the city that provides a mode of disclosure – not of the city-object, but of the manner of construction of meaning and space in the urban environment. Timothy Clark sets out Heidegger's 'deep history' as being concerned with:

[...] the trace of what (a) was not explicitly thought, but was precisely 'unthought'; and (b) which could never have been present as an *object* of thought, for what is 'unthought' was never an entity *in* the world, but is precisely the holistic all pervading world and context out of which particular things emerged. (2002, p. 77)

The city is a cultural process like language, one that through its illegible tracings is 'unthought' – but one that also has a 'deep history', a functional

context built of past inhabitants and situations. This 'deep history' is uncovered by the 'dreamcity'⁶⁰ where that which is un-thought (the context of past histories, people and constructions of space out of which current meaning and situation emerge) rises to the surface. This practice also un-conceals the self in the city via the dialectics of the 'other' to found in the dreamcity. Consider Merleau-Ponty's notion of the cultural object as an encounter with the subjective other:

In the cultural object, I feel the close presence of others beneath a veil of anonymity. [...] it is through the perception of a human act and another person that the perception of a cultural world could be verified. (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 2002, p. 405)

If as Merleau-Ponty goes on to suggest, the body is the ultimate cultural object (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 406), and we understand that cities are built by bodies (Whybrow, 2011, p. 8), then the cultural object of the dreamcity must re-reveal the subjective other. This is politically powerful in the terms of the 'political' found in community, a form of politics that 'comes into play' discovered in the impossible communion of self and other. The inoperable inbetween of the 'what is' and 'what if' of self and other, city and dreamcity, is constantly reflexive, in flux, as they de-limit and contextualise one another. Indeed, as Merleau-Ponty sets out in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, the

[...] revolutionary project is not the result of a deliberate judgement, or the explicit positing of an end. It is these things in the case of the propagandist, [...] it does not cease to be the abstract decision of a thinker and become a historical reality until it is worked out in the dealings men have with each other [...] (2002, pp. 517-8)

In its radical ambiguity the practice of walking in the soundwalk is able to resist the powers of the propaganda (images) of the Spectacle, as well as approach the unwork of the community of the subject and the subject other, providing the transurban inhabitant with access to a functional context built *using* the 'far' of technology, in the 'near' of being-here.

⁶⁰ Steve Pile in *Performance and the City* even likens the city to a dream 'because they are never simply works of the mind or of chance, and also because they embody paradoxical and ambivalent elements' (2010, p. 52).

The radical act in the city: listening.

As well as the active, embedded embodiment the soundwalk offers, it also uses the ultimate medium of the inbetween – sound – to augment the experience of the participant. As Frances Dyson suggests in *Sounding New Media*, the medium of sound can offer a fundamental return to subjectivity – to a functional context:

Three-dimensional, interactive, and synthetic, perceived in the here and now of an embodied space, *sound returns to the listener the very same qualities that media mediates*: that feeling of being here now, of experiencing oneself as engulfed, enveloped, absorbed, enmeshed, in short, immersed in an environment. (2009, p. 4) [My emphasis.]

This is a powerful point in the context of the personal-as-political sought in urban space. As Dyson suggests, the ability of sound to augment, as opposed to *simulate* an environment, embraces (as Andy Field phrased it in one of a series of blog posts for the British Council) the ‘total impossibility of getting away from the world around us’ (2010) – the fact that we are both in and of the world. Sound is pervasive, but *spatially* so; it is shaped by the spaces in which it moves, and in being re-created in certain ways (for example, binaural* recording equipment⁶¹ used in Lundhal and Seidl’s *The Symphony of a Missing Room* completely and utterly simulated the sound of someone approaching you from behind across a forest floor) can *shape the perception of space* in return. As Brandon LaBelle explains in *Performance, Technology & Science*, headphone listening situates ‘listeners inside the actual *and* the virtual, the live and the recorded, thereby leading them through a labyrinth of information and its ultimate lack of cohesion’ (2006, p. 225). At the same time as appearing immaterial, sound can confuse human perception of material space and action, and thus it can re-present the potential of the ‘experience error’ in the act of perception, and crucially, do so in the *context* of a transurban experience. The sound in a soundwalk is able to play with the near and the far, and, in showing both as construct, return the participant to an embodied understanding of

⁶¹ Binaural audio uses a recording technique which, when recording, uses microphones in each ear of a ‘stand-in’ head – this could be an actual person, or an accurate (in terms of density, scale, etc.) mannequin. The stand-in head interrupts the noises picked up by each mic in the same way the head of a listener would experience them in each ear, producing a sound which is uncannily spatially realistic.

active perception. LaBelle goes on to discuss a piece of work by Janet Cardiff, describing the effect of a *disjunction* in sound and vision:

I'm on a street that is no longer confined to visual referent; time is agitated through the overlapping and intersecting of different presences, and my understanding of where I am, what I'm doing, and where I'm going is given a jolt, making uneasy my sense of location--and, more important, as to what or whom to trust. (2006, p. 226)

This unease is enframing; it provides a route to the dreamcity (where significance shifts, and time and space twist) as a radical inbetween. Sound is able to return active eventhood to the embodied subject in a functional context – whereas the media of the Spectacle seamlessly mediates the event (to combine Dyson with Baudrillard), sound is able to return the event to the re-aware act of perception of the participant. In urban space the headphone may more typically be used to create space *separate* from a shared functional context, but in the soundwalk it is recouped, in the disjunction (the augmentation of 'what is' with the 'what if') an inbetween emerges, is inhabited. LaBelle, again:

[Sound] teaches us that space is more than its apparent materiality, that knowledge is festive, alive as a chorus of voices, and that to produce and receive sound is to be involved in connections that make privacy intensely public, and public experience distinctly personal (2006, p. ix)

Sound, in its ability to both conjure space and pervade it, is the ultimate encapsulation of the near and far, the private and public. It is the impossible communion of body and space, and as such finds a backdoor to the finitude of the subject. What's more, in a world of the 'selfishly directed' ear, active listening – allowing oneself to be open to the potential pain of the near and far riddled transurban experience – is a political act. It encourages a 'sensitive ear' – the soundwalk participant does not only re-see the space around them, but re-hears it, too. To reference LaBelle once more, sound can 'uncover a range of possibilities in which truth shifts from the environmental to the political'. As sound pervades boundaries, plays with time, space and perception, public and private and near and far, the act of listening sounds out the politics of urban space. It is, in phenomenological terms, an un-covering medium. LaBelle continues:

To hear 'many places at once as one rather than many' is to piece together multiple threads of information, assembling narrative out of disparate elements, lending significance to the relational and associative connective found between the many. Inclusive listening, from this perspective, may charge the environment not only with the sensitive ear that while identifying harmonious possibility may also eavesdrop on forces operating against it. (2006, p. 159)

In this manner, these acts of bodily augmenting the city can play a large part in reclaiming the city from the messages of the Spectacle.

Both of the following case studies find routes through soundwalks to this transurban personal-as-political. Slung Low's headphone shows reconcile the being-here and being-with-the-other within the scale of urban experience through the journey into the deep history of the dreamcity. Conversely, the *Subtle mobs* of Circumstance invite the participant to inhabit and re-present the self as site, as situation; through the use of a poeticisation of the everyday, the dream self is placed in the city, and the hidden community.

Slung Low – the dreamcity

Slung Low is a theatre company based in Holbeck, Leeds. They have been making work for 10 years and were formed out of a collaboration between a large group of Leeds-based performers and theatre-makers that eventually became a smaller core group. They have existed in their current form (with interviewee Alan Lane as Artistic Director) since approximately 2004. Early notable works include *They Only Come Out at Night*, a piece of pervasive horror theatre first performed in 2007; and *Helium*, an Oxford Samuel Beckett Award commission that took place in the Barbican in 2008 (Slung Low). Since *Helium* in 2008, Slung Low's larger productions have almost exclusively worked with sound delivered via headphones. Lane describes their work as 'theatre shows in unusual spaces' (2012, p. 284).

In their most recent work Slung Low have tended to deal with live sound, mixing and broadcasting reactive sound experiences to an audience as they follow performers around an installation or city-space. This study will focus on

the 2011 piece in Hull *Mapping the City*⁶², as well as touching on 2010's *Anthology*⁶³, produced in conjunction with the Liverpool Everyman. Slung Low will be used to particularly consider the more theatrical end of headphone-work, the theatricalisation of the everyday through the application of sound and performance. Likewise, it will focus on their interest in the ability of sound and performance to disrupt sense of time in place, and the company's constant focus on the *now* of *here*, and layers of time, space, history and community in the city. Finally, Slung Low's work will be considered in a political *re-revelatory* context; from their resistance to the broadcast model of culture⁶⁴ and sense of returning to older forms of theatre-making and delivery (such as Mystery Plays) *through* technology, to their urge to 'transport our audience to new places and to make them see familiar places from new perspectives' (Slung Low).

Slung Low are here used as an example of the more firmly 'theatre' end of sound-performance. Both *Mapping the City* and *Anthology* make use of live performers, and live-broadcast and mixed audio. Lane is eager to establish that the work that Slung Low make is very much 'theatre'. Also it is not, as he terms it, 'interactive'⁶⁵, or driven by game mechanics:

[...] it's not a game. We don't make games, we make something that – we make theatre that looks like it might be a bit of a game, [...] I don't think it's interactive, I think it quite often uses the tropes of interactivity (2012, p. 290)

⁶² *Mapping the City* was a three-hour journey through the centre of Hull, three stories set in three separate times, delivered over live audio (mic'd performers and mixed recorded music) – props, characters and extras from all of the different times and spaces littered the streets, and the participants were threaded through, under, and between the fabric of each story, walking, travelling on buses past brief and enormous projections onto half demolished buildings, standing in warehouses, watching people jump from buildings, being put in taxis, watching a lifeboat speed into the distance, and turning to see 50 people holding a lit lantern in the darkness.

⁶³ *Anthology* was seven more separate (i.e. not intertwining) hour-long stories for 7 groups of audiences played out in separate streets in Liverpool, and inspired by the city – each visit to the show would lead you on one of the stories, which were again formed of a listening audience following mic'd performers, and live mixed in pre-recorded scores.

³¹ 'Shows that re-examine how audiences go and see a piece of theatre' (Slung Low).

⁶⁵ Though it does fit into the 'navigational' level of interaction set out in chapter 4.

Lane calls these works 'headphone shows' – and are characterised by reasonably traditional theatrical storytelling, shifted in terms of the setting and frame (site and method of delivery). It is the headphones that make the difference, which allow the company's work to pervade time and space through the re-present 'live' context of theatre in a way that heightens that experience. Slung Low can be seen to use the otherwise divisive form of the headphone to re-connect the participant to the *site*, particularly to the history and significance of being *of* as well as *in* space. As Deborah Pearson of Forest Fringe suggested in an interview for this study on interactive and intimate work,

[...] *all* theatre is site-specific [...] the site is a part of the audience's experience [...] spaces aren't empty, they're full, they're very full of history, and where the space is, is not empty, where the space is, is important, is part of the context of the audience's experience. (Pearson, 2012, p. 413)

Slung Low's work is site-responsive. Lane does not claim that the content talks about site itself, but the works of *Anthology* and *Mapping the City* are worked up through a close investigation of local history and engagement with the cities and communities of Hull and Liverpool. Slung Low do respond to the thickness of the city's existence, or, as Pearson above suggests, the 'fullness' of space. It is furthermore important that this is happening through an item of pervasive technology* – the headphone.

Slung Low's use of the headphone is significant – Lane stresses that there is practical significance in the manner of being able to uniquely hold the attention of an audience, and when in open spaces to deliver the lines of the performers clearly and within a controlled construct (mixed with sound effects and music) (Lane, 2012). But there is also significance in the use of the increasingly pervasive cultural platform of private listening. Slung Low's use of headphones as a live delivery mechanism for heavily-sited performance forms a reconciliation with functional context through a piece of technology that so often serves to distance the individual from it. Headphones have been set out earlier in this chapter as a potentially selfish re-direction of listening. However, their ability to augment reality thus is also key to their theatrical

possibility and disruptive capability, precisely because it is a mode through which people already (in Etchell's terms) 'move in and speak through' (1999, p. 96). This audio-based augmented reality is described by Lane as 'Magic Realism', in the interview for this study he described this as

That idea of *what is there* and extrapolating that out into *what if*, that's my definition of magic realism. [...] that idea of 'the world's amazing' – recognise it, really scrutinise it, and follow it. (2012, p. 294)

Lane is directly referencing Tassos Stevens of Coney's notions of the *what is* and *what if* of games, play, and art (introduced in this specific usage in detail in chapter 5 p.196). *Magic Realism* then, is not referenced in terms of its typical definition, but taken to mean that space between the *what is* and the *what if* that Slung Low's headphone shows are particularly able to conjure. This has both phenomenological and political relevance; firstly, Lane connects the headphone-show format directly to the phenomenological notion of re-revelation. The ability of headphones to re-make (augment) every day space (and thus life) with a story which is strongly reactive to its spatial context connects the listener-participant to the space around them, and their being both *in* and *of* it. In *Mapping the City* the littering of the streets of Hull with objects and people that at one time seem merely part of the fabric of the city and then are later revealed to be of story-significance, causes the listener-participant to be hyper-aware of their surrounds, actively *looking for* significance in the city; this is what Lane describes as the 'magical real', the re-significance of mundane life into the hyperreal story. This clearly relates to the phenomenological sense of re-revealing the thickness of being through a bracketing, the idea that 'the art work is not just something that comes into the open, next to other things, it changes the Open in which it appears' (Clark, 2002, p. 44), and it is also a manner of re-revealing how meaning is constructed (and corrupted) in city space. Furthermore, the fact that the medium of delivering this bracketing effect is headphones, enables a reconstruction at the *site – the interface* of the city and the body of the listener-participant. Even though the participants do not *affect* the piece in a highly interactive manner, the inbetween of 'what is' and 'what if' is sited in the body. The physical act of listening and walking matched with the headphones' ability

to reconcile the individual and site means a radical inbetween is opened at the site of occupation by the Spectacle in the digital age. Indeed, as Brandon LaBelle suggests in *Background Noise*,

Activating space through implementing and inserting auditory features shifts [...] understanding. Fusing listening with spatial narratives, audition with inhabitation, and the movements of time and body as dramas of discovery, sound installation heralds new forms of embodiment. (2006, p. 167)

The headphone show enables new forms of embodiment for the listener-participant, forms of embodiment, furthermore, that when combined with the tendency of Slung Low's work to inhabit and expose layers of time, history and space in a city (the dreamcity) serves to prise open "fissures in the urban fabric", those 'spaces of different temporalities, outmoded spaces with distinct cultural characteristics' which Nicholas Whybrow (quoting Lefebvre) situates as locations of a potential interruption of the 'homogenising and hypnotising effects of capitalism's standardisation' (2002: 141)' (2011, pp. 111-2). This is coupled, then, with a reclamation of the technology that often serves to drive us away from the thickness of being, through a *sited live broadcast* which subverts the usually recorded, and very rarely spatially-relevant audio that is typically delivered to us by headphone technology.

In socio-political terms, there is also a very conscious pull in Slung Low's work away from the traditional theatre building which echoes Nicholas Whybrow's suggestion that "theatre' – having been co-opted and institutionalised effectively by a privileged, complacent constituency of society – needs to be both re-situated and sought (or encountered) on the street' (2011, p. 17). Indeed, Lane speaks to this directly, explaining in a matter of fact way that 'the easiest way of getting an audience that wouldn't normally go to theatre to go to theatre is by not putting it in theatres' (Lane, 2012, p. 286). In terms of the theories of the SI, this could be seen as a response to the commodification of the arts and a return to the potential of radical *unwork*, as well as the agency-for-all they derived from art-for-all.

Lane talks of imparting a sense of 'thank goodness *you're* here' through the intimate feeling that headphones are able to provide; the work is not

interactive, and can happen without the direct input of the listener-participant, but they do bodily *inhabit* it through the headphones' ability to appeal to and activate the interiority of the subject within the thickness of context. This, coupled with the fissures between the *what is* and *what if* conjured by the company's 'magic realism', also has political potential in the day-to-day experience of a site or city. In *Presence as Play*, Cormac Power quotes the Brechtian notion that:

The illusion created by theatre must be a partial one, in order that it may always be recognised as an illusion. Reality, however complete, has to be altered by being turned into art, so that it can be seen to be alterable and be treated as such. (2008, pp. 28-9)

The conjunction of the *what is* and the *what if* in the soundwalk produces a rip in the space-time of the city which reveals the possibilities of both *what is* and *what it might be*; in this metallic inbetween alternative universes are accessible. The city is re-present, the participant can see the systems in which they are implicated, and, in the space between 'what is' and 'what if' offers the possibility of an alternative. The work's effect in re-connecting the listener-participant as a wholly engaged constituent of the city is profoundly important to its political potential. The key to this in Slung Low's work is the 'reality bleed' – the notion that participants are never quite sure what is significant (i.e. placed there to be of significance) removes all sense of a 'backdrop' and so everything becomes foregrounded. For example, Lane describes peppering the most likely journeys *to* a point where audience members have been asked to meet with adverts, billboards and signs that later become significant;

[...] we didn't say what the rules were, we didn't say it *started* at 7.30, we just said you had to *be here* at 7.30 [...] [so] the audience were so active in looking for things that everything became part of the show [...] and they were playing in their city [...] (2012, p. 291)

This is not the 'playing with the pieces' of postmodernism, but rather the playing with the potential of meaning and significance in the city. *Anthology* participants mistook an ordinary Liverpool street for one dressed by the company as one at the turn of the century (Lane, 2012, p. 288) simply because of the use of a piece of music. And those who commissioned *Original Bearings* started to ask which of the stories of Holbeck pinned up on lampposts around

the area 'were true'.⁶⁶ The frame of fiction when used in a 'real' context can be disorienting in a manner useful to those who would use such 'magic realism' to re-reveal meaning creation in urban space. Slung Low's magic realism happens between the place of *what is* and *what if* – it is not entirely fiction, not entirely fact, it is the space of the embedded, but here a fissure. This is not the fluidly presented embedded news reporter that pretends to the *what is*, but rather in the frame of 'theatre' it holds *what is* and *what if* simultaneously, fundamentally interrogating a space outside the functional context of the city that is increasingly inhabited by the headphone wearer, or pervasive technology* user. The soundwalk participant is re-situated, therefore, in the 'here, and, also, in the other part of 'thank goodness *you* came', the now. In Slung Low's use of live-mixed audio delivered through a medium much more often used to deliver recorded audio, the word re-reveals the *presence* of the performers and their actions. Likewise as the audience act (walk through the story-space) they too are implicated in the *now* which the performers inhabit. The sense of being wholly *present* in an age of fragmentation and dissemination is a powerful place to situate an audience-participant. Indeed, Lane clearly sets the work of Slung Low against the context of an increasing rate of change, multitude of spheres of attention, and weight of information. Couching this in terms of what Lane sees as theatre's ability to explore 'the idea of 'now', rather than 'yesterday', he explains that:

[...] information is coming at us so fast now, and [...] we're not in control of it, but we are personalising it and filtering it [...] And that has transformed the way we just walk down the street – but our theatre looks exactly like it did 40 years ago. I find that extraordinary. (Lane, 2012, p. 286)

This sense of the digital field which pervades contemporary lives – and the idea that the individual is able to *filter and personalise* but not *control* or take active part in its creation – is at the heart of Lane's urge to take theatre into non-traditional theatre or arts spaces. However, this situating of performance in procession, or in non-theatre buildings, is by no means *new*; Lane explains that Slung Low 'make mystery plays. That's the great unhidden secret' (Lane,

⁶⁶ The project had been commissioned on the basis of a series of 'true sounding stories, that were made up'.

2012, p. 293), and therein lies the work's route to the collective in the street. The participant engaging with a mystery play, or a headphone show, is bodily experiencing something together, *here and now* – the headphones one participant uses are the ones other participants use also, they are being delivered the same content as the other they also move alongside. And in the exposure felt by the audience *with an audience* – the group of listeners walking down the street watching something they also know must seem a bit odd to those without headphones – brings the participants together in a functional context. Lane continues:

[...] it's a collective, we feed the audience the same thing all the time. [...] the collective experience is very important to us [...] we're always working towards, [...] a collective experience that allows us to recognise that *you*, individually, uniquely, are *here* (2012, p. 300)

The headphone show is fundamentally a collective act of experiencing, learning, understanding and invention. Further details enhance the sense of a social and collective experience; Lane mentions the fact that he almost always feeds an audience (for example, in *Mapping the City* hot soup and a roll is provided) because for Lane, eating is a social act. Performers address the audience, and do so as a *whole*, and so 'thank goodness *you* are here' gains a 'now', and in the collective a 'with us'. The subject, the being-here and being-now and the subjective other are all addressed. This collective listening through individual headphones is also a reclamation of the gaze that technology 'selfishly' redirects, as the technology, in Slung Low's headphone shows is not directed away, but rather *towards*. It is a collective refocusing of the gaze on the here and now, through the re-revelation of the stories and history that persist in a city: through an approach to the *dreamcity*. *Mapping the City* in particular is an invitation to rediscover the proximity of the dreamcity, not just through the use of technology, but through the 'magic realism' that augmented reality allows, and in particular in that work's interest in the slippage of time. Likewise both *Mapping the City* and *Anthology* have an interest in the stories of others that weave through a city, a social history, the history of the collective, experiences *here, now, together* that form a deep history of the cities of Hull and Liverpool.

The use of time and space in Slung Low's work – particularly *Mapping the City* – is significant; as well as un-concealing what is 'unthought' of the city, it can be seen as both a rejection of the 'rolling' nature of contemporary information culture, and a rejection of the city-space as corridor, and the single-flow throughput that implies. *Mapping the City* rejects the arrow of time; characters in period dress move about the city, far off old lullabies are heard but the singer is only briefly glimpsed. In one story thread, a man obsessed with the science of being and time visits an old warehouse, and a sudden power cut shows him his dead older brother as a young man, he delivers the lecture he has never had the courage to give, and they embrace; the man is reconciled to his past. The present moment is infiltrated by far-off times, and they are overlaid on place like transparent pages in a book. The collective listeners are invited to stroll, follow, uncertain of their end point, and at all times more and more woven around by the thicks and thins of stories left by other people, different times, fragments of moments lost, found and never-happened. Lane explains that:

[...] the *what if* in *Mapping the City* was [...] about being able to oscillate up and down; what happens if the layers of history could all just sit alongside each other. I think that that's driven by [...] the idea of remembering, and carrying people's stories by the retelling of them. [...] I wanted to make something [...] transformative – 'I've sort of forgotten when I came here, when was that?' (2012, p. 297)

The everyday is made significant by the frame of art, the *newness of now* is re-revealed by Slung Low's use of time and space, enabled by the collective listening through the headphones. It is also, finally, the examination of the city in the participant – a re-siting of the individual (their fragmentary presence reconciled rather than distanced by the use of technology to augment their bodily experience) amongst the city-as-collective history – a return to a functional context. It begins to approach a 'deep history' of a city – an illegible whole that never existed at any one time, but underlies every inch of the journey, and that – as a whole – the individual could never hope to conceptualise except by the bodily experience of being part of it. This is what might be termed the *dreamcity*.

In work such as *Mapping the City*, Slung Low's *dreamcity* is a space where strange and wonderful things can happen, a place that people visit, where old friends and family return to us, where buses from 50 years ago pick up performers and audience, ambulances scream by, lifeboats jet into the distance. It is a dream that, because it is overlaid on the streets, lingers after waking. This dream city is the effect of holding the *what is* and the *what if* simultaneously in the streets of the city, and forms very well what Steve Pile calls for in *Performance and the Contemporary City*, a 'revolutionary practice that relies as much on imagining and mobilizing better stories as on shocks to the system' (2010, p. 53). Pile goes on to discuss the nature of a dreamcity and its ability to transform urban space, by hovering somewhere between the *what is* of the waking world and the *what if* of the dream:

[...] collapsing neither into the waking world of rationalizations and instrumental logic, nor into the dreamworld of barbaric desires and satisfying fears, the transformation of urban space would instead necessitate an understanding of vicissitudes of the dreamcity. (ibid)

We can draw this notion to Benjamin, who talks of the arcades and intérieurs of his time as 'residues of a dream world', and suggests that it is the route to the dialectical thinking that will awaken the individual to the constructs of their city, which he likens to the 'realization of dream elements, in the course of waking up' (Benjamin, 1999, p. 13). The half-awake state, where one cannot quite sift reality from the dream, is what Slung Low discovers in their headphone shows. And this inbetween is a route to a functional context that reconciles the being-with here, and in discovering the other in the deep-history of their city, de-limits the individual, and reconciles the near-and-far. Lane explains in a blog post written in 2010 that, for him, the headphone show can:

[...] harness all the immersive qualities of a good radio play, a good iPod dash, a good film watched in the dark with the phone off, with the communal event of witnessing stories as part of a crowd. The personal and collective, the passive and participatory brought together in a way that I have never been able to manage with other forms. The magical, fictional, hopeful side by side with the real, the everyday, the familiar. (Lane, 2010)

It is the conjunction (or, if you will, dialectics) of the *what is* and the *what if* which re-focuses the subject on the divisions between the both. It is in this space, of dreaming-while-awake, that the individual has the opportunity to be reconciled through technology with a collective and deep historical experience of their city, a functional context that is a vital step towards implication, understanding and thus political empowerment in the city.

Circumstance – the *Subtle*mob and the hidden community.

Circumstance is at the time of writing formed of Duncan Speakman, Sarah Anderson and Emilie Grenier. They describe themselves as an ‘international artists collective’, and work with largely mobile electronics to create interactive and reactive audience experiences, most often based in city-spaces (Circumstance). Though the individual artists are all from theatre, contemporary performance and musical backgrounds, the references that they draw on with regards to their work are largely filmic. They describe their use of ‘emergent and commonplace technology’ as an attempt to ‘make films without cameras, creating alternate worlds and poetic layers in the everyday’ (Circumstance).

The series of their work that formed the focus of the interview with Speakman and Anderson for this case study is the *Subtle*mob. At the moment this on-going series consists of two pieces, *As if it Were the Last Time*⁶⁷ and *Our Broken Voice*.⁶⁸ The *Subtle*mob is a deliberate subversion of the ‘flashmob’ form – it is a

⁶⁷ *As if it Were the Last Time* is a *Subtle*mob for two about loneliness, inner monologues, being in a space, and our connections to those around us – there are two tracks to be downloaded, and the pair intertwine on both an individual and dual journey, moving through a specific street area when asked to, making actions, and in a small gesture to the performative, at the end, dancing together.

⁶⁸ *Our Broken Voice* is a more fragmentary piece, described by Circumstance as ‘about trust and suspicion in public spaces’ (Circumstance). There are four tracks, which are downloaded according to the participant’s gender and birthday – it takes place in a area like a shopping centre or train station, busy and with people going about individual journeys. The four different audio tracks leave messages, items, and visual images for the others, but they are less thoroughly intertwined in that you are present as an individual interacting with others, not as a pair or group; it is an individual journey through almost-connection.

gathering of people, co-ordinated over social media or other digital technology, performing a similar act or task, with the key difference that the participants are asked to *stay invisible*. Rather than a large, playful, senseless and extremely visible act, the participants will have downloaded a specific audio track, and when in a certain time, at a certain place, they will play that track, and follow the ensuing instructions *subtly*.

Circumstance's Subtlemobs are used here as an example of the soundwalk in the city where the participant is situated as protagonist in the narrative that unfolds. You are never asked to 'play' a character, but rather to inhabit a world where you are someone who takes the actions offered to you by the instructions. In *As if it Were...* the participant is a version of himself or herself who acts as instructed, and in *Our Broken Voice* the participant is cast as one of four different 'names', but not asked to perform, rather to *commit acts*. Speakman explains how the Subtlemobs attempt to state at the outset that:

[in *As if it Were the Last Time*] you're just playing yourself, this isn't about performing or whatever, this is just being in a film but it's you. [...] And I think with *Our Broken Voice* [...] we are saying, 'this has already happened and we are asking you to re-enact it.' (2012, p. 397)

This largely anti-performative aesthetic is also linked to their use of pervasive technology*, and subversion of the flashmob form into something that is *subtler*. The aim, here, is to embed the participant in both reality and story, this is perhaps why filmic language is easier to appeal to, as film is wholly representational – a story that *looks* real. Here, however, the story is *embedded* in reality – the world and the participant are *re-cast* – in the same context, but for now, differently significant. Finally, Circumstance's explicit aim to 'address the social, political and emotional impacts of the technologies used' (Circumstance), is of great relevance to this thesis, and will be considered in terms of the Subtlemob's use of headphones to cast the participant-as-protagonist in the city.

Although the Subtle mob is not site-specific (in the sense of containing material that is directly responsive to the exact place in which it is situated) the work is *situated at the site*, typically of a city, or in public places, and is reliant on the movement of its participant. An increased awareness and different⁶⁹ formation and use of this public space is fundamental to the political effect of the Subtle mob; indeed, as Nicholas Whybrow (quoting David Blamey in *Art and the City*) suggests, 'spatial metaphors constitute powerful political devices which can be employed as critical tools for examining the relationship between the construction of identities and the politics of location' (2011, p. 31). Private interests are daily attempting to augment our experience of the world, and observe, control and shape the actions that we take in public space; we are coerced, as Adam Greenfield suggests in a talk on pervasive technology* in the city called 'On Public Objects', into becoming 'consumers' of the city, visitors in an organism that is no longer ours (2011). If the contemporary individual is to be re-placed in a position of agency as 'co-constituent' (ibid) then current 'spatial metaphors' must be re-purposed, re-revealed, and reworked through the act of inhabiting, being truly embedded in a space that has otherwise been turned into a 'frictionless passageway' (Buchanan & Lambert, 2005, p. 7).

As previously references, to theorists such as de Certeau and artists such as Graeme Miller, the base unit of experience of the city is the act of walking. For them walking is the route par excellence to the *embodied knowledge* of the 'chance encounters', 'affective energy flows' and 'ephemeral gestures' (Lavery, 2010, p. 135) that form the everyday practice that unites the micro-experience of the individual with the macro-organism that is the city. Circumstance are just as interested in the act of walking; Speakman emphasises the 'legacy and history in walking, how it changes the way you think, how it changes the way you perceive things' and Anderson adds that also important to them is 'just the physicality of being, touching the space that you're looking at... [...] exploring the space with your own bodies.' (2012, p. 404). This attempt to re-connect the

⁶⁹ Also more autonomous compared to the following audience collective of Slung Low's work.

participant with the physicality of their surroundings situates the Subtle mob away from the flâneur of Benjamin, whose aim was to detach themselves from the vicissitudes of capitalism in the city. Instead we move towards the embodied experience of the practice of the wandersmänner combined with the political intent of the Situationist *dérive*, indeed, *As if it Were...* directly asks the participants to 'drift'. In both *As if it Were...* and *Our Broken Voice*, the participants' movements, while guided, are fundamentally left open to interpretation. They may be asked to 'find a place where you feel safe', or 'find somewhere where you can see your reflection', or to walk at a certain direction or pace, but the route the participant takes is made in direct consideration of the space around them, how it makes them feel, and what appeals to them in the moment the decision they are being asked to take is made. Speakman discusses the use of the 'drift' in his writing:

[...] for me the drift is a tool [...] it's a sort of sandbox thing that goes, 'okay, this space is where you are but just view it in whichever way you want to view it, we are going to try and shake that view through the soundtrack. And we're going to let things happen around you but we don't want you to really concentrate on a task, we are not asking you to go to here or there. (2012, p. 391)

The resistance to a task-based approach to instructions is an important one in the context of truly enabling a re-connection between participant and place – as each individual needs to discover their own functional context. The openness of the *drift* is able to counter-act the by-numbers task approach that might otherwise emerge, and instead the participant is offered small glimmers of agency. They are encouraged to undertake a degree of psychogeography, an understanding of how the individual participant *feels* about a space. The situating of the second Subtle mob *Our Broken Voice* at places where people gather (as opposed to the more passing-through space typically used for *As if it Were...*) – such as shopping centres and train stations – puts this into direct dialogue with the aggressive presences of seemingly 'public' spaces where actually one has very little agency (the shopping centre and the train station are *single use* spaces).

What's more the *dérive* – to drift – is to find a route to a different relationship with space *and* (as it is used here) with the self. The act of re-casting the self as

well as the space around oneself in the Subtle mob provides a détournement of the *self*, a tool that is vital in a world where increasingly the technology that is augmenting our lives with the messages and controls of private interests is pervasive, and travels with and through us. As de Beauvoir explains in 'Destiny', 'the body is not a *thing*, it is a situation [...] it is the instrument of our grasp upon the world' (de Beauvoir, 2002, p. 468). The Subtle mob offers the self as a situation, and offers a psychogeography of the self in space, not just of space itself. As Amelia Jones highlights (citing Judith Butler), when:

[...] works of art are situated in space in such a way that they engage the body as an 'essentially dramatic structure' then the individual is shown both city-space, and self-space, the site which is increasingly occupied, but also always 'the 'place' in which possibilities are realised and dramatized' (Whybrow, *Art and the City*, 2011, p. 6).

This thesis would consider an 'essentially dramatic structure' as that which simultaneously plays with the 'what' is and 'what if' – the soundwalk inhabits this space in the functional context of transurban space, and the Subtle mob, in offering glimmers of agency, or of self-as-situation, shows the possibility of *change* and of *action*. If political empowerment (as set out in the introduction) is the understanding of the systems in which one is implicated, and the ability to conceive of and enact change within them, then the Subtle mob offers a powerful resistance to be enacted by the body which finds itself a site of contemporary Spectacular occupation.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ There are of course ethical and accessibility problems that this kind of highly-personally constructed work approaches, and of which this thesis is aware of, but unable to tackle in the depth they require. The work of Circumstance is gentle, the slow build of intensity of instructions, and the separation of voices heard to always make clear which is the 'instruction' voice, and which are more narrative-led ones means that the individual is not shocked into immersion, but rather invited to embed themselves in an alternate universe, overlaid on this one. The fact that the work is built around the participant, rather than immediately casting them as another, means that the starting point of the participant is not assumed, helping to avoid problematic notions of the 'Everyman'⁷⁰ that interactive work sometimes comes across. Likewise, in terms of the ethical difficulty of the use of 'the baggage of that which you might have brought with you – in order to construct the experience' is something that the artists are keenly aware of, and where possible, is dealt with: (Whybrow, Introduction to Part 3 "Sounding/Rhythms" , 2010, p. 146)

[...] there are definitely times where we have considered the ethics of what we are putting people through. [...] We didn't take Our Broken Voice to Japan, just after the earthquake, purely for that reason. Because the baggage – we'd be asking a group of people who had all gone through a traumatic large-scale

The phenomenological notion of 'bracketing' also becomes again relevant again here; through the use of the frame of art – here the language of film – the everyday is made significant, and the participant is asked to see both their individual actions, and the flows and affective influences of the space around them, as important. Speakman explains how the use of the language of film (the Subtlemobs often reference camera shots; 'zoom out', and use the eye of the participant like a camera, panning, switching focus etc.) serves to 'bracket' and re-reveal reality:

[...] if something is being filmed and put on screen, then we pay more attention to it, we deem it as being more important. And so if you [...] make the everyday seem like a film, hopefully that means people will also give it in the same importance (Speakman & Anderson, 2012, p. 385)

But instead of de-coupling the audience from reality in order to create this illusion, the use of mobile technology to *augment* the surroundings through the language of film serves to re-embed the participant in reality, at the same time making it significant.

Subtlemobs came from this idea that mobile technology [...] connects you to remote places but it distances you from what's around you, so how can you hack the basic devices that we use to make you connect to what's around you? (ibid)

And so the platform of mobile technology is made a site, too, re-revealed through its involvement in the sphere of art, and newly implicit – seen to be directly affecting and re-forming the world around the participant. Speakman goes on to explain that this embeddedness, the invitation to *be invisible*:

[...] means that anything else that we haven't choreographed or we haven't organised, becomes part of it as well. And that's really important, that idea that, there's enough space for the rest of the world to keep happening, and if

event, to then come to a piece of work about a large-scale traumatic event. (Speakman & Anderson, 2012)

And Speakman also spoke of recommending that friends avoid *As if it Were...* when going through particular personal struggles. And for all the people that Circumstance aren't able to understand the exact 'baggage' of⁷⁰ – the fact that the Subtlemob happens *as recorded* means that all the participant need do to exit the experience is hit 'stop'. Likewise the Circumstance team always offer an opportunity to come and offer feedback – to talk to the organisers – as a form of 'decompression' (Speakman & Anderson, 2012). However it is worth stating that in terms of access, disability, technology, awareness (in terms of the arts in general), class and complications of gender and identity this highly personalised experience is much less accessible, in that respect, the Subtlemob is no less problematic.

we have told everyone to just be part of the world then every part of the world is on the same level. (2012, p. 418)

This poeticisation of the everyday and the subject originating at the site of the pervasive technology* that all too often remains invisible is fundamentally political in a way that the Situationist International would have recognised.⁷¹

It is significant too that the Subtle mob is built of a series of acts which effect the experience of other participants. *Our Broken Voice* works only because other individuals on different journeys following different instructions are in certain positions, leave books, or write letters to be found by another. Likewise *As if it Were...* gently shows the participant the significance of reaching out and touching the shoulder of the other, asks its participants to walk through a street in search of smiles from the faces of strangers. These acts are significant not only because of the frame of poetic experience that holds them, but also because they *are* the frame: they hold it up, the acts of the participants construct the space for the narrative experience. The implication of the actions of the individual within a community are re-revealed, the subject and the other are thrust into conjunction, and discover where they begin, where the other ends, and the community experienced between the limit of these two things.

In *As if it Were...* the participant is asked at one point to move briskly through a busy place; they are asked to smile at passers-by, and at each smile collected they are to suddenly change direction. This small glimmer of allowing the Other to effect our journey is significant. Indeed, *As if it Were...*'s invitation to see the Other as affective subject can be seen as an attempt to install new programming to rival the highly individualistic and personalised 'centre of the universe' point of view that the private interests of capitalism rely upon. As embodied experience, the Subtle mob is *praxis*, an application of theory; it plays with new practices of the everyday which are best placed to rival those of private interests, practices of the city which Whybrow describes as installing 'constitutive effects and behaviours in the body of its citizenry that implicitly

⁷¹ '[...] we have to multiply poetic objects and subjects [...] and that we have to organize games of these poetic subjects among these poetic objects. [...] Our situations will be without a future; they will be places where people are constantly coming and going' (Debord, [1957] 2004, p.47)

render some ways of being in the city 'off-limits' or 'inconceivable' as much as conceivable' (Whybrow, 2011, p. 8). In the context of this, the Subtle mob could be seen to be a return to agency via the hidden community.

In fact the whole conceit of *As if it Were...* – to re-cast the participant as a different version of themselves, overlaid on the 'real' self and built slowly through a collage of sounds and actions – can be seen as a manner of asking the participant to inhabit the *site* of the Other. This is even more pronounced in *Our Broken Voice*, which speaks to the participant in third person, not second, and gives the participant a *name*. The participant is asked to step into the actions of an individual implicit in a terrible event that (because they hear news reports of it at the very beginning) the participant knows has *already happened*. They cannot change the outcome, but they are invited to step into the actions of another, and encouraged to feel the paranoia, the anxiety, the loneliness from which such acts emerge. It is an embodied understanding of the *other* that the Subtle mob allows. To draw parallels from de Certeau's language of inscription and the city-as-embodied-experience back to Heidegger's notions about language and meaning we can consider Wittgenstein (quoted here by Timothy Clark):

There is no way to language except as a path that turns back upon itself, transforming itself as it does so. The aim must be to avoid merely writing *about* language but 'to bring language to language as language' [...] Wittgenstein argued similarly: 'What is spoken can only be explained in language and so in this sense language cannot be explained. Language must speak for itself' (Wittgenstein 1974b: 40). (Clark, 2002, p. 88)

Action, here, speaks for itself. All of this amounts to a *Dasein* for modern times, the 'there-being' which, throughout this chapter, has been shown to be disrupted by 'near and far' of digital technology. It is reconciled through pervasive technology* as a route to an embodied (yet re-present) action that 'speaks for itself'. Action is brought to the agent as action, and understood through doing. The re-presentation comes from the poetic frame the art-act offers, the simultaneous *what is* and *what if* that (to continue with Clark) instead 'of merely re-presenting what is already apparent [...] can change the most basic sense of things, the overall context or 'world' in which things are apparent to us in the first place' (2002, p. 103).

Through the making-significant of bodily experience using the lens of art (or as the Situationist International, and Clark in his study of Heidegger here puts it, the poetic) the Subtle mob is able to begin to develop new practices of everyday life, ones that, because they are developed in the spaces to which they refer, can be much more easily recalled and put into practice after the removal of the film-like framework.

Finally, the act of gathering in the Subtle mob is also significant. In the flashmob form that it references, the act of gathering is important because it is able to show that (as Jane McGonigal suggests in *Rules of Play*) “social networks are real and performative”. In other words, participation in them has consequences in the actual world’ (Whybrow, 2011, pp. 102-3), returning the ‘far’ to the context of ‘near’. But the bursts of energy and action that occur in the flashmob, although disruptive, are most typically another form of *Spectacle*, lacking deeper engagement with space and subjective experience. Indeed, Speakman suggests that they set out to counter just this, that the *subtle* in Subtle mobs is ‘a response to the idea of not trying to make Spectacle, and trying to make experience for the people participating rather than the people viewing it’ (Speakman & Anderson, 2012, p. 383). This makes the act of gathering in (apparently) public space a deeper seizure of power.

The act of gathering, of being aware that you are part of a collective – realised in the moment at the end of *As if it Were...* where suddenly the street is full of dancing couples, and in *Our Broken Voice* where points of progression rely on the messages, items, and images left by other participants – is also vital to a sense of reconciling the near and far in city space. If we return to Tim Etchell’s notion of ‘machines that have brought us together and held us apart’ (2010, p. 38), then the act of using one of these ‘machines’ that hold us apart to contribute to a collective act is significant. Speakman speaks directly about how the sense that ‘communication devices [...] connect us with people who are far away, they separate us from what’s right next to us’ and that in the Subtle mob form Circumstance are ‘constantly trying to use those same tools to reconnect with people’ (Speakman & Anderson, 2012, p. 398). The use of the typically individual experience of listening to audio on an mp3 player over

headphones, when re-cast as the source of a collective and creative (or at least affective) experience that re-embeds the participant in the city and re-connects them to the other, re-reveals the new subjectivities that the digital has brought to our lives. As Tina Hanssen explains in an article for *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image*, the proliferation of pervasive personal listening in certain contingencies of the city populace means that these individuals:

[...] are immersed in sound, but are at the same time separated by media, a distinction that also provokes the separation between interior and exterior space [...] We need [...] not only to view the body as acting through a technical mediation, but also to take into consideration that subjectivity is actually created through it. (2010, p. 50)

Hanssen is talking about what in this chapter has been characterised as technology which is used to provide a 'far' without the context of the 'near'. The re-focusing on the effect of personal pervasive listening that the Subtle mob provokes reunites the interior with the exterior, near with far, cause with effect, and enables the listener to re-see themselves as part of a space, a community. Furthermore, it enables the listener to see themselves tethered there anew through a technology which they now see often disconnects them. As Speakman explains, 'here's what it is: we are immersing people in an audio work that in turn, embeds them in their city' (2012, p. 403). In doing so, Circumstance bring about a détournement of recorded mobile media.

Finally, we should also consider the spectator and the passer-by, and their significance and use in Circumstance's Subtle mobs. Returning again to the metaphor of film, Speakman describes the passer-by as a kind of 'extra', though he is keen to emphasise that although the majority of the work isn't *for* the passer-by, they are still very much involved, not in a Spectacle, but rather as part of the fabric of the piece (and by extension, one might suggest, the city). He describes moments like the dance at the end of *As if it Were...* as being made more for the significance of participants seeing *how many other participating pairs there are*, rather than a Spectacle for non-participants to look at. Instead, in terms of the passer-by,

[...] it's all the other parts that are important, it's where you walk along looking for someone to smile back at you and that just brings anyone else into the experience. Not in an abusive way, not in a Spectacle way, but literally a direct connection with someone. (Speakman & Anderson, 2012, p. 395)

In this encouragement to find 'direct connection' with people through simple everyday practices (walking, smiling), we find our way back to the Wandersmänner, whose body follows:

[...] the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it. [...] The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces (de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1988, p. 93).

Circumstance don't attempt to present anything legible to the passer-by, but there is no way the work could exist without them; the intersecting writings which are made by the participants are just as illegible to the passer-by as the passer-by's are to the participants. But they *do pass*, and in the offer of a smile, they briefly connect. The passer-by is re-present. And are offered a smile, or the vision of 30 couples dancing for no reason, as thanks. This re-connection of the self with the other in the city is the intent of Circumstance, as Speakman explains:

[...] it goes back to that question of saying, all the problems of the world come from a lack of observation of each other, and a lack of awareness of each other. And the whole point of these [Subtle mobs] is about becoming [...] more observant and aware. (2012, p. 402)

Through a *détournement* of recorded media, the use of sound to poeticise (re-frame) city-space, the presentation of self-as-situation, and the implication of the self in the community of the city, the Subtle mob is able to approach a form that is powerfully political. This example of first person theatre overlays the poetic 'what if' over the 'what is' of the body of the participant, implicating them in a co-constructive relationship with the other. The participant feels the community made demonstrative, recognises the city as a construct, and is offered a 'what if' of agency over it. As such, the Subtle mob forms a powerful potential model of the personal-as-political in the digital age.

Because it starts with fire. But where does it end?

Solon warning Thesis with the tale of Prometheus (Boal, 2000, p. xiv)

[...] in this new theatre I shall be free to transform my audience into kings. Not only into the semblance of kings, but into the real thing. Into statesmen, thinkers and engineers. What an audience I'll have! What goes on in the world I shall bring before their judgement seat. And what a distinguished, useful and celebrated place my theatre will be if it is to become a laboratory for this great mass of working people. I too shall act according to the classic principle: Alter the world; it needs it. (Brecht, *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, 1985, p. 100)

Chapter 4: First person theatre and games: the playful-as-political

This chapter aims to consider the influence of gaming and play on first person theatre as a potential route to the political-as-personal in the digital age. In the terms of the definition set out in chapter 1, political empowerment consists of the ability to reflect on the socio-political systems in which one is implicated, to be able to conceive of an alternative, and to act in a manner that might bring about that alternative. In this context pervasive games are considered in four personal-as-political aspects:

- The practice of pervasive games as a manner of accessing the inbetween of space and digital technology
- Games as a route to community through the encounter with the subjective other
- Games systems as a manner of reflecting on systems outside the magic circle, and
- The game player in embodying agency.

In addition to touching on notions of community, the phenomenological body/world interface and the theories of the SI set out in the introduction and chapters 1 and 3, this chapter will bring in the thoughts of Boal and a little of Brecht's as additional theoretical lenses to consider pervasive games through, as a form of first person theatre that offers reflection and action on the possibility of political change. The second half of this chapter will then look at the use and influence of games on the work of Hide&Seek and Invisible Flock to form case studies that apply the theories of the first half of the chapter. The game design company Hide&Seek represent a 'mechanics' approach to games in an arts context, and are particularly interesting regarding hacking urban space. Invisible Flock are presented as much more recognisably 'games influenced theatre'. Invisible Flock's interest in abstraction and 'big picture' reflections on societies and communities, matched with their scepticism about the 'power' of games and concerns about a manner of cultural imperialism implicit in the form, serves as a useful counterpoint to some of the more unchecked enthusiasm surrounding (what is generally perceived as) the new

form of pervasive games.

It is also worth noting that this thesis would still situate pervasive games (though at the edge of a spectrum) firmly within the definition of 'theatre' set out in chapter 1 – that is 'live play [...] the communication or navigation of a story or experience to some degree played by bodies' (p.28). Likewise within the classifications set out in Schechner's performance studies, the examples discussed (and pervasive games for the most part) fall within the 'arts' frame – that is, a form that plays specifically with the simultaneous presence of 'what is' and 'what if'. However that is not to – in a way – 'colonise' the form of games, rather to suggest that pervasive games are the mutual territory in the Venn diagram of theatre and gaming, sharing things such as the play-character, the suspension of disbelief, and a fundamental concern with the spaces between 'what is' and 'what if'. Indeed, often the only difference between interactive and playful first person performance and 'purer' pervasive gaming such as ARGs* and LARPs*⁷² is who designs them: artists or game designers (though of course neither are these mutually exclusive titles). Therefore this study will not be so arrogant as to attempt to *claim games for theatre*, but rather as both theatre and games come from the realm of play, it will claim that theatre can still use and learn from playful forms – especially in the context of digital game culture and the end of the era of broadcast. Moreover, if pervasive games are (as they are within this thesis) to be described as on the spectrum of theatre, then they are very firmly a form of first person theatre – that which sets the participant at the centre of the work, activating and effecting the content and/or outcome of the story or experience.

It is worth noting that in the introduction, and in chapters 1 through 3 (and increasingly in this chapter) the phrases 'what is' and 'what if' are used to describe the tensions between reality and theatre or play, or between self and other. This phraseology is perfectly understandable without the context from which its usage derives – from that of Tassos Stevens of Coney – and only in

⁷² LARP or Live Action Role Playing Game – a more traditional form of 'real life' gaming that does not expand the magic circle to contain the 'real life' of the participant, but where the player takes on the game-world and plays the part of a character in it.

Chapter 5 does it become more technically applied, and is therefore at that point given a full context and explanation.

Finally, it should also be noted that there is a certain amount of crossover from the theories of this chapter to the practices of Non Zero One and particularly Coney, as considered in the next chapter. This is to be expected, as a manner of inviting and controlling interaction game mechanics or playful techniques are highly useful. In the end, the separation is down to the companies' self-definition; both Hide&Seek and Invisible Flock refer to game mechanics and design, whilst Coney and Non Zero One first and foremost discuss their work as playful or interactive theatre.⁷³ Chapter 5 also contains a close definition of 'interactivity', which may be relevant to this chapter (p.205).

Games and Play

Before considering pervasive games in the context of digital culture and the personal-as-political it will be useful to set out some definitions of games, play and the affordances of the game form. First, then, we will set out what is meant by **play**, **game**, **meaningful play**, the **lusory attitude** and the **magic circle**.

Play and games are separate but overlapping concepts. Play can be a result of games, but not all play involves game structures. Johan Huizinga's seminal text *Homo Ludens* describes play as a manner of:

[...] voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that is 'different' from 'ordinary life'. (1950, p. 20)

For Huizinga play 'is never a task' (1950, p. 8), it is a leisure activity that is voluntarily chosen, and is fundamentally set aside from 'ordinary life'. Play is a voluntarily entered field which shifts meaning and signification in ways that produce activity that are fundamentally unproductive (in the context of 'ordinary life'). These 'rules' can be extremely informal (for example the act of

⁷³ Though, in fact, the most common response was a disinterest or even slight discomfort in defining or naming what they do, and a much greater interest in actually doing it (or in the case of an interview, talking about the content of the work).

play in a child's tea party) or very formal (in a card game) but play, as set out by Huizinga, is united by two characteristics:

[...] the first main characteristic of play: that it is free, is in fact freedom. A second characteristic is closely connected with this, namely, that play is not 'ordinary' or 'real' life. It is rather a stepping out of 'real' life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition of its own. (1950, p. 8)

Play is 'free' in that it is free from the rules of 'ordinary life', and that it must be a voluntary action – a willing suspension of 'what is' to play with 'what if'. Furthermore, because, as Huizinga sets out, as one willingly suspends 'what is', one steps out of the field of 'what is' into a 'sphere of activity' with new rules and significance; the 'what if', the play-space.

As an addition to this definition, Roger Caillois, here quoted in *Pervasive Games: Theory and Design* by Markus Montola, Jaakko Stenros and Annika Waern, offers a useful division between the *kinds of play* that there are. Caillois differentiates between play both in and outside a game context, as Montola et al explain:

Caillois (1958) classifies playful activities on an axis ranging from free play, *paidia*, to formal play, *ludus*. Paideic activities include very informal playful activities, such as *children's play*, *make-believe*, [...] whereas [sic] ludic activities are well defined and somewhat formal forms of play such as *chess* or *basketball*. (2009, p. 9)

These classifications are in turn, interwoven. For example theatre – within Caillois' definition – has more traditionally been connected to the 'make believe' of paideic play, but the 'form' of traditional theatre and its conventions could well be considered a formal, or ludic, form of play. For application within the context of this study, however, we might suggest that these two categories of play enable different kinds of political empowerment: paideic play tends to be more transgressive, as without well set-out boundaries the spaces between 'what is' and 'what if' are more slippery, and allow new significances to re-reveal old ones. Ludic play, on the other hand, is better at abstraction and examinations of systems of control and influence, as they present a simplification of the bounds of 'what if' that allow the player to look at a

‘whole’, at the same time as they can observe their embodied effect on a system.

Following on from this definition of play, Bernard Suits offers a widely accepted simple definition of what, therefore, is a **game**. Here quoted in Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman’s *Rules of Play*, Suits explains that a game is the ‘the voluntary effort to overcome unnecessary obstacles’ (2004, p. 76). The addition to the above definition of play (Huizinga’s free and voluntary entry into an alternative field of significance) that produces a game is the ‘unnecessary obstacle’, which we might define as a ‘rule’. A defined rule set is what Caillois sets out as *ludic* play, and which this study considers to be one of the defining features of a ‘game’.

For example, Tetris, tag, Portal and solitaire are all games that require a player to *choose* to subscribe to a *rule set*. With solitaire as an example; quite the simplest way to arrange a deck of playing cards in order of number and house would be to spread them all out face up and swap them around them accordingly. Solitaire works by a player allowing the unnecessary obstacle of the layout, and rules about revealing and dealing cards, to obstruct the task.

The pleasure of game play is not in the outcome, but in the result of choices made and obstacles faced in getting there. This is termed by Salen and Zimmerman as **meaningful play**. They describe meaningful play in the context of game design as the satisfaction of having an effect on a game system – of seeing the result of distinct and integrated interaction. For Salen and Zimmerman, ‘to create instances of meaningful play, experience has to incorporate not just explicit interactivity, but meaningful *choice*’ (2004, p. 61). It is not enough to see cause and effect, but rather choices must be *meaningful*; a player must understand how they affect the game both in this one instance and in the wider context of the game-world. The goal of good game design, Salen and Zimmerman suggest is *meaningful play* – integrated and opted-for cause and effect – from which arises a pleasurable and hard-earned agency. Meaningful play is a useful way of distinguishing active gameplay from imitations of interactivity and game-like structures, because meaningful play arises only from true and integral agency.

The mood whereby one submits to certain forms of ‘what if’ (such as rules) for the benefit of play is termed by Salen and Zimmerman the **lusory attitude** (2004, p. 98), a phrase drawn from Suits’ original definition. The lusory attitude is best thought of as a gaming equivalent of the suspension of disbelief; it is the act of accepting the rules and unnecessary obstacles of a game:

The lusory attitude [...] describes the attitude that is required of game players for them to enter into a game. [...] an act of ‘faith that invests the game with its special meaning [...] the game is a formal system waiting to be inhabited, like a piece of sheet music waiting to be played. This notion can be extended to say that again is a kind of social contract. To decide to play a game is to create--out of thin air--an arbitrary authority that serves to guide and direct the play of the game. (Zimmerman & Salen, 2004, p. 98)

As Suits, and Salen and Zimmerman describe, this voluntary subscription to the obstacles that form ludic play is not just an act of the individual, but is a form of *social contract* (ibid, pp.97-98). It is the point at which play becomes a social practice, even if it is only between the game designer and the player (as in single player games) though, much more often, this exists between players.

It is the voluntary and mutual entry into the lusory attitude that allows the magic circle to arise. The **magic circle** is a term in common usage in game design communities to describe the boundaries by which play is structured; this structuring typically delineates the form of play as a *game*. The phrase ‘magic circle’ originates from *Homo Ludens*, which describes the magic circle as a contractual boundary where things have different meanings, where significance shifts according to rules agreed and accepted between players. In short, where ‘what is’ becomes ‘what if’. The magic circle is a portable field of suspension of disbelief, created by a mutual assumption of the lusory attitude.

Because of these characteristics of games and play, games can be said to have a number of ‘affordances’.⁷⁴ Just as the stage has certain affordances (that it

⁷⁴ The specific use of this term is derived Tom Armitage of Hide&Seek, who wrote in a publication produced for the *Edgelands* conference at Forest Fringe in 2011, and reproduced on his blog shortly after, about the *affordances* of digital technology (Armitage, 2011) urges the reader to consider digital technology as a *material* not a *tool*, suggesting that the artist consider the *grain* of all of the materials with which they attempt to work.

typically works with live bodies who repeat pre-ordained actions and words, that those visiting it expect to suspend their disbelief, that it is usually highly proximate to its audience), so too do games. The affordances of a medium can be worked with, or against (as one can the grain of a material), but either way it is crucial to understand them in order to consider the effects particular to a medium. In this context we might set out some of the key affordances of games as **agency**, **emergence**, and the creation not of a single narrative, but of a **space of possibility**.

These three affordances feed into one another. **Agency** is the ability to act and have an effect within the ruleset – it is a key factor in meaningful play, and means that games systems are able to examine power and culpability in practice. The space of possibility arises from the freedom and voluntary entry into the lusory attitude, the cultivation of the magic circle, combined with the willing subscription to a rule set that the lusory attitude implies. Games create a space of possibility from which meaningful play can emerge – they don't tie down a linear progression of meaning (beginning, middle, end), rather looking to the inbetween – the opted-for obstacles (the practice, in fact) – as a source of pleasure, not a product. The space of possibility allows the suspension of 'what is' and an active playing with 'what if' which in turn allows the individual to examine and test (in practice) alternatives to 'what is'. Lastly, complex meaning that arises from agency enacted in a simply constructed space of possibility (i.e. from a simple rule set) is herein termed '**emergence**'. Emergence is the result of giving a player/participant *agency* in how they interact with a system. As Salen and Zimmerman explain, that 'in an emergent system, we might know all of the initial rules, but we cannot describe all of the ways that the rules will play out when they are set into motion' (2004, p. 159). Emergence happens when a ruleset becomes a playground; simple obstacles give rise to complex tactics, social relationships, and narrative frameworks. Emergence is what happens when theory is embroiled in practice, and is vital for an embodied understanding of politics and the political. To return to the definition set out in chapter 1: the political world 'is a world in becoming, not a world in being' (Turner, 1976). Games play with systems of becoming, and in

this manner – in their fullest expression – create a personal-as-political **space of possibility**, an embodied and co-habited inbetween.

Finally, reflecting on the definitions of politics and community set out in chapter 1, one should also set out that games and play could be formally described as a manner of *unwork*. Huizinga emphasises that play occurs ‘outside the sphere of necessity or material utility’ (1950, pp. 132-3). Play does not *produce*, and while play is often characterised as anti-serious, it is in fact *unserious*. Huizinga again: ‘play’s the thing by itself. The play-concept as such is of a higher order than is seriousness. For seriousness seeks to exclude play, whereas play very well include seriousness’ (1950, p. 45). Games are not the ‘opposite’ of work, but happen in a world aside from that of work; they overlay a radical and illogical *unwork*⁷⁵ over the ordinary world. Likewise for Bernard Suits games are fundamentally anti-productive, and within the rule set of ‘ordinary life’, inefficient and illogical. Indeed, as Suits puts it, in ‘anything but a game the gratuitous introduction of unnecessary obstacles to the achievement of an end is regarded as a decidedly irrational thing to do’ (Zimmerman & Salen, 2004, p. 97). In terms of the political bent of this thesis, as *unwork*, games are able to challenge the supremacy of the society of Spectacle, which relies on production and consumption to maintain its ‘seamless inevitability’ (Plant, 1992, p. 12).

Pervasive games

Having defined ‘play’, ‘game’ and associated notions, we can look to Montola, Stenros and Waern for a definition of what a ‘pervasive game’ is. In *Pervasive Games: Theory and Design* they describe a *pervasive game* as ‘a game that has one or more salient features that expand the contractual magic circle of play spatially, temporally, or socially’ (2009, p. 12). A well-designed *pervasive game*, then, is a system of voluntarily encountered obstacles, where your actions

⁷⁵ Roger Callois – also argues that ‘characteristic of play, in fact, is that it creates no wealth or goods, thus differing from work or art... Nothing has been harvested or manufactured, no masterpiece has been created, no capital has accrued. Play is an occasion of pure waste; waste of time, energy, ingenuity, skills, and often money.’ (Zimmerman & Salen, 2004, p.124-5)

have meaningful and integrated outcomes, all of which occur in **space**, across **time**, or in **social** situations in ways that do not typically accommodate play; the 'magic circle' of play is expanded to include an unusual context. Pervasive games are characterised by a blurring at the edges of the magic circle, situating play throughout time, space and social expectations in ways that games have not typically been accommodated, and so widening the gulf between 'what is' and 'what if', creating a larger uncertain inbetween.

Games can be seen to pervade **time** if they put the player in conjunction with the game in or across time in which they would not normally be – alone on the streets at night, on the top of a hill in Edinburgh just as the sun rises. A game can also pervade the daily lives of its players in an unusual way; happening over several weeks, being entirely open-ended, being something that fits into other actions of the day. In political terms, games that pervade time unusually disrupt one of the fundamental equations of contemporary capitalism, that time = money.

Space is typically the most prevalent of boundaries traversed in pervasive gaming. Montola, Stenros and Waern explain that '[p]ervasive games embrace their environments and contexts' (2009, p. 12) and in doing so bring the 'what is' and 'what if' into greater confusion. The utilisation of (typically public) space for something other than its typical use or designed purpose is one of the most politically symbolic actions of taking part in a pervasive game – it reveals public space as *possibility space*. Spatially expanded games embed an *inbetween* in (typically public) space, which offers a frame to reflect on 'what is' (viewed from 'what if', 'what is' is re-presented), as well as a 'what if' of alternative rule-sets or systems. Or as it is put in *Pervasive Games*: 'Approaching a decidedly nonludic space with a playful mindset exposes the unseen and makes the familiar strange' (Montola, Stenros, & Waern, 2009, p. 89). The player is able to re-see the current system and is offered the ability to conceive of alternative possibilities. Furthermore, in playing in open space pervasive games are also able to open game play to those who might not otherwise have had access to it, reaching a greater variety of 'other' (see the 'accessibility' section on p.165 for a little more on this).

The **social** norms that pervasive gaming can pervade might include adults playing in non-designated play situations (parlour games played in an office, *Assassin* played across a university campus), play across social boundaries (class, gender, sexuality, age, disability, strangers), or in the very act of *acting illogically*. For many people, *entering to the magic circle* – the active choice to follow imaginative rules, as opposed to those of the system into which they were born – is a powerful decision in itself. It makes the participant an agent of meaningful choice, and in political terms, has the opportunity to make people aware of the *lack* of the same choice in their original system.

Finally, one should also draw out a definitive strand in pervasive gaming which makes use of the field of pervasive technology* – ‘pervasive games’ are often associated with games that use pervasive technology* as a form of delivery; GPS, mobile data connections and SMS are examples of this. Pervasive technology* is defined in the previous chapter as contemporary mobile technology that travels alongside an individual, and in effect *pervades their lives* interweaving immaterial digital fields with material experience. These spaces are often cultural spaces in their own right; the web and SMS are, again, examples of this.

Accessibility and witnessing

A caveat on accessibility and what it means to be a non-player part of the space, social norm or time that a pervasive game pervades should be provided. As noted above, pervasive games often take place in public space (or at least space through which the public pass). Because of that they often draw significance from what in the theatre is termed an ‘audience’, but here (to echo a phrase from some differently aimed Boalian thinking) we might call ‘witnesses’ (Salverson, 2006). Pervasive games can be so subtle that they are not noticed; they can be loud and everyone but the busiest commuter will stop and watch; they can play off unknowing or eventually-knowing strangers. You can be an invisible, visible or integral witness to pervasive games, all before you begin to be a participant.

This comes with some substantial ethical considerations: is it acceptable to be *using* someone’s presence unknowingly? What about when you intervene in

their journey, create a moment in their lives? A key part of the definition of games is that they are *opted-into*, so what happens when you are witness to a gaming incident? There are no easy answers to this, and it relies on each individual designer or artist to make their decisions carefully and supportively.

However, this tension is part of the effectiveness of pervasive games. As Nicholas Whybrow is quoted in chapter 3, redirecting attention to the here-and-now can be a powerful step in reconciling the near and the far of the gaze in public spaces pervaded by technology (the mobile phone and the headphones, or the billboard camera and CCTV) (2011, p. 65). It can draw attention to our surroundings. Pervasive games in this aspect can operate for witnesses as interventions that ask to be looked at. They can also highlight that we do not act in a vacuum. Indeed, Randy Martin, writing in the context of Boal's work, describes how a 'non-intervening bystander [...] also *facilitates* oppression [...] there is no neutral place [...] It is not simply that the failure to act as a kind of complicity with dictatorial powers; coercion is imbricated in this kind of participation' (2006, p. 27). As such, the witnesses to pervasive games are an integral part of their effect and operation. Their being outside the magic circle makes the encounter between the witness and participant strange, and has the ability to re-present them to one another.

Additionally, as explained in *Pervasive Games*, '[s]imply locating play on a street does not lead to empowerment' (Montola, Stenros, & Waern, 2009, p. 211). Despite the potential power of pervasive games, their reach is currently poor. They are still largely played by middle-class people in middle-class areas; they are more likely to be designed by men⁷⁶ (although the diversity in gender in designers is better than, say, playwrights⁷⁷); the active games are rarely accessible to people with mobility or sensory impairments (though there's no reason rules couldn't be changed for accessibility); many require the luxury of

⁷⁶ A brief survey of Hide&Seek's *Ludocity* game wiki entries from A-J revealed 30 male-named designers, 12 female-named, and 4 collectives/unknown gender. (Various, 2012)

⁷⁷ A 2009 report by Sphinx Theatre found that just '17% of performed plays are written by women', vs. 26% of games on the Ludocity site. (The Independent, 2010)

uncomplicated identity – or to put it another way, there are many who live in state of poverty of imagination, for whom the act of *playing out of turn* is inconceivable.⁷⁸

Play does not come easily to everyone. That is not to say that it can't be accessible and empowering for everyone, but different, gentler and more considered tactics are needed, and have yet to begin to be addressed, when it comes to pervasive games and difference.

Pervasive games in the digital age

Pervasive Games are relatively new phenomena. Though play and games themselves can be traced back to the very beginning of human development and culture (Huizinga, 1950), as Montola et al explain, play 'becomes *pervasive* only in a modern society that erects boundaries to be pervaded by such games' (2009, p. 257). The pervasive gaming phenomenon (in its current guise) can be traced back⁷⁹ to the first *Come Out and Play* festival in New York in 2006, and in the UK to the first Hide&Seek Festival (Fleetwood, 2012), followed by similar festivals in Bristol, Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham – and so while they really are very recent phenomena, they are also one that is fast growing and becoming more mainstream (with 'blockbuster' models such as *2.8 Hours Later*). This burgeoning interest in game-forms in an artistic, social and political context can be seen as a reaction to an increased prevalence in game-forms as popular entertainment. For example, in 2009 the biggest selling entertainment item on Amazon.co.uk was a video game – *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* outsold both *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* on DVD (Rosenberg, 2009).

⁷⁸ For example, Larkin' About ran a series of pervasive games in a deprived area of Trafford in 2011 for a 'Let's Go Global⁷⁸' event called 'Space Invaders'. One of the games (designed by me) required the participants, who included a group of boys aged 13-19, to hold hands. They refused, point blank. There was no world that they could imagine where two boys holding hands was acceptable. Likewise, try playing pervasive games in a slum town. Or in a neighbourhood riddled with gangs and guns. Space means life and death in those places. It is a different kind of oppression – the cop on the street, not in the head, or the architecture, which is the master there.

⁷⁹ Although the act of playing games in manners that interact unusually with time, space or social expectation can also be drawn throughout the history of art, performance, gaming culture and social intervention, from Fluxus, to the *New Games Movement* in the US, and LARP* and ARG*culture.

The UK spent 30% more on video games in 2008 than it did on going to the cinema and purchasing DVDs combined (ibid). And a survey commissioned by the BBC found that 100% of the 6-10 year olds they spoke to gamed regularly; one of the quoted participants (age 10) explained the appeal: '[w]ith gaming you're involved and in control. With other things you just have to sit back and watch. I've been gaming for most of my life' (Pratchett, 2005). Games are now a *cultural form*, as Montola et al write, 'Games have become ubiquitous, which paves the way for ubiquitous games as well' (2009, pp. 62-3).

Montola et al also situate this new interest in pervasive gaming in the context of wider shifts in message-sending, beyond digital gaming, suggesting that pervasive games might be seen as:

[...] a societal response to the need for advanced media literacy. Play has always had an enculturating function, and pervasive games teach players media literacy skills [...]. As long as these kinds of skills are required, pervasive games will be available as one appropriate field of expression and response to the increasingly mediated and complex surrounding social realities. (2009, p. 276)

Pervasive games develop an 'advanced media' literacy against the context of the nature of being in the digital age, a context set out in chapter 1 as characterised by the **end of broadcast**, the **removal of the interface**, **personalisation** and the disruption of the **near** of being-here with the **far** of technology.

In terms of the **end of broadcast** the form of the game is the ultimate alternative; game play is dialogue – between individual and system, real and make believe, player and designer, and mutual participants. Games are the cultural form par excellence at the end of the age of broadcast. Games are *interfaces* – and they hand you the mechanism, not the story. They are systems from which (if well designed) meaning *emerges* in the interaction between individual and game system, spatial and temporal context, and other players.

Pervasive Games suggests that games have the ability to:

[...] transform our understanding of [...] cultural space, forcing us to rethink the categories of creator, audience, and work that currently structure our thinking. Instead of becoming a new globally dominant form of message-sending and receiving, they will shift our focus away from the idea of broadcasting inherent within that model to a new way of thinking about

meaning-creation that is more like a network, like a conversation from which meanings emerge. (Montola, Stenros, & Waern, 2009, p. 248)

Games are part of the new language of message-sending to be discovered at the end of the era of broadcast. Though – as set out in chapter 1 – private interests are always seeking to co-opt, censor or regulate the ‘two-way’ conversation of the digital age, pervasive games as an artistic and theatrical form are able to resist the control that the Spectacle requires over meaning. This is because, in handing the player a rule set rather than a finished message, the individual is able to identify their own role in constructing meaning. In *choosing* to put the world of ‘what is’ to one side in order to inhabit the ‘what if’, the individual is returned to both recognition and agency. As it’s put in *Rules of Play*, pervasive games ‘put culture ‘at play,’ not just reflecting culture, but shifting between and among existing cultural structures – sometimes transforming them as a result’ (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, pp. 517-8). Pervasive games teach the player to recognise systems as well as the implications of acting within them. In games the message is emergent, contingent on the players – and when the form is co-opted in the name of marketing, as private interests seek the thrill of agency as a method of getting people to *choose* to follow a defined path, *meaningful play* is lost. Margaret Robertson, Development Director at Hide&Seek explains the marketing trend of ‘gamification*’:

Gamification’, the internet will tell you, is the future. It’s coming soon to your bank, your gym, your job, your government and your gynaecologist. All human activity will be gamified, we are promised [...] You’ll be able to tell when something’s been gamified because it will have points and badges. And this is the nub of the problem. [...] What we’re currently terming gamification* is in fact the process of taking *the thing that is least essential to games* and representing it as the core of the experience. Points and badges have no closer a relationship to games than they do to websites and fitness apps and loyalty cards. They’re great tools for communicating progress and acknowledging effort, but neither points nor badges in any way constitute a game. [...] They are the least important bit of a game, the bit that has the least to do with all of the rich cognitive, emotional and social drivers which gamifiers are intending to connect with. (Robertson, 2010)

Gamification *isn’t* games; that games are resistant to manipulation is because they are constructed out of *choice* and *everyone knowing the rules*. Points and badges are sometimes outcomes, but they are the least important part; it is

from the journey past opted obstacles that the game and story-world emerge. Game forms are situations *defined by their participants*. Games, in a similar way to the flashmob of viral marketing, are in the hands of everyone, and will turn to whatever the ends of the people designing, framing and participating in them wish. That is their power. *Agency*. As a practice, pervasive games invite the player to constantly remake, moment by moment, an 'inbetween' at the site of the embodied subject, offering an 'infinite resistance', which, if not always successful, reshapes in the next moment and the next.

Pervasive games and games-inspired theatre represent the **removal of the interface** of the actor in arts-based performance. This means that the inbetween of 'what is' and 'what if' of theatre is held in the self, not on the stage; the player *enacts*, bringing the attention of the perceiving subject and the body as site of occupation (as per the *embedded Spectacle* of Causey (Causey, 2006)). As Montola et al phrase it, pervasive games (in expanding gameplay unusually) can use the blurred boundaries of the magic circle to discover a radical inbetween, to develop a 'media literacy' for the age of embeddedness through the re-presentation that is enabled at the edges of the magic circle. In this radical inbetween, the player can find a tool excellently placed to tackle a culture of 'embeddedness' that Matthew Causey highlights in *Theatre and Performance in a Digital Culture* (2006). As set out in chapter 1, the Spectacle, in the context of pervasive message-sending technology, is able to infiltrate the 'interior body of the material subject' (ibid, p.179), and corrupt the data flow of everyday life with the messages of the Spectacle. This is because, in a world of vanishing interfaces and of a new '**near and far**' of communication and presence (disrupted by technology – c.f. McLuhan's concept of us extending ourselves into the 'global village' via networked technology, see chapter 1), the limits of the subject are hard to distinguish; information flows and the context is lost, and so the Spectacle is able to present its messages as 'raw data': '[e]mbeddedness alters simulation's masking of the real with a dataflow that can inhabit the real itself and alter its essence' (Causey, 2006, p. 152). Through removing the interface of the actor, the pervasive game is able to return the subject to their embodied subjectivity, re-unifying their body, attention and agency all within a complete system. The

radicalism to be found in the *inbetween* is that it is not one thing, nor another, but a space where possibilities sit side-by-side. This mutability of space is able to thrust the subject back together and enables them to examine – through the vehicle of the ‘what is’ (the material subject) – the *experience* of embeddedness, re-revealed, through embedding themselves in a ‘what if’ (magic circle, or game context).

Finally, in the context of the trend towards **personalisation**, pervasive games might embody a (re)turn to ‘configurative practices’ which allow us to resist the invisibility of systems of control and communication embedded in contemporary life (c.f. (Moulthrop, 2004, p. 57)). As set out in chapter 1, the problem of embeddedness is that Spectacle will then attempt to influence the process of configuration (hence the battleground of contemporary capitalism being located in the body of the material subject), interrupting it with new pervasive message-sending, and false rhetoric of ‘choice’ and ‘agency’. However, pervasive games present a radical inbetween that talks the language of contemporary technoculture. As pervasive games can pervade the same spaces as the message-sending technology, they present a personal embodied, and re-present view of that space. They are able to remove the interface of the actor to reconcile the near and far in the body of an active agent who is able to keep open the *radical ambiguity* of contemporary technoculture – playing with agency, getting a sense of what both true and limited agency *feels like*. And, because games are, as McLuhan put it, extensions of *social man*:⁸⁰

Games are popular art, collective, social reactions to the main drive or action of any culture. Games, like institutions, are extensions of social man and of the body politic, as technologies are extensions of the animal organism. (1964, p. 235)

They might provide players with a space to set aside and examine social as well as personal inscriptions of ‘choice’ and ‘agency’, as well as implication and culpability.

Through the medium of live play navigated by the bodies of participants, pervasive games form a theatre of the personal-as-political for the digital age.

⁸⁰ Even a single-player pervasive game is an encounter between designer and player, and any witnesses and player.

They are games which, through a combination of live play and (as set out in *Rules of Play*), ‘design interventions that call specific attention to the borders of the Magic Circle through acts of creative resistance’, form a manner of resistance to the Spectacle that is not a rival image, or conclusion, frozen and inert, but that can be formed as ‘a broad rubric of *friction*’ (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 558). Games may begin as simple rule-sets, but out of those rules emerges complex and on-going meaning, and as such represent a radical inbetween, a radical ambiguity, that can continually – at the edge of the magic circle – rub up against the assumptions and systems that control social and personal being in the digital age. They might – as the form develops – provide the contemporary individual with a tool to resist the embedded, the pervasive, the personalised attacks of capitalism, and a space to encounter the other.

Games as systems of control

However – before discussing games as a route to community, agency, abstraction, and the inbetween – a second caveat should be added. Although pervasive games have an ability to reunite personal choice with tangible consequence, to re-place the body in a metallic inbetween, this is not a *solution*. It is a *way of seeing* and a *way of being* which can amount to a friction-practice, but games are also systems of control (as well as a frame) – they are willingly entered into, but are also, fundamentally, experience engines. For this reason private interests will seek to use the form for control and profit (c.f. the Hollywood-style gaming blockbuster, or the practice of gamification* in advertising), and for this reason artists should also be in this space, making use of the affordances of games to re-reveal private interests.

Likewise the tyranny of ‘fun’ in games should be rejected. Games should not be defined by ‘fun’, but rather *unwork*. If ‘fun’ is the intended outcome then what you are demanding is a *work* – something with a product. The games theorist Jane McGonigal is perhaps the guiltiest of this approach. McGonigal situates *pleasure* (as opposed to *unwork*, or leisure) as a manner of empowerment –

her view is that *intrinsic*⁸¹ reward is what gaming offers (here gaming takes on a broad definition to include the pervasive, digital and traditional), and that the satisfied individual should be the ultimate end, because they are *more productive*, and can be applied to 'fixing' the world. In *Reality is Broken*, McGonigal suggests that in the context of global capitalism,

[...] everyone on the planet is being sold the same dream of extrinsic reward. [...] but there is cause for hope. One group is opting out of this soul-deadening, planet-exhausting hedonic grind, and in larger and larger numbers: hard-core gamers. [...] Good games *are* productive. The producing a higher quality of life... gamers aren't escaping their real lives by playing games. They are actively making their real lives more rewarding. (2011, pp. 50-1)

Admittedly she is trying to argue against the rejection of games as 'not serious' (a problem Huizinga also dealt with) but the problem is that where Huizinga says that games are not the opposite of seriousness but both transcend and envelop it⁸², McGonigal argues for the *productivity* of games. In the McGonigal view, games are systems that produce and players are throughput. Instead of a creation of a radical inbetween of unwork where one might discover a space and manner of being that the Spectacle cannot commodify, McGonigal proposes games as a form of equation. McGonigal's terminology turns game design, which she calls the 'optimisation of human experience', into 'an applied science' where game designers 'are becoming the most talented and powerful happiness engineers on the planet' (2011, p. 38). This notion of 'engineering happiness' is deeply troubling. Game designers construct experience engines, spaces of possibility, McGonigal's suggestion that these engines should be turned to any particular prescribed 'product' – for all the good intentions in the world – is at best wrongheaded, and at worst dangerous. McGonigal's 'happiness' is contingent on a box-ticking model of personal fulfilment, and looks towards 'harnessing' the power of gamers as satisfied individuals; her aim is always an end. Instead, this thesis suggests, games are better situated as a route to a 'middle', to socio-political and personal *practice*. Or, in fact, to a

⁸¹ As opposed to the 'extrinsic' rewards put forward by 'globalisation' (McGonigal, 2011, pp. 50-1).

⁸² '[...] play's the thing by itself. The play-concept as such is of a higher order than is seriousness. For seriousness seeks to exclude play, whereas play very well include seriousness' (Huizinga, 1950, p. 45).

Boalian notion of 'happiness' identified by Julie Salverson in her discussion of the experience of the witness:

Happiness, for Boal, is both a personal and a social task that is always difficult and involves making things better: more generous, more ethical, more just, more alive. [...] I am interested in the importance, even the ethics, of a courageous, tough kind of happiness that is based [...] in contact with others and oneself. (2006, p. 146)

McGonigal's happiness is found in the end of the game, Boal's is in the interplay. In the joined-up encounter with the subjective other or in the inbetween of 'what is' and 'what if' encountered when the magic circle traces the gaps in time, space, technology and social structures – that is where play becomes and can sustain true radicalism. Tassos Stevens of Coney delivered a talk as part of a series presented at the *Wonderlab* event in 2010, which brought together practitioners around the areas of playful structures and digital technology. In it he dealt directly with the McGonigal 'productive' gamer:

Jane McGonigal says reality is broken and let's fix it with game, a whiff of formalin in the air. Her lens on the world is rather monocular, fundamentalist in the proper sense of the word. It rarely admits failure and dreams of a superhumanity. But I think I can do no better than make play with people, and forcing them into one game they don't want to play is like trying to choreograph butterflies [...] the best play doesn't tell you how to act, play invites you to imagine what if and – if then – what do you want to do about it. It's a principled belief that creates an action-space, where the agent of play is you. (2010)

Happiness is not a product, it is a practice, and, as Stevens suggests, radical play – that which truly opens an inbetween – doesn't frame itself in terms of consequence, but invites the player to inhabit a space of possibility, a space of encounter, a place where the subject discovers their subjectivity and encounters the subjective other.

Games as Community.

The definition of community this thesis has been working with is of *an unavowable practice that arises in the encounter between the self and the other, through and of which arises all of politics and ideological foundations* (p.22). Community is a manner of subjectivity and implication that is discovered an encounter with finitude – it is, for Jean-Luc Nancy a 'place of a specific

existence, the existence of being-in-common' (1991, p. xxxvii). The introduction traces the encounter with finitude – to be discovered in the death of the other, or the experience of the lovers – in moments where the urge to join totally with someone else forces the subject to see the impossibility of true communion. Community is not 'achieved', for true communion is impossible, but in discovering how you are separate from the other, you discover both yourself and them, in the limit. Community is discovered in the middle, in true *contact* – the touching of the skin that reveals where 'I' stop and 'you' begin.

In the context of pervasive games, when they are played with other people, the subject is able to discover the subjective other through a co-appearance (compearance, as Nancy puts it) of agency. The multi-player pervasive game provides an *inbetween* where players observe their agency through the effect it has on the game system, and are also able to observe the effect of others on the system. As the player holds the simultaneous 'what is' and 'what if' at the site of the self, they discover their own subjectivity, and, in an inbetween that is practiced in conjunction with the other, others who also have agency, but an agency that is like but not yours. The subject compears with the other – because 'compearance [...] consists in the appearance of the *between* as such: you *and* I (between us)' (Nancy, 1991). This inbetween of the magic circle is a place where the subject and the subjective other compear. It is also a construct of both – it is contingent on, and re-presents, finitude – in the void between 'what is' (the real world, and the subject) and 'what if' (the other, and the interior of the magic circle) the subject is thrust into conjunction, and separation, in a place of mutual-implication. Community, and game play, emerges in the inbetween, not in an end, at which point both game space, and community, cease to be. What's more, as a form of *unwork*, games are able to open a space for community that doesn't 'produce'. For Nancy, community 'cannot arise from the domain of *work*. One does not produce it, one experiences or one is constituted by it as the experience of finitude [...]' (Nancy, 1991, p. 31).

Community is not a product (an end), but a process (middle), and so too are games. Where the experience of community cannot, in Christopher Fynsk's

words, be 'represented' (Fynsk, 1991, pp. xxv-i) – likewise games cannot be exactly replayed. Community cannot be theorised, nor the complex meaning emerging from a game be extrapolated from the originating ruleset. Fynsk goes on to suggest that 'something other than a theoretical discourse is required to answer to the exigency of community' – this thesis would like to suggest that one route to community is the embodied encounter with the other discovered in the radical inbetween of pervasive games, and that at the edges of the magic circle, where the weight of 'what if' and 'what is' is greater, one discovers in co-constructing the boundary, the limit at which Nancy suggests

[...] all politics stops and begins. [...] community, in its infinite resistance to everything that would bring it to completion (in every sense of the word *achiever*—which can also mean 'finish off'), signifies an irrepressible political exigency, and that this exigency in its turn demands something of 'literature,' the inscription of our infinite resistance. (1991, pp. 80-1)

In the embodied practice of the pervasive game the players are able to play with inscriptions of the social and the political – to encounter the other and their agency, and to weave together a world of 'what if'. In this possibility space, what Boal would call a 'dialogue' emerges:

Dialogue is always dangerous, because it creates discontinuity between one thought and another, between two opinions, or two possibilities – and between them Infinity installs itself; so that all opinions are possible, all thoughts permitted. When Two have ceased to exist and only the sole Absolute Thought remains, creation becomes impossible. Dialogue is Democracy. (2000, p. xvii)

This is the political potential of the first person theatrical form of pervasive games, that when they are designed to enable agency and when meaningful play emerges between players, the subject is re-present to themselves and the other, and invited to inhabit an inbetween. They then share a dialogue inscribed with the actions that, for Huizinga,

[...] simultaneously represents a pact with the beginning and end, but one without beginning and end. The magic circle inscribes a space that is repeatable, a space both limited and limitless. In short, a finite space with infinite possibility. (Zimmerman & Salen, 2004, p. 95)

In this space of possibility one is able to discover community, and as one

enters an embodied practice, in phenomenological terms, one is also able to discover 'the social world, not as an object or sum of objects, but as a permanent field or dimension of existence' (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 421). In the radical inbetween, and the power of the frame of the magic circle to represent perception and meaning creation, the embodied subject finds themselves both in and of the world, alongside the subjective other, in impossible communion. This begins to look like an unavowable practice of the personal-as-political.

Games as abstraction.

Another (slightly more straightforward) political potential of pervasive games (and of games in general) is that as they are in essence, a framed *system*. Games abstract reality – alienate it from us and allow us to see it anew. Because the magic circle is a small, self-contained and necessarily simplified version of the world, the broader brushstrokes provide a wider lens, and more reflective attitude through which to discover social and political assumptions and implication. All games re-present the nature of systems, and enable the player to reflect on the personal implications and top-down view of 'what if'-systems played within the magic circle, and re-reveal the systems that govern 'what is' when they step out of the magic circle. Pervasive games in particular, in playing with the edges of the magic circle and with the body of the material subject, bring the 'real' world and game world into closer proximity, enabling the embodied subject (the base unit of tall socio-political system) to both act and analyse.

This 'systemic' approach to the socio-political field strikes an interesting parallel with the 'epic' theatre that Brecht sought. Both are 'big picture' views, and the 'alienation' Brecht pursued took aim at the experience error that stops the individual from seeing the systems in which they are implicated. Brecht suggests that a new 'scientific' way of looking at the world should be encouraged. Noting that alienating oneself from the 'immediate surroundings' enables us to re-see them, remark up on them. To Brecht, science had 'carefully developed a technique of getting irritated with the everyday, 'self-evident', universally accepted occurrence' (Brecht, 1964, p. 140). He was interested in

an audience that was likewise irritated into an encounter with the 'everyday' where nothing was 'universally accepted'; a model of thought that observed, measured and theorised multiple possibilities. What Brecht finds in the scientific manner of looking that he begins to describe is the notion of *alterability* – the audience are not told how to feel, but presented with the facts of the matter. They are invited to assemble the facts, to see how the situation in front of them can be constructed, and, in taking a more active perceptual part in piecing it together, recognise how it might in turn be alterable. In *The Indirect Impact of Epic Theatre* Brecht explains that by 'means of a certain interchangeability of circumstances and occurrences the spectator must be given the possibility (and duty) of assembling, experimenting and abstracting' (1964, p. 60), and in that way discover a 'practical attitude, directed towards changing the world [...]' (1964, p. 57).

Brecht wanted his audiences to discover a theatre created and maintained by the audience, and therefore alterable by them – for this reason the actor was not to act, but *enact*. Brecht draws on the example of a 'street scene', where a witness to an incident describes it to the crowd – the enactor does not try to convince the audience it is really happening in front of them, but rather takes 'two situations into account. He behaves naturally as a demonstrator, and he lets the subject of the demonstration behave naturally too [...]' (Brecht, 1964, p. 125). This enactor is very similar to the player of the pervasive game, simultaneously holding in themselves 'what is' and 'what if'. Brecht wishes his audience to observe the enactor and see 'the laws of cause and effect. People's activity must simultaneously be so and be capable of being different' (Brecht, 1964, p. 71). When Brecht talked about a 'scientific' theatre, 'science' meant a manner of seeing, understanding, theorising and *testing*. The ability to move – as Boal puts it in *Rainbow of Desire* – from the 'phenomenon to the law' (1995, p. xx), which in the first person theatrical form of pervasive games is expanded into a laboratory where one can actively *test* theories, using the basic unit of all systems and laws (indeed, experience), the human body. When one represents a system, one is re-presenting systems that link people, and that weigh on and affect the spaces between them. This is politically potent – enabling perception, inviting interpretation, and allowing (re)configuration in

a place like, but also aside from, 'real life'. Games offer a 'systematic' view which is unusual to performance, and which forms a key tool in a digital age of vanishing interfaces and embeddedness. Warren Linds (in the context of Boal) emphasises that in order to:

[...] understand our interactions in this world, we must think systematically. As we engage in a continuous dialogue with the world, we engage in continuous dialogue with each other, behaviour, relationships, and conversations. This web is the space of possibility, the metallic in-between (Linds 2001). This in-between is not empty but alive with intentions, responses, and actions arising from the system's prior history. Complicity holds each of us responsible for the good or bad of the whole and bids us perceive and pay attention to the in-between. (2006, p. 120)

Pervasive games have the capacity to add complicity to the space of possibility Brecht wanted to engender in the theatre. What Brecht termed 'alienation' we might call (in the context of the addition of embodied agency) *abstraction*. In addition to this theoretical exploration, the case study that considers the work of *Invisible Flock* deals further with a practical exploration of how macro-economic and politic systems are played with in their piece *The Agency*.

Games as an inbetween – a route to the real

Like Brecht, the SI also sought to make the spectator (returning to the political implications of that title) 'constructors'. In their terms, as a specific resistance to the Spectacle, which was, for them, (as previously stated) 'a world. The Spectacle as we experience it, but fail to perceive it, 'is not a collection of images, but a social relationship among people, mediated by image.' (Debord, 1977, p. 2). The Spectacle infiltrated the *site* of being, the spaces between people, and for that reason the spectator should return themselves to what in this study has been called the 'radical inbetween' – a space of possibility that is constructed by the individual, and so, above all, is *alterable*. For the SI, then, agency (as reflected in Brecht's urge to break with agency) was key. As Guy Debord wrote:

[...] the most pertinent revolutionary experiments in culture have sought to break the spectator's psychological identification with the hero so as to draw him into activity by provoking his capacities to revolutionize his own life. The situation is thus made to be lived by its constructors. The role played by a passive or merely bit-part playing 'public' must constantly diminish, while

that played by those who cannot be called actors but rather, in a new sense of the term. 'livers', must steadily increase. ([1957] 1981, p. 25)

Debord is calling for the public as participant, embodied agency in life, which, for the SI, was to be discovered in the break from empathetic spectating and a move to active (re)construction. Debord continues, demanding the multiplication of 'poetic objects and subjects', and the organisation of 'games of these poetic subjects among these poetic objects' ([1957] 2004, p. 47). The SI, too, in a way, sought *enactors*, the dual 'what is' and 'what if' that is the heart of an active 'poetic' subjectivity, and, as the SI directly suggests, might be discovered in the poetic inbetween, and *unwork* of games. The agent in a game is a 'poetic subject'⁸³ in that they are re-presented to themselves, given a new manner of signification and a context that is aside from the real. Likewise all contents of the magic circle become 'poetic objects' – objects with shifted significance and context. Pervasive games' content may not be directly political⁸⁴, but by taking game mechanics in an embodied-performative and playful context, and embedding them in 'real life', the embodied subject is invited to construct their own life, (*crucially* for the SI) in a space of unwork, which is anti-productive. This is very close to the 'new species of games' that Debord called for – a combination of the broadening of the 'nonmediocre portion of life' and a radical negation of games' 'separation from the stream of life' ([1957] 2004, p. 45). Pervasive games are able to create a *friction* with 'real life' in the fact that they *pervade*; pervasive games (as explained by Montola et al) 'encourage players to see and experience their living area in a new and different way and to have stronger agency over it' (2009, p. 44). Pervasive games are able to rework 'living space', both physical space, and the social constructs of everyday life – they are a form of sandpaper that the player can use to remove the varnish of the Spectacle.

⁸³To use the notion of 'poetic' that is set out, in a phenomenological context, by Timothy Clark in *Martin Heidegger*, who explains that for Heidegger, 'the poetic engages and can change the most basic sense of things, the overall context or 'world' in which things are apparent to us in the first place' (Clark, 2002, p. 103).

⁸⁴ Though they are almost always *implicitly*, and occasionally explicitly so; budgetball, developed as part of the Hide&Seek *Sandpit* series, for example, is a team ball game about the fiscal deficit.

Pervasive games can also be played by ‘everyone’ to a much greater extent than professional theatre. These playful explorations of constructing and reconstructing our selves and the places through which we move are a manner of détourn-ing our relationships with the spaces and people around us. Pervasive games (and the development-community from which they grow) serve to change space-users into space-makers.

In a consideration of the playing-with-space that is the festival/carnival in a protest context, Deborah Muntick suggests that there are ‘two overarching models of public demonstration – ‘occupying public space’ and ‘opening public space’ (2008, p. 52). Pervasive games are able to do both. It is in this space between that the player discovers themselves re-present; that is, they are made into poetic subjects with material agency, and the magic circle is discovered as both plastic and poetic space. Recognition, reflection, agency – a potentially political-as-personal form par excellence.

Games as agency – rehearsal for the revolution

The SI’s poetic space and Brecht’s scientific theatre also have similarities in the practice of revolutionary theatre maker Augusto Boal.

Boal sought what Randy Martin describes in ‘Staging the Political’ as ‘a theory of the audience, of what a public in attendance can do to ‘decolonize the mind’ (2006, pp. 26-7). Boal’s work is incredibly relevant to pervasive games in particular, and although pervasive games are a much less overtly political form than the games and playful tactics Boal used, both approach the political *act* in a similarly reflective, demonstrative and active mode. Boal’s methods form one of the first truly ‘first person’ theatre practices of the twentieth century. The Boalian technique concentrates on the embodied discussion of social structures of oppression through performance, and also attempts to embed these discussions in everyday life as, for example, *Invisible Theatre*.⁸⁵ In Forum

⁸⁵ The practice of constructing a situation of the everyday but political in the street, which is performed ‘as if real’, by actors, in a manner that aims to engage passersby. Montola et al locate Boal’s Invisible Theatre as both a forerunner of the theory and application of pervasive games, and also as a step further, as a manner of ‘social blurring’ which perhaps goes beyond the bounds of ‘games’ – as the potential players

Theatre, Boal uses theatre games and techniques to assist participants to move through a process of embodied knowledge, expression and reflection towards a renewed agency. Boal identifies four stages he looks for his participants to pass through; *knowing the body, making the body expressive, using theatre as a language, using theatre as discourse* (Boal, 2000, p. 126). Boal uses the ‘what is’ and ‘what if’ of theatre to develop an embodied discourse – particularly focusing on reuniting the body of the individual with wider systemic agency – through careful workshops that take individual inscriptions of ‘what is’ and draw out of them a wider language of oppression by examining them as ‘what if’; ‘what if they did this instead?’ ‘Why is this so?’ ‘How can it be done better or fairer?’ The participant is asked to perform again, and in the ‘what if’ accessed through the ‘what is’ of the body, to test theories of a better, fairer world. This moment of extrapolation that Boal calls ‘ascesis’ – from the phenomenon (what happened to one person) to the law (what happens to all the people) (1995, p. xx) – provides another route to abstraction. It draws the wider sentences we inscribe together out of the embodied individual, and demonstrates that they are fundamentally alterable.

In theatre, Boal discovers an inbetween, which he terms ‘metaxis’ – Warren Linds, in a piece on ‘metaxis’ for the *Boal Companion*, articulates this directly as an ‘inbetween’ which arises in the tension between ‘what is’ and ‘what if’. Linds explains that metaxis arises in the ‘moments questions arise, when we ask, what if things could be different?’ (2006, p. 122). Metaxis, in a Boalian sense, moves beyond the dichotomous thinking sought by Brecht’s ‘scientific’ theatre, and creates an *aesthetic space*⁸⁶ where the ‘what if’ can be *practiced*. The language Boal used to describe the inbetween of his first person theatre chimes very closely with the practice of pervasive games:

do not opt-in to a magic circle, rather they opt-in to a situation they aren’t aware is a construct (Montola, Stenros, & Waern, 2009, p.15). The spaces between pervasive games and Invisible Theatre would form an interesting comparison if there were more space available.

⁸⁶ ‘All combinations are possible there, because the aesthetic space *is* but *doesn’t exist* [...] This extreme plasticity allows and encourages total creativity. The aesthetic space is endowed with the same plasticity as dreams’ (Boal, 1995, p. 20)

[T]he state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different, autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of the image. The participant shares and belongs to these two autonomous worlds; their reality and the image of their reality, which she herself has created. (Linds, 2006, p. 114)

It is this inbetween of 'two autonomous worlds' that enables the agency of the participant, which enables them to play with 'what if'. In engaging in the aesthetic space of theatre's *inbetween* (or poetic space of games, as the SI would put it), they can reflect on 'what is'. Or as Linds explains, through 'metaxic action, our bodies become generative sites of knowing; learning is tangible and available for future exploration' (2006, pp. 114-5). Boal brings the body to the way of seeing Brecht urged, and the situations – poetic spaces of possibility – which the SI wanted to construct. Likewise the act of playing a pervasive game is an embodied practice, understood as part of a social field navigated by other equally embodied subjects. This is a potentially profoundly political act, because in the digital age of embeddedness the *body* is a situation that requires re-construction. The personal is the route to the political – in terms of it being both a site of infiltration by the Spectacle (the 'cop-in-the-head' (Boal, 1995, p. 42)), and a place of potential dialogue, mutual inscription and action, which re-reveals *systems* of control, wider politics as a personal and social practice. Shari Popen explains how Boal calls theatre 'the art of looking at ourselves', and goes on to suggest that:

Once we begin to take seriously the performative and material qualities of space, the art of looking at ourselves shifts to an analysis of the total environment [...]. It teaches us to recognise that in society power itself is never fixed and closed, but rather is exercised along a grid that is an endless and strategic game that we must continually learn to imaginatively and tactically outwit. (2006, p. 132)

Pervasive games are similarly an art form that are able to re-present us to ourselves. They encourage the 'art of looking' as any art-frame does, but by putting the body into practice, in a fundamentally aesthetic and poetic inbetween, they invite the movement from the embodied phenomenon to the law, and bring the law into contention. Pervasive games rarely take explicit or direct aim at oppression, rather they resist the *seriousness* of what is expected from an adult in the world – a non-playful productive mindset which doesn't question what is expected. The *don't take yourself so seriously* of pervasive

gaming is able to expand into *don't take the rules of the so-called 'real world' so seriously*. The 'ascesis' of Boal, that is aimed at in making the body expressive and transferring individual oppression into discourse is reversed in pervasive games, which begin in the 'what if' and, in their form, rub up against the 'what is', inviting the embodied subject to move from the 'new law' (ruleset) to the phenomenon, and in the inbetween, to compare that emergent 'what if' to the phenomena and laws of 'what is'.

We will now turn to two case studies that examine in practice the personal-as-political of pervasive games, and the wider application of techniques of game design in theatre. Two companies have been chosen for consideration, at comparatively opposite ends of the pervasive gaming-influenced theatre spectrum. Hide&Seek are selected as a highly mechanics-interested company, whose games are very 'pure' – ludic as opposed to paideic. Hide&Seek's work is a good example of pervasive games as a manner of hacking urban space – and their game *Hinterland*, is a good example of designing for an encounter with the non-playing other. Invisible Flock, on the other hand, are much more traditionally 'arts' situated – their work is almost exclusively with theatre and arts buildings, and they are interested in game mechanics as a way of introducing *agency* into audience experiences. Invisible Flock are of interest both because of their interest not only in playing with the boundaries of the magic circle and games systems as abstractions of socio-political ones, but also because they present an interesting point of view on what they call the 'cultural imperialism' that is a danger in the McGonigal view of play-as-product.

Invisible Flock

Invisible Flock are a relatively new company, although all three of the company members have been working in various parts of the performance community since leaving university. Invisible Flock came together in mid 2009 and consist of Ben Eaton, Richard Warburton and Victoria Pratt. They are based in Leeds, and situate themselves as an 'interactive arts trio', describing their practice as having moved away from theatre, but also noting that much of

their work is in association with theatres, museums and other arts buildings and institutions (2012, p. 429). Their three respective journeys into a more game-influenced practice seem to be united in a drive away from half-hearted and cursory interaction with audiences in theatres, as well as an urge to take theatre out the theatre building – a place that to them seems barely part of most people’s lives.⁸⁷

This urge to encounter non-arts⁸⁸ audiences can also be seen as the root of their immediate move into pervasive work, and continual use of game-like structures and invitations in interaction set outside arts buildings. Invisible Flock’s first production *Follow the Bird*, was made for a nightclub to accommodate 300-400 participants, and took the form of a clue-based puzzle game (starting with a clue hidden in the ice cube of a free drink given to participants), which guided players throughout the building (Eaton, Warburton, & Pratt, 2012, p. 430). This was later refined as part of the Forest Fringe *Microfestival* at Bristol Old Vic, and their work has since followed several main strands: the clue-based adventure-type experience on which *Follow the Bird* was modelled, which will often engage in audio, SMS-based, locative or near-field technology; a strong education strand using games to develop literacy and understand stories and history; and the more game-mechanic interested macro-systems and cultural investigations such as *The Agency*, and *Bring the Happy*. This study will particularly reference *Bring the Happy* as a theatrical intervention that discusses the problems of ‘cultural imperialism’ (Eaton, Warburton, & Pratt, 2012, p. 459) in pervasive

⁸⁷ However Warburton notes that they also struggle with identifying themselves as a ‘games based’ company:

You say the word 'theatre' and people have preconceptions about what it is [...] although also it works the other way; you say the word 'game', and there's preconceptions [...] not being *either* of those has been helpful to us. (2012, p. 429)

Hence their identification as ‘interactive arts’; although they do also struggle with the label of ‘arts’ in their conscious drive towards encountering people who are reluctant to engage with the arts – a concern that is certainly prevalent in the areas of Leeds and Bradford where they have worked.

⁸⁸ For want of a better term, and here used to include people actively resistant as well as passively uninterested.

performance. *The Agency* will be considered as a manner of exploring the use of agency in examining macro-political systems. Reference will also be made to *Fanfare*, a pervasive adventure around the Crucible Theatre exploring the past 40 years of its history.

For Invisible Flock, the story comes first, and game mechanics and pervasion are a manner of allowing meaningful interaction with their work. Indeed, Pratt explains the main game framework that influences them is the point and click* genre (2012, p. 430), which is certainly among the most story-driven (and one might suggest traditionally theatrical) of contemporary game genres. There is also an interesting resistance in the company to the recent resurgence in parlour game-style play that has been popularised by more mechanics-first pervasive gaming movements in the UK.⁸⁹ Eaton explains that he finds them 'empty' and that the focus on 'notions of play in that purer sense' draws a line to a too-obvious 'notion of adults reclaiming play' as an ends and a not as a means (2012, p. 445). This considered resistance to play and interaction-for-interaction's sake is expressed as a direct reaction to the McGonigal-esque fervour for the revolutionary power of games in 'fixing' the world. Eaton responds to the McGonigal 'fix' directly:

I'm slightly suspicious of this notion of 'play' as a – in a Jane McGonigal sense in that it can solve all our wrongs – but also I'm suspicious of the notion of 'play' as a synonym for almost the infantilisation of things [...] the notion of the city as a playground is very much the construct [...] of a wealthy middle class, that can afford to play in the city, and actually the city still continues despite that. [...] [A]nd again, why I'm slightly suspicious of play is that more often than not it's a coercion, you're being coerced in a public space. (ibid)

As Eaton here emphasises, games are fundamentally frameworks for coercion, frameworks that can be misused, whether through ignorance, incompetence or even optimistic intent. They are problematic as systems of control as long as the player is a problem to be solved rather than a situation to be re-seen, pulled, challenged, or shifted. Invisible Flock are therefore interested in a more complicated, *paideic* form of play that uses game mechanics to allow genuine agency in a complex system of 'what if'. Eaton's concern with play-for-play's

⁸⁹ Such as IGfest in Bristol, BARG in Birmingham, Hide&Seek in London and Larkin' About in Manchester.

sake seems to be that it does not rub up against the ‘what is’, it is just a manner of replacing one system with another, not for bringing them into contention or dialogue. It is at the edges of the magic circle that this occurs – in games that re-place the player in the context of two systems, a lens that shifts the world, but the edges of which can still be seen. Playing with the magic circle of games is politically powerful, because when the ragged edges are visible, the player is given the opportunity to identify coercive constructs, as well as the effect their agency has in these systems. As Tassos Stevens of Coney suggests (again responding directly to the McGonigal notion of ‘fixing’):

Reality is broken. To which the only true playful response is: Yes And. A cascade of Yes Ands, with the odd Yes But, an occasional No Thank You, one step at a time. [...] Actually it’s where reality breaks that matters. Where one game breaks down and you choose to start playing another. Or simply because someone else asks you to play nicer for them. (Stevens, *Make Believe* by Jimmy Stewart - Wonderlab, 2010)

This sense of re-revelation of the edges, and thus the construct of the whole, is at the heart of Brecht’s theatre, and in the appeal to ‘play nicer’ we find the acting agent re-framed, which is the thrust of Boal’s forum theatre. Preservation of genuine agency in a form which is able to re-reveal systems of coercion *in which we are complicit* is the route to the political power of game-forms in theatre. Invisible Flock situate their use of game forms and interaction similarly, recognising in agency the tools with which to ‘provoke the capacities’ (Debord, [1957] 2004, p. 25) of participants to identify potential revolutions in being and seeing in their own lives. Eaton explains that the company sees game mechanics when experienced in a pervasive context as a route to what this thesis has called the ‘personal-as-political’ – for Invisible Flock, interaction and genuine agency is:

[...] a means to empowerment [...] rather than show them something, we get them to do something with us, because we’re interested in them being able to play around with it [...] and then by extension in the place where it’s happening. [...] that notion of [...] looking at a space; [...] how else can we participate in that space, or how else can we look at it – or what else can we do together. (Eaton, Warburton, & Pratt, 2012, p. 437)

Games-as-theatre expand the ‘magic circle’ of suspension of disbelief past the confines of the stage, the edges of which are too well worn to be able to throw

the edges of the Spectacle into relief. As Stevens suggests ‘it’s where reality breaks that matters’ (2010) – the spaces between real and not that game-play makes visible. Indeed, Pratt explains that for *Invisible Flock* ‘it’s about never trying to get rid of the cracks [...] and I think that, for us, is actually quite political, [...] people can look at their surroundings differently’ (2012, p. 436). This playing with the edges of the magic circle of pervasive first person theatre experiences can provide this *friction-as-resistance* particular to pervasive games, which Salen and Zimmerman identify in *Rules of Play* (2004, p. 558). However, while this more paideic play is characteristic of works such as *Fanfared*, *Invisible Flock* do also make use of more ludic play, but again as a manner of re-revealing our complicity in systems. To take *The Agency*⁹⁰ as an example, Eaton explains how that work set out to investigate game mechanics as a way to ‘get people to think about genuine choices and consequences’ (2012, p. 451).

In *The Agency* it is the players that activate the story; aside from the simple framework of place, resource and territory, the stripping back of story which is then built through the growing emergent activity of the players re-reveals the fact that ‘no single action happens in a void’ (ibid). Indeed, Eaton explains that they are ‘interested in that notion of macro stories that can emerge out of [micro] systems’ (2012, p. 453). This is a key tool to understanding the ‘global village’ in which we are so often told we live, as well as developing the ability to de- and re-construct the systems of control that are otherwise in place. These emergent games are irrevocably tied up in the nexus of the *bodily*

⁹⁰ *The Agency* was developed as part of a Hide&Seek event at the ICA in London. The two-hour game situates the six players as key decision-makers for a fictional country by the name of ‘Tigali’. Players are invited into the ‘situation room’ setting, and given the task of stabilising the region. There are economic rules in place that govern each region and its resources, and each player has specific tasks they can complete that relate to the character they are cast as (the pilot can transport items by plane, the miner can drill, etc.). Rolls of the dice and statistical models determine the outcome of their decisions, and at the outset the game system seems reasonably straightforward. Then the mobile phones hidden in the players’ costumes ring, and eventually it becomes evident that while there is a group victory, there are also ‘individual victories’ (Eaton, Warburton, & Pratt, 2012, p. 450) that can be driven by more complex and emergent bargaining. *Invisible Flock* are here using very solid and visible game mechanics to examine those mechanics ‘as very explicit things’ (Eaton, Warburton, & Pratt, 2012, p. 448).

present Other-as-equally-active-agent, and the acting subject. Bodies are, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, *cultural objects*, platforms from which behaviour is enacted; this is also bracketed and re-revealed in *The Agency* as immediate and abstract consequences are drawn from the actions of the six players. Populations die, or thrive at their hands. The form of game as emergent system allows players this aerial picture whilst still being grounded – connected – to their own bodies and actions. Their bodies become the edge of the magic circle, the costume against their skin the point of fragmentation. Each participant is therefore cast as a break in reality, a break which they are able to then carry with them.

This abstraction or ‘map-view’ which is a key characteristic of the game form is also at the heart of the much less ludic *Bring the Happy*. *Bring the Happy* focuses on the politics of inhabiting space; the work is an attempt to bring a community into conversation with itself. In *Bring the Happy Invisible Flock* inhabited a stall in a market in Leeds, and invited passersby to leave stories about ‘happy moments’ experienced in the city. Pratt talks colourfully about the provocation for the piece:

[...] we were quite frustrated about the rhetoric that was going around about 'we're all fucked', 'England's going downhill' and we were like, well, how can we make something that actually looks at whether that's true (2012, p. 454)

The company were also eager to take the piece out into the community, for it *to pervade*, Ben Eaton continues:

[...] we wanted to [...] explicitly take over an empty retail space, [...] on the high street, to fill it with – taking these spaces that were so symbolic of everything that was being used against us almost, and turning that instead into something not necessarily positive, but something that was [...] reactive. (ibid)

The installation consisted of a large map, and the daily presence of the three artists, collecting, recording and categorising the memories of the people who passed through the exhibit. The work was slowly built by the participating storytellers and a ‘map view’ of the happy moments of the inhabitants of Leeds came into view. This gentle piece could be seen to be influenced by the

overview of community that the God Game^{*91} enables and can also be linked to the Boalian notion of 'witnessing';

[...] beyond the hopeless, self-enclosing indulgence of a tragic response to existence, there is an alternative: the encounter with the Other. Witnessing, in these terms, has both personal and political consequences. [...] the challenge to respond with integrity – honestly, fully, with one's entire being – is a challenge to witness. (Salverson, 2006, p. 147)

The 'challenge to witness' is incredibly important to the political potential of this interactive, generative installation. It takes the theory of the functional community that is defined by area and attempts to bring the subject (who discovers their subjecthood through the speaking of their story) into side-by-side subjectivity, an encounter with the other. The *Bring the Happy* map situates the experiences of the subjects of that community in conjunction with one another. Because the installation is generated by the participants, the bodily action of leaving one's own story, or examining traces of others, physically represented as the overview of a place draws clear lines between experience in a city: births, marriages, amazing nights out collect in pools over hospitals, town halls and nightclubs. This is a different challenge to encounter the other than the head-on encounter of death or lover with lover; it is not the close encounter, but the chance to recall individual inscriptions, and apply them to a 'big picture'. If not a direct route to community, it is a context for one. A context built of mutual subjecthood – as Deborah Muntick sets out in *Critical Interventions* 'the very act of speaking one's story publicly is a move toward subjecthood, toward agency, with political implications' (2008, p. 104). The act of further situating that subjecthood within the nexus of the stories of others is a move towards the other-as-subject, it creates an inbetween of story-space that is overlaid on the city, setting the individual inscriptions amongst the full story of the community. Rather than a place to encounter the other, the map becomes a series of postcards sent from one subject to another,

⁹¹ A game genre thought to be invented by game designer Peter Molyneux, that typically places the player in the position of some form of 'god'. It is similar to the challenge of cultivating activity in the complex systems of simulation games such as *Civilisation* and *Command and Conquer*, but with the ability to control additional aspects of the natural world. *Black and White* and *Spore* are examples of the God Game.

to form a public conversation about space and community.

Finally, in terms of the ethical implications of pervasive work, it's worth noting that the very *presence* of the company in the market provoked a strong reaction, and a good deal of resistance from passersby and other market holders. The piece, for the company, also became challenge to the assumptions of art-as-automatically-benevolent intervention, and the place of art itself, in the city. Eaton explains that the company came to understand that:

[...] there is the risk of there being an arrogance, or almost a [...] cultural imperialism, that because we now work in the public realm, or a lot of art is in the public realm, of imposing your ideas, or your aesthetics onto a public space, and I think that's really, there's something really interesting about that, but also it can be really aggressive, and even if you don't mean it as being aggressive, *Bring the Happy* [...] highlighted that a [...] just because you think you're doing art, and you think it's good, people don't fucking want you there. And a lot of people didn't, and that's something that's really interesting, and needs to be taken into account I think when you tell stories in public spaces. (2012, p. 459)

It is the heart of these complications that we return to the notion of not *fixing* reality, but existing in a way that *reveals the cracks in how it is constructed*. This lens should perhaps be turned on art and the constructs of games as systems of coercion, as often as it is turned on the perceived problems of society, and of capitalism.

Hide&Seek

Hide&Seek can be situated at the far end of the 'game mechanics first' spectrum compared to Invisible Flock (story first, operating in and from theatre and arts spaces). Hide&Seek describe themselves as a 'game design studio' who are 'dedicated to inventing new kinds of play' (Fleetwood, 2012, p. 307). Although they are associated with, and run events in spaces such as the Southbank Centre, the V&A and the National Theatre, they also design more 'traditional' iPhone and browser-based games and experiences. Hide&Seek were founded in 2007 by the now Director of the company, Alex Fleetwood (with whom the interview for this thesis was conducted). Fleetwood's professional background is in the commercial TV and film sectors, as well as having studied and worked in music and opera. The first Hide&Seek

'weekender' in 2007 was the first organised UK presence of pervasive gaming, and its founding was heavily influenced by the immersive theatre of Punchdrunk, by several ARGs* popular at the time, and by the first *Come out and Play* festival, which Fleetwood attended, in New York in 2006 (Fleetwood, 2012). Fleetwood sets out the company's beginnings as very much situated in the sphere of live performative storytelling:

[...] it started out with a very theatre flavour, and then the audience was a very even split between gamers who were curious and confident 20 something cultural types who were used to the Punchdrunk type of experience and who were willing to give something playful and in the street a go. (2012, p. 307)

This influence can be seen in early experiments (and indeed a collaboration with Punchdrunk) in what the company termed a *Multiplatform Immersive Theatre Experience*.⁹² However the company moved away from this more literal application of game aesthetics and mechanics to theatrical encounters, and more towards the performative nature and cultural value particular to play in its own right. Working across both subsidised and commercial sectors, Fleetwood confirms that Hide&Seek's work 'exists through the lens of thinking about games and game mechanics first, and we very much distance ourselves from interactive theatre companies on those terms' (Fleetwood, 2012, p. 309). As such, their work is considered here as an approach to pervasive games and the performative aspects of play from the ludic end of the spectrum, one which starts with a purer interest in game mechanics.⁹³

⁹² Using the language of first person puzzle games, participants would work together to play the game, one in a virtual version of an environment and the other in a 'real' version of the same environment.

⁹³ However, it's worth pointing out that while the company position themselves as 'game mechanics first' that doesn't mean they are uninterested in or attempt to eschew story. The one arises from the other, and experiences are much more fluid and exist across several platforms which allow a variety of levels of experience:

[...] the game vs. story thing only really works as an argument if you hold with the idea that everything must be contained within one single unit, and so many [...] game experiences now – operate game and story in lots of different spaces, aggregating into one kind of totality of experience in the person who's interacting with it's mind. It's less of a fight, then, I think; the things 'game' and 'story' coexist much more readily. (Fleetwood, 2012, p. 309)

Fleetwood is emphatic about games as an important new (or returning) cultural form, one which is not only relevant but vital; it needs to be considered and investigated in the context of a digital age, especially considering the growing use of games and play by mainstream and private interests. Fleetwood recognises that games are fundamentally systems of control:

[...] we see games changing peoples' behaviour, and that force, culturally, is often used very negatively by companies whose sole intention is profit. And it's important that – it's *culturally urgent* that – there are games studios who are different from that (2012, p. 308)

This is another acknowledgement of the game form as fundamentally coercive; however the discussion of this (re)emerging cultural form must occur within the language which it attempts to coerce. Indeed, as Bert O. States explains in his phenomenological investigation of theatre, if 'you want to investigate a new aspect of human experience you can't use the old vocabulary of signs because, as far as expressiveness goes, the old vocabulary *is* the old experience' (1985, pp. 99-100). The arts are a manner of reflecting on the changing nature of cultural experience, and as such they need to inhabit new cultural forms in order to interrogate them. This is the *cultural urgency* of investigating play of which Fleetwood speaks. It is also important for Fleetwood that this cultural play is *embodied*, physical:

We have this twentieth century blip of people not playing together physically, relatively speaking, and broadcast forms of communication being the dominant medium. [...] we're shifting back to a more playful society, it's in some ways that new idea [...] the ludic society, homo ludens [...] but it's also an incredibly old idea that – the Dionysian impulse to be on the street and *do* something. (2012, p. 308)

The Dionysian impulse to be *on the street* is an important one; the street is a place of encounter that, in the contemporary urban experience (disrupted by the near and far of digital technology, and an increasing privatisation of previous public space), is increasingly difficult to find. Public space is political – it is an inbetween (as set out in the previous chapter) of potential encounter, and therefore a place where politics *comes into play*. Play that occurs in these places is political, because it re-presents and re-imagines how one might be with the other and within the city. This practice of playing with(in) public

space, according to Fleetwood 'is absolutely integral to Hide&Seek's work as a studio [...] to make stuff in public space, and to make stuff for people to come together and play. It embodies every element of our politics as well as our design processes and we'll always do it' (2012, p. 310). There are two aspects of Hide&Seek's approach to play: here, first, the fact that it persists in *public space* and, secondly, that it is about people *coming together to play* – this represents both a place and a point of encounter with the other. Fleetwood is explicit about the political intent of both motives. In terms of space, he describes the pervasive games they make as:

[...] an experiment in hacking public space, using it for other purposes [...] governments are currently exercising more and more control over what you can and can't do in public spaces, you know, increasingly public space is being corporatised and privatised [...] we're proposing different more convivial uses for public space [...] Occupy, protests, marchers, riots are all one, we're very much at the lightweight cultural end of that spectrum but I think there is a kind of thread that you can draw. (2012, p. 311)

The ability to play with meaning in the safe space of the magic circle is a key component of the political power of play, as Salen and Zimmerman explain in *Rules of Play*, games 'not only create meaning, but they play with meaning as well' (2004, p. 479). Fleetwood situates their practice as proposing 'convivial' uses, and indeed it is the *act* rather than the *content* which is the political aspect of the majority of the pervasive games that the company run in public space: the act of stepping aside (bracketing) ordinary cultural assumptions and expectations, and in the *lusory attitude* giving way to new meanings and new manners of significance. The act of walking is to the city as the speech act is to language (paraphrasing (de Certeau, 1988, p. 97)); the active agent that is the body-in-the-city which pervasive games evokes activates an awareness of what Fleetwood terms the 'operating system' of that space (2012, p. 311). To recognise the operating system is to understand that it might be re-programmed, or replaced altogether. As Tassos Stevens of Coney explains:

[...] the best play doesn't tell you how to act, play invites you to imagine what if and – if then – what do you want to do about it. It's a principled belief that creates an action-space, where the agent of play is you. (Stevens, 2010)

Social play in spaces not designed for it has the ability to be *transformative*, and

it does so by creating active agents in possibility-space, and embedding this in the functional context of the city. The edge of the magic circle rubs up against the 'rules' of public space, and in the inbetween that the pervasive games create the embodied subject is able to encounter the other in a space of *unwork*, in the void between 'what if' and 'what is'. They are thrust into their own finitude by the inbetween, and handed agency by the magic circle of the game – a play-community arises. Hide&Seek's practice becomes politically significant when it employs game design built around the invitation to encounter strangers; the 'need' (as Fleetwood terms it) in the contemporary urban (Western world, developed) ridden with *personalisation*, 'to come together with groups of people who you aren't connected with via your friendship network or your professional network and *do something*' (Fleetwood, 2012). And so the work is an embodied practice that has the potential to discover an inbetween in the city, and one that only exists because of *mutual* agency – the collective choice to enter and thus create the magic circle.

The games typically played at *Sandpit* events (usually based in a particular arts building, which then spill out onto the surrounding streets) very much ask strangers to *do* together. These games are simple, often team-based, move in the outdoors, ask participants to encounter members of the public and work together to solve problems. The *Sandpit* events are also a challenge to the author-over-audience mode of the broadcast model. Fleetwood, again:

[...] the traditional boundaries of artist and audience and curator and spectator and the kind of sacredness of the art object as an inviolable thing created in isolation that it is up to others to interpret as they – as best they can – which is this for me bizarre privileging of the artistic class as somehow – the receivers of greater insight and wisdom than others – is completely blown apart within Sandpit, where I go from playing, to running a game, to watching a game that I've designed, to talking about games, you know, I am in charge, I am a player, I am a spectator, I am all of these roles at a Sandpit. (2012, p. 311)

The *Sandpit* participants are offered a situation, framed (here by the magic circle, the lusory attitude, rather than the stage of traditional theatre); they are invited to witness situations, and they are invited to devise their own frameworks within which situations might arise. The *Sandpit* participant is a Boalian spect-actor at play, an answer to the Situationist impulse to develop 'livers', players of a new type of game on the street, one which transforms

meaning and signification away from that of the Spectacle of capitalism, and invites the do-er to encounter the other. However there are still all of the usual problems of access – how can this experience be shared past people who are likely to a) hear about the event and b) be willing to take part? In early 2012 Hide&Seek launched a call for ‘games with audiences’:

[...] explicitly inviting designers to acknowledge passersby in the work that they create, and to create work that is as enjoyable to watch as it is to play. And moreover to create tracks through which audience members can become players and vice versa. So not just going to a circus carnival, you know, Spectacle, plus onlookers, but to create things where there is a fluidity. (Fleetwood, 2012, p. 319)

This exhibits an interest in tackling the access issues of the confidence to try, and awareness of these events in the first place, though Fleetwood remains keenly aware of the limitations of the pervasive game form in this context, something that he also set out to tackle in the conception and design of the game *Hinterland*. *Hinterland* is based on an early experiment in translation-as-means-of-encounter, *The London Poetry Game*, which presented participants with a poem with each line in a different language spoken in London, and inviting translations in order to re-write it in English. Played for the first time as part of Forest Fringe in Edinburgh 2011, *Hinterland* is a game that attempts to use the act of translation a way of dissolving the edges of the contemporary ghettos of class and culture that pervade the UK’s major cities. Fleetwood explains the provocation for the game:

I don't live in London, I live in English Speaking London, specifically I live in English Speaking University Educated Creative Classes London. Which is an incredibly narrow slice of London and one of the prime goals of *Hinterland* is to make all the other Londons materialise for that English Speaking Creative Class. [...] What is the nature of that border, and what is over the other side of it? (2012, p. 316)

Hinterland is a game that uses mobile phones and face-to-face communication with strangers. For each level of the game you wish to progress through, you are given a different booklet, half of which will be in a language other than English, you are invited to go out into the streets and seek out a person who speaks that language, and to complete the tasks necessary in order to progress to the next set of tasks. *Hinterland* is, additionally, constructed like a poem; the

levels you progress through are called 'Cantos'. At the end of each Canto, your answers to questions within, and the answers of the person you found to help you, are used to generate a unique piece of poetry. This piece of poetry can be accessed by both player and translator online, and is delivered to the phone of the player with the invitation to return to base and collect a new Canto. For Fleetwood, the intention is simple:

[...] it cedes power to your interlocutor. And that's very important, that you cannot progress or participate without the aid of another. But you know, this is why we're not – I'm not at the end of that design process, I'm still pulling at 'how do you make an experience which is going to be initiated by someone like me, inevitably, rich and meaningful and rewarding for the strangers whom you encounter en route'? (2012, p. 317)

Though not currently a perfect expression of the intention, the game forces the player into conjunction with the other. It asks the player to invite someone into the magic circle, and so suddenly all passersby are re-present as potential players. It asks the player and the additional participant to work in two different languages, re-presenting their difference, the impossibility of communion, but through the mutual inbetween of the game, the players produce a poem. The fracture between where 'my language' ends and 'your language' begins is what *Hinterland* opens up; it is a finitude expressed through the metaphor of impossible, and yet constantly sought, socially vital, translation. In this manner, *Hinterland* comes close to notions of unavowable community, the embodied subject and the subjective other inscribing a communion that can never be achieved.

Likewise the attempt at the making-subjective of the other through the problem of language is a manner of making-present the cultural object of language itself (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, pp. 412-3). *Hinterland* re-reveals the edges of the contemporary ghetto for the player – people, whom the player would be largely unlikely to encounter (and much less communicate with) become not only visible, but active, *important*. Fleetwood highlights that the game is still on the terms of the player; the majority of the power of satisfaction – the 'big picture' of a complete game experience – still rests with them, but, in the act of asking the player to not just approach the other, but to create something *with* them, is transgressive and transformative. This has the

potential to re-situate the player amongst a tangible social world; the social world, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, is a 'permanent field of existence' that should be returned to through the body (2002, p. 421). This is something which Hide&Seek's games set out very determinably to do. Contemporary being in the digital age is permeated by a lack of a *functional* context (see chapter 3); greater personalisation of our daily online experience drives us away from alternative and unwanted experiences, greater connection to like minds in online space decreases our need to form attachments based on proximity. *Hinterland* attempts to create a dialogue between increasingly atomised communities (and in the use of mobile phone technology to play the game, across the cultural space of both the physical and the digital and networked field).

The experience of playing *Hinterland* is an uncomfortable one; you are constantly filled with the fear of offending people. At one point you are asked to find a Korean speaker, and suddenly you realise that you're not certain you can tell apart Korean people from other East Asian people. This sense of unease is driven by a realisation of the cultural imperialism of the English language on the one hand, but also, more simply, empathy for a person you might upset. In a more and more atomised and – at the same time – increasingly standardised, world, the failure to communicate, to translate, must be faced. Indeed, as Tassos Stevens suggests:

As a society, as individuals, it's how we respond to fail more than to epic win that matters. It's in fail that we find the dimensions of our capacity for resilience: connectedness, the ability to be stretched, our very own agency, powered by accurate reflection of *what is* with still space to dream *what if*. (2010) [My italics.]

Hinterland plays with the failure of language, it begins to re-reveal the realities of how the player is connected to the social-world in which we are all embedded, and asks the player to seek connections with the other in proximity, bodily, and through the lens of the cultural object of language. The agency of the player cultivated by the satisfactory overcoming of opted-for-obstacles is only made possible through the agency of the other, and the game becomes a *shared practice*.

The *Sandpit* games – in the fact that they pervade space, time or social boundaries – represent challenges to the systems of control, order and signification in place in streets and social notions of what it is to be ‘an adult’. They are fun and frivolous, but at their heart are driven by a lusory attitude that briefly fractures the Spectacle of everyday life. Games such as *Hinterland*, however, begin to use game mechanics to re-reveal how these systems are constructed – they invite us to play with new constructions. This is what the personal-as-political means to Fleetwood.

I think you go to see a piece of David Hare verbatim theatre about a political issue and you come out thinking 'well that's terrible', but you play a game that inhabits that same political space and you're forced, I think, to reflect on your place in that system and what you would do if you were in the shoes of that person in a much more visceral way. (2012, p. 314)

At the end of the twentieth century, it is evidently still necessary to insist on the obvious: we are embodied creatures (Hayles, 1996, p. 3)

Chapter 5. First Person Theatre and the Body, Transcendence vs. Transposition

Chapter 1 presented first person theatre as a form suited to an exploration of the personal-as-political. Personal because it examines the infiltration of the site of the embodied material subject, and political in that it offers a practice that is able to recover agency for the participant, as well as speaking to how (in conjunction with the other) they inscribe the political with their daily actions, and together with the other build and maintain the systemic: re-presentation, reflection, (re)action. The three sites of potential resistance chapter 1 suggested were: the **self as agent**, the **self in the environment**, and the **self and the subjective other**. Chapter 3 looked at the self in the urban environment through the soundwalk, chapter 4 the playful tactics in pervasive gaming as a route to agency, and this penultimate chapter will consider interactivity and the subjective other. Particularly using the lens of phenomenology set out in detail in chapter 1, this chapter will consider most directly the implications of emerging and re-emerging tactics of immersion and interaction in first person theatre, and how interactive theatre in particular is able to reconcile the subject with their primary ‘vehicle for being in the world’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 94). This is a fundamental step for the personal-as-political, as the subjectivity reconciled with the body is then able to begin to recognise the subjective that other bodies might also possess – and at this point we discover the beginnings of socio-political inscription.

The first section of this chapter will deal with some additional definitions – particularly defining the difference between ‘immersive’ and ‘interactive’ theatre, the originating influence behind the phraseology of ‘what is’ and ‘what if’ – and then move on to look at how first person interactive theatre is able to re-place the body in time, place, and in the context of others (and the implications of these reconciliations in the context of the digital age), before considering three main case studies of ‘interactive theatre’ which use different ‘levels’ of interaction as a manner of responding to and interrogating contemporary being.

Finally, it should be explained that ‘interactive theatre’ is taken here as a broad genre of first person theatre. ‘Interactive theatre’ would certainly overlap at one end of the spectrum with the highly emergent pervasive gaming of chapter 4, and at the other end with the navigationally interactive soundwalk in the city of chapter 3. It is considered here more particularly as a first person theatrical tactic that is driven by a focus on the act of interaction – not the form (games mechanics), or the environment (the city). As such, the chapter will focus on the type of work in the ‘middle’ of the spectrum, which tends to be work that happens in the context of theatre and arts buildings (not on the streets, and not in a games context).

What is and what if

The continual use of the phraseology ‘what if’ and ‘what is’ to discuss the boundaries between the sphere of suspension of disbelief or the boundaries of the magic circle and the ‘real world’ deserves a small note, here, regarding its origin. The ‘what is’ and the ‘what if’ are the terms that Tassos Stevens of Coney most often uses to discuss first person theatre and play, and it is from Stevens that this study derives their use. The ‘what if’ is a powerful device in the context of the phenomenological notion of bracketing, as a way of *re-seeing*. Merleau-Ponty (here quoted in the context of Frances Dyson’s study *Sounding New Media*) dismissed traditional philosophy for its inability to ‘restore to us the ‘there is’ of the world; indeed, it ‘replaces our belongingness to the world with a view of the world from above’ (2009, p. 119). Traditional theatre, in exactly the same way, shows us the ‘world from above’, it is first person theatre which restores the ‘there is’ of the world, which provides a ‘hyper-reflection’; ‘a reflection that is simultaneously aware of itself and engaged with the horizon of the world’ (Dyson, 2009, p. 120). The ‘what if’ in direct conflict with ‘what is’ allows an emergent inbetween, with political implications.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ To recall Warren Linds’ words on Boalian first person theatre from chapter 4:

This in-between is not empty but alive with intentions, responses, and actions arising from the system’s prior history. Complicity holds each of us

First person theatre bids us to pay attention to this 'in-between'. And it is a step towards creating a contemporary activism that is truly effective. As Andy Field suggests in an interview for this thesis, 'activism is very good at doing, and art is very good at imagining'; in that context, the question for activism has to be not only to find something that can create 'ruptures within the fabric of capitalism' but also that can investigate the question 'how do we live in those ruptures?' (2012, p. 333). Therefore, it is not only re-seeing the in-between that is important, but also providing the participant with an ability to respond to it – agency, through embodied, contextualised action.

As first person theatre reconciles the body of the participant with a sense of community, being-in-time and place (more on this shortly), the participant is invited to consider their embodied and inter-subjective selves, and to see how *their actions* exist within time and space, and affect the other. This *agency*, this will-to-action embodied in the inter-subject, is vital to maintaining the political power of a work beyond the bonds of its specific happening. By awakening and embodying agency, first person theatre provides a 'muscle-memory' for the subject. This allows a 'what if' of true agency to be identified, and thereby noticed by its absence and reclaimed in the 'what is' of wider life.

It is the *reflective* space of art that makes this possible, and for this reason the most effective play with the inbetween also allows room for reflection in the return to the 'what is'. Indeed, as Oliver Grau suggests in *Virtual Art*, 'there is no *Homo Ludens* without a return from the game world to the real one' (2003, p. 308). It is a simple but important tactic to note; much focus is put on the work as a manner of transport or transposition, but the journey back to the real finishes the expression. When critical faculties are necessarily exchanged for the deep embeddedness and bodily transposition into the 'what if', there must be space for the transition back into the 'what is'. Stevens talks about

responsible for the good or bad of the whole and bids us perceive and pay attention to the in-between. (2006, p. 120)

'decompression' as a way out⁹⁵ of the interactive theatre piece *A Small Town Anywhere*:

At BAC [Battersea Arts Centre] one of the most crucial decisions we made was to invest in buying a glass of wine for everybody in the audience [...] there was a decompression zone that meant they didn't leave to go to the bar, there was a free drink, and then once they'd started conversations there they stayed [...] the immersion that they've been in, that's broken so they're now free to just take it and share it and try and understand the bits that were opaque to them. (Stevens, Interview with Tassos Stevens – appendix a) pp.476-489, 2012)

The effectiveness of art in a phenomenological and political sense is that it is by its nature reflective; it shows us the world anew. Stevens here shows how, through providing a space to transition between the heat of 'what if' to just 'what is', it is possible to retain reflection, at the same time as preserving the embodied agency of the immersive experience.

Interaction and immersion.

The terms 'interactive' and 'immersive' are frequently confused and misused in theatre and performance circles.⁹⁶ The misuse of the term 'interactive' – or rather the necessity to talk in greater specificity when discussing interactivity – is highlighted by Steve Dixon in *Digital Performance*:

If one turns a light switch, the process is interactive – something is received in exchange – but no real dialogue takes place. In precisely the same way, many and arguably *most* products and artworks dubbed 'interactive' [...] should more accurately be termed 'reactive.' (2007, p. 561)

Rules of Play also picks up on this, and for both Salen and Zimmerman, and Dixon, interaction is defined in terms of a *dialogue* (2004, p. 59), and Dixon

⁹⁵ It is equally important from an ethical point of view that an individual always be provided with a way out – whether it be a pause button, a raised hand, or an open door. As Andy Field explains in a blog post for the British Council on the ethical problems dealt with by immersive and interactive work,

[...] a shared danger can be a powerful and meaningful experience – a way of undermining our suffocatingly mediated experience of the world. That though is always jeopardised when the piece lacks a compassion for its audience. I think maybe it comes down to this: that we should be allowed to feel lost, but to know (if not see) that there is a way home if we ask for it. (2010)

⁹⁶ As well as in the wider media, in fact in any area where the question of experience design is likely to come up.

goes on to suggest a new scale of 'levels' of interaction (2007, p. 563). That a *dialogue should take place* is the definition of 'interaction' from which this thesis wishes to work, although instead of Dixon's four levels of interaction⁹⁷ a different four levels of *first person theatre* are proposed, below. In Dixon, and Salen and Zimmerman's terms, the first 'level' would not be 'interactive', but in terms of first person theatre it still places the participant as an activator, and thus at the centre of the work. These 'levels' represent independent theorising as well as notions set out in *Digital Performance* (Dixon, 2007, p. 563), *Rules of Play* (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004) and *Pervasive Games* (Montola, Stenros, & Waern, 2009).

The four forms of first person engagement are:

1. **Reactive**
2. **Navigational**
3. **Conversational**
4. **Emergent**

Reactive work is best described as switch-based – you press 'play' on an mp3 player, you turn a light on, you take something that a performer hands you – the work is 'on' because you are there, but you do not shape the content or the context in which it is experienced. Work such as that of Analogue Theatre Company's 2011 piece *Lecture Notes on a Death Scene* is a useful example of this; you are situated *in* the story-world, you pick up phones, open letters pushed under your chair and are directly addressed, but you cannot choose to look from a different perspective, or shape the content or context of the work. Most immersive work fits into this first category.

Navigational work allows you to choose context; you not only get to choose how and where to direct your gaze, but also where and how you act. This action may be guided (speed of walking, specific directions in which to approach something), but your actions colour and shape the experience (though the content of the work is not effected by your decisions, only the *context*⁹⁸). In navigational work the piece constantly stops if you do not take an action. Where reactive work offers moments for switching on/off, in

⁹⁷ 1. Navigation, 2. Participation, 3. Conversation, 4. Collaboration. (2007, p. 563)

⁹⁸ Although this is still a powerful component of experience.

navigational work your movement and actions are a constant on/off. Duncan Speakman's *Subtle mobs*, as discussed in chapter 2, are usefully characterised as 'navigational'.

Conversational work is work in which the content as well as the context is shaped by the participant; there is a construct controlled by the artist(s) (who might be considered to have lexical control), but the content is directly shaped by the interaction with the participant whose responses fundamentally form the work. A work such as Ontroerend Goed's *Internal* is a useful illustration of this; the key markers in the journey of the piece are the same with each performance, the performers select an audience member, they take them off and talk with them, then return to the group and discuss one another, but each time the work is contingent and made up of the responses of the participants.

Emergent work, finally, occurs within a framework – but content, context and lexical control are all within the power of the participant; the content, and, crucially, *conclusion* are decided by their actions. Emergent work allows the greatest amount of agency for its participants and most often involves more game-like tactics, the asking of a question, a 'what if', which the participants are invited to inhabit. Coney's *A Small Town Anywhere* is an emergent work, one relying on game mechanics to build a framework for the question 'would you let the fascists in?' More can be found on *A Small Town Anywhere* in the case studies section.

Further to these clarifications, in *Performance, Technology and Science*, Johannes Birringer offers a useful insight into the *effective* use of interactivity using the metaphor of 'hot' (complex) and 'cold' interactivity which is a useful addendum. Birringer explains that

[...] cold interactivity entails purposive decision-making and effectivity. [...] Complex interactivity draws on metaphors of social interaction adding many layers of human behavior and emotion which reflect the grey areas of play, performance, and theatricality, all those hot zones of indecision, frivolity, irony, and confusion that affect the nature of action-reaction. (2008, pp. 238-9)

While different 'levels' of interaction suit different questions and forms of work, it is the area of 'hot' interactivity in which this chapter is interested;

those tensions between play and performance, the mirroring of social activities in the embodied participant, and a dialogue between the ‘what is’ of the real world and the ‘what if’ of the performance framework that true or partial agency offers. As the first level of first person performance is not a form of ‘interactive’ theatre, ‘hot interactivity’ is to be found in navigational, conversational and emergent work. It is in hot interaction that the cracks between old and new ways of being can be discovered, investigated, inhabited, and thus form relevance to the socio-political intent of this thesis.

And so having defined three levels of interaction (and four of first person performance) we can look to another useful insight from Birringer that will allow us to clearly divide ‘immersive’ work from ‘interactive’:

First, I think of ‘interaction’ as a spatio-temporal and architectural concept for performance that maintains a social dimension even if intersubjectivity [...] is reframed [...] Secondly I look at ‘interactivity’ in the more narrow sense of collaborative performance with a control system (2008, p. 110)

The second sense we have just tackled; the four levels of first person performance are all levels of control systems for collaborative performance. The first point is that from which we can draw our clarification. Birringer here highlights a distinction of interactive work that can be contrasted against immersive – put simply it is the difference between re-framing and removing the ‘what is’ of the everyday world. Interactive theatre builds a framework that maintains the presence of the *real world* amongst the invitation to re-frame it and our selves – and what we will call ‘immersive’ performance represents an entire shift in context.

Immersion, though part of the wider spectrum of first person theatre⁹⁹, will not be dealt with much further in this chapter, which is mostly concerned with navigational, conversation and emergent interaction. ‘Immersion’ is too often

⁹⁹ With regards to definitions, the term ‘first person’ theatre will continue to be used where it is most useful in collating the different distinctive definitions of interaction and immersion considered in the whole thesis. ‘First person’ will be used when distinction is not necessary; first person theatre is work which places you at the centre of the narrative framework or universe – you are both in and of the narrative-world, to what level, or purpose, is immaterial to this term.

used interchangeably with the word ‘interaction’, when in fact they are very different approaches to first person work. Interaction can certainly occur within work that is also immersive, but in escaping the context of the real, immersive work is less effective in the political terms of a theatre of the ‘inbetween’ and the theory of resistance as *friction*. Immersion (in theatre) is another sticky term, and is so widely associated with the transcendent that it provokes a rejection or specific unease in many artists. Ant Hampton, interviewed for the case studies section of this chapter, phrases this unease when asked about what he would call his own work (*Etiquette, This is Not My Voice Speaking, etc.*):

[...] to me it seems like immersive theatre is more about work which – pretty much kind of sews up the whole experience in terms of 'this is the environment' [...] And for me that's only interesting if you're going to cut the strings at a certain point and come crashing back down and deal with the real world. (2012, p. 350)

If you *interact* with something, it is a two-way conversation from where you *already are* (physically or otherwise) – it is augmented reality, the theatrical equivalent of the HUD*. If you are *immersed* in something you are entirely washed away – somewhere and someone different, it is the transporting techniques of the HMD*. Immersive theatre attempts to vanish the ‘what is’ and bring the participant entirely into the ‘what if’, and as such it steps over the inbetween which this thesis finds useful in discovering and reconciling the contemporary being with here, now and other people around them. Immersive work, in the confines of this thesis, is therefore considered much less politically empowering, in that it *transports*, as opposed to interactive work, which is a form of *transposition*.

It is worth briefly expanding on why, exactly, transcendence or total immersion, is problematic, politically speaking.

Critical distance¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Aside from the critical distance that is lost when work focuses only on the ‘what if’, it is also necessary to briefly address the difficulty (and need for new forms) of critically discussing work which asks you to let go of some of your critical faculties; work that is contingent on its participants, and therefore *different every time*. Johannes Birringer’s explains that:

The language of immersion, before its enthusiastic application with regards to virtual reality and online environments, has more historically been applied to *sound*, and here we can find very early discussion about the effect of the removal of critical distance. Frances Dyson's *Sounding New Media* talks in detail about this, and Theo van Leeuwen draws a very clear example in his study *Speech, Music, Sound*:

Perspective and hierarchization disappear. The individual no longer feels separate from the crowd, but become fully integrated and immersed in the environment:

The sound in Norman and Gothic churches, surrounding the audience, strengthens the link between the individual and the community. The loss of high frequencies and the resulting impossibility of localising the sound makes the believer part of a world of sound. He does not face the sound in enjoyment – he is wrapped up by it (Blaukopf, 1960:180) (1999, p. 28)

Immersion, one might say, is characterised by this disappearance of the perception of self ('perspective'), and context ('hierarchy'). The problem with this is that it does not also mean that these things cease to exist, what is in fact being discussed is a means of embeddedness, where the embodied subject is split into body (what is), and subject (which can fly to the 'what if'), at best leading to escapism, and at worst corruption. We see here, then, the particular 'power of immersion to deprive the human subject of the right of decision' (Grau, 2003, p. 110). Grau is discussing the history of illusion and immersion in art, with particular regard to the propaganda panoramas of the Franco-

[...] if human agency in reception and participation with complex systems produces emergent behavior, how can such behavior of interacting participants be analysed or measured in regard to patterns and coherences in the productivity of the content for the aesthetic experience? [...] New description techniques for such transience and individuality and collectively changeable content-generation are needed. (2008, pp. xxiv-xxv)

This is a problem for all first person work, and much wider studies could be done into the critical role in a theatre of interaction and immersion. As for the brief engagement that is all this thesis can afford, as there is no currently established or approved description technique, this study will therefore (when referencing first person works directly) echo approaches used by Steve Dixon in *Digital Performance*, and certain contributors to Nicholas Whybrow's *Performance and the Contemporary City*. This means the thesis will clearly frame personal experience aside from descriptions of what happened, so that the subjective experience is not discounted, but framed by the factual experience.

Prussian war. He touches on the important aspect of the presentation of images of 'what if' in conjunction with the removal of the critical distance that is provided by the 'what is', and how immersion has thus been used for political or militaristic purposes. Matthew Causey likewise highlights a (more contemporary version of) problematic 'immersion' in his conception of embeddedness – 'a problem of materiality and embodiment' – a separation of subject from embodied context (2006, pp. 151-2). Embeddedness (tackled in depth in chapter 1), as Causey describes, is an extension of the images and message-sending of private interests into the body of the material subject, corrupting the data of the real at the point of interface, perception. This is made possible by the *unhoused being* of contemporary technoculture – where 'real' and 'self' are fragmented and pervaded by the replication and pervasive nature of personalised, mobile and networked cultural platforms. The *unhoused-being* of the world of immersion or embeddedness (following the eras of 'virtuality' and 'simulation' that Causey marks (2006)) has their 'self' washed away so often that its original position is forgotten; functional context is lost and the (re)embedded individual loses all effective ability to distinguish *truth*.

In terms of the 'politics' defined in this thesis, immersion does not access an *inbetween* and so cannot compare 'what is' with 'what if' – embodied reflection is not possible, and so recognition and reaction are not provoked. Although, where immersive work is first person the 'what is' still exists in the body of the participant, because that participant is 'unhoused' they are removed from the 'here and now' of a functional context. This means the participant can reflect on the self, or the content of the work, but is not invited to recognise the implications the 'what if' in the context of 'what is'. The frame is vanished, as the work attempts to pretend there is nothing outside it, and so immersive work circumvents the space of possibility accessed in the *inbetween*.

This study intends, therefore, to consider first person work which can be characterised not by a 'washing away' ¹⁰¹ – but by a re-revelation of the body

¹⁰¹ A phraseology influenced by reading on Deleuze and Guattari:

as *an interface between* self and society, a framing of the ‘what is’ via the ‘what if’. Work, therefore, which provokes re-embodiment of the *unhoused being*, a reconciliation with selfhood, before an inviting the participant to recognise and react to the political implications of being here, now, with other subjects. That is, the active embodied consciousness, reflected in the mirror of what is/what if of first person theatre.

The body

And so this study intends to suggest that the political power of first person theatre is directly rooted in its embodying function. This allows us neatly to recall the use of phenomenology as a theoretical lens. Phenomenology is the *original philosophy of the human-world interface*. It is the *space between* perception and perceived (the impossibility of objectivity, and the development of the importance of reconciling the body with mind in conceptualising inter-subjectivity) that allows us to describe phenomenology and first person theatre as returning us, through an embodied re-revelation of consciousness, agency and intersubjectivity, to ‘our functional context’, related to people, place and time (referenced in both chapter 1 and chapter 3) (Arendt, 2002, p. 346).

This study therefore focuses on three reconciliations represented by first person theatre: those of the body in time, place, and in the context of the other. It will set out to show how these reconciliations can be seen to deploy phenomenological tactics, and in doing so connect up again (as Arendt puts it) with our functional (socio-political) contexts through the ‘stream of consciousness’ (ibid) (unknown or unplanned action) experienced in interactive theatre work. This is considered in the context of first person

‘Deterritorialisation means the process whereby the very basis of one’s identity, the proverbial ground beneath our feet, is eroded, washed away like the bank of a river swollen by floodwater – immersion. Although such transformations are often narrated as a discovery of oneself, it would be more accurate to think of them in terms of loss, or, becoming-imperceptible, as Deleuze and Guattari put it, by which they mean ceasing to stand out, ceasing to be perceived as different, looking like everybody else, merging with the landscape.’ (Buchanan, 2005, p.23)

theatre as a manner of political resistance in the digital age. An age characterised by increasing **personalisation**, the **end of broadcast**, the **near and far**, and the **removal of the interface**, and the implications these shifts have for the ability of the Spectacle to infiltrate our lives. This thesis suggests that the (already well-documented) disruptions of personal and political agency by the new manners of message-sending and receiving emerging in the digital age can be re-presented, re-considered and reacted against through the embodied subject discovered through first person theatre.

The body in time

Theatre, as 'live play', is fundamentally an art that, beyond all others, is *of* as well as *in* time. The phenomenological value of fine art is often suggested to be its longevity; in these terms Arendt explains that the purpose of art is 'to attain permanence through the ages' (2002, p. 371). As well as serving to *bracket* the attention of the observer through its very frame, this permanence and value beyond simple 'use' is one that throws time and human endeavour into relief. This is important from a phenomenological point of view (and to our consideration of a new politics of the personal in theatre), because 'live play' further allows us to be hyper-aware of the phenomenal moment *in time*. Though the 'live play' of theatre does not re-present time through permanence, it is able to have a similar effect from the opposite direction by making re-visible the fundamental *impermanence* of the body in time. In traditional theatre (performed by actors), the tension between the *what is* and *what if* of theatre is suspended in the bodies on stage; the stage is a bracket, and the bodies of the performers are an interface for 'what if'. The inbetween is held in their bodies, and they become ships that sail against the tide of the inevitable *what is*, the certainty of which must invade at the curtain's fall. This tension has led to many considerations of theatre and the *void* – and meant that writers such as Matthew Causey (2006) and Cormac Power (2008) have found in performance a useful way of discussing the levels of presence thrust upon the contemporary individual in digital spaces. *First person* theatre, as it works *directly with the bodies of the audience-participant*, progresses this point by transferring the experience of the *weight* of the inbetween – the body weighed

on by the inevitable return to the what is – to the audience. The participant must hold the *what is* and *what if* simultaneously in their own body – it is a continual, physical and psychological action, rather than an extended psychological process. It re-sites the body as the fundamental interface of experience and perception, and prepares the subject to re-see space and encounter the subjective other. Indeed, as Merleau-Ponty suggests ‘our body [...] is temporal before being spatial. Things co-exist in space because they are present to the same perceiving subject and enveloped in one and the same temporal wave’ (2002, p. 321). In order that the perceiving subject be able to consider space, being, and all the thoughts of subjectivity and intersubjectivity that might follow, they must be located in *time* – ‘[e]nveloped’ in the ‘same temporal wave’ as other bodies (ibid). In the context of the digital age, the re-embodiment of questions of time and presence, in a field of radical ‘constant (dis)integration, and continuous re-constellation’ (Birringer, 2008, p. 177) is important, and allows the participant to play with immateriality – the ‘what if’ – at the very site of their being able to have a material ‘what is’, their body.

First person theatre does not show the participant the world, but asks the participant to step in to the thickness of their existence in it¹⁰² – to bodily inhabit the space between presence and absence that theatre in general summons so well. This is important to a new politics-of-the-personal in the digital age – our conceptions of ‘being-present’ are shifting in the context of ubiquitous tele-presence (Skype), so-called ‘real-time’ social media (Twitter) and rolling news. The stream of time is more and more mapped out for us, recorded moment by moment, at the same time as our *presence* in that stream is complicated by the increasing ubiquity and embeddedness of different levels of ‘presence’ (being-in-time). This is the ‘constant (dis)integration, and continuous re-constellation’ of the contemporary being-in-time of which Birringer speaks (Birringer, 2008, p. 177). By asking the participant to be *bodily* at the intersection of a *foregrounded* (in the sphere of art)

¹⁰² ‘[theatre’s] primary accomplishment is not to represent the world but to be part of it, to effect a ‘transaction between consciousness and the thickness of existence’ [...] Given day-to-day forces which rob us of our being present in our lives, the theatre must disclose to us both our presences and our absences.’ (Fortier, 2002, p.43)

'disintegration' and 're-constellation', first person theatre fundamentally, in its form, addresses notions of presence in the digital age. That it is *bodily* means that one is hyper-present; there is a degree of tangible presence which can serve to contrast against the *simulation* of presence, or re-reveal to us the slipperiness of projected presence, in everyday life.

This can be illustrated most easily using the ubiquitous technology of headphones as an example. Brandon LaBelle, in *Background Noise*, describes how headphones 'situate listeners inside the actual *and* the virtual, the live and the recorded, thereby leading them through a labyrinth of information and its ultimate lack of cohesion' (LaBelle, 2006, p. 225). As set out in chapter 3, the headphone, in this manner, disrupts the listener's sense of the *near and far*, enclosing the listener in a 'far' (recorded) and drawing them away from the 'near' of present time. In using the 'far' of the headphone-delivered experience as an intentional disruption (as opposed to transportation from) of the 'near', however, the way in which headphones powerfully augment daily experience is constantly foregrounded. The tension between the virtual and the actual is evoked in the perceiving, active body of the participant, and they view their situation in and of time in a reflective capacity. They are made re-aware of their presence on the street (in space), by making the experience of it re-present – that is, in *time* and *place*, the interface is re-appeared, reflected upon, reacted to. Further to this, LaBelle's mention of the live and recorded is also a useful point to touch on regarding the many of the examples of first person theatre that play with or are delivered via a recorded medium. Ant Hampton's *This is Not My Voice Speaking* in particular (which will be discussed in greater detail as part 4.2 of the thesis) plays with separating recorded voice from projected video, as well as using previous generation technology (record players, film-based projectors) to make strange the act of playback, and to focus attention on the *construction* of recorded images. 'This is perfectly normal' the voice constantly assures the audience, as they slow down and speed up the voice through physical manipulation of a record player. This re-revelation of the recorded, and of image/sound manipulation, serves to

foreground temporality and the bodily effect we can have on representations of it – showing to us presence and its simulation.

Finally, as interactive work becomes more formally inventive in the light of accommodating participating audiences (one-on-one experiences, site-specificity), the *durational* performance in particular turns its attention to time. Johannes Birringer, in *Performance, Technology & Science* explains how:

[...] the space of the work over time [...] raises the question of where the viewer positions herself in relation to such a space-time, the long 'duration' of the ephemeral, and how these many fleeting perspectives can be integrated in to the world we imagine as our digital future. (Birringer, 2008, p. 177)

Presence in Blast Theory's durational piece *Day of the Figurines* here forms a useful example of this effect in first person theatre. The fact that you play – after an initial physical encounter – primarily over a mobile phone (via text messages) deals directly with the emergent cultural space of cellular communication. The fact that it occurs over several days and threads itself into your life in the same way as anyone with your mobile number might, re-focuses attention on how the participant 'positions herself in relation to such a space-time'. Presence is slippery; though the body is still the interface for the experience, *presence* is confused by the lack of proximity to the figurine it controls. The body is the intersection between a disintegration and re-constellation of presence and absence, as the work deals directly with agency at one-remove. A form of agency concurrent with a cultural space that is a fact of most developed-world (and increasingly developing world) daily lives. Matt Adams of Blast Theory, at the *Edgelands* conference in Edinburgh 2011, spoke about wanting to examine:

[...] where culture takes place, and how culture is configured [...] a mobile phone is not just a communication tool, it is a cultural space [...] and that is repeated across a whole multitude of technical platforms, all of which have profound social and political implications (Adams, 2011)

Time is fundamental to our being-in-the-world, and our being-among-others. As phenomenologists assert, we must be temporal in order to be spatial – present – at all. The notion of presence (being-in-a-place-in-time) that first person theatre can explore allows participants to tackle the 'profound social

and political implications' that new and increasingly pervasive ways of being present that there are in the digital world. Andy Field echoes this in another British Council blog post considering interactive theatre:

For me, that is about a reassertion of the importance of an audience being present in a particular place at a particular time. About a reaffirmation for the audience of their precarious suspension between where they actually are and where it is that the work is asking them to go. (Field, 2010)

First person theatre is able to reconcile the individual with their body, opening them to the context of time, followed by place, and the meeting with the other. Phenomenologically powerful, first person theatre has the potential to provoke the participant to re-see their relationship to the shifting notions of time, place and community, and to connect with their bodily experience of (and augmentation by) digital technoculture.

The body in place

Although chapter 3 set out a good deal on first person theatre and place, a little more can be added in the context of interactive theatre. As the participant in-time is hyper-present, they are reconciled to their temporal context, which, when inhabited in the material context of the *body*, creates a *situation* – a space in time and place. Birringer (here quoting John Newling) explains that situation-art is a route to spatial agency, as when 'art form becomes a part of place a situation is formed. [...] Situations are bridges by which we learn and challenge the conventions of a given place (Birringer, 2008, p. 205). Birringer is specifically discussing site-specific installation work, but the example can be usefully extrapolated. We can consider this sentiment in two ways: first, that first person theatre, even when it isn't site-specific in a traditional sense (i.e. outside a theatre or arts and heritage building), admits *site* into the performance space. Interactive theatre provides frameworks, but they are exactly that, *frameworks* – structures built in a place that persists. On the British Council blog, Field highlights this feature of interactive theatre, explaining that you can't 'hold back the weight of the world. It comes flooding in regardless. [Interactive theatre] doesn't just understand that, it relies on it. It swims in reality' (Field, 2010). For Field, interactive theatre doesn't pretend a place is *other*, but rather 'swims in reality', asking you to be buoyed up on

bubbles of 'what if', whilst always, constantly being rooted in the 'what is' of the acting body. It says, differently to traditional naturalistic theatre, 'we're all in this room, but let's play with the idea that 'we' and 'room' might become something else'. This 'embracing of the total impossibility of getting away from the world around us' (ibid) is fundamental; first person theatre admits the truth that we are all of us always contextual creatures, we cannot escape our environments. Or as Merleau-Ponty puts it, the 'body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be intervolved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them' (2002, p. 94).

For theatre to be at its most politically effective as set out within the terms of this study (that is, to engage the participant with notions of the exercise and attainment of power in their society, and allow them to draw active conclusions about how they wish to interact with or change that relationship), it begins to admit environment. In order to truly open fissures in the real world, first person theatre begins to allow the participant to discover the real in the imagined.

A second reading of Birringer's quote that leads on from the other half of Merleau-Ponty's statement – to have a body is to be 'intervolved' in an environment – shows us that to be in an environment (as participants are actively reminded in first person theatre when it asks them to make actions that *form* the 'what if') is also to have a body. The 'site' of first person theatre might very well be considered the body of the participant itself – it attempts to invite you to be 'part of a place', it turns the participant into site and (as it is active) situation. We return to Birringer: 'bridges by which we learn and challenge the conventions of a given place' (2008, p. 205). The self becomes site, and as the experience turns the participant into the fulcrum of what is/what if (picks at the edges of our 'natural' selves) both perceiving subject and perceived objects are bracketed, available for new examination. When suspension of disbelief happens in places not explicitly designed for it –

whether literal space or subject-place – the membrane, the edges of the magic circle and the ‘real world’, are foregrounded.

In *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty criticises scientific approaches of the day for their ‘requirement’ that, for example, ‘a perceived crystal should have a definite number of sides’. He suggests that the scientific point of view has missed that ‘the perceived, by its nature, admits of the ambiguous, the shifting, and is shaped by its context’ (2002, pp. 12-3).¹⁰³ First person theatre, like phenomenology ‘chooses the perspectival over the universal’ (Stanton B. Garner, 1994, p. 5), it centres on the basic unit of experience that we have of the world; our body and the actions it can make. What and how we perceive is fundamentally shaped by our body, which in turn is fundamentally shaped by its environment. We cannot escape the shifting nature of how these things interact, nor admit that true criticality is impossible; we cannot extract ourselves from experience, and nor should we be asked to. Interactive and immersive theatre is often criticised for its request that we exchange critical distance for a more personal experience; traditional theatre tries to show us all sides of the crystal at once. In this context, first person theatre is strongly phenomenological, and when followed by opportunity for reflection (the stepping out of the bracket, magic circle, or suspension of disbelief), becomes a political theatre par excellence. In the context of a shifting digital age, first person theatre is a potential crucible for examining changes in our sense of self, place, and community. As Carver and Beardon suggest (quoted by Birringer) in ‘its early stages, any new technology will be understood primarily as technique [...] we need to move to a more conceptual level so that we can talk about the technology in terms of models of use’ (Birringer, 2008, p. 51). In a truly political theatre of the digital age, the disrupted fields of place and perspective should both become sites; situations which allow participants to

¹⁰³ It is worth noting that although the reasoning behind most phenomenologists’ dismissal of the scientific approach to perception is easily understood; that developments in science since have much more often begun to tackle the idea of the effect of observation on the observed. This has emerged from quantum physics studies in particular, where the act of observation can maintain and collapse possibilities, and has since made its way into wider scientific thinking. Likewise the social sciences’ greater use of ethnographic manners of studying also point to this shift in recognising the perspectival as well as the universal as a site of study.

examine them both in terms of changing 'models of use'. It is not the platform or place that is the focus (content), rather it is important that it be acknowledged as a fundamental context.

The body in context of others

Following the body reconciled with time and place, Merleau-Ponty gives us our final reconciliation, that of the body amongst others, the aforementioned 'social field' that he calls to be rediscovered 'not as an object or sum of objects, but as a permanent field or dimension of existence: I may well turn away from it, but not cease to be situated relatively to it' (2002, p. 421). Merleau-Ponty argues in the *Phenomenology of Perception* that in re-revealing to the subject that an integral part of their subjectivity is their body, the subject is then able to more easily conceive of *inter*-subjectivity, the idea that other bodies are also subjects. This is the first aspect of a theatre of community: reconciling body with action at the site of the participant. A second aspect is the ability of interactive theatre (in particular) to build frameworks ideally situated to re-opening an inbetween for community and a public realm to emerge.

Chapter 4 has already touched reasonably thoroughly on the ability of play and games to work with ideas of complicity in socio-political systems through an encounter with the subjective other. Because playful and gaming forms are systems built for interaction, they are extremely adept at examining the systems of interaction that exist between people. The same is true of interactive theatre. Interactive experiences designed for more than one participant engage with the crowd in a radically different way to traditional theatre; not just a group of individuals directing their gaze from their own personal ghettos, but a group of people-as-part-of-a-group, who together *actively* participate, and who each can contribute to, corrupt, or break the experience. This is Merleau-Ponty's permanent *field* of existence, a field that cannot be denied. For example, the simplest possible interaction (as defined by this study) in Rotozaza's *Etiquette* is between two people, and is formed of instructions and lines delivered over headphones. The level of interaction is reactive, edging on navigational, and yet the very fact that the performance is

contingent on two unrehearsed performers fundamentally foregrounds intersubjectivity – that you feel self aware, and you can see another feel similarly self aware, connects you to them. This, as LaBelle points out in *Background Noise*, is newly relevant in the context of the shifting encounter with the other in the age of the network, LaBelle suggests that given ‘the radical multiplication of presence introduced by networked society, art needs to come to terms with the crowd, not as single consumer, but as multiple user [...]’ (2006, pp. 259-60).¹⁰⁴ The digital age presents (parts of) a world where, in McLuhan’s terms, we struggle with the weight of the ‘global village’, and we are forced to numb ourselves as our technology extends us and interweaves us until we wear ‘mankind as our skin’ (1964, p. 47). Numbing ourselves to the implications of our extended senses and amongst technology that is increasingly pervasive the interface vanishes and the contemporary individual loses their finitude – where they stop and other things begin. This loss is politically disempowering; numb to the extension of the self, there is no extricating oneself from the message-sending of private interests, no notion of ‘what is’ to separate from ‘what if’. The finitude of the self is politically significant in the age of the network, and as set out extensively in chapter 1, is to be discovered in the encounter with the subjective other.

In the mutual time, place and co-created inbetween space of interactive theatre, the self and the other find the possibility of being re-presented to one another, framed in a place maintained by their alike agency, but always thrown back into their own, re-revealed embodied subjectivity. The act of co-inhabiting the ‘what if’ is a manner of destining oneself together with another, in a way that can never be achieved; thrusting themselves towards the ‘what if’ the participants must eventually fall back into ‘what is’. In the inbetween of interactive theatre one can discover a limit at which ‘all politics begins’, a

¹⁰⁴ How are we supposed to fit this globe into our heads? What stories do we tell ourselves about the world in order to understand it? What does it mean that I can follow the minute by minute happenings to an individual protester in Greece or Syria? What does proximity mean in an era where those with whom I have most in common with may be scattered all over the country, and over different social networking sites? What does ‘in common’ mean? This is what LaBelle is touching on when he talks about a ‘radical multiplication of presence’.

community that is made of co-habitation: 'that way of destining ourselves in common that we call a politics, that way of opening community to itself, rather than to a destiny or to a future' (Nancy, 1991, pp. 80-1). Interactive theatre has the potential to open community to *itself* – to a mutual inscription of limited duration, to something which cannot be *achieved*, but a practice of pushing together what must inevitably fall apart – to the limit which re-reveals the finitude of the subject, and re-presents the subjectivity of the other. Matthew Causey calls this inbetween the 'void'; he explains that the 'void requires control from the state of things. This unhinging or interruption of the state of things as they are, which reveals an invisible impossible thing, is the vent of a truth' (2006, p. 193). In terms of Blanchot and Nancy's theories, the community of interactive theatre is an invisible, impossible practice, discovered in its collapse. Political in its radical *unwork*, in destining the subject with the other, in its embodied practice, and route to finitude, agency, and the implications of sharing space.

We now move on to the direct exploration of interactive theatre as a potential route to the body in time, place and the context of the other in the work of Coney, Non Zero One and Ant Hampton. These three case studies have been chosen to take in work at different levels of interaction; much of Coney's work is heavily play-inspired and so fits firmly within the 'emergent' category, whereas Non Zero One have work that fits into the conversational and navigational level, and Ant Hampton's work tends to be further towards navigational interaction. Ant Hampton's instruction-based pieces are considered as a manner of playing with the pre-set, pre-recorded and pre-expected, and of the making present of the body of the participant – the body, then, set in time. Coney are considered particularly in terms of *A Small Town Anywhere* as emergent interactive work that opens a radical space for community, and in the encounter with the other, explicitly evoking a personal-as-political experience. But first, Non Zero One's headphone-based experiences are considered as a manner of playing with *absence*, and the use of the 'far' of technology to discover connectedness in the 'near' of the subject-in-a-place.

Non Zero One.

Non Zero One are a relatively new company; they formed at Royal Holloway University in 2009, had their first full commission from the Barbican in 2010, and have since devised pieces alongside BAC, for the Bush Theatre and at Forest Fringe, among others. They describe themselves as an artists' collective, and are formed of six main members with diverse experience in areas such as theatre, dance, fine art, game design and photography. The interview for this study was with one of these six main members, Cat Harrison, who was careful to stress that the views she expressed as part of that interview were hers as *part* of the collective, rather than ones that represented the collective's point of view as a whole.

Non Zero One produce work that this study would classify as 'interactive', usually based on playful or reactive frameworks. Their pieces tend to involve headphone use, typically occur in art buildings or spaces, and seem particularly interested in the idea of the 'absent performer'. The collective's first piece, *Would Like to Meet*, was developed as part of their university course in 2009, supported by Farnham Maltings and its first full performance was commissioned by the Barbican in 2010.¹⁰⁵ Harrison talks about the genesis of the piece:

[...] one thing in common, that we had felt especially at that point in our university career was a very strong feeling of absence. At the time there were people going missing from our university [...] there were also a couple of suicides in the university, and it's a very small university. There's about 7 or 8,000 people at that time, so you knew of everybody [...] we were all away from home [...] absence became a theme of what we were doing. (2012, p. 365)

The company were responding to a dislocation of moving away from family, at the same time as joining a (relatively small) community that felt under threat, represented in their daily lives by *absence*. Linking to the loneliness implicit in

¹⁰⁵ The work is an incredibly intricately timed journey for six people across an entire arts building. Actions are timed to the second, participants are invited to lower envelopes off balconies, to look at people pass and wonder if any of them is the voice to which they're listening on a recording, to lean back and be caught by another participant, unseen, scheduled to be there at exactly the right moment, the voice in the participant's ear simply says: 'I'm going to ask you to lean backwards, into the arms of someone, and I'm telling you now, they will catch you'. (Non Zero One, 2010)

lives that are more and more lived in the 'far' of technology, the 'near' of their small university community also felt riddled by absence. Indeed, there's a thread that can be drawn through all of Non Zero One's work thus far – of an urge to re-make our relationship with place, people and experience, and to deal with this *present* absence that pervaded the inception of their first work as a company. Harrison explains that the company, working in this context, 'came to this conclusion of... that absence of the performer [...] We didn't necessarily want a performer to be the thing that you were watching, we wanted people to really try and experience this feeling of absence' (ibid). Non Zero One thus removed the present performer from the equation, and instead re-focused the delivery of the work on the *present absent* platform of recorded sound. However, instead of presenting a fearful and empty vision of absence through the use of technology, *Would Like to Meet* attempts to re-place this sense of bodily absence with the reassurance of the presence of an *invisible community*, what, in the context of the digital age, one might call a networked one. The bodies of the participants step into the physical space left by the wandering voice – they are constantly unseen, but committing physical acts which connect them to other participants, complete each others' experiences, and make their total journey possible – inscriptions that interweave.

Non Zero One frame the work with the question 'can you miss someone you've never met?' (Non Zero One, 2012). In tackling the question of 'absence' in terms of the emotive language of 'missing' someone, Non Zero One attempt to re-present a presence in your life that isn't 'near', but is nevertheless there – and which has the room to be emotionally significant. Delivered through headphones, one might suggest this is a manner of reconciling the 'near' of the subject with the 'far' of the other in the global village – re-presenting the absent other as a manner of safety net – that can be reached out to. Letters are delivered from unseen participants several storeys above you, conversations are had on abandoned laptops over instant messaging, mobile phone messages are left to be listened to – all manners of communication *through* absence that can be seen to pervade our digital lives. A voice heard over a mobile phone speaks: 'You could be looking at me right now [...] not knowing it is me' (Non

Zero One, 2010). And this is not a threat – it is a comfort. It is the words spoken by someone who is a reassuring and confident guide. *Would Like to Meet* marks the beginning of a body of work that is prompted by a dangerous absence, but seeks to reconcile itself to a community-in-absence – to begin to ask questions about the encounter with the other in the digital age, to re-present the gaps felt in our lives in the context of new manners of communication, and, using the physical experience of carefully placed cultural objects to re-place us in a community (encounter with the other) that we might recognise. By asking participants to undertake embodied, first person acts – at the same time as undertaking a journey that is itself supported by five other unknown participants – the bereft subject is able to site themselves in the context of an invisible community. They are reassured of their connectivity with others, even when they cannot be seen, as the voice in their ears laughs and says that ‘We might bump into each other one day, sometimes when I get the train or get on the bus I do look around to see if you're there’ (Non Zero One, 2010) – it is a comfort, and also an invitation to *look*, to see other people as inter-subject. In a way this piece is a re-presentation of the inbetween of the networked age – of the void opened in the near disrupted by the far. It also looks at how this world is still full of the inscriptions of the other, inscriptions that build pictures maintained by people weaving paths together. It is the act of trust that is most important to this effect – the moment (for example) the participant is asked to fall backwards, and another appears to catch them. Both participants in that moment step into the void, the falling subject throws themselves into the arms of the absent other, in a gesture that reveals the presence of both subject (reconciled with the context of the digital age) and subjective other (re-revealed as being able to return from the far).

In a more recent headphone piece, *The Time Out*¹⁰⁶, Non Zero One moved to the use of live audio – where members of the company speak live and directly

¹⁰⁶ The participant enters an area set out with lockers, three benches, the distinct smell of chlorine, and a man in speedos fiddling with his locker. Participants are invited to put on water polo caps, with headphones fitted in the ear defenders, and the piece begins. The scenario is the ‘time out’ just before a major water polo game. The participants are cast as the players on the team. A coach enters, and delivers a pep talk, which forms a construct for discussions of what it means to be a team, enabled

to the participants, following a script that is constructed as a series of logic gates, allowing the work to branch in many directions in order to respond integrally and directly to the choices and actions of the 12 participants. Non Zero One here discuss directly the attempt to situate the participant between two worlds through the use of the absent presence of the headphone voices.

[...] as 12 participants sit shoulder-to-shoulder on benches in a swimming pool locker room, it becomes clear that they are part of two worlds. In the first, a coach called Ken is convinced you're all nine minutes away from a water polo final, and is determined to give you the pep talk of your life. In the second, a playful voice in your ear is helping to make sense of it all, asking you what it feels like to win, asking you to study the veins on a hand that might soon throw you a pass, asking you how you cope with these big moments. [...] *the time out* looks at teams and what it means to be part of one. (Non Zero One, 2012)

This transition to the live is an interesting one, no longer dealing with the 'far' of the recorded voice which the participant is left to discover, the live but non-proximate communication deals with the *flow* of mediation characteristic of the constantly connected age. The voices actively shape the experience of the physical 'real' in front of them, but in a constantly self-aware and re-present manner. The attention of the audience is again drawn to notions of togetherness by the voices, who talk openly about the oddness of the situation, but also use it to provoke consideration of what it means to be part of a team, and to slowly reveal that actually, in your shared strange situation, you *are together*. The voices talk explicitly about the fact that obviously you *aren't* a water polo champion, and that you have never met these people, or this strange man who calls himself your coach, before. As such, *The Time Out* pushes the 'what if' and 'what if' forcibly against one another, creating a foregrounded inbetween which, the intimate softly spoken voice in the ear reminds you, is exclusively the provenance of the people present there and then. Opening a common inbetween is a way of 'destining' the participants together, which in turn opens a space for the discussion of 'teams'. It weaves in questions about each individual's strengths and weaknesses, and uses simple 'team building' exercises to demonstrate how teams bring themselves together

by the voices in the headphones, which interrogate the situation, invite action and provide instruction.

– focusing on how the strengths of one person support the lacks or vulnerability of others, and vice versa.

Harrison described this move away from the pre-recorded voice towards live audio as an attempt ‘to respond directly to [audiences]’ (2012, p. 267), to make each performance more reactive to its participants, and so create a richer feeling of something that is exclusively shared. There is a sense that the journey each ‘team’ goes on is theirs together. *The Time Out* begins with an absent community – a missing team – foregrounded from the very beginning by the self-aware voice in your ear. The task of the piece begins with the invitation to build this team. This time the performer-participants are present, but a void is discovered in the heavily foregrounded inbetween, and the participants rush to fill it. Harrison describes the space they open between the *what is* and the *what if* as ‘blurry’:

The Time Out is not about water polo. The whole water polo, dressing room... [...] is all a facade just to bring you together. [...] It was meant to be one separate world and then the other just being in the present [...] But we felt that we couldn’t just launch into that blurry moment, because we felt that people had to have something to work towards. Like a team has to have a goal, a group of people, in order to change from just being a group of people to being a team, you have to have a goal. (2012, p. 378)

In this context the ‘goal’ is made clear by the void between the reality presented to you by the locker room and water polo caps, and the voice in your ear speaking to the ‘you’ who has come to see a performance. Again the work exhibits a conscious move towards an encounter with the other through dislocation – by providing an inbetween that the participants share, and constructing a journey into that inbetween that fundamentally relies, in an almost emergent manner, on the actions, words and decisions of eleven other people.

The threading of the ‘far’ of pervasive technology* through our everyday ‘near’ is an interesting parallel to draw against the collective’s work, which could be said to be about re-presenting the possibility of the other in that context – that the boundaries of ‘near’ and ‘far’ can be transgressed, and work towards one another, as well as away or against. When asked about their use of

headphones, Harrison replies that they use them because headphones, like other pervasive technology* (mobile phones in particular), are a potential interruption that needs investigating:

[...] because when you see someone walking down the street with a phone, they are not in that space they are in a different space [...] in the same way that I kind of think, with headphones and sound there is something [...] that is very closely related to first person kind of thinking [...] (2012, pp. 379-80)

Non Zero One's first person forms use technology that typically dislocates the individual from their functional context, to foreground how we are agents, supported and connected to the agency of others – blurring the edges of the bubble of 'personalisation', a kind of 'first person thinking' that is increasingly pervasive. Non Zero One, a company made of individuals all in their early to mid-twenties also use technology 'because it is part of our language now [...] in a way that theatre isn't necessarily' (Harrison, 2012, p. 380), pervasive digital technology is the new inbetween. In a way, beginning with the act of putting on headphones, is a manner of starting with a 'what is' of the young, urban experience, each individual a ghetto: 'We live in a more personalised culture. [...] I think the notion of community is changing in that it is expanded and also kind of shrunk as well' (Harrison, 2012, p. 381). The global village expands the possibility of connection, at the same time as personalisation creates smaller and smaller ghettos of interests and activities. The absent performer and present absence in the interactive work of Non Zero One attempts to open a space for the subject to discover the inscriptions of the subjective other, to discover the thread in the fabric of the social world that is theirs, and to follow it into an encounter. Through the ability of the participant to fundamentally shape the experience, and at the same time see how this shapes it for others and others shape it for themselves, the work attempts to reconcile the subject to new ideas of intersubjectivity in the digital age. If we return to Žižek's notion considered earlier on – of the need to maintain the *radical ambiguity* of networked space through an examination of how it reshapes contemporary being¹⁰⁷ – this work examines the *social inscription* of how the near and far of

¹⁰⁷ Žižek, in Johannes Birringer's *Performance, Science & Technology*: '[It is] crucial to maintain open the radical ambiguity of how cyberspace will affect our lives: this does

technology alters presence in our lives, and does so in the active body of the subject as it exists with and through the digital.

Coney

Coney describe themselves as an 'agency of play' and though there are certainly aspects of their work that could crossover into the 'games' focus of chapter 4, the majority of the work they make can be easily and more clearly classified as (highly emergent) interactive theatre. The company was allegedly founded by an unknown figure called 'Rabbit', who appears to head the semi-secret Society of Coney.¹⁰⁸ Rabbit can be corresponded with directly only via email. Rabbit, when asked over email what kind of work the agency makes, replied: *'Adventures and play. That perhaps imagine that ordinary people can sometimes do the most extraordinary things, and that the everyday world can sometimes be a magical place'* (Rabbit, 2011, p. 545). Rabbit suggested that most of the questions put to him/her would be better answered by the agency's Co-Directors, and so interviews were done with two of the agency's three Co-Directors; Annette Mees and Tassos Stevens. Mees' background is in film, before moving into theatre, and Stevens worked in (and indeed ran a) theatre for several years after completing a PhD in psychology. Mees came to the company through encountering their early work, and Stevens talks slightly elliptically about 'meeting' Rabbit very early on. No company history is present online, though the earliest work listed on the website goes back to June of 2006 (Coney).

The Agency of Coney make interactive theatre, as well as work that spills over into the digital world (websites, apps, email-based adventures), built very clearly on play and playful frameworks. Coney are here used to examine the overt use of interactive theatre as a personal-as-political form, particularly

not depend on technology as such but on the mode of its social inscription' (2008, pp. 27-8).

¹⁰⁸ A collection of playful individuals who have encountered the company's work, and for the most part, proven themselves in the areas of curiosity, adventure and loveliness, three principles for 'good play and play for good' (Stevens, 2012, p. 480) that both the agency and the Society subscribe to.

looking at the community in collapse in *A Small Town Anywhere* (2009-2012). Both Mees and Stevens worked closely on *A Small Town Anywhere*.¹⁰⁹ Brief reference will also be made to a new work starting development in 2012, *Early Days of a Better Nation*.

The Agency's website talks about creating a 'playing audience' in work such as *A Small Town Anywhere*, and in discussion about the play and game mechanics that enable this 'playing audience', Stevens emphasises how they are not a company which makes *games*, but one that makes *frameworks for play*. He stresses how 'all theatre is play', and characterises games and theatre as separate *crystallisations* of play (2012, p. 482). Crystallisations, in this context, are rule-sets that govern play, and in this way interactive theatre is a different crystallisation of the kind of play that happens in traditional theatre – where one new rule is that the player becomes the protagonist. Using the '*what is/what if*' terminology that this study has adopted, Stevens reflects on what *play* is, and how, in a first person theatre context, *meaning* is able to emerge from it:

[Play] is about being able to go 'what if?' and 'what is?' at the same time – that I can hold those two simultaneously and for that to be ok. And to be able to switch between the two and even if you go to one, always remember that there is *that* one. The meaning of it comes from how one reflects back onto the other. (ibid)

Playful frameworks, therefore, enable work to site the rupture between the fact of *what is* and the possibility of *what if* in the body of the participant; the two then reflect back on each other and meaning emerges. Play is often considered *meaningless*, and indeed several definitions of play include meaninglessness, however it is important to stress that though the *act* of play is to indulge in the *what if* – something that has to be aside from meaning-significance in the real world – it is nevertheless an act that takes place through the body of the *what is*. This means that the one must constantly effect and remake the other. People can 'get lost, get hot in the 'what if' and yet the 'what is' is always present because it's still you, [...] you can't hide' (Stevens,

¹⁰⁹ Although each Coney project will usually involve several collaborators, drawn from Coney's wider network of what might in a more traditional company be called 'associate artists'.

2012, p. 486). Play thus creates meaning which is grounded in the fact of the body, but which allows people to re-imagine the relationship between the acting-body (subject) and the world/other people. Stevens explains how it's important that the 'what is' of the self isn't vanished into character, that the participant doesn't act but *enacts*¹¹⁰ – they aren't given a person to play, but a persona to 'wear':

[...] what we're making on every level is framework[...] literally it's a hat and a badge and it will always be, with the most budget in the world [...] it's not a costume, it's not a mask, [...] that's the least that you need in order to be able to say 'I'm playing somebody else' but, somebody else who at their heart is you, so it's your choices you're making. (ibid)

The play between the *what is* and *what if* is enabled through the creation of a framework – a construct which doesn't 'fill in the gaps'. When making first person theatre, the most effective frameworks in enabling agency and *accountability* are the ones which keep the line between 'me' and 'me-playing' at its most tenuous – transposition, not transcendence. Participants in *A Small Town Anywhere* build their character over email and other electronic communications before they attend the performance – however, when they play, all they have is a hat and a name badge. And it is not the name a person, but of a role; Le Tourist, Le Mayor, etc. In Coney's work the frameworks are supportive but not obscuring; they provide a clear ruleset, and there is *context* (Mees characterises this as a 'light dusting of narrative' (2012, p. 338)) which tends to pull the work away from purer ludic gaming to paideic frameworks (see chapter 3 for full explanation of these terms), which allow the story that emerges to be that of the collective actions of the participants. This allows the agency of the subject to become strongly re-present to the participant, as the inbetween re-presents their actions, bracketed from real life by the magic circle. This sense of agency is key to the political power of interactive theatre like Coney's. In terms of interaction, *A Small Town Anywhere* is best classed as 'emergent', and what this level of room for the agency of the playing individuals allows is a true sense of repercussion. Participants, 'hot' in the *what if* and transposed by the framework of play to let go of the 'experience

¹¹⁰ See also Chapter 3 – particularly the section on Brecht beginning p.181.

error' of the *what is*, take decisions and make choices that beforehand, or in careful thought, they might not have expected from themselves. Embedding people in action and then asking them to make moral and political decisions that have genuine and fluid outcomes as part of a system that involves other people reconciles the *thinking subject* with the *acting subject*, and much more realistically represents the thickness of *being-in-the-world* than traditional theatre.

Matt Trueman, in a review of the piece, explains how the fact that the framework does not ask you to 'pretend' (act), but rather *play* means that:

You, yourself, are very much present in the small town. Your decisions remain yours, not those that your character might make. Not only does this remove awkward inhibitions, it allows the piece an ethical and political dimension beyond the bounds of the small town. You feel the weight of betrayals as much as the excitement of transgressions. (2009)

The act of carrying the *what if* in the body of the *what if*, Trueman suggests, means that it persists long after the framework has become a thing of the past. The participant has transformed their nature through the agency offered by the playful framework; *what if* has reflected back and altered the *what is*, and a vent of playful agency has been opened in the individual. Trueman then goes on to explain how the framework for decompression (addressed earlier in this chapter) offered by the piece after play has come to an end is key to the effectiveness of this reflection:

[...] it is in the bar afterwards – swapping stories, exchanging experiences and dissecting the event – that a real community comes into existence. As strangers connect afterwards, A Small Town Anywhere grows in import and the game really does begin to matter. (ibid)

As such, A Small Town Anywhere is able to offer a hot 'what if' where the embodied subject is offered meaningful agency, and then in the 'cooling off' of the decompression space, allowed to reflect on the experience – re-present leads to reaction, all through the experience of the body acting. Rabbit explains why he/she thinks that this level of input on the part of the participant is important: because it's *'their world, as well as my world: our world in fact. That's the best reason. That people can find their own way is all about giving them the agency to take agency'* (Rabbit, 2011, p. 545). Although Rabbit is here

talking more specifically about the ability of people to dig into the online presence of Coney in order to find clues that lead them to *The Society...*, Rabbit's response can be seen as more widely applicable to their work. Through playful frameworks and emergent story-enabling, participants are offered *the agency to take agency*. First in the space of play, but because the *what if/what is* rupture takes place in the body of the participant, they then carry that forward with them into their wider world.

Finally, in offering the opportunity to co-construct an inbetween, Coney open the community to itself providing a space for an encounter between embodied subject and subjective other. In the encounter between the subject and the other, in the destining themselves together and in the experience of the inevitable void of 'what if', the 'limit' of community can be approached – that is the unknowable certainty of the other. Two notions of community are approached – the manner of discovering finitude through the encounter with the other, and the making a *practice* of the social and political systems that govern our dealings with the other. Annette Mees explains that:

A Small Town Anywhere is not the world, it's incredibly simple [...] it's a microcosm of the social network, but because it's so simplified, because it is has to be, because it is a story rather than the real world. It allows you to hone in on particular elements of it rather than having to take in the whole world, which seems to be a bit daunting. (2012, p. 338)

For Mees, *A Small Town Anywhere* is fundamentally about creating a simplified microcosm of community. Because the 'social network' (the field where people encounter one another) is simplified by game-like progressions (the passage of time, the delivery of mail, challenges and questions that the town must resolve), by broad brushstroke characterisation (a hat and a badge), and because you are harbouring the *what is/what if* split in your acting-self, this social field – and the connections created and maintained by our actions – are re-revealed, thrown into high contrast. An audience member speaking on a video of the 2009 BAC version of the work explains that 'over the two hours that I played *A Small Town Anywhere*, I felt genuinely connected to people I'd never met before, in ways I never thought possible' (McLaren, 2010). The high-contrast version of community that is able to arise in the broader brushstrokes

world of the *what if* re-focuses the attention of the participant on the spaces between – the potential for connection, and the implications of interconnectedness. The work is powerfully political because it is not about the *ideas* of politics, but about a personal-as-political *practice*. Mees again:

The work is not about the human condition, it is about you. It is also about the human condition, but it's about you [...] just in this point in time [...] How people respond and look at each other as an audience in interactive work, or as an audience in non-interactive work is completely different. (2012, p. 342)

It is this notion of the political individual that interactive work allows an audience to see in themselves and others which is vital to its relevance to an era of personalisation and embeddedness. The *what is* context is bracketed by the *what is* body, as it chooses to transpose itself into the *what if*; here the acting-subject exists in a place of *unwork*, beyond the white noise of capitalism. They are shifted into a *radical ambiguity* (Birringer, 2008, pp. 27-8), and able to feel the inscriptions of society and community on their bodies in the process of their being written. And then, in decompressing, in the space of reflection that returns to the 'what is', the muscle memory of the 'what if' says 'you have the choice to write something different'. In this way it is about the personal, and *also* about the 'human condition'.

Finally, Coney's work also plays with political *content*¹¹¹, as well as form. The functional context for *A Small Town Anywhere* is one of the weight of fascism

¹¹¹ More recently in the beginnings of a piece called *The Early Days of a Better Nation*, Coney can be seen to be approaching the same questions of how we can be better people and communities from the other side, post revolution and the fall of the charismatic leader, the participants will be asked 'what next?' These kinds of questions are the big imaginative leaps that can only be asked in a space of *what if*. Mees explains how:

[...] in a non naive way I am very interested in utopianism. I always think that the world's currently quite pragmatic and quite small thinking, even within politics, there's no big ideas being pursued at the moment [...] (Mees, 2012, p.337)

Mees describes the ultimate aim of the work as 'quite literally that is to create an alternative space [...] for artists and makers to create these spaces where, 'let's be quite radical'' (2012, p. 338). *The Early Days of a Better Nation* appears to have been conceived as a rehearsal for what we do *after* the revolution, a story about what could

on a community, but, as Stevens explains, through the process of testing and playing with the work, Coney discovered that when you add participants to the work, it becomes about 'heroism'. The framework is enough to free you from reality, and the 'dusting of narrative' is enough to provide an analogue for big political ideas, and an understanding of how the acting individual is *always* complicit in them. In a room of 29 other people, and in a space which re-reveals your inter-subjectivity, there is nowhere to hide, no ability to remain invisible.

[...] basically [in] *A Small Town*, you're making a series of individual and collective choices, and you're complicit in the collective choices even if you don't... because you're still there – it gets you to the point where you might let the fascists in, and you might string up somebody in order to save your own skins (2012, p. 484)

Stevens describes how almost always the end of the game contains some form of an act of heroism, almost always someone stands alone against the fascists and invites others to join them. That's why, Stevens explains (visibly moved), 'it's about heroism. I always get really emotional, I always feel really... Because I'm genuinely moved by – by thoughts of what people are playing – they're playing, but it's still, but they're themselves' (ibid).

Ant Hampton

The final case study is of the work of Ant Hampton. Ant Hampton trained as an actor at the Le Coq School in Paris before moving into a career as a theatre-artist. Since leaving Le Coq, Hampton has become more and more interested in what he describes as 'auto-theatre', work which explores the unrehearsed performer and is often instruction based. He founded Rotozaza in 1998 with Silvia Mercuriali, where they collaborated on seven works that Hampton describes as auto-theatre (Hampton). Hampton and Mercuriali have since dissolved Rotozaza, though both continue to make work, and Hampton has otherwise collaborated with artists such as Tim Etchells, Forced Entertainment and Jerome Bell (Hampton, 2012). *Etiquette* and *This is Not My*

be, told together by a roomful of mostly strangers, acting individuals, realising how they are connected.

Voice Speaking are the auto-theatre pieces that will be discussed in the context of this chapter. *Etiquette* was the first in the auto-theatre series, and was a collaboration in 2007 with Mercuriali under the Rotozaza name, while *This is Not My Voice Speaking* was made in collaboration with Britt Hatzius in 2011 (Hampton).

Ant Hampton has been particularly selected for discussion in this chapter as an example of navigational first person interactive work, and also because of his specific ideas about auto-theatre: work for two or more people performed only by the participant themselves. Auto-theatre forms an interesting subsection to the idea of first person theatre; it focuses much more on the role of instructions, and instead of directly exploring notions of community and political agency as Non Zero One and Coney's work has, Hampton's auto-theatre (more often than not, headphone based) is much more interested in the *act of the unrehearsed performer* in the context of the erasure of clumsiness in a heavily mediated culture. Hampton defines auto-theatre (also referred to as autoteatro on the Rotozaza website) as:

[...] a new kind of performance, whereby audience members perform the piece themselves, for each other. Participants are given instructions, often (but not exclusively) via headphones for what to do, and sometimes for what to say. [...] Autoteatro does not ask audience members to be clever or inventive. It simply frames and celebrates our slightly differing, often clumsy and always unique responses to simple instructions, and uses them to build narrative and event. (Rotozaza)

In interview, Hampton is careful to differentiate the work from games and game mechanics; he does not ask his participants to *play* with his instructions, rather just to 'be' and 'follow' them. As such, one could even consider auto-theatre as more *open* than other playful and game-based work, as it doesn't obscure the system of experience control, rather focuses directly on it. This is an interesting contrast to the request of Coney's first person theatre; which is to simultaneously hold the *what is* and *what if* together in the body of the acting subject, and play in the reflections they create. Here, participants are much more simply asked to be *what is*, and to follow the instructions left by another person. The reflection arises because the work is re-present, the participant watches themselves following instructions as if in a dream. The

what if arises in the tension between the instruction and the action; '*what if I do*', '*what if I don't*', '*what if I do but I don't do it right*'

The Rotozaza definition of autoteatro has only two stipulations:

- There is no actual 'audience' beyond the participants themselves
- The structure is automatic: there are no actors or human input during the work other than their own. An Autoteatro work is a 'trigger' for a subsequently self-generating performance. (Rotozaza)

The work doesn't use game mechanics or either/or branching decision-making, rather the work is largely *reactive* and a little navigational. These are the most fitting forms of interaction in which to examine instructions, as they are the forms in which the agency of the individual is most reduced, keeping the tension between individual and instruction high. Indeed, Hampton is also emphatic about the preservation of this tension, which is key to his refusal to classify his work as immersive. Hampton explains the difference between:

[...] the work that says 'you're not even here' and 'this is not the person in front of you' and the work which says, you know, 'you are here, this is the room where things are going to happen, here, I'm looking at you, I'm speaking, what about that? [...] immersive work, too often doesn't ask enough questions, really, of what is really going on, it's more just sort of plunging you into some kind of 'wow' thing. (2012, p. 351)

Instead, Hampton wants the auto-theatre work to interrogate 'what is really going on'. The work is a conscious drive away from illusion; *Etiquette* takes place in a café, is embedded in the real world, and *This is Not My Voice Speaking* fills a theatre space with sound and image that the participants directly activate and manipulate, but which is constantly explained, re-presented in its manner of progressing. Hampton's work, here, does not ask the participant to either play or pretend – rather to simply *engage*, to listen, act and see.

[...] the auto-theatre idea in a way is just this idea of how you can make a generative piece and the fact that's how we interact anyway, as humans, we give and take, we give a little bit, and then we shut up and we take a little bit. (2012, p. 354)

This is the root of Hampton's interest in the unrehearsed performer, that in general, we are all unrehearsed performers. His interest is in framing the natural action of the individual in a way that they are able to see it – and then, in re-presenting instruction-based action, re-reveal what un-natural (mediated) action feels like. Auto-theatre in this way theatricalises (brackets) being. It is the foregrounding of the everyday which is at the heart of auto-theatre, the interaction between two or more people, the social inscriptions that are reflected back to the unrehearsed performer interacting with another, foregrounded by the frame of a recording, or the 'special investment people have when they go to a theatre', or otherwise enter an arts context (Hampton, 2012, p. 348).

The unrehearsed performer is also, for Hampton 'about an equalising [of the] power balance between the stage and the audience' (2012, p. 354). Auto-theatre attempts to strip away all sense of 'playing' something; of preparation or 'cleverness'; instead, in a direct reaction against the mediation of society, Hampton explains that the auto-theatre work is driven by a curiosity to 'see struggle, to see, to kind of frame the clumsiness and to sort of heighten people's awareness of the contingencies involved' (2012, p. 348). Though Hampton denies any overtly political motives, his focus on the human/system of control interface of the instruction, and the manner in which this opens a gulf between the *what is* of the participant and the *what should be* of the instruction, is a manner of re-focusing of attention on contemporary mediation. Hampton explains how:

[...] what we're kind of fed by TV, film, all that, is 'slickness', where there are no gaps in the presentation or in the production, there's no clumsiness [...] how messages are given to us from politicians, from advertising, and anyone else that manages to find some space in between that, is generally the attempt is to do it as slickly and as micromanaged as possible, and for me performance is definitely a chance to celebrate and frame the more – the less sort of polished aspects of how we are [...] (2012, p. 359)

This increasing 'slickness' can be directly related to Matthew Causey's cautions about embeddedness (Causey, 2006). Embeddedness is a papering over of the cracks – a transposition of the mediated into the real so that the dividing line

between the both becomes invisible – the interface is vanished and the corruption of the data flow of modern life goes by unnoticed. In that context, Hampton explains that following on from his discomfort about ‘slickness’, his auto-theatre work aims to re-present that interface, to Hampton auto-theatre is ‘fundamentally also about trying to understand how people are living, and being in the world, and, of course one of the biggest challenges now is to try and get people to be more aware of media, what media is’ (Hampton, 2012, p. 352). *This is Not My Voice Speaking* is exactly this – a clear attempt to ‘get people to be more aware of media’.

In *This is Not My Voice Speaking* two or more people enter an installation area, one is named ‘One’ and the other ‘Zero’, they are presented with several previous generation media devices: a record player, a slide projector, a film projector, a Dictaphone. Following instructions delivered to either ‘One’ or ‘Zero’, the participants navigate a set of instructions, and in playing with the devices present discover an interrogation of notions of recording, liveness, of the voice, and the medium of instructions itself. ‘One’ and ‘Zero’ are, from their very names, cast as ‘digital tourists in an analogue arcade’ (Hampton). But they are not ‘playing’ One and Zero, or even representing them, they are simply *labelled*, as parts are in an instruction manual. Crucially, all of the instructions are delivered via the pieces of technology themselves as this tension reveals the *agency* at the heart of the use of technology, because if you can do it *wrong*, you are aware of the agency that makes it go ‘right’. Participants are asked to investigate and discover the record player, how it works is explained, they are shown how to speed up and slow down the voice. This becomes vital later on when mismatches in the video from the 16mm projector of someone speaking, and the sound – delivered separately via the record player – demand that the participants intervene, and play with the speed and position of the record until image and audio match up. This is a conscious bracketing of the recorded medium, a re-revelation of it as *construct* and is a powerful political tool in an age of rolling, pervasive, and embedded media, using phenomenological notions of bracketing almost explicitly. As Hampton explains, ‘it’s a lot about de-familiarising [...] de-familiarising the everyday’ (2012, p. 350).

The chasm between recorded media and 'real life' is also foregrounded in more literal ways; the voice originally given to a male swaps gender, images are manipulated using magnifying glasses, a voice speaks saying 'this is not me, this is not my voice speaking', while all the time the instructions reassure the participants that 'this is perfectly normal'. When these edges are papered over in our daily experience of technology that is exactly what they are, normal – embedded in our notions of 'live' and 'real'. *This is Not My Voice Speaking*, in contrast to this, re-reveals and interrogates current 'solid state'¹¹² media through a bracketing of its more primitive predecessors.

Ant Hampton's auto-theatre, as a kind of first person theatre, attempts to reconcile the body of the participant with the *operation of* media technology, in order to question the difference 'between the voice coming out of a machine which is as precarious as the human body, and the voice coming out of the machines that we're used to now [...]' (Hampton, 2012, p. 356). Hampton's auto-theatre is about re-revealing the edges between 'real' and 'recorded' – about re-revealing our relationship to *interface* – be they human conversations and language (turn taking and the relationship between two people in *Etiquette*), the interfaces between humans and media, or the interface between absent intention and human action that is the instruction format.

Hampton's work plays with the difference between action and agency, the participant may choose not to follow the instructions, but the fact is that for the work to progress, they have to submit. And yet beyond the interface of absent intention and human action (something very worth re-presenting in an age of the embedded Spectacle) the instructions could be seen to free the

¹¹² Hampton describes 'solid state' as meaning:

Either it's there or it isn't. Either the voice is there, crystal clear, or isn't there at all. The point at which the sound begins and ends is just like [makes a slicing noise] that. And you don't see anything, your body has got nothing to do with it, your body in a sense that it's either there or it isn't; it's not like you can help it – it's not like you can see the tape trying to go round and all it needs is a little bit of jiggling. (Hampton, Interview with Ant Hampton – appendix a) pp.343-361, 2012)

individual from the slick rhetoric of 'choice', and foreground the linear and pre-constructed nature of the media message. This is an excellent example of incredibly effective use of the 'lower' levels of the interactive form. The work *continues* only with the input of the participant, but the content is not affected; this is useful because it is not the *outcome* which Hampton wishes to represent, but rather the space between individual and action. In its interest in clumsiness and defamiliarising and thus exposing the constructed 'slickness' of the media, Hampton's auto-theatre is a powerful assault on *embeddedness*, and its threat to freedom as Causey formulates it. Hampton explains that:

For me it's the same as Beckett [...] *Waiting for Godot* is the perfect play, but it's all about clumsiness, it's all about a guy not being able to get his boot on, and even he does, he's in pain, and you know, all these things that are very funny, but only insofar as you don't really know whether to laugh or cry, it's that kind of divide. (2012, p. 359)

It feels like a dream, almost, like those dreams you have of the house you grew up in. Uncanny, different things that you can't quite put your finger on, in the corner of your eye. Familiar, and not.

(Nicklin & Goff, 2011)

Chapter 6: The Umbrella Projection – in search of the voice of a city

This final chapter presents a consideration of *The Umbrella Project* as a means of enquiry into first person theatre as a personal-as-political theatre for the digital age. It was necessary that this study co-evolved from both theory and practice, indeed, after so thoroughly describing both politics and community (as a route to the other, embodiment, and a functional context in the digital age) as *practices*, it would hardly be possible to express these theories separately from their practical application. It is for this reason that case studies have played such a substantial role in the wider thesis, and for this reason, too, that *The Umbrella Project* is part of the thesis, as a manner of approaching a personal-as-political practice through first person theatre.¹¹³ Theory and practice are inextricably intertwined, and one without the other leaves each incomplete – if unable to test through action, or unable to act on reflection. As Jane Rendall intimates in a piece about travelling and encountering the other for *Here, There, Elsewhere*:

Practice intends to answer a set of aims. Critical thinking questions the values of the aims themselves. Thinking is also a practice. It is something we do. We make ideas. Unless we understand thinking as a form of practice, and practice as a thoughtful process, it is impossible to transform the relationship between the two. (2002, pp. 43-54)

As Rendall sets out, in terms of theory and practice, for one to affect the other, they must be understood together; any mode of enquiry into the practice of politics must engage with both practice and theories of the political. Action must inform reflection, and reflection should be followed by the opportunity for action. Practice is included in this thesis, therefore, as a manner of completing the thought and beginning the action, and as manner of truly investigating the political effectiveness of first person theatre, which is set out

¹¹³ We might also consider phenomenology's insistence that perception – that originating act of human experience – is fundamentally *embodied*, both in and of the body, space and time, and is as such only to be re-discovered through practice, and likewise the theories of the SI, Blanchot, Nancy, Boal, Benjamin, de Certeau, all of whom urge embodied action as the only true manner of encountering the truth of experience in-and-of the community, self, and city, and the socio-political systems arising from and governing their practice.

in chapter 1 (in the context of an age of embeddedness) as a route to re-seeing, reflecting, and *reacting*.

Additionally, it should be noted that what is being described, analysed and investigated in the practice discussed in this chapter is a process that is hoped will have particular effects – a process discussed through the decisions made in making, audience reactions, and related to the theoretical body of the thesis. *The Umbrella Project* is not a product that had definitive effects – not least because each experience was entirely individual to the participant and situation in which the soundwalk was experienced – indeed, it is key to the main thrust of the thesis that what emerges is *not* a product. This chapter therefore represents the documentation of a practical application of the theory explored in the thesis (particularly chapter 3) – that is the approach to enabling political practice of city-space.

A full account of *The Umbrella Project*, from the conception of the idea, through development, and the process of collecting material for, reflecting on, and writing and producing the soundwalks, can be found in appendix b) (on accompanying DVD or available by request from the thesis repository). Full scripts for the walks are also provided in appendix c), as well as the audio recordings which can be found in appendix d). To briefly set out the project, however, it was conceived as an attempt to discover the (multi-faceted) ‘voice of a city’. Over a period of five weeks, 200 umbrellas were put out in key venues (shops, cafes, libraries, tourist information, cinemas, etc.) across the city of York. Once opened, the umbrella would reveal a small tag, inviting the user to call the number on the tag and umbrella, and leave a story in answer to a question. There were three questions: the first on the city at night, the second about an encounter with a stranger, and the third about a journey the respondent had taken. These responses (along with stories collected on outings at times of day intended to correspond with one of the questions¹¹⁴, and to raise awareness of the project) were then used to provoke, and directly

¹¹⁴ A busy Saturday lunchtime, for the ‘stranger’ question, nighttime for the ‘city at night’ question, and 6am-10am and 4pm-7pm for the ‘journey’ question.

feature in three roughly 30 minute long soundwalks made for specific areas of the city, at certain times of day; Soundwalk 1 – *Nighttime* (after dark), Soundwalk 2 – *Daytime* (lunchtime), and Soundwalk 3 – *Commute* (8am-9am or 5pm-6.30pm).

In this way *The Umbrella Project* sought to draw a collective understanding of the city, and develop from that a series of three first person theatrical experiences that would (re)connect the soundwalk participant to the functional context of York – an embodied experience that re-revealed the city, the self in the city, and the other experienced in the city. Through seeking re-embodiment in a context of here-and-now, and the other, *The Umbrella Project* sought a manner of re-presenting the experience of the city, and allowing the listener to reflect and react to their reflections, thus forming a personal-as-political practice to rival the embeddedness of the Spectacle and its associated (digitally enabled) disruptions of the everyday.

Additionally, to reiterate, *The Umbrella Project* pieces are fundamentally *theatre* within the definition of this thesis, which is ‘live play navigated by bodies’, and ‘first person’ as the participant is placed at the centre of the world-constituting process.

Within the resources and time available it was unlikely that a piece of work that approached all three ‘versions’ of first person theatre considered by the thesis would be possible, and so the form of the soundwalk was selected for the practice-as-research. In doing so, the work set out as an exploration of the ‘beginning’ (as it were) of the personal-as-political process described in the thesis: re-see, reflect, react. In rediscovering the body, the body in time and space, and the body and the subjective other, and in siting it in the hot *inbetween* of the augmented city-experience, the participants are invited into a space for reflection. The participant starts by re-seeing themselves in and of the city (re-joined to themselves and their functional context in and among space, time and the other) and then the enframing effect of theatre (the conjunction of *what is* and *what if* encountered at the site of the participant) enables embodied reflection. In the terms set out in chapter 5, the soundwalks

are largely 'navigationally' interactive, although each soundwalk also ends with a 'leaping off point', an invitation to action, so as to maintain the trajectory from 're-see, reflect' to a point of 'react'.

Why sound?

The Umbrella Project therefore employed the soundwalk as a manner of representing the city and the other to the embodied subject. By manner of augmenting the *what is* of the city with the *what if* of the poetic subjects and objects conjured by the augmenting effect of the headphone-delivered sound, the soundwalks sought an *inbetween* city – the *dreamcity* also touched upon in chapter 2. This is directly addressed in content as well as form, particularly in *Commute*, which uses the story of a man returning to York for the first time in 40 years to recall that feeling of discovering, in Benjamin's words 'your front door as if you've just arrived from a foreign country; to discover the world in which you already live' (1999, p. 427). The quote that begins this chapter follows that story:

It feels like a dream, almost, like those dreams you have of the house you grew up in. Uncanny, different things that you can't quite put your finger on, in the corner of your eye. Familiar, and not. (Nicklin & Goff, 2011, p. 539)

And in terms of form, in using sound to augment (or in the terms of chapter 5 *transpose*) the experience of the city, to poeticise it through the use of music (a little more on this to follow) and heightened language, and with images and voices that played with the idea of *just being out of sight*¹¹⁵, *The Umbrella Project* aims to (re)present the city through the 'what if'. It looks to discover the real city through an encounter in the *dreamcity* – 'familiar and not'.

Sound is also particularly useful in making the subject the *site* of the experience. This was why headphone-based work was particularly selected as a manner of searching for re-embodied experience, as a route back to a *functional context* in the city (see chapter 3 starting on p.118). As set out in previous chapters, headphone sound in particular is able to intervene at the site of perception; headphone listening is, in Michael Akeroyd's words, able to

¹¹⁵ 'You keep on catching glimpses of him, in a crowd, even if you reach where you came from, keep moving, keep following the sound of singing, there, there, on the edge of hearing' (Fleming, 2011).

[intertwine] with our hearing system. . . . The closeness of the amplified sound to the body requires our hearing systems to embrace the apparatus as an extension of our natural hearing systems' (Tompkins, 2011, pp. 235-6). As such the headphone also directly represents the extension of our technology into and out of us as set out by McLuhan in chapter 1 (p.34 on) – this means headphones are a prime site for the exploration of how this opens the contemporary individual up to infiltration by Causey's embedded Spectacle. Tina Rigby Hanssen writes in the journal *Music, Sound and the Moving Image* that headphones:

[...] transform our experience by providing us with a new representation of reality. This not only has consequences for the shaping of sonic space but also for the production of subjectivity. According to Peter-Paul Verbeek the process of technological mediation is not something that 'take[s] place between a subject and an object, but rather coshapes subjectivity and objectivity' (2010, p. 51)

This is the danger of infiltration of the 'interior body of the material subject' (Causey, 2006, p. 179) in the era of embeddedness – not images presented to the spectator, but a *reshaped subjectivity*; objectivity interrupted by technology. Headphones represent one of the most commonplace interruptions of the *near* with the *far* besides that of the mobile phone – in the highly *personalised* space of the headphone the listener is removed from the full experience of the 'near', the possibility of encounter with the other is thwarted, and the experience of the 'now' is augmented – the *interface is vanished*. In *The Umbrella Project*, however, the soundwalks use the headphone as a manner of directing the 'far' (of what if) back into conjunction with the 'near' (of what is). As such the listener arrives at their front door as if they had (to return to Benjamin) 'just gotten off the boat from Singapore' – the everyday experience of pervasive technology* is re-presented, and the route of infiltration is also foregrounded, re-framed – opening the redirected listener to the real city as the headphone 'reveals the humanity before [them] [...] unknown until now' (Benjamin, 1999, p. 427).

Sound is also able to play with interiority *in the context of* spatial and social constructions – as Brendon LaBelle sets out in *Background Noise*:

Sound [...] *performs* with and through space: it navigates geographically reverberates acoustically, and structures socially, for sound amplifies and silences, contorts, distorts, and pushes against architecture; it escapes rooms, vibrates walls, disrupts conversation; [...] it misplaces and displaces; like a car speaker blasting too much music, sound overflows borders. It is boundless on the one hand, and site-specific on the other. (2006, p. xi)

Sound is social, and spatial, and in its ability to 'overflow borders' and the experience of interiority that the headphone provokes, sound is able to re-reveal the penetrability, vulnerability of the human body to occupation by the message-sending of the Spectacle. This re-revelation of how it might be penetrated, re-presents the barrier between inside and outside, revealing the finitude of the body – that it is not a field, but a *node* – and the *site of the body* as a fundamental part of the construction of experience. The use of headphones, therefore, is fundamental to *The Umbrella Project's* ability to explore a personal-as-political exigency in the digital age – to explore being in a *transurban* context (see chapter 3 beginning p.120 for more on *transurbanism*).

The music created especially for each walk by Simon Goff also bears mention. While the music isn't discussed greatly in *The Umbrella Project* appendix, it is integral to the final soundwalks ability to poeticise the everyday – to transpose the experience of the participant into the inbetween. The sound was carefully thought through and written in direct reaction to the writing (in turn written in response to the stories collected). The music also made use of samples – recordings from all over the city including bicycle bells, footsteps, vehicles, shouts in crowds, boats, markets, singing, and more – which were then turned into 'instrumental' sounds, both in and of the city. Textures, layers, loops and excerpts of the sounds of the city were woven together in a very similar way to the characters and words gathered and re-woven as part of the writing for the project.

Finally, sound was particularly selected, too, for it's approaching an *inbetween* in the most accessible manner for the intended audience¹¹⁶ (not through play or emergent or conversational interaction, which can be a little daunting).

Why collect stories?

The first reason that stories were collected as a starting point for the writing of *The Umbrella Project* was to draw the *dreamcity* out of a collage of encounters with the 'real city'. In order to access the city *in practice*, 3 different times of day were selected to make soundwalks for, and to allow for themes to arise situated in these times, guiding questions offered to help provoke answers from story leavers. Three questions were therefore selected, each with the intention of both connecting with a time and place, and each, too, with the intention of linking to a specific form of embodiment:

1. Tell me about York at night (*Night-time*)
2. Tell me about an encounter you had with a stranger (*Daytime*)
3. Tell me about a journey you took (*Commute*)

The first soundwalk set out to use the way a city changes at night to re-present the body in and of the *space* of the city. The second was the most obvious invitation to re-see *the other* in the busy space of the main shopping streets of York, and the final set the listener in conjunction with *time travelled*.

The method of collecting stories in the work was initially driven by an intention to represent the peer-to-peer experience of the *end of the age of broadcast* – umbrellas passed from hand to hand, in a manner that made networks demonstrative, and that opened a moment of *unwork*, of radical generosity – 'here, have this umbrella'. However a combination of an incredibly dry autumn (one that lead to severe droughts the following summer), and the fact that (as it turned out) people had *to be persuaded* that they might have a story to tell, meant that the majority (¾) of the stories were

¹¹⁶ The city of York isn't home to a visible avant-garde or innovative arts community in the same way, for example, Bristol, Manchester, Brighton, Birmingham and Leeds are, however there is a strong presence of 'walking tours', from ghost tours to general tourist information headphone-based experiences, and as such the soundwalk seemed like an approachable form.

collected in direct contact with the people who left them – in conversation on ‘story collection’ outings.

What this revealed was a crisis in *eventhood* which ended up being addressed by all three of the soundwalks – people *simply didn't think they had a story to tell*. The collection process therefore discovered an additional barrier to reclaiming a voice (the aural equivalent of agency) in the city. The loss of eventhood is encapsulated in Baudrillard's notion of a ‘destructured social’ – an illegible violence done by the Spectacle (phrased in chapter 1 as) – a ‘stellar collapse of medium and message’ (p.36) where only ‘the medium can make an event – whatever the contents [...]’ and so the ability to make an event is removed from the subject (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 82). Indeed, Soundwalk 2 references the effect of this loss of eventhood directly:

One autumn I stood in this place and I asked people like these for their stories. Too many people told me, not because they wanted to get away, but because they truly seemed believed this: ‘I don't have any’; ‘I'm nobody’ (Nicklin & Goff, 2011, p. 524)

This, then, became a focus for the project, which attempted to re-situate eventhood as an embodied as opposed to mediated experience. Likewise in using the stories of the citizens of York as the jumping off point for the content the project allowed the people of York to originate it. It could be argued that the stories were still *mediated* – in both delivery and the context of my writing – but because the medium of first person theatre *re-presents* mediation and eventhood *at the site of the embodied subject*, the work seeks a framed *hyperpresence* as opposed to a *hyperreal* – it is a mediation that reveals, not steals eventhood. For this reason too, moments of ‘leaping off’ agency at the end of each walk invited the participants to take action *outside the mediated experience of the soundwalk*. For example *Daytime* asks the participant to:

Find a stranger.
And give them something.
It might be a smile.
You might start a conversation.
Or you could offer them a cup of tea.
Buy them a biscuit.
Sneak them a note.

Telling them something you think they might like to hear.
Give something for nothing. (Nicklin & Goff, 2011, p. 532)

It is additionally significant that the *inbetween* of first person theatre is fundamentally a place of *unwork*, and likewise these 'leaping off actions' invite the participant to take action that it outside the capitalist terms of a work that *produces*. The participant is thus invited to inhabit a radical inbetween that is not tied to the *productive* consumerism that – as set out in chapter 1 (and by the SI) – attempts to subsume leisure as well as work time. The Spectacle seeks to commodify the relationships and the inbetween of work and home (that *The Umbrella Project* also seeks to reclaim) in order, that the *interface* – the edges – of the Spectacle be vanished. As Sadie Plant puts it in *The Most Radical Gesture*:

It is the Spectacle which stupefies and commodifies, forcing us to live in its truly 'global village', full of the 'conformism, isolation, petty surveillance, boredom and repetitive malicious gossip about the same families' which characterise every other sort of village. (1992, pp. 172-3)

In using sound to build an inbetween in and of the stories of some of the citizens of York, *The Umbrella Project* seeks to circumvent the commodification of eventhood. The headphone listening also, with regards to the 'global village' here referenced by Plant represents a *resocialisation* of sound – in reconciling the near and far of the transurban experience with the embodied subject. Embodiment is problematic in the context of a 'global village' where we 'wear all mankind as our skin' (McLuhan, 1964, p. 47), but are deprived of a *functional context* to embed the transurban experience in. In this context the typical use of headphones represents, in Frances Dyson's words, a longing for silence:

[...] the transcendent and impossible silence that headphones represent. Not only is the sound contained within the ear of the listener, but the listener's relationship to the world is virtually eliminated: sound is desocialized, and the threat of an overcrowded mind, or the din of the social, is temporarily reduced (2009, p. 82)

Soundwalk 2 references this directly, both the reconciliation of individual with eventhood, and the din of contemporary living that dulls (or in Plant's words, stupefies) us to (as it is phrased in chapter 3) 'active' listening and responding:

The world is full of people who think they are nobody. People who think they have no story to tell, but stories are important. Listening to other people's – it is like saying 'you are important'. When we are little, stories shape and hone our own understanding of the world, stories are our guide for learning to be people.

But as we grow older, we grow tired. Tired. We just want to switch off, to put headphones on, to walk past, to drown out the conversations. Not hear the arguments, the potentially different opinions, the emptiness, the din of hundreds and thousands of people. We learn to stop listening. (Nicklin & Goff, 2011, p. 524)

Daytime invites the participant to 'zone in' on passersby, and to reflect on stories collected of strangers encountering one another – not drowning one another out but co-creating a moment of radical eventhood. Because *almost every single person asked*¹¹⁷ 'tell me about a time you spoke to or encountered a stranger' told a story about generosity. Soundwalk 2, in particular, addresses this plainly:

Stories are things we share.

Stories are important.

But we have done to them what we have done to our cities;

Corridors and compartments, presided over by others

Hollywood tells our stories now.

But they only tell one type of story, for one type of person. Characters are only there if they serve a function.

They are selling our stories back to us. Like bottled water; sterilised.

So many people I speak to who don't think they have a tale to give.

As if they hadn't lived on this earth, had never experienced anything.

It's easy to outsource our stories. But they're standardised, shaped, tasteless.

Like the difference between apples from a tree, and apples from a supermarket.

Sometimes they will be sour, or rotten.

But at least they're something.

Sometimes they're sweeter than you might be able to imagine.

(Nicklin & Goff, 2011, p. 527)

¹¹⁷ The only story that saw a stranger as a form of danger was from a young girl, of primary school age. She spoke about a stranger who asked her to get in the car, she said she screamed and ran. Then the story became about the people who helped her get home safely.

The Umbrella Project attempts to present eventhood (through the listening and responding of storytelling) as a manner of navigating the transurban experience (interrupted by the near and far of technology). Rather than transporting listening, the soundwalks *direct it*, and thus thwart the Spectacle's attempt to corrupt our ability to reflect on our own lives. *The Umbrella Project* invites the participant to inhabit a story constructed in the 'interior body of the material subject' (Causey, 2006, p. 179) – to approach, in Steve Pile's words, 'a revolutionary practice that relies as much on imagining and mobilizing better stories as on shocks to the system [...]' (2010, p. 53).

The silences.

The Umbrella Project was written a matter of weeks after the UK Riots of 2011, where the sense of the inarticulate violence of unlistened-to people was pervading my mind. It was my belief that those riots, the visceral reactions to them across social media, and the political rhetoric that followed (and that had characterised the Tory government as a whole) represented a fundamental failure of empathy. A lack of empathy that benefits private interests and is driven by a disruption of the true encounter with the stranger, in turn thwarted by a disrupted subject who shuts themselves off from the *noise* of the global village, to the vulnerability that 'speech' (in this context) implies. In Jean-Luc Nancy's words 'in 'communication' what takes place is an *exposition*: finite existence exposed to finite existence, co-appearing before it and with it' (1991, p. xl). True communication, like true communion, is impossible – but to attempt it is to open oneself to a form of radical empathy. Therefore the silences discovered by the project were just as important as the stories – for they represented a failure of empathy that makes the encounter with the other, and the resistance to the Spectacle's version of the world impossible. This is because (in terms of the definition of 'community' set out in this thesis) the act of communication exposes oneself to the other, and in being thrown back by the impossibility of a *true* communication the individual discovers their own voice – their subjectivity. Community – the encounter with the other that arises from the limits of both to ever come together – arises, therefore from a radical inbetween that cannot be recouped by the Spectacle, as the

subject is re-presented with their finitude; where they end, and the message-sending of the Spectacle begins.

The Umbrella Project therefore did not attempt to erase the silences of those who didn't feel able to tell their stories; instead it aimed to *re-present* them. *Nighttime* begins with the invitation to hear the silence of the city:

I asked the people of York to talk to me, [...] But with you, today, I want to start with the silences. [...] The inarticulacies. The people who don't feel like their lives are worth putting into words. The people who asked 'why me'? The lack of light, the darkness on the edge of city nights, the silences. (Nicklin & Goff, 2011, p. 513)

This soundwalk in particular picks up on the voiceless – the work seeks to embed the silent figures back in the line of sight (or hearing). Through the use of general but 'specific sounding' instructions participants are invited to seek a physical and embodied presence for the usually invisible; either through small gestures of empathy (imitating a pace, or being asked a character-relevant question), or by asking the participant to pick out, to 'see' the people of whom the recording speaks:

As groups of people move through the streets, I want you see if you can spot this one man. [...] This man is tall. He is dressed in jeans and a polo shirt. His shoulders are high, against the cold of the air. Very short hair. Short for the sake of it receding. (Nicklin & Goff, 2011, p. 518)

Likewise the participant is invited to chase the sound of song on the air, to disappear like the Girl With No Name, find the smell of food that follows The Kebab Man, or to seek tirelessly for somewhere to sit as they hear about The Man on the Bench. These actions re-present the subject to embodied experience, but they also embody acts of empathy. Acts that stand against four tales of marginalisation that lead to a story about violence, about the violence of inaction. The silent, the invisible individual, adrift from the anchor of the encounter with the other, loses their sense of self, and therefore their ability to act – to either resist, or offer resistance. The silent individual swims and dissolves in the noise of the global village, and commits illegible violence:

Once he saw one of his mates put a strange girl, unconscious outside of a club, into a taxi, and then follow her in. He didn't say anything. He sometimes thinks he should regret that. But he's too tired to think about it much. You probably missed him. His mates were swearing loudly, were taking up all of the space. But he likes it there, on the edges, on the bit where it frays, where no one looks, where he doesn't have to be anything. (Nicklin & Goff, 2011, p. 519)

But in this cascade into darkness, the final two stories of *Nighttime* are one and the same – the final co-story is about the language of people opening themselves to the possibility of communion. The final story is one of love, of light:

It's warm. It's warm like good brandy, or full-bodied red wine, or a fiery whisky. Sound surrounds you, at once loud and muffled, full of orange light and laughter. There's a group of friends in a corner. No different to any of the others. Except you haven't seen them, have you? Look closer. (Nicklin & Goff, 2011, pp. 519-20)

This story is encountered by the participant with their eyes closed – the bright 'what if' of *The Couple Who Aren't a Couple Yet* is conjured within the interior of material subject. And in the light, is a story about rediscovering a language beyond words, in opening oneself to the infinite finitude approached by love:

[...] tonight, wrapped in the warmth of the city, the orange night and narrow streets and close walls, they laugh, and when their eyes catch they see themselves, and they see the possibility of this. Look at them and see the things, see the things you have forgotten about yourself... (Nicklin & Goff, 2011, p. 520)

In the final 'leaping off' action of this soundwalk the participant is invited to connect one of the characters they have encountered throughout the walk with an artefact in the space around them. In a whole unguided imaginative act, the participant is invited to create a 'what if' of a person, 'so the next time you walk past, you might see them, you might remember to listen' – this empathetic creation of a 'what if' is intentionally anchored in the 'what is', so that it might be returned to, so that a small piece of empathy is installed in the muscle memory of the individual.

Walking.

The invitation to *hear* the other is matched in *The Umbrella Project* with the invitation to *walk with them*. Walking – as set out in chapter 3 – is key to the

rediscovery of the embodied subject in and of space. Soundwalks 1 and 3 in particular are subjectively guided walking journeys¹¹⁸ (not pinned directly to a route, but provoked by psychogeographical instructions such as: '[f]ind somewhere, find a place you feel comfortable; you can sit, or stand, lean against a wall, shop front, tree or building. Just find somewhere you feel ok' (Nicklin & Goff, 2011, p. 513)). The further implications of the embodied subject in space are dealt with shortly, but specifically as to the act of walking: it is fundamentally (in terms of the political-as-personal) a political act. Walking enables a pace that allows for the 'chance encounter' – walking is a practice of the *inbetween*, and in this case, the radical *inbetween* of a first person theatrical 'what if'. Walking allows humans to (in Graeme Miller's words) 'mark their lives against a real space and other people' and thus resist 'the centralized reality of the media [...] increasingly witnessed as a passing blur from a car window' (Lavery, 2010, p. 153). Or as put in one of the stories left for the project: you've 'just got more time to take in your surroundings when you're walking, haven't you, like, when you're walking through somewhere, you're not rushing, through it' (Nicklin & Goff, 2011, p. 534).

And so, walking opens the individual to the encounter with the other, it allows the walker the opportunity to listen, to engage in the *practice* of a space which enables the encounter with the other. The city is thus practiced by thousands of people, intertwining through the city with the others, an inscription that convokes the city and that is visualised in *Commute*:

This is the story of a journey. Many journeys. Of the threads of experience that entwine the city. That bind us together. That thread between its walls. York has a history that shapes its boundaries. But so too do the people that move across its paths. (Nicklin & Goff, 2011, p. 543)

¹¹⁸ In Soundwalk 2, which doesn't involve walking, the embodied subjectivity is evoked through other means, such as carefully examining the hand, placing it on the owner's mobile phone and envisaging and 'homing in' on the body:

Think about where you are sitting.
Think about the city from above, put a pin in the map of where you are.
Zoom in. Closer. Focus on exactly where you are sitting. See yourself, there, from every angle. [...]
Now forget everything else.
Forget the places you have to go, the people you will see, all of the tangled thoughts and worries, put them out of your mind.
Be wholly here. Present. Now' (Nicklin & Goff, 2011, p.525)

In walking the individual is invited to co-construct the 'what if' with the narrator, and also reflect on their psychogeographical experience of the city. It is a manner of re-discovering the individual-in-the-environment as a practice.

As Carl Lavery writes (in the context of de Certeau):

To get to grips with everyday life, we have to be a part of it, to experience it, engage with it. Walking permits this type of embodied knowledge, this form of concrete participation, because it compels the walker to be physically present in the space s/he observes. In this way, everyday life reveals itself through smells, sounds, sights, tastes, intensities, and the rhythms of the body. (2010, p. 135)

De Certeau's wandersmänner, to which Lavery is here responding, feels the 'thicks and thins' of urban experience (de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1988, p. 93), and when *The Umbrella Project* participant walks through the city they are invited to 'feel it through the soles of [their] feet, the beat of [their] hearts melding with the thud of [their] shoes against the pavement' (Nicklin & Goff, 2011, p. 534). Aside from the politics of space, walking in *The Umbrella Project* is therefore a practice that enables the participant to gain embodied experience of the city, to employ the entire body in the journey into the 'what if', and so to re-present how it exists in the social field of 'what is'.

The City of York.

A small note is worth making here of the particular nature of the city of York as a *tourist* city. The main industry of the place is very much the tourist industry; ghost walks, shops in the Shambles, the Minster, its Viking and Roman heritage. The culture of the city is dominated by a consumerism of place. Storytelling (even pervasive) is situated in the city, but it is not of a form which asks the tellers or listeners to consider relationships between individual and stranger, or individual and city *here and now*, rather it is a commodification of the dead and the past; ghost walks, 'olde worlde' fetishism. The inhabitants of York are rightly proud of the beauty of the city, but any present ugliness is easily walked by, or again, commodified as a Spectacle and marked as a thing 'past' (e.g. the peasantry and violence of the Yorvik Viking Centre).

The 'tourism' aspect can be useful subverted however, particularly through the recognisable 'audio tour form', and in directly in the content of the

soundwalks; the final soundwalk explores York specifically as a place *travelled through*, the focus on strangers in the second soundwalk (which says ‘we’re all strangers here’, and begins with a 20 year resident Lancashire man explain how he’s unwelcome, a stranger; *offcomdum* (Nicklin & Goff, 2011, p. 522)) and the intentional reclamation of the darkness, the ‘ugliness’ on the edge of the fabric of the city at night. Likewise all of the walks ask the participant to make use of the attention of the traveller, who really *looks*, to see the city anew, again, as Benjamin suggests, to ‘walk out your front door as if you’ve just arrived from a foreign country; to discover the world in which you already live’ (1999, p. 427).

The embodied subject

One of the key theoretical lenses for the thesis is phenomenology – the return to the embodied subject as the fulcrum of perception. As covered in detail throughout the thesis, phenomenology aims to re-present the act of perception by ‘bracketing’ experience and approaching an *inbetween* of object and perception, which Merleau-Ponty tells us is the embodied subject. The bracket is another version of Benjamin’s suggestion of seeing one’s home as if a tourist; of coming home via an ‘unfamiliar route’ (States B. O., 1985, p. 22). The bracketing of experience aims to re-present it to the individual in a manner that defeats the ‘experience error’ – which can be closely drawn to Causey’s notions of embeddedness – where we ‘are caught up in the world and we do not succeed in extricating ourselves from it in order to achieve consciousness of the world’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 5).

It is politically important to extricate ourselves from being ‘caught up’ in the world in order that we might reflect on it – which is why the first step of the personal-as-political is to re-see, then reflect, and then react. The arts (as set out by Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, McLuhan, States etc.) are a form of re-seeing and reflection par excellence. In transposing the ‘what is’ into ‘what if’, theatre in particular is able to bracket ‘what is’, to consider it from the vantage point of ‘what if’. Timothy Clark, in *Martin Heidegger* explains that the ‘art work is not just something that comes into the open, next to other things, it changes the Open in which it appears’ (Clark, 2002, p. 44). *The Umbrella Project*, in inviting

the individual to become the sole practitioner of a *world constituting practice*, not only represents 'what is' through the inbetween of 'what is' and 'what if' but places this inbetween at the site of the body. The embodied subject, for Merleau-Ponty, is our manner of having a world, and so too is it the manner of accessing the world of 'what if'. In setting the inbetween of experience and perception at the originating site of the body, the subject finds a route back the fundamental experience of being-whole and being-here which phenomenology suggests is a manner of re-seeing, and which within the definition of this thesis, is the first step towards political empowerment.

The content of all three of the soundwalks drive the embodied subject to the 'what if' through action, but also constantly glance back to 'what is'. Soundwalk 1 asks you to '[l]ook around you. Look at the things you don't normally see, the tops of buildings, the sky, the ground beneath you' (Nicklin & Goff, 2011), Soundwalk 2 asks the participant to study their hand, before talking about how we 'know the city like the back of our hands. Which, actually, we don't look at that often' (Nicklin & Goff, 2011), and the final soundwalk asks participants to look 'around at your surroundings, have you fallen into a recognizable route? A normal pace? Change them both' (Nicklin & Goff, 2011). Through actions that constantly weave the visible body and conscious actions of the participant into the construction of the 'what if', *The Umbrella Project* participant finds themselves returned to the body as human/world interface, and into conjunction with a 'what is' seen from the 'what if'. This embodied inbetween is also a route to a social context. Merleau-Ponty, again:

It is by being unrestrictedly and unreservedly what I am at present that I have a chance of moving forward; it is by living my time that I am able to understand other times, by plunging into the present and the world, by taking on deliberately what I am fortuitously, by willing what I will and doing what I do, that I can go further. I can miss being free only if I try to bypass my natural and social situation by refusing to take it up, in the first place. (2002, p. 529)

The individual is only 'free' – has agency – when they can see the implications of their existence – embodied, in time, with others. The functional context of being both in and of a field of time, space and social implication, provides the subject with a context for action. This agency is what the first person form of the soundwalk offers – to place the participant at the heart of the world

constituting process is to reconcile oneself with an embodied subjectivity which is accessed through the *inbetween* of perception and perceived object. That which returns them to a *functional context*, where one might discover the other, not as an 'object among other objects' but as part of 'the social with which we are in contact by the mere fact of existing, and which we carry about inseparably with us before any objectification' (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 421).

The body and space.

Simone de Beauvoir in *The Phenomenology Reader* explains that 'the body is not a *thing*, it is a situation [...] it is the instrument of our grasp upon the world' (2002, p. 468). Once one has access to the body as the instrument of our encountering the world, one is able to discover the wider context in which it is set – its situation. The SI, directly address the politics of the situation – how the 'material setting of life' and the 'behaviors that it incites' (Debord, [1957] 2004, p. 44) shape the individual. They proposed two tactics that this thesis has found particularly useful, that of the *dérive*, and *détournement*. *The Umbrella Project* uses similar tactics to address the politics of space and situation. The use of headphones as a form of delivery can be seen as a straightforward *détournement*, or re-purposing, of the typically personalised private listening that directs the listener away from engagement with the situation. Likewise, in a poeticisation of the city through the language, music and symbolism invoked through the soundwalks, *The Umbrella Project* transposes the 'what is' of the city into a 'what if' *dreamcity*; the city itself undergoes a form of *détournement*, where meanings shift, and one *re*-construction reveals the other as construction. In content, too, the soundwalks directly challenge the ownership of public space (by private interests that seek to govern behaviour, and construct situations to that effect). Soundwalk 2 does so most overtly, setting the listener on a busy shopping street and asking them a series of questions:

How public is this space?

There are lots of people here but

Who owns it?

Do you?

Who decides how you use it?

If you wanted to stand here and sing, how long before someone moved you along?

What about if you brought a choir?

Brought together hundreds of people to dance and sing.

What if you wanted to have a picnic?

Paint a picture?

Who is watching you here? How many security cameras are there? What would you have to do to be taken away?

Who gets to say where those lines are? (Nicklin & Goff, 2011, p. 529)

Using the enframing effect of the narration, *Daytime* invites the subject to observe how the surrounding space shapes the movement of the passersby. The piece consciously asks the participant to question the construction of space in the age of globalisation – of a near and far disrupted by headphones and mobile phones as well as the commodification of leisure time and the *inbetween*, which produces, as set out in *Deleuze and Space*, ‘spaces that do not confer the sense of feeling of being in a place, either because they are frictionless passageways designed as conduits or simply so vast or alien they have lost contact with human proportion’ (Buchanan & Lambert, 2005, p. 7).

But while the *détournement* of the city space re-presents, the *dérive* invites the *embodied* understanding of how space constructs situations. Guy Debord describes the *dérive* as ‘the practice of a passional journey out of the ordinary through rapid changing of ambiances, as well as a means of study of psychogeography and of situationist psychology’ ([1957] 2004, p. 24). The often-used literal translation is ‘drift’ – a kind of movement not governed by *purpose* (or productivity) but a manner of discovering an embodied *unwork* of the city. A manner of moving that takes on board how the surrounding environment made the subject *feel*, an invitation to make different connections. In the *dérive*, the SI saw the body as a route to the construction of ‘situations’, and the construction of situations as a manner of drawing the spectator away from the (re)production of the Spectacle and into ‘activity by provoking his capacities to revolutionize his own life’ (Debord, [1957] 1981, p. 25). In re-seeing how their current situation was constructed and affected the individual, the SI thought the individual might be enabled to envision and construct their own situations.

Soundwalk 3, Commute, is the closest to a *dérive* as Debord describes; not only does the work ask you to walk without destination, to take account of where you *feel* you want to go, it also intentionally shifts through different times, places, and stories experienced by other people. As such, it presents a psychogeography of the metaphysical as well as physical city – of the socio-political as well as geographical field. This amounts to an approach to the *dreamcity*:

There's a buzzing you can't get away from. A buzzing. A buzzing.

You tread the steps of many as before you.

'I emigrated, we make uprising, you know, to kill the communism, it was a solidarity, you don't remember, it was in 1980s, and I left my family, I was like a political prisoner, not crime, political'

You stoop down to pick up a leaf. They fall from trees around you.

Autumn, summer, spring, winter.

The seasons shift, blur.

'I haven't been in York for over 40 years, and yep, parts of it haven't changed, and parts of it like everywhere, have.'

The River Ouse floods, then returns to its bounds.

You blink and suddenly look out on endless ocean.

(Nicklin & Goff, 2011, p. 535)

The dreamcity bubbles with experience, and through the soundwalk the situation of the dreamcity is constructed, one that plays with (and thus reflects on the 'what is' of) a *deep history* (see chapter 3 p.123 on) of a place – the situation in time, space, and the context of the inscriptions of others. Johannes Birringer quotes John Newling in *Performance, Technology & Science* as suggesting that when 'art form becomes a part of place a situation is formed. [...] Situations are bridges by which we learn and challenge the conventions of a given place' (2008, p. 205). As such, the construction of the dreamcity invites the participant to engage not just with the psychogeography of *place*, but of a situation built historically, and socially, too. And, in eventually waking from the dreamcity, the soundwalk participants are able to re-see how we are constructed as social, spatial and temporal beings.

The body and the other.

The experience of *The Umbrella Project* soundwalk form is largely a solo one. The walks are done alone, and aside from moments of reaching out (catching the smiles of passersby in Soundwalk 1, or inviting the participant to go out and make a small gesture of kindness for a stranger at the end of Soundwalk 2), in the act of conjuring the *what if*, the participant is alone with the recorded voice. However, in terms of the *content* of the work, *The Umbrella Project* is driven by a profound empathy, an embodied approach to the other. An unreachable one, certainly, but in several ways *The Umbrella Project* attempts to evoke a space for the encounter with the other.

All three of the soundwalks ask the participant to constantly ground themselves in the social field, to find their embodied selves in the here and now *in the context of the other*. From Soundwalk 1's request to find your reflection in a shop window which is then tied to experience of a character¹¹⁹, Soundwalk 2's invitation to examine your hand on your lap and consider who you might like to hold it, to Soundwalk 3, which invites the participant to *make evident* their inscription on the city, to write something on a piece of paper and then leave it somewhere, for someone else to find:

You're leaving a little fragment, a residue of your walk today, here, behind you. Look around, and find somewhere to put it, the crack of a door, the edge of a bench, the crook of a tree branch. Find somewhere you want to leave this small part of yourself. Put it there. (Nicklin & Goff, 2011, p. 543)

The soundwalks are all *in search of the other* – the works chase voices through the streets, ask the participants to trace the pace of others' steps, or to look into the crowd and find a particular person. The 'what if' may be inhabited alone, but it is directed at the other still in the 'what is'. And in this manner – from a hyperpresent embodied practice of empathy – echoes the impossibility of community. The participant never finds the singing man in Soundwalk 1, the glimpses of journeys past slip away in Soundwalk 3, and at certain points you are invited to fall in step just behind certain characters, never quite able to catch up with them, but you *try* to reach them. This embodied movement that

¹¹⁹ 'Look at your eyes. Into them. Do they want for certainty? Or for someone to listen? Or for a feeling of great heights, of falling from them' (Nicklin & Goff, 2011).

reaches out to the other launches the participant into ‘the place of a specific existence, the existence of being-in-common, which gives rise to the existence of being-self’ (Nancy, 1991, p. xxxvii) – the space which Nancy calls ‘community’, or where community arises, is practiced.

The embodied subject in *The Umbrella Project* never catches hold of the other – this is an approach to the notion of *community* as discussed in this thesis – a practice as part of a social field, certainly, but also an impossible communion. As such, *The Umbrella Project* does not attempt to present ‘whole’ characters, rather fragments, snippets, traces. True legibility is impossible, and to become reconciled to one’s own inscription in the context of the illegibility of others, is to recognise the finitude of the self in the context of the subjective other. This exposure, in between the impossible *what if* and the re-presented *what is*, is an ‘opening to community’ – in Christopher Fynsk’s terms ‘outside ourselves, we first encounter the other’ (1991, pp. xv-i). The soundwalk form used here opens the subject to a space where they might encounter the other – in the sound of their voice, or the glimpse they conjure in the *dreamcity* – at the same time as it is a manner of unifying the subject with their own embodiment, here and now, in the hyperpresent of the enframing aspect of first person theatre. To turn to Fynsk’s discussion of Nancy again, ‘it is the opening of a relation at the same time that it is the tracing of a singularity’ (1991, p. xvi). In inscribing one’s path through the city, one is also invited to trace the inscriptions of others – mostly illegible, but drawn with a similar instrument. *The Umbrella Project* does not create a space where community occurs, but it does open the subject to embodiment in the context of the other – it opens them to the (im)possibility of community. Pierre Joris preface to Blanchot’s *Unavowable Community* finds in this community a manner of politics:

Thus one will discover that it also carries an exacting political meaning and that it does not permit us to lose interest in the present time which, by opening unknown spaces of freedom, makes us responsible for new relationships, always threatened, always hoped for, between what we call work, *oeuvre*, and what we call unworking, *désœuvrement*. (Joris, 1988, p. 56)

This is the radical empathy the work seeks: in a place of *unwork*, *The Umbrella Project* re-joins the embodied subject to a social field in which they are unavoidably implicated, a field where one might approach the limit of

community, and in the encounter with the other, discover a political exigency that must be answered. In Nancy's words:

The communication that takes place on this limit, and that, in truth, constitutes it, demands that way of destining ourselves in common that we call a politics, that way of opening community to itself, rather than to a destiny or to a future. (1991, p. 80)

Difference, ethical responsibilities, and accessibility.

The Umbrella Project was not wholly successful in terms of accessibility; in terms of *affordability* and *aspiration* it was perhaps the most successful: the fact that it didn't take part in theatre buildings, that it worked with the local library, and went out into the streets and spoke to every willing person, that the cost of offering a story could be nil, that the technology required to take part in storytelling otherwise was as simple as a phone, and, to listen to the walks, an MP3 player that could be borrowed for free from the library or a theatre. In these ways it attempted to erase typical barriers to taking part in theatre. Likewise the work also attempted to uncover the aspects and areas of society that are often seen past: homelessness, unthinking violence, what it is to be invisible. Careful consideration was given to the involvement of stories given by people struggling with mental health difficulties, to quote directly from the evidence document in how the writing of the final soundwalk dealt directly with this:

Although there were ethical implications in using them, so too were there problems in *erasing* them. They, too, were part of the fabric of the city. As such there is one, slightly ethereal figure in the writing of this piece, the woman who can't stop hearing the buzzing, the woman who feels like she's drowning, the woman who is given a conker by a small child. Someone on the edge of seeing/hearing seemed the most respectful and truthful way to deal with these stories. (Appendix b, p.507)

These 'difference' and accessibility concerns were able to be reasonably well integrated, however there was still a problem with making the work accessible in terms of physical disability/sensory impairment, particularly for those with hearing or sight difficulties. An evaluation of why and how that might be tackled is again quoted here from the evidence document

The walks would not be accessible to people with sight or hearing impairment, although Soundwalk 2 (Daytime) was designed with people with mobility issues in mind (it only required the participant to sit in a certain space). Because the experiences demand such integral and frequent references to the body of the participant, as well as the sights and sounds around them, they were less likely than traditional theatre to be translatable for someone with a disability/impairment. The answer, I feel, is not to make them less specific, however, but to also produce work *designed* for people with hearing/vision/mobility impairments. If I were to repeat the work, or do more pieces in response, it would be appropriate to produce at least one that is doable by able bodied/non impaired people but *designed* for those who aren't. I am also interested in developing a whole new project that addresses these issues within work which is so individually-referential. (Appendix b) p.496)

Finally, we have to consider that there is 'an ethical difficulty with the general principle of the work: that of relying on what and whom you happen to encounter – to saying nothing of the baggage of that which you might have brought with you – in order to construct the experience.' (Whybrow, 2010, p. 146). As Whybrow points out here, the weight of the suspension of disbelief is great when it weighs on one person. The work is also ethically complicated when it uses the unwitting presence of passers-by to draw characters in front of the witting participants. The first problem can be solved to some degree by reassurances of safety (direct requests to move safely, as well as making clear in the full instructions that the participant will not be asked to do anything that makes them look foolish), letting the participant know they can trust the narrator voice. Another tactic in lessening the burden of world-creation is to keep movements minimal, instructions clear, and to ask/offer gentle questions/instructions. Likewise the overlays of character which use passers-by to fill out the experiences (particularly in *Daytime* and *Commute*) are the lightest-possible touch, the briefest glances, inoffensive descriptions, and no actions that intervene in these stranger's lives non-consensually. It is and should be a tension that cannot be wholly solved, rather *addressed*, for it is the tension that makes the theatre taut – the tension between 'what is', and 'what if'.

Conclusion: The Theatre of the Inbetween

And so we come to the end of this investigation of first person theatre and its political relevance in the context of digital technoculture. This thesis, after establishing initial definitions set out to explore how first person theatre represents the Spectacle in and of the self – exposes it and situates the subject in a radical inbetween which allows fundamental reflection on three key fields in terms of the personal-as-political; the urban environment, play and community (the self as agent), interactivity and the subjective other (the self and the subjective other). This, as explained in **chapter 1**, is a route to political power in an era of embeddedness, where, through digital technology, the site of occupation becomes the ‘interior body of the material subject’ (Causey, 2006, p. 179). In chapter 1 the theories of the SI, and key phenomenologists were used to support the proposition of enframing and unworking the Spectacle through the arts practiced at the site of the self. **Chapter 2** then went on to situate first person theatre amongst a select history of the shifts in the performance and audience relationship throughout the twentieth century. In **chapter 3** the case studies of Slung Low and the Subtle mob were used to investigate how the embodied, imaginative acts fostered by the augmenting of urban space with story (and the application of typically isolatory digital technology in doing so) results in the potential re-visioning and re-locating of the agent-in-city-space. In an age of the ‘global village’ and the ‘big picture’ that data gives us, the micro-level (the magnification and making significant of the everyday), can form a powerful new language of the personal-as-political. Sound artist Graeme Miller, quoted in Whybrow’s *Performance and the Contemporary City*, suggests that:

Artists [...] have a useful role to play in the tiny acts of micropolitics that make a difference to the macropolitics that make a difference. (2010, p. 149)

By writing stories on the bodies of its participants, chapter 3 explained, performance is able to hand the citizen critical tools to interrogate the culture of ‘embeddedness’ – of technology that pervades contemporary lives and the messages that private interests embed through it. They are able to locate the

battleground of the 'interior body of the material subject' and the player-as-protagonist aesthetic of the digital world can become the personal-as-political.

Chapter 4 looked at the potential political power of the first person theatrical form of pervasive games, inherent in the notion that when they are designed to enable agency and when meaningful play emerges between players, the subject is re-present to themselves and the other, and invited to inhabit an inbetween. They then share a dialogue inscribed with the actions that, for Huizinga,

[...] simultaneously represents a pact with the beginning and end, but one without beginning and end. The magic circle inscribes a space that is repeatable, a space both limited and limitless. In short, a finite space with infinite possibility. (Zimmerman & Salen, 2004, p. 95)

In this space of possibility one might discover community, and as one enters an embodied practice, in phenomenological terms, one also discovers 'the social world, not as an object or sum of objects, but as a permanent field or dimension of existence' (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 421). In the radical inbetween, and the power of the frame of the magic circle to re-present perception and meaning creation, the embodied subject finds themselves both in and of the world, alongside the subjective other, in impossible communion. This is the unavowable practice of the personal-as-political. In this context, chapter 4 explained, pervasive games expand the magic circle, and widen the space of the inbetween in order to approach systemic and oppressive assumptions about the other. They invite the other into the lusory attitude, and begin briefly to create a place which the embodied participant and other-as-subject can inhabit, or in which they can share a practice which is political as it re-reveals, frames for reflection and opens for the mutual agency that arises from the encounter with the other. This is an area of practice that is relatively new, but has the potential to develop as a powerful personal-as-political form, within the terms set out by this thesis.

Chapter 5 found in the mutual time, place and co-created inbetween space of interactive theatre, the potential to find self and the other re-presented to one another; framed in a place maintained by their alike agency, but always

thrown back into their own, re-revealed embodied subjectivity. The act of co-inhabiting the 'what if' is a manner of destining oneself together with another, in a way that can never be achieved; thrusting themselves together the participants must eventually fall back into 'what is'. In the inbetween of interactive theatre one can discover a limit at which 'all politics begins', a community that is made of co-habitation: 'that way of destining ourselves in common that we call a politics, that way of opening community to itself, rather than to a destiny or to a future' (Nancy, 1991, pp. 80-1). Interactive theatre has the potential to open community to *itself* (to a mutual inscription of limited duration, to something which cannot be *achieved*, but a practice of pushing together what must inevitably fall apart) to the limit which re-reveals the finitude of the subject, and re-presents the subjectivity of the other. Matthew Causey calls this inbetween the 'void'; he explains that the 'void requires control from the state of things. This unhinging or interruption of the state of things as they are, which reveals an invisible impossible thing, is the vent of a truth' (2006, p. 193). In terms of Blanchot and Nancy, the community that might be found in interactive theatre is an invisible, impossible practice, discovered in its collapse. Political in its radical *unwork*: in its destining the subject with the other, in its embodied practice, and route to finitude, agency, and the implications of sharing space. Chapter 5 explained that the re-placing of the participant as world-constituting inter-subject¹²⁰ in interactive theatre is able to provide a reconnection with the social, a re-opening of the public realm. This is an important political necessity as the very notion of 'public' space is shifting under pressure from a tech-enabled surveillance culture, increasing privatisation, and – in the digital public realm – increasing personalisation (where we have a 'personalised' filtered public tailored to our likes and dislikes). A place to encounter the other is increasingly hard to find – as Causey explains in relation to [Hannah] Arendt's suggestion that the public realm, wherein action is performed in face-to-face communication, has been all but closed in contemporary culture' that 'political action is increasingly harder

¹²⁰ That is, an embodied subject amongst others, who can recognise through their reconciliation of mind/body/action the mind/body/actions of others, and being joined in the activity of participating in a performative experience.

to perform' (Causey, 2006, p. 153). For Arendt, political action 'possesses a unique revelatory capacity, the ability to illuminate the realm of human affairs in its specific phenomenal reality, and to endow this reality with meaning' (1996: 85)' (ibid). First person theatre has the potential to assume this role. In embodying intersubjectivity it can form a playground for practices of community and publicness with the vital addition of agency over (the ability to change, to experiment with) what is discovered. As Andy Field encapsulates:

Politics is as much about form as it is about content. It is a way of doing things. Interpersonal relationships, the structure of our communities, our reading of and relationship to the place we inhabit. How we understand our *being in the world*. What these game-based structures allow us is an opportunity to explore and experiment with how we do things. In displacing or undermining our usual, unconsidered way of relating to the people and things around us, they generate a vital context for reflection and experimentation. (Field, 2010)

First person theatre can be a route to our *being in the world*, in time, place, and the context of the other. As such, the inbetween of 'what if' and 'what is' played with bodies provides a place of re-presentation, reflection, and reaction grounded in the subject, in a manner that is profoundly personal-as-political.

And finally, in the practice-as-research section of the thesis *The Umbrella Project* discussed in **chapter 6** explored first person theatre *in practice*. This piece of practice-as-research can be situated alongside the work of other practitioners: the use of site-specified and user generated stories of Graeme Miller's work, the embedding of characters in the fluid *dreamcity* of Slung Low's *Mapping the City*, and Circumstance's use of Situationist re-visioning and *dérive*-type techniques in their *Subtle mobs*. Like all of these pieces, the work directly pervades city space: like Slung Low's work it plays with a *dreamcity*, like Graeme Miller it attempts to reveal the humanity in and of the city, like Speakman's work it poeticises the streets and asks you to walk them holistically and actively. *The Umbrella Project* takes aspects of all of these first person forms, and then builds a piece of work which attempts to evoke a radical, active empathy.

In doing so, *The Umbrella Project* seeks to (re)connect the soundwalk participants to the functional context of York – an embodied experience that re-reveals the city, the self in the city, and the other experienced in and of the

city. Through seeking re-embodiment in a context of here-and-now, and the other, *The Umbrella Project* looks to re-present the construction (social, spatial and technological) of the 'real' city from the vantage point of the dreamcity. *The Umbrella Project* is an invitation to re-see (and hear) one's embodied context, to reflect on what is seen and heard, and by finding oneself part of a functional context, to react to their reflections, if they wish. Thus, within the terms of the thesis, the soundwalks form a personal-as-political practice designed to rival the embeddedness of the Spectacle and its associated (digitally enabled) disruptions of the everyday.

A Personal-As-Political theatre for the digital age.

And so we discover in first person theatre a *theatre of the inbetween*. A practice that is politically empowering and (fundamentally to its relevance in the digital age) encountered at the site of the embodied subject. This is achieved through playful techniques present in the pervasive games (and play-inspired end of the performance spectrum) that decrypt the Spectacle in the city – in the site of the self – and provide a route to the unwork of community. This is achieved through embedded and embodied re-presentation of the urban experience through pervasive games and navigationally interactive sound works, that recoup the technology of the headphone to re-present being in the city. This is achieved through an encounter with the community of subjective others, and a return to agency in the subject itself that is implied in interactive theatre. The theatre of the inbetween embeds participants in re-presentations of systems which govern daily lives (architectural, social, political), offering a key space for both reflection, and because the work is first person, *agency*. The inbetween is a space of radical possibility. In Warren Linds' essay for the *Boal Companion*, he suggests that to:

[...] understand our interactions in this world, we must think systematically. As we engage in a continuous dialogue with the world, we engage in continuous dialogue with each other's behaviour, relationships, and conversations. This web is the space of possibility, the metallic in-between [...] This in-between is not empty but alive with intentions, responses, and actions arising from the system's prior history. Complicity holds each of us responsible for the good or bad of the whole and bids us perceive and pay attention to the in-between. (Linds, 2006, p. 120)

The inbetween of theatre is found in the conjunction of 'what is' and 'what if' held together by those making it. It is a rip in the space-time continuum within the bracketed space of reflection that is the arts, which as phenomenologist Adolf Reinach put it, 'allows us to view what was, indeed, *there already*, but without our being conscious of it' (Reinach, 2002, pp. 180-1). First person theatre attempts to take this 'metallic in-between', and evoke it through and with the body of the audience, the body of the participant. Ken Hillis in *Digital Sensations* explains that '[o]ur bodies are where we experience the intersection of our individuality and the cultural sphere' (Hillis, 1999, p. 172) – first person theatre is a route to the possibility and political implications of the embodied subject. It can also examine the implications of presence and the politics of the personal in the digital age.

First person theatre is a practice, as such this is not a study that should draw conclusions about any 'solution' that first person theatre might produce to the problems of contemporary capitalism and digital technoculture – rather it offers a practice as a means of constant unworking; reseeding, reflecting, and reacting to the rules of contemporary capitalism in play. There is, however, much more scope for further investigation, particularly through practice-as-research, into the other main area(s) that this study investigated. While *The Umbrella Project* sought to explore sound and the city in practice, the interactive theatre and pervasive gaming end of the interactivity spectrum could not be investigated within the scope of this thesis. As the rise of gamification, the use of games, and interaction design lessons learnt from the gaming world begin to become a greater part of the tool kit of contemporary capitalism, an anti-capitalist performance should begin to explore not just the agency to act within a system, but the making of these systems themselves.

Further study, therefore, might develop a manner of game-making that draws greater attention to the structure as well as the playing of the game, that highlights the agency of the game-maker, as well as the willing admittance of the game-player. Coney, whose *A Small Town Anywhere* forms a particular case study in chapter 5 (p.222 on), have recently (2012-13) begun development of a new piece of interactive theatre; *Early Days (of a Better Nation)*. Set at the

beginning of a post-revolution society, 100 players are invited to become political parties and begin to construct the laws and principles of their new nation. However, as time passes, their decisions are more and more constricted, their freedom to act blocked. The players are increasingly oppressed by the game system, which keeps on shifting beneath them. Coney are aiming with this piece to build a game which invites its audience to break it. This is a particularly fascinating route – an exploration of the game system as well as the game experience (its playing out). Is it possible to design for revolution? Do revolution games increase everyday political agency through analogue, or simply provide a player with an easy catharsis? Does that mean aiming at a ‘product’ in an audience which problematises the radical unwork of the play-community? Perhaps another manner of game play would be to invite an audience to play the game for half of the evening, and then in the second half, invite them to redesign it for the next night’s audience? Perhaps, as pervasive games and the idea of the ‘playful city’¹²¹ become more widely accepted, they need to find new ways to pervade in a manner that continues to be unexpected, to shift players into a mutual inbetween.

For first person theatre to remain effective (within the terms of this thesis) it should be a fluid practice (as well as a practice that enables fluidity) – to allow a place to examine the infiltration into our lives by private interests and how our being is translated, augmented and traded as data within the capitalist digital technoculture. As such, a study of it is necessarily never ‘finished’. It must also begin a recuperation of configurative practices within the arts, through and of digital technoculture. For this reason too, further study might investigate the place of the artist – and the increasing anachronistic singular that this implies – in interactive and playful performance.

Being is a practice, as is the being-there of place, and the being-with-and-of that is community. Aspects of first person theatre allow access to a community and politics of form, of the systemic. The power of first person theatre is that it offers the participant access to a personal-as-political *practice*. As Andy Field of Forest Fringe wrote in a series of blog posts for the British Council:

¹²¹ C.f. the 2012 *Playful Leeds* initiative (Leeds, 2013)

Politics is as much about form as it is about content. It is a way of doing things. Interpersonal relationships, the structure of our communities, our reading of and relationship to the place we inhabit. How we understand our *being in the world*. (Field, *Playing Games*, 2010)

First person theatre must remain and continue to be an evolving and challenging form, an opening of the inbetween that allows revelation, reflection, and reaction to the systems and rule sets of late capitalism.

Technical Glossary

4chan is an English-language imageboard originally created in order to discuss manga and anime. Users are able to post anonymously, and aside from being the site responsible for the creation and propagation of many internet memes, they are also known to be the source of a great deal of internet subcultures, including that of Anonymous. 4chan is notorious online for its 'anything goes' anonymous board /b

Algorithm – an algorithm is a set of rules used as part of a computational process.

ARG or Alternative Reality Game – a kind of real-life role playing game, where the playing board is all of life, and players are versions of themselves, but in a slightly alternative reality. Players allow the magic circle of game play to augment their daily lives. ARGs usually play with the mystery solving or treasure hunt game forms, and leave clues and game artefacts online and in 'real life'.

Binaural audio uses a recording technique which, when recording, uses microphones in each ear of a 'stand-in' head – this could be an actual person, or an accurate (in terms of density, scale, etc.) mannequin. The stand-in head interrupts the noises picked up by each mic in the same way the head of a listener would experience them in each ear, producing a sound which is uncannily spatially realistic.

Cookies: in terms of the web, cookies are small pieces of data stored in the web browser of the user, they are used to gather information from the visits of that user to a specific website. They can, for example, store preferences, as well as shape features depending on whether and how the user has accessed a certain web page before. Their use is very common.

Darknets are peer-to-peer filesharing networks where each user is a trusted peer, and traffic does not move outside that network. Darknets use specific protocols, avoiding the sharing of IP addresses (the unique internet protocol address of a specific machine on a specific network).

The **Deep Web:** The forgotten web; sites not crawled (and therefore, indexed) by any search engines.

FPS or First Person Shooters are a genre of video game that typically situates the player in a first-person perspective – viewing action from the eyes of the central character.

Gamification. A term most widely used in the games and entertainment industries, in some areas pejoratively, to describe the act of making something game-like. When not used pejoratively it can mean learning from and applying the behavioral and interaction design lessons that games offer to typically non-game situations and experiences. When referred to pejoratively it is typically in the context of lazy 'pointsification' or the use of other game-like mechanics to encourage an individual to engage more actively (to provide the illusion of agency and choice) with the story, image or message that is intended for delivery. This is tackled in more depth in chapter 4.

A **God Game** is game genre thought to be invented by game designer Peter Molyneux, that typically places the player in the position of some form of 'god'. It is similar to the challenge of cultivating activity in the complex systems of simulation games such as *Civilisation* and *Command and Conquer*, but with the ability to control additional aspects of the natural world. *Black and White* and *Spore* are examples of the God Game.

HMD or Head Mounted Display – A head-mounted computer display device that typically aims to obscure the participant's view of reality and replace it with a view of a

computer-generated virtual reality. This device is largely outdated now (popular in the 80s and early 90s), and has been replaced with 'head up displays' that augment – as opposed to replace – reality. HMDs were used particularly in early experiments in virtual reality, matched later with the addition of the 'data glove' that allowed users to inhabit and interact with a virtual reality.

HUD or Head Up Display – where the user's vision of reality is augmented with an overlay of information, sometimes a graphic user interface

IRC or Internet Relay Chat – instant messaging in today's parlance, where users exchange text-based 'chat' messages online in real-time.

LARPs or Live Action Role Playing Games – a more traditional form of 'real life' gaming that does not expand the magic circle to contain the 'real life' of the participant, but where the player takes on the game-world and plays the part of a character in it.

MMORPG or Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game: a role-playing game that is played online with many other remote players. Well known examples include Everquest or World of Warcraft.

MOOs or Object Oriented MUDs, which allow users to use an object oriented programming language to alter as well as interact with the game.

MUDs or Multi User Dungeons – early text based online role-playing game-like experiences.

Pervasive technology is used as shorthand for 'pervasive digital technology', and it describes the tendency for contemporary mobile technology (the mobile phone, the smart phone, the MP3 player, the digital cameras etc.) to travel alongside an individual, to *pervade their lives* and to bring in new immaterial fields to material experience. Pervasive technology is most truly pervasive in places such as the UK, the US, and other developed Western countries, where cellular and data networks are available to connect mobile devices forming a world of 'ubiquitous computation' and 'telecommunication' (LaBelle, 2006, p. 258).

Point and click games are almost always clue and puzzle based games played in the 3rd person, the story is built through exploration, rather than driven by action, and is therefore much more akin to slower burn literary story forms, as opposed to the fast paced action influence of film. In point and click adventures players are rewarded for curiosity and invention.

Quantified Self is a practice whereby an individual uses pervasive technology to closely monitor and thus manage weight, exercise, blood pressure, other health measurements, as well as sleep patterns and mood, relative happiness and stress. The Quantified Self movement share hints, tips, and extoll the virtues of the practice online.

SEO or Search Engine Optimisation – optimising a website for increased prominence in search rankings – using tags, mutual links, meta data – sometimes piggybacking on irrelevant but often used search terms.

Tor is a piece of software that uses a series of servers all over the world to re-route an individual users' internet traffic, making their activity effectively untraceable (the re-routing is protected through a series of levels of encryption).

UI or User interface, in this case a GUI, or Graphic User Interface. A means of allowing a person (or user) to interact with a piece of programming – when 'graphic' it means

representational or visual, in a way that usually aims to allow a layperson to operate a program.

Virtual Reality: computer-generated totally immersive simulated environments, in which a player or viewer can be placed and explore often using head mounted displays (HMD) and other human-computer-interface (HCI) devices.

Wearables: Digital technology woven, networked, or otherwise applied to clothing and/or accessories. Wearable technology.

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Appendix A: Interview transcripts for the case studies

Interview with Alan Lane, Artistic Director of Slung Low, completed on the 17th of January 2012.

H: Alan of Slung Low, tell me about your background

A: My background?

H: Yeah

A: Personal, or theatrical?

H: Anything that you think might apply to questions about you and Slung Low

A: Erm, I was born in Berlin, in West Berlin, and in the forces, so I moved around a lot and then I went to the University of Sheffield where I studied English, but there- Sheffield is a- it's not unique there's about 5 of them, where they didn't have a theatre course at all but they did have a very good working professional theatre that was run by a couple of old men who were very nice. So we made lots of work there but there was no sort of 'guidance', you're working in a vacuum, you're just doing things because they strike you as a good idea, not because you know that that's what Kenneth Branagh does or whatever, and Slung Low was formed out of that. We went to the NSDF [National Student Drama Festival] with a series of short Samuel Beckett plays and then a devised piece both of which went down like a cup of cold sick, erm... And Slung Low was formed out of the idea that – some of this is looking back and rewriting our intentions, or being clearer about our intentions than probably a 22 year old could have been – but the idea was making the act of going to the theatre more exciting, or more about the fact that *you* person 'a', are *here now*, not the concept that you might be here but you *are actually here*. So it should greet you eye-to-eye and should look after you and should make you want to bring your friends back and that sort of stuff. So, so that's, so Slung Low was formed out of that, and then we spent 5 years being very bad, and doing new writing, and new musicals, and old plays, and all sorts of nonsense trying to work out – erm – what we were up to. And then did a project about Bosnia – went to Sarajevo for quite a while and came back with a load of stuff – and brought together as many emerging artists who were good at what they did, as possible, and we ended up with 32, in a warehouse in Bradford, and we took all this material, and we made what could only be described as possibly the worst piece of theatre ever made by any group of people anywhere. But people liked it because it was weird and it wasn't- if it had played in Shoreditch no one would have paid it a blind bit of attention because it would have been just like everything else, but it was in Bradford so the idea that you could get 32 25 year olds running around the place was... So, we got a bit of attention there, but being in a warehouse the thing that occurred to me was that with 32 people – we were given this little studio but we couldn't actually get everyone in, there was no room for the audience so we took over this warehouse because it was as big as the

stage at the West Yorkshire Playhouse but it didn't require me to be a 40-year old experienced theatre director who promised he'd do Romeo and Juliet and nothing else. So there's something about the space and the fact that we didn't need the permission – well we did but a different set of permissions, the council just wanted to make sure we weren't going to hurt anyone. And the show wasn't particularly good but we did run it for quite a while, it did run for about 3 weeks in the end. And out of that 32 – I didn't really fire anybody – I just let 20 of them drift away overnight. I just stopped returning their calls because there was a lot of fighting, Slung Low doesn't really fight, but they – it did then, lots of people arguing – and then I ended up with a core group, so that was maybe – 4 years ago and then we started to make the work that everyone would recognise with *Helium* and then *They Only Come at Night* first, which was a vampire show in a car park.

H: And *Helium* was a Samuel Beckett commission-

A: Yes, and there was the little boxes. And I think although I think everything looks now – *Mapping the City*, on the streets, and everything in between – and although everything looks very different ... Actually, the box is a conceit; why would anyone want a theatre company that made work in boxes? That was – the box was just the mechanism by which we could shut the word down small enough to go 'you're here, brilliant, thank god *you* are here' because there was only room for one person in the actually physical space because it was a 6 foot box... 8 foot box. And the same with the car park – and we'd split everybody up so then 'thank god *you're* here' and the same with headphones, now we can speak very directly to the – the idea of personalising. That's the thing that's really kept the last 4 or 5 years together. Because the work is very different.

H: OK, brilliant,

A: That's quite a long summary, I feel

H: Yes, that's allowed, though.

[Interlude where Alan finds a 'dead' plum in the fruit bowl, and discards] –
06:40

H: How would you best describe Slung Low as a company – when someone says 'what is Slung Low?' what do you say?

A: We make theatre in unusual spaces.

H: And would you call yourself a theatre company?

A: We're not 'Slung Low, theatre company' – I would now, I used to be much more stressed about this until I realised that the world really, genuinely doesn't give a shit, it's not vitally important. I think what we are is probably a... So if someone asks me or if I have to write it in a funding thing or on a wall somewhere, I say 'we make theatre experiences-' actually, I say 'we make audience experiences-' ... 'audience adventures in unusual spaces' is what I say. If I'm having to be slightly more sensible than that I think I make theatre shows in unusual spaces.

H: On the Arts Council forms, which – because they put you into theatre for-

A: Oh, I just tick 'theatre', but that's rather – that's more because after your 900th form you don't care anymore, because you know no one's reading it. I think Slung Low is a 'creative production team', we're all very practical and the amount of time I spend being a director in terms of what that traditionally means, or what that might in the broad mainstream mean... Reading a play over and over again and spending time with actors – that is part of my job, and it's an important part of my job because if I get it wrong nothing else really matters – but it's a very small part of my job in reality, and everybody else is incredibly practical. And I so I think that's what we are...

H: So I guess I got a history of the company when I asked about the background of the company, so that's really useful. One fewer question to get through, but just concentrating on that 'taking work out of boxes' thing, what... Do you recognise in your memory a point where you realised that 'this is where I want to be taking things-?'

[Interrupted by Alan's dog Billy getting overexcited at the postman's arrival] – 09:12

A: Yes I do, I think part of that is a post-rationalisation where... So, I was talking before about as a student going to the NSDF, and going down really badly. And in my memory you look back and go 'and that's the point where I really realised that I-', and you just go, 'well, no, in that moment I was actually just a 19 year old going 'oh god it hurts''. So there's – but there is definitely a point, I think the most pivotal thing that happened in terms of what we make, is that I worked for the West Yorkshire Playhouse [WYP] and I probably – amongst a similar line of peers there aren't many of us who have done both the truly wacky fringe... So I worked with Mapping4D – I was *in* an Oxford Samuel Beckett theatre show when I was – years and years ago – where we all ran around and it didn't make any sense, everyone was running around naked and sticking themselves in... And at the same time was Ian Brown's assistant [at WYP]. So I think at that point I had a lot of time being very frustrated, working with incredibly talented people who were very skilful – doing something where I was like: 'oh my god, no matter how skilful you are, we're not getting any further down here, this, the same people are coming through the door, to watch the same thing, to behave in the same way'. And the same people who are standing on the outside of the door going 'but this isn't for us, and you shouldn't have this money, or you shouldn't be having this' – never have I been in a more stagnant situation where you go: 'I could' (and literally did) 'I could turn up drunk and it won't make any difference does it, this thing rolls on without me, and but, also without *any of us* and what we're aiming for... Is a conservation of what happened yesterday', and I thought 'I can't think of another art form that does that. At it's highest level'. So there's lots of music where people stand up and play Beatles' covers over and over again but we go 'they're Beatles' covers, they're not Mica' (a true artist) [laughter]. Nobody thinks a Beatles' covers band is the pinnacle of our art form – of music as an art form, we – I think many things, you look at radical new interpretations of, Rachmaninoff, or – but in theatre there's this idea of 'we did it again! Ha'. It's extraordinary and at that point I realised that there were some parts of

that system that just don't work, and therefore making work that is for places that aren't theatres – for example – is the easiest way of getting an audience that wouldn't normally go to theatre to go to theatre – is by not putting it in theatres. So it's definitely a moment -

H: And why is that important to you?

A: Because the exploration of the idea of 'now', rather than 'yesterday' is what I think theatre can do. So the idea that 20 years ago we bought our holidays on Ceefax and we booked train tickets and had them posted to us and now we walk into the Leeds station and we'll have our iPod, listening to our own selection of music we'll have selected according to our mood, that we bought through a shop that's personalised to us and that can stop, and my mother can be ringing, and I can talk to her whilst checking the board to see what's there, and getting the news ... And that information is coming at us so fast now, and we are – we're not in control of it, but we are personalising it and filtering it to us. And that has transformed the way we just walk down the street, but our theatre looks exactly like it did 40 years ago. I find that extraordinary, there isn't another part – our hospitals don't look the same, our schools don't look the same, in fact no part of our society looks the same but our theatres do. You sit down and at the *same time*, which is this weird 7.30 time that doesn't make any difference, which is actually about the last train from London, but that stopped being 20 years ago (and plays got shorter so it doesn't make any sense at all) but we still sit there at 7.30 (which is quite inconvenient because you can't eat beforehand and you're too...), going 'what the fuck am I doing? What is this?' and I find that bewildering. But at the same time hold onto the idea that a group of people sat in a room, or stood in a room, or stood anywhere, live, and going: 'oh my god we're going to be told a story and *collectively* we're going to share this – that still people speak directly *to me*' is probably the most exciting thing we can do. And that contrast of the most exciting things you can do and 'my god that system's boring', is the tension, which is why we find ourselves (though sometimes we get it wrong) find ourselves in warehouses going 'maybe this is the answer!' ... 'No it's not the answer'... Does that make sense?

H: That does make sense, thank you. What was your first 'headphone show' which is I guess, hopefully, how you refer to them? And what prompted it?

A: Comes back to us being a practical company. We made a show called *Small World* which was for teenagers which had been commissioned roughly at the same time as *Helium*. And *Helium* was a box show for adults at the Barbican, and had quite a bit of money, it was all plush, Patrick Stewart was the lead voice, it was a very adult, very cosmopolitan experience. In that sense it was all rather (probably not to the people in London but it was to us)... And at the same time we'd been commissioned by a Liverpoolian youth theatre – young people's company, they were called, they used to be called 'Mipped' (changed their name) – but they were the guys that originally commissioned Blood Brothers back in the day so they were that kind of company. And they asked us to make a 'cutting edge theatre installation for teenagers' – and we were doing *Helium* and we were really

very aware that we didn't just want to repeat the same urban cosmopolitan aesthetics and values and that that should be something slightly more interesting for teenagers, but we were genuinely very scared about taking it on because we didn't know how we were going to get the teenagers to shut up long enough for us to talk. And we looked at how other companies did that and they mostly did it by that [raises voice] 'you're going to come on and be the loudest thing in the room and then they'll be quiet and then when you've got them you've got to keep going' – that felt like an incredibly... All roads led to Blue Peter. Everything we looked at, was basically 'this is just another version of Blue Peter' – you've got to come in and go 'Yeah!' and they'll shut up – but they won't and why would they? So we came up with another box show, that was still boxes, but the boxes came out having to – we were going to split the audience into ones, because then they won't be able to distract each other – OK, 'how on earth will this work' – and that's where the whole idea of 'audience adventures for one' came from. Because 'well then we'll just have to get through people very quickly and we'll make very small environments so we can fit many small environments into the...' [We] came up with a box show, but because they were packed into such small spaces you get maybe 4 boxes in a room like this – the noise bleed was horrific, and we couldn't work out how to change the signal from room 1 to box 2 without having to go through this whole pirate radio thing which was... And there's 6 rooms going on at once so we need 6 signals, but all within this proximity – and we discovered the rooms were so small, infrared worked. So you walked (you could hear nothing) you walked into a room and you'd get the signal, you'd walk into a different room and get a different signal. And that – it came from the very, very practical point of view of wanting to talk to (or at, probably more likely) teenagers about things that might have an emotional resonance, but needing to give them enough space so they could process that without turning their back on us. So we were really pragmatic, but at the same time were talking lots about – talking about the train station and how we personalise and put filters on and that felt like – that's a huge remove from the headphone shows that we do now which is partly a continuing conversation we've been having about headphones that create new environments and change. So you just play a different song and the world looks different – and that those sorts of... And pragmatically which has been about the largest number of people that can listen into a changing signal. So in Liverpool we had 8 different signals going at once, and there is a limit to that technology, there is a new type of technology but then you're into tens of thousands of pounds as opposed to thousands and that's our – we can't really do this any more without that – but that's where it started, it started from a very practical space and then once we got the technology we were like 'oh what does this do?' and then we started to try to look at the idea of immersing people into... I find that fascinating, that if you disconnect the sound from – in American Sitcoms, say you put that down [puts coffee cup down] they don't record that, they put that in as a special [effect] – because that heightened (and put sugar on top, and more 'boom') MSG sound – makes the whole thing feel more 'punchy' to people. And you can do that in real life just by disconnecting the sound. So that's where we

ended up, but we started from a very pragmatic place, which is 'how do you get teenagers to shut the fuck up'.

H: My next question was 'why sound', but you sort of began to answer that there, you mentioned immersing people in – I guess augmenting how they see things...

A: Yeah, I'm never amazed that if, no matter how tired I am, no matter how much it's raining, I'm a fucking hero running through a city and I will then just start to run... And that says someone who's incredibly interested in sound, but isn't monstrously interested in music really, music is great, it exists, but I can't get as excited as you or Chris Thorpe; music is music, if it works in my ears it's great. And so it is transformative, in the sense that it will immediately transform your mood. And in the theatre you start with darkness and silence and you can add everything onto it. In the street, or anywhere, you start with a load of stuff and you have to co-opt it in. I often think that when our shows don't work it's because we haven't necessarily co-opted enough of reality into it, so it's just easier to go 'that's just fucking rubbish isn't it' – the suspension of disbelief is too great. You need to help people along, and music especially, but sound particularly, just does so much of that work that you can be walking down – I mean a street in Liverpool, we hadn't touched it, it was just where people lived, and play a certain piece of music and everyone was sure we'd gone down and dressed it as the 19th century. And we hadn't, it was just that right moment where you turn that on and all the colour will bleed out because that is where the street is – just hit them with that and you're off. And I get very excited about that, because I think that can help you leap somewhere else.

H: Have your headphone shows always been made for city space? What is it about embedding performance in those spaces that interests you?

A: Do you mean city-space as in opposition to rural-space or-?

H: I think so, although there's probably a conversation about central business districts – shopping, the centres of cities and – where people live

A: Domestic-

H: Yeah

A: My answer to a lot of these questions I think is going to be (and I think they're both equal) there is the pragmatic answer – so for example the last question one of the other practical answers – I've been working with Heather longer than I've really been working with anyone apart from Scotty, and Heather is an extraordinary composer. The thing that makes her genuinely unique is that she can deliver completely broadcastable levels sound film score at the same price as anyone else I work with in sound and music delivers me 'oh, I thought I might play it like this'. She doesn't- she just delivers it; it's an orchestra; 'bffff!'. I mean now we use live choirs, but there is the pragmatic – which is we cut our cloth according to our skills, so there was a time when we had people involved in the company who worked with triggers and arduino boards and all that, now we don't have that and I'm not as interested in that as they were so now we just don't have that. But alongside that practicality is also a discussion about the

immersive nature of music and sound and how that can – I think both of them are equal. So the answer to the city question is: because that's where people are willing to pay for us to do it, but alongside that especially [...] in Hull for example the layers upon layers of real history where you realise that an entire generation of people died here – those big sweeping epic dramas that you get on television. Or in Leeds as well, you can see that history just literally on the streets. And that I get very excited about, the idea of ghosts and ... I suppose I'm just really working towards making *Wings of Desire*. [...] That I get very excited about, that alongside a show... Like *Mapping the City* can run down a high street and the kids outside McDonalds can just be watching and I don't think in that instance we particularly co-opted them into the fiction, but they added texture to the world of – there was a tension about watching that and them watching us – but again the headphone technology allowed a lot of the audience to not really bother about that.

H: No, but you felt like you were doing 'a thing', though, the moment that you were all staring at you, you were like 'oh, we're doing a thing, we're not just here, we're also walking the line of that suspension of disbelief'.

A: And that's what *theatres* should do – not 'theatre' necessarily, I think it's ok for theatre to happen in that room that you have to go into, but I like that a lot of how we're funded... Our shows are really expensive, we don't get paid very much money but they are in comparison to other shows, they're just a really fucking expensive way of doing business. But one of the reasons people sustain that level of investment is because – we talk about two audiences, there's you and Linda who's come along and put on headphones and are walking along, you are audience one. But there are also audience two, who are the people watching you watching them, and those people [...] there were lots of people who saw that [*Mapping the city*] repeatedly who found their place, not that we generated but their place just pinged up a bit, and they were talking about their space and that's something that most councils recognise as – in really brutal terms we can tell people we did something because they'll be able to *see* that we did something. But I think that there is a more interesting – around the army show a lot of people came out to watch the explosion every night. HAd no intention of seeing the play when we gave them free tickets but they were quite happy to talk about the themes and issues about the British army and everything else, but they just didn't want to go in *that room* because *that room* belonged to weird people. That's one of the reasons for cities; it's where all the people live.

H: This is a bit of an annoying question but [small interruption where Alan asks about transcription- 25:14] so if you had to pin down what you do – and you can say 'all' or 'none' to these sort of things, would you call your work 'embedded' or 'immersive' or 'interactive' and do you feel like it's in any way responding to a shift in narrative forms in the digital age?

A: I wouldn't call it interactive, I think that there was a point when [...] in the past our work *looked* interactive – I'm still a theatre junkie, as in, greaseproof, and *nothing* makes me happier than a night with old queens, I

fucking love it. Stories about Ian McKellan are quite frankly the only way I want to spend my time. So there's – so one of the things we're always looking for is an ability to deliver an experience with a [...] that amazing consistency you get in theatre where you go 'they look like they've never had this thought before in their life, and they've been touring for 7 years'. And that's a skill, and it's a craft, just like it's a skill for a band to look like – to sing that song like it means something, [...] so the last 5 years are when we've been the – and the first half of that 5 years I was working towards work that looked interactive but was a piece of theatre. So it started at x, ended at x + and, but the audience member's like 'oh my god!' And actually in *Helium*, and in lots of other shows, they were clip tracks; once that button was pressed the show was 27 minutes and 52 seconds long. But along the way people were like: 'oh my god and then they asked me the question, and I answered and then MAGIC TRICK' But it doesn't matter, if you stand still and go 'no, not playing not playing not playing' it was join got end and the trick I think was that it felt like there was choice – especially from the big old lions of this sort of thing came along and go 'it's not interactive!' and you go 'I never said it was ever meant to be' – it's not a game. We don't make games, we make something that – we make theatre that looks like it might be a bit of a game, but because the discourse then changed into 'we should have theatre companies that make games' and at that point we had to go 'yeah but we're not them, though' – that's different, that's a different thing. Yes we should have theatre companies that make games, but that's not what we quite do. So I don't think it's interactive, I think it quite often uses the tropes of interactivity to give the impression that – so we'll often give you – like in the vampire thing we gave you a band, and there were different blood groups on this fluorescent club night band thing and people had to fill them in, and it was just a way of keeping everyone busy while we got them all in the room, but it felt like – 'oh! what's going to happen!' – and it wasn't in any way connected. So we use the tropes of interactivity, I think we are immersive, in the sense that – in the really simple meaning of that word when you sit in a theatre and it's coming at you on one channel and what we try to do – my favourite moment in the whole of Hull, for everything that that show could do and didn't do and failed to do, or succeeded in doing, which was in the first play, which was the most difficult – the scene in the foreground which was a couple eating dinner [...] and in the background a man in a full lobster costume walked – maybe 30 metres behind just across the landscape, and half the way through the argument – the woman said to the man 'so what are we going to do with the lobster?' – by that point he would be there, and he just kept going, and there was never any connection, and half the audience saw it, and it obviously wasn't being lit and it wasn't connected so they went – 'fucking hell, this is such a weird experience' – it was a guy just going to a fancy dress party! And then right at the very end of the scene they just said the word 'lobster' and they all went 'ohhhh, you fuckers!' and then you could see the moment [...] and they spent the rest of the show, for two hours going [mimes looking around frantically] and I love that, and then in a way that's when it does become, and that's what I mean about the tropes of games, that's not a game, that's not interactive, but it's – basically

– a big game of *Where's Wally?* It's immersive in that sense – where is it going to come from? We'll do more of it in Singapore this year, show starts at 7.30, you have to meet at place X, it works easier in London because of all the tube stations, everyone catches the tube so you know how they're going to get there, so you go to the nearest tube station and you take the image of the show and you just spray them – so angels were important in one of them – spray the stencil of angels and then we'd invented a lot of restaurants so we put a load of billboards up for them, so they're just seeing subliminally (sometimes not), but that was leaking out before the beginning of the show. So that simple demonstration of: [...] 'we didn't say what the rules were, we didn't say it *started* at 7.30, we just said you had to *be here* at 7.30' meant that the audience were so active in looking for things that everything became part of the show [...] and they were playing in their city, and that's very – in whatever ways we can do that... [Alan turns heater on] and I think that's immersive, that's my definition of immersive.

H: And I think that's really interesting because everything in the city becomes significant and you see it for the first time in probably a long time in that same way as we all go 'like the back of my hand' and never really look at the back of our hand.

A: And that exact sentiment is often – obviously the people we work for, who commission us say 'what do I get out of it, what does Bradford get out of it?' – and that's the first, second thing we list, is this is what you get out of it – people still email us and go 'I'm just by the fruit market' – which is just a completely abandoned shithole of a place – 'and I keep seeing her!' – and we say 'we promise you we're not doing this'. In *Helium* the main image was a white helium balloon, we love giving people stuff, so you've got a white helium balloon because it was drip feeding a new member of the audience every 5 minutes over 9 1/2 hours, walk into the Barbican at any point and you would see someone with a white helium balloon or if you were really lucky you'd see someone release a white helium balloon, so people had these profoundly moving moments [by] going back and putting emotion into a memory, extraordinary. So in that sense it is immersive, and the more play we can get with it – the best example of it was the original bearings thing which was Leeds, we said we were going to deliver 100 stories about Holbeck by talking to the community and put them up on signposts. And then we put 100 stories up, none of them were true – at least not in the factual sense – but by the end of the project even the West Yorkshire Playhouse were coming to me and saying 'so which ones were true?' and we were going 'you bought this, you read the document, none of these are true!' and the layers of bleeding out into the real world – so I suppose in that sense it is embedded, it's embedded in a reality.

H: There's probably a useful metaphor in actually the language and theory of play – the magic circle – which is so you're playing a vampire game your suspension of disbelief bubble is the magic circle, and if you're outside the magic circle, you're not playing the game, and what it sounds like is you're playing with the membranes of the magic circle as theatre.

A: I think so. This year we're doing more. The Vampire show we're doing as

much of that as we can, John who's writing it is doing the ARGs that we did with the last one [...]. I think they're games when they wear their gameness on their sleeve, I get much more excited about them when you're not sure whether they're games or not. [...] The suspension of disbelief is just one decision rather than endless decisions. It gets harder because the North Yorkshire shows we're doing this year will not have as much of that in, just because the larger the audience the less time you have for curating those kinds of things, I think.

H: And then there's the second half to that question which is the slight leading part which is 'do you feel like they're responding to a shift in narrative forms in the digital age'?

A: I suppose that would require – whether we've responded them...

H: I mean there was something in when you were saying 'we used to look at things on ceefax' and -

A: Oh yeah, we're definitely changing, I'm – yes I think I don't think it's more how this central thing of why our theatre experience hasn't changed very much in the face of everything else changing, I think that probably underpins everything. And so, the answer is, I suppose, yes, there are certain elements of the digital expansion that aren't of interest to me but that doesn't mean they aren't reflected in the other ones. But definitely the rate of information and how we – how everything makes us feel special, a lot of it's completely fucking artificial – but you go shopping, I log into a website and 'hello Alan Lane, oh, that thing you fancied, it's here! And look! And three months after you bought that you'll probably want this now' and all of this is 'welcome here, you, you're brilliant'. Unlimited's got it as their tag line; 'so glad you came' – and it's great, rather than that 850, [...] it's just absolutely irrelevant whether I'm here or not, like if I take all of my clothes off will anyone even – will this reality change? No? Oh god. And I think that's key, and a lot of that's to do with information.

H: Actually everything that's problematic about the idea 'the show must go on' – that it's always the same, nothing can stop it, and something should, I suppose?

A: I think in that sense 'the show must go on, it must be the same' but it can't do that by just bulldozing through, you turn up 'oh thank god you're here, Hannah! We're going to do this thing, now, and because of the skill and craft and rehearsal we *are going to do this thing* but *part* of doing this thing is to convince you that it's not just happening – that this is [... Like in Hull] it's like logic gates; 'if the audience have caught up with you when this happens, do this', 'if-' because you can't rehearse it like you – but you can't improvise because there are people out in the street waiting to blow things up and all sorts of stuff. There is a definitive show, but that definitive show is made up of a series of decisions that whoever's in charge at any given point – which is normally a performer – will make, because if the audience haven't got around the corner, you can't do that. There's no point in saying that if that person isn't there, so there's a series of – the show will go on, but the show will be changed by the fact that *you've* arrived, and today, *you* run, but some other audiences will walk, and some other audiences will sit

down and refuse to go on, that has to be engaged with.

H: And you sort of touched on this, so I don't know if you feel like you've answered it or not, do your headphone shows exist only for the participants or do you think about passersby too?

A: Yeah. In Islington it was FM – we don't use that anymore because it doesn't really work and we get beaten up by [...] horrible pirate DJs who are not willing to negotiate in any way shape or form – and we told them all the frequencies, so these things would happen in shared gardens or basketball courts or whatever, and a load of people would just come and sit on their balconies and watch the 10 minute scene. Fascinated [...] had no real desire or intention of following it around the corner to see what happened next, or really before, but loved that that piece. There was this really lovely moment which Jack Lowe did (who runs Curious Directive before it was Curious Directive – when he was just kid), he made a constellation of stars with lamps on this basketball court. And it was just a nice scene and like a lot of our shows it was someone talking and telling a story whilst some nice things happened around and actually people loved that, and you could hear them all turning their stereos on so then you'd take your headphones off and you'd get this weaker signal and you'd go 'ah, that's lovely'. And those sorts of things aren't built in; but the idea that 'the circus has come to town' when Slung Low turns up. I love the fact that it nearly always smells of burnt wood wherever we are, 'I'm cold and I must have a fire!' 'It's July! Fuck off' [...] And with the caravan and everything else there's a sense of 'oh god they're here, what are they going to do?' And then the dog gets out and we all start shouting and throwing things at each other, and that sense of 'something's different! Who are these people?' I think is a really old theatre thing of 'we're here! We shall play! Tell you funny stories! Impregnate your daughters!' [Laughter.] I think that's really important because it bleeds into the shows.

H: Do you think there's an older version of theatre, before the distribution of theatre became buildings, big buildings, that you're tapping into there?

A: Oh, we make mystery plays. That's the great unhidden secret. Every time a journalist goes 'innovative', I go 'we're not! We're like medieval players'. And *Knowledge Emporium* is basically *Noel Edmund's House Party*, which is just a remaking of the *Commedia Dell'arte*; it's just daft. And it's got some technology and there are some elements which are much more sophisticated in its concepts, but there are other things that are really not. It's a play that moves 'how?' by walking. With the bus thing, when everyone was 'oh my god' – apart from the fact that Forced Ent did it 25 years ago, but before Forced Ent it was just a wagon, it's just now we've got a bus. But I've probably got a lot more in common with the Mystery Plays than I have Andy Field, or that sort of (the company has rather)... but that's ok, that's – all of us are still just aiming to excite an audience, a group of people, in a room, who are here *now* as opposed to any other point; you're here *now*, thank god. [...]

H: In a blog post, certainly, and mentioned occasionally is this idea of magic realism that you talk about, which I've seen talked about with regards to

Anthology but I guess you've also mentioned it with regards to other shows. Could you expand more – explain what you mean by 'magic realism'.

- A: There's a German – I can't remember his name – he talks about the 'super-essence of now'; so rather than the literal version of 'what is this feeling', what is the *super-essence* of that feeling. For me that's a manner of reading – so the example I've used before is I woke up in Liverpool in a flat they put us in and there was this great big fuck off horse dancing to – steel drums – and Billy was up at the window as well, and we were both like 'fuck, a dancing horse' [laughter] [...] and there was this possibility open to us, and we allowed it. And at the same time, not being *completely* insane, I was aware that the unions were marching that day (it's Liverpool the unions are always fucking marching, god love 'em) and they'd started outside my flat because the flat was by the cathedral, and it was a police horse getting spooked, and the steel drums were for the 'national union of something', and both those things can exist. Both these things that, I think me and Billy came up with the idea that the police hired a dancing horse to get the – and both those things can happen, and sometimes [...] both of those are possibilities, and the most magical thing that... That the beginning point of truly extraordinary things are always real, they're always *true* – our cities are magical. It doesn't take very much to make them magical, play a bit of music and have someone running along the roof top – because actually the number of things you see (or I see) one sees, 'that's nuts, that's like something from a film' but we'll so easily – I think disconnecting sound and sight is really important in this – but it doesn't take a very great leap to get into the fantastical. So that idea of magic realism, especially in painting, I suppose, where you look at it and go 'oh that's nuts, but I can sort of see – I can see the black and white flat view of that before they went [explosion noise]'. And it's so much more exciting when you just let it go... Just go 'what if'. And it's Tassos saying, and I've never heard him say it, I don't know him very well, but again, Tassos is one of those people I sort of know second hand, really, and he has a thing somewhere that has been reported to me which is *what is* and *what if*. So *what is here* – these things are here (and I have no idea if this is what he means, because I don't know, but) OK this is here, I understand where I am, and I've read that, and I've paid attention. *What if* – [...] the New Sherlock idea of 'there's a scuff on your toe, that is *what is*, but *what if* I just imagine that that scuff came from when someone attacked you, and you start to follow. [...] That idea of *what is there* and extrapolating that out into *what if*, that's my definition of magic realism. Now, I am certain, because I read some books after I wrote that blog and people started shouting at me, that's not really how other people use 'magic realism', I'm ok with that, because I'm not an academic, but that idea of 'the world's amazing' – recognise it, really scrutinise it, and follow it.
- H: And I suppose in certain way in showing people *what if* they suddenly go *what is*, as well, and that's an audience journey.
- A: Yes, absolutely, yeah. And that, a lot of the time, [...] the cast got arrested in Islington, they were playing hoodies [...] a load of kids in ski masks and BMXs, and they were just 16 year old kids who were doing it for us, and they were on BMXs and they would appear at certain times and disappear

at certain times and it was all sort of slightly balletic, and one day the audience came back and [...] and said 'oh my god, where did you get that police car from?!' And I said 'what?' [...] What had happened was the police had come along and just stopped the kids, but what the police didn't know was – and then another group of hoodies, because there was a *real* gang in Islington, had joined, so the actors hadn't really clocked that this was now a new group of hoodies, so the audience had had the experience of *real* kids on bikes doing what kids on bikes do – who were really threatening, but not violent – and no one had noticed that they'd swapped. [...] But even better, the police had stopped our lot, and said 'get here and show your-' and they took their masks off and they were *all gold*. Because we'd painted them all gold. So for me this is magic real moment where a copper goes 'what's going on, what's that, take your mas-' [makes flabbergasted noise] 'well I'm arresting you' – and that's it. (Obviously someone went down and fixed it, you know). But that's a magic real moment, there, where someone goes 'what?' [...] The hairs go up on the back of your neck and you go 'I need to grip onto reality, this can't possibly be happening', or when you're talking to very famous people and you think 'I know you, I don't know you' [...] that happens all the time if you're aware of it. Goat Island and Lone Twin do really good workshops on this about embracing the absolute glory of- if you just pay attention to life it's absolutely fucking amazing.

H: Yeah

A: But you've just got to pay attention to it, switch all the -

H: I've been to 3 separate shows, one of which was my own, *The Smell of Rain Reminds Me of You* in Manchester, which ends with a load of people holding white umbrellas in, sunshine, as it turned out, along a bridge

A: [Laughs] fucking Manchester contrary weather

H: The one time it doesn't rain in Manchester, and also at the end of a Duncan Speakman show when a load of people walk out of a shopping centre and just stand still and look back. And I can't remember what the other show is, but people walked around saying ... 'are they filming an episode of Doctor Who?'

A: Yeah, yes. The best Doctor Who [...] episodes, the ones that stick with everybody, are the ones that are based in real life, not the ones where you're on planet Zogg. They're great, who doesn't love a good Zogg, but the ones where the shopping centre comes to life, or that – for all the money and effort we took on boats and buildings, the bit that everybody wrote [...] the ones they all remembered was right at the very beginning, when they had no idea where she was coming from and she just appeared in the train station and then the four people with coffee cups [...] walking through the audience turned out to be part of the show and the audience went 'oh no! oh my goodness!' [...] Because that connection between the real and the ordinary and the everyday and 'yeah I've seen it before'. I saw *The Duchess of Malfi* on stage, and a guy came on with a moped, and the audience went [gasps]; 'it's a fucking scooter, what they've done is they've hired a scooter, how are you-?' but it's because *you don't expect to see that onstage*. And I think there's something of that.

- H: It's amazing how much we put on stage that people would expect, actually.
- A: Yeah. [...] No one in my entire existence ever walked in to a room, and slammed the door, and then talked to me, because if they were doing that I'd either leave, straight away [...] or I would commit physical violence. I've never managed to have a conversation for longer than 5 seconds that's been any louder than this but [...] it happens all the time onstage. But put a moped onstage [...] and everyone goes 'oh my god'. So I know that's a slightly ... clumsy definition, but for me [...] it's literally the journey from real to magic and I think what you said about the *what if* often leads to the *what is* – some of the most 'wow' things that people have come back and gone 'I can't believe you did that' (and we try to hold a line of [mimes keeping silent] 'did you do that?' [mimes keeping silent]) have been the most ordinary things [...] and there was this [...] incredibly painterly image of a man lit with a sodium light [...] that happened anyway, and you would have seen that and ignored it, but because you – that was in the background of someone handsome and actorly here, you saw that and what became a thing for you but that is *what is* anyway.
- H: That's good thank you... this is a wordy question; Anthology demonstrates a several strand split in the audience's experience; how does this multi-strand narrative change the participants' experiences.
- A: I feel really boring because I always answer these questions pragmatically
- H: I think that's a reasonable answer though – I think too often people like me go 'ah, that must be significant' –
- A: It was, as always with these things all these things happened at once; so, firstly – and I'm not winning this argument [...] – work like ours I don't think is very experimental, and it's certainly inclusive (and by experimental I mean the bad kind of experimental). I don't think it stops – so I believe that it can sit within a normal season, that you could do 3 weeks of *The Duchess of Malfi*, 3 weeks of a Slung Low show, and that they're in really basic terms, the same number of people could see that and see that and therefore – and we can make them cost the same, and therefore why can't they be of an equivalency? Adrian Lester, and Chris Eccleston and Patrick Stewart do the voices, and I can get the press, so why aren't they the same if they hit the same number of people, have the same number of celebrity names attached, cost the same money, if every one of those [...] how is it not the same? Because if it's the same, then there are *millions* of, *millions* of pounds spent on making theatre in this country, every year, and we talk about [...] it's such an inequality, I don't think that there *is* an equivalency, some types – not all types- of work need 20 people [...] and if that happens then the idea of it being different doesn't weaken its point. So Anthology was the – 'how many are you going to sell Macbeth to? 380. I'm going to make a walkabout show for 380 people.' I failed, I got to about 280 [...] so there was a real sense of driving for that because it's like having to [...] the resources we have to achieve things are so small in comparison to ... 'really, you're going to do *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, *again*?' And spend £100,000 doing that. [...] And there is a limit to the number of people you can take on each route, because basically any more than 30 and you stack them up too

deep, so they can't see the actor, which means you've got to get the actor up, which basically means the actor needs to be in a van, which means that's a weird show. Alongside that is the idea of a city being [...] Liverpool is the most keyed into it's own narrative that I've ever known a place. Get off the train and get into a taxi and they go 'first time in Liverpool?' and you go 'yeah', – and they'll tell you what Liverpool is in 30 seconds. And then you meet someone else and *they'll* tell you what Liverpool is, and whatever, and Liverpool's great gift is its ability to talk about itself, but all cities do that, Liverpool is just the easiest one. What Billybob says [...] the idea that you can make a show that walks up and down Hope Street, and is – not definitive but that one perspective would already be too few, so the idea was to create an anthology so that the disparate voices could be heard, so the idea that [...] there is not one defining experience, that you could approach that task of writing a walkabout show, a headphone show, on Hope Street different. And then the third one was that I think we need to increase the depth of audiences [...] 'churn' is a huge problem – we get loads of people in for the first time, marketing is working in theatres, but they don't come back, or more likely people think they're a 'regular theatre goer' if they go once or twice a year. The financial models that theatres are built on need them to go 5 or 6 times a year. [...] You can't come and see *Hamlet* more than once – well you can, but you'd be weird – but people came to see *Anthology* 8 times, and bought 8 tickets. And collected the little stamp coffee card. [...] And all of a sudden there were 200 people who were in a gang. And when one of the computers blew up – literally in a ball of flames – and it meant that there were 4 people who wouldn't see all the 8, because there weren't enough nights left, they stayed on and went 'we've got to do something about this' [...] I was like 'I'm not running a second show, you are insane' and that level of [...] you don't get that. So that's the other thing that it did.

H: This is a really horrible question that I've written, I'll think of a better way to say this. [...] That multi-layered narrative of *Anthology* – I guess multi-stand is a better word – *became* multi-layered in *Mapping the City*.

A: Yes.

H: Did this feel like a progression, or was that just what suited that form? And what is it about that way of telling stories that interests you? That depth, I guess, you were mentioning earlier

A: Partly it was depth, because the best thing I've ever seen was Robert LePage *Lip Sync* which just took the top of my head off. [...] I'm quite intrigued by the idea that naturally a lot of what we make – [...] I wanted to make something that was long enough and meaty enough to be transformative: 'I've sort of forgotten when I came here, when was that?' – so really what I meant was to; travel real distance, tell a number of stories that were somehow connected, and start in light and end in darkness. Because that was a big thing – in fact all of the shows this year [...] start in light and end in darkness. [...] The other thing was dramaturgs (who are really literary managers in this country) have a set of rules for plays, and none of our plays really fit those rules and it drives them a bit potty so

Anthology was connected by place, but that doesn't count [...] in a world of a literary manager that doesn't mean anything [...] because they're looking for a script that can travel from place to place. [...] So a lot of the conversation that was coming out of *Anthology* was 'how much better would it have been if these had been thematically linked' [...] and so one of the things that came out of that was 'ok, let's give that a go for a bit', let's look at what happens if you put 3 very different writers together so that they are more like musings upon a theme that you might get in music. But mostly that was about deepening the experience for the audience so that – feels a lot like fast food, a lot of the stuff we do, it's 40 minutes long and you come in and go 'oh my god it's amazing!' and then leave, and I wanted to make something that was a bit meatier and a bit bolder.

H: Time is played with a lot in *Mapping the City* as well as space, again is that a progression or is there something about the city of Hull that demanded that?

A: I think we play with time in a *Doctor Who* sort of way, so in *Beyond the Front Line* – the army one- we started in a tent and sat you all down and then the lights went out, and you were suddenly an audience sat in the dark in a tent, and then you heard the PM headlines but from 2015. And then you immediately rushed out of the tent and the world had changed and there were soldiers everywhere [...] so I think that science fiction-style magic realism, often: it's exactly like it is now, except that it's in 3 years time, it's exactly like it is now, except for it's 50 years ago. [...] Which is another way I think of saying 'imagine a slightly different reality'. [...] So the *what if* in *Beyond the Front Line* was really clear; *what if* the threat of terrorism becomes so great that we have to defend on our doorstep, or I suppose, the *what if* in *Mapping the City* was slightly more obscure, but was about being able to oscillate up and down; what happens if the layers of history could all just sit alongside each other. I think that that's driven by the central interest that me and Scotty have always had, the idea of remembering, and carrying people's stories by the retelling of them. We're both Irish Catholics, so, arguably we've been making the same show for 10 years [...] they're all about 'if I remember you and tell your story then you still exist, you still echo', which is a very Catholic thing to do.

H: [...] Do you think there's something important about taking performance out into real life – I think we've already answered that in a way, haven't we?

A: I think art should matter. And I think that's one way of doing it. I don't like the idea of taking performance 'out' in the sense of 'I'm going to live in a poor community' [...] it should matter and I think one of the easier ways of making sure that it matters is not hiding it away in a building.

H: And again, is there something you think that in walking through a story changes how the story is experienced? It's that 360' thing, it's happening all around you?

A: This isn't me, this is one of the guys who used to be in Slung Low and isn't now, he came up with a brilliant thing, there was always a real tension in the early days of Slung Low between the people who believed in narrative

and the people who didn't believe in narrative. [...] I used to sit in the middle like a benevolent father [...] and Scotty used to shout at everyone because for Scotty it was a matter of class, because he always used to confuse the idea of narrative for many other things – but he always used to assume that when people said 'the narrative is too simple' or 'you're too obsessed with narrative' [...] that actually what they were doing is calling him/us/it stupid or simple, or soap opera. Which was both a true reading of some really snotty fuckers from Oxbridge, and also some paranoia on both our parts, and then equally on the non-narrative side [...] which was actually about 'I don't want to tell stories, I want to create experiences', which is again both a good and a bad thing [...] which was about not wanting to remake old stories, but was also about not wanting to ever be pinned down, and therefore if you can't be pinned down, you can't have *failed*, which was a type of cowardice. And this was huge, fights and shouting that would happen about this [...] and anyway this guy came up with this thing: If you have to move through the story, then you have to literally chase the narrative. And therefore you have to have a desire for the story. And that was really interesting. [...] And I think that's true, and I think up until probably this next show that we're doing now, the audience have always moved through the story somehow. And that's about chasing narrative.

H: The next 2 questions are sort of linked, the first one is 'how specifically have you found-

A: Hang on, sorry, what?

H: How *specifically* have each of the headphone shows gone into the cities in which they have been made, and is the city a character or is it a backdrop, is it a performer in these pieces?

A: I think it's both, I definitely I think it's a backdrop, definitely, and we work very hard making sure that it's- the right bit of action fits in the right bit of space. But it's definitely a personality, so we made very different shows for Liverpool and Hull because they were very different places. It helps that Salford looks like a [...] bad TV series set, so therefore you can do something more televisual there because it already looks like someone's going to come along and film that. So they're definitely – and I think... People said with Hull is that you could do *Mapping the City* anywhere, and I think the problem with the answer to that is 'it's true', but you wouldn't have ended up with *those* stories told in *that* way if we weren't in Hull. So we spent a lot of time walking around the place, sort of like being tourists, we go to all the museums and I'm really interested in how cities present themselves. Leeds is a really difficult case in this, but Manchester presents itself in a really clear narrative, and Liverpool presents itself in a very clear... And actually Hull does. Hull, in 50 year's time, most of Hull is underwater. Fact. No one disagrees with that. We turn up and go 'oh my god, how is no one talking about that?' And everybody in Hull goes 'please don't talk about that', [...] 'you're building something there?', 'Yeah, please don't talk about that', [...] and there's, as guests, you get a real sense of how people want to present themselves. [...] We did one in Newcastle recently, [...] came back and the

presentation at the end was 'OK, I've spent 2 days here and I think these things are the important things about the city' [...] and everyone in the room who was from Newcastle spent some time arguing about it – but it can't be fair or unfair, it's my perception, it's not an accusation, that's what's happened. [...] And I think that's what we do, so even though there was nothing in Hull that you could have gone and done it on the banks of the River Thames by changing 3 words, maybe, and one accent, and that would have been fine. Partly I still don't think you'd get that show unless we were in Hull where there was a real... That the whole city is driving down to the sea, the estuary is really clearly dragging you that way, and you get those really unique layers of history and an incredibly independent city – has its own telecom, has its own post office, has its own – and you end up in the third part in James' being about independent thinking, and independence from it. 'Yeah but it wasn't about Hull', yes it was, it was about the nature of Hull, it was a scrutiny of – and similarly I'd say the second one, less the first one, but the second one was also about exactly the same thing – so I think it's that. It's about a place *like that* rather than *about a place*, rather than 'welcome to Liverpool, the history of Liverpool is-'.

H: There is something I think a little unusual about walking with a group but with headphones, now would you argue that *Mapping the City* was a collective or an individual experience?

A: I don't know, I think [...] a lot of the questions that's you're asking are a lot of the themes that we're constantly scrutinising or going back on, I think it's a collective, we feed the audience the same thing all the time. Sometimes that's nice, like soup 'oh, I like soup' [...] but, so food is very important, and for me that's not about eating that's about the collective experience. It's impossible to eat on your own [...], you have to be in a room on your own to eat on your own you can't eat on your own with other people in the room, it just doesn't work, people move towards you and go 'hello!' [...] So I think the collective experience is very important to us, dominating sound or visuals is a must in the shows and it's nearly always sound because it's use cheaper and easier to do better. The only way to dominate that is to divide you up into individual members, so we're always working towards, [...] a collective experience that allows us to recognise that *you*, individually, uniquely, are *here*, thank goodness, and now the show can proceed, or the thing can proceed. Doing both those at once, and sometimes we get it right [...] so the aim is for it to be a collective experience, but I think it is more uniquely. Maybe like gaming online? [...]

H: Are you interested in interrogating public space as a 'thing'? Or -

A: Yes, [...] I'm interested in [...] [Alan gets up to get cards (also finds a 'dinotorch')]. These – Dan Lockton, he's doing a PhD in something, and he's done these cards which are about – [...] but anyway, he's at Brunel – this is about how public space effects behaviour. So like airports for example are places where people are meant to spend money – they're consciously moving you onto the next level, and I'm really interested in the way that – partly because we're nearly always commissioned by a big theatre building and big theatre buildings always sit in the centre of town. And so, actually

the nature of Liverpool – for example – is very clear in its architecture and I suppose the thing I'm interested in is which one came first – did your city make you the way you are or did the way you are make you your city? And how we – and how public space effects behaviour and then we sort of go 'why is it that no one goes shopping anymore' and you're like 'because you've laid it out like this and it's impossible to get to' [...]. So I suppose that's a constant interest, often the shows end up not being about that because we have to make a show and no one wants to listen to me talk about why if parking was cheaper you'd have more footfall, but those are of interest because we often have to share space with other things and public space.

H: Nearing the end now. [Alan sets off the dinotorch and his dog gets excited] [...]. What kind of audiences do you reach, I guess, social demographic-wise.

A: I think that we reach the type of audience that everyone wants to reach in terms of it being a non-theatre going younger audience, sometimes, nowhere near as much as everyone thinks we do. That's not a creative thing, it's marketing thing, for example we had a recent argument, the next show we're doing is – the central images are a series of things floating in water. One of them is a Nike Air Max children's' trainer, and one of them is a rose. These images are then sent to the festivals who then put them in their brochure, their brochure goes out, people book tickets. The tickets are free, but you have to book. One of those places we've picked a rose, because that's the theme of the story, but the festival wrote back saying 'a rose won't encourage a younger audience, could we have a trainer'. No you can't have a trainer because it's a rose that [...] 'but how are we expected to get a younger audience?' The fact that they're going to put it in their brochure, I cannot have that conversation with them anymore, they're just mad. The idea that a picture of something would attract – it just doesn't – [...] we don't get that audience as much as – I think it's about 30-40% which is higher than the average, but I think what our audiences are, are people who have an experience of going to the theatre, but are a bit jaded by it, and then they hear about this, so there's a sort of – they're the Catholics coming back for the second wave, they're – it crosses ages and all that, something I'm constantly amazed at is that our shows are physically – does not ever put off the inevitable three 75 year olds that we have turn up who get round faster than anyone else. So I do think we attract a younger audience, partly because of the nature of it, and partly because there's now a certain reputation.

H: They think it's going to be more relevant to them?

A: They think it's going to be more fun. In simple terms, we don't, I mean we make plays, there's no denying that, but we don't particularly – we don't often call them plays. They're events – we used to, we don't as much now, we used to get people turning around and going 'don't worry I've seen Punchdrunk, I know what to do'. [...] I think also partly because the company is quite present in other – in social media and other forms, and we lecture a lot at universities and that sort of thing so I think we have a presence in those areas. But there is still a problem – for any piece of

theatre – is sold using the old tools and so therefore will be sold to the people who listen – who – if you don't get the brochure. It's posted to people! They have to have your *postal address*, that's the ball game.

H: I was going to ask the question 'how do your audiences react to stuff?' which I guess you could answer generally

A: [Plays dinotorch roar] like that.

H: [Laughs] but you said a PhD student wrote down some audience reactions for *Mapping the City* – is he or she published?

A: No, I'll send you the thing, he did a – he's called Adam Park, I'll send you it all. [...] I think the research failed, but apparently that was a good thing, I don't know, he was looking at how the show presents places in different ways and engages people in different ways and it by all accounts – they recorded the wrong... But what was interesting about the audience feedback; it was very well received as a show so there was very little that people were critical about. It was a very small audience so they were already feeling incredibly looked after anyway, so there was a sense of 'I can't believe I'm getting to see this' which wasn't us cheating, but certainly us stacking the decks in our favour. [...] But the things that people remembered were interesting, because I thought: the big finale of the show, [...] and people, when they were asked what they remembered a month later: not that [...] they remembered the little moments. But I'll send it over .

H: [...] Last 2 questions. Would you call your headphone shows 'theatre'?

A: Yes. It begins and it ends and any demarcation from that storytelling is like an assessed and calculated risk, we're in control of it and that's – for me that's what makes it theatre.

H: Cool, that's useful. [...] Final question! And it's a nasty one... how do politics, and/or political intent, shape the artistic decisions you make? Not at all is a reasonable answer to that.

A: I'm not sure that's true, I don't think- I think that the sheer act of making theatre, especially work – and it's true for a lot of us – that in one way or another doesn't hide away is inherently, at the minute, a political act. I think that's why people [artists] got angry, I think some people are angry because the country is being changed, of course, but I think the reason the anger felt so *personal* for so many people [in the context of the arts cuts] is because: 'you have valued what I have spent my life doing at zero, now you've fucked me off'. And actually, the response that – well for me anyway, [...] I mean I joined the Labour Party, I started going to meetings, they were very dull and my *Lord* if I thought theatre companies were slow doing things sweet Christ [...]. My favourite thing was when I said – this is apropos of nothing but – I said 'I'm sorry, I'm new here, I'm not that stupid, but you're all talking in- and I just don't know what you're talking about' and Rachel Reese [Reeves?] is our MP, and she's [...] she's like 'yes, no, but don't worry' – but the thing is, you're alienating me, and I'm here, and I'm saying – and she interrupted me to say 'we talked about this a couple of months ago and we are preparing a handbook' [...] 'we've dealt with this'. Well actually, no, you haven't because you haven't finished the handbook and

I'm sat here and I will be leaving now, and then not coming back because you have no interest in sharing this information. Once all that was done, actually the thing that I came to – and shared with some other people – is the political act – the first political act you can do is *keep doing it*. Going 'yeah but it *has* value', 'we think it doesn't', 'well good for you but I'm still going to do it'. [...] 'Yeah but you can't', 'yes I can'. The Yorkshire Post worked out how much a ticket to *Mapping the City* really cost and published it. Extraordinarily they published it *as a support* – they said 'look at this, it cost £1200 per person, *that's how good it is*' and I went 'oh, fucking hell, that hurts' and it was a political act. So then I immediately emailed the Yorkshire Post going 'we're available for interview'. [...] That figure has to be seen – that's not a real figure – that number divided by that number, yes, but it's not, it's not a [...] but then I suppose in one way the political act is [...] is *to keep doing* and they go 'you can't do that' and you go 'well I just did it, I just spent that money on it, well you could have spent it on Trident but you didn't because I spent it in *Hull*, so fuck you, I win, 1 – 0.' [...] And that actually is now, for me, having done the – writing one decent speech for an MP wasn't going to change the world, it's not West Wing (fuck) – that *is* a political act. And then it's not – sorry I'm not being very clear [...] the content of the shows are not necessarily political, I'd argue that sometimes – I think *Beyond the Frontline* was an incredibly political piece, and that's interesting, where there wasn't anything in that where you came away going 'god, that was such a pro-army thing' or 'such a pro-Iraqi thing' or 'such an anti-Afghanistan thing', it sat in a very public place, where the local... A local Islamic community started to become offended by the fact that we were rehearsing in a lot of British army uniforms, around... Then the EDL found out about it and were like 'Yeah!' and started to issue statements of support, and then the [...] Tory party conference was 3/4 of a mile that way, so the political thing was I've got kids on a rooftop with rifles and there is SO-19 there, and if you move 200 yards that way... so this is this sort of realpolitik of 'fuck we're actually in a live space, you have a gun, it's a plastic gun but they *will still shoot you*, so that's one thing. EDL, stop marching towards us because – so I'm going to an issue a statement of 'you're a fucking idiot' *that way* [to mimed EDL], [turns to mimed Islamic community] don't be angry with me! [Turns again to EDL] shut up!' And I think that is a political act, the play was political in the sense that it talked *about* – but it didn't in that all...

H: But that it was in that space...?

A: It was in that space, and there was nothing in the play where you'd go 'oh, the politics of this are:', what the play *said* was 'our defence costs something, and we should talk about that'. [...] But it wasn't *Oh What a Lovely War!* And it wasn't *The Long, the Short and the Tall*, it was neither, it wasn't political in that sense, but all of a sudden it was very live. And the EDL was a real issue, because you don't want to actually get into a physical fight [...] but I have to immediately move it on. And they kept nicking things out my yard. So that, and I think equally in a small and less exciting way the North Yorkshire project, the tickets cost nothing, there aren't a huge amount of (it cost a fucking fortune to do) [...] the show costs nothing

because we're starting to play with the idea that the piece has already been paid for by the public, and [...] £32 to see *Annie*, people on this street can't afford £32, 'yeah but you've already chipped in for it', I have a problem with that, because these people have a problem with that. [...] Because they're my neighbours, and this is just an example, but *Annie* was advertised on ITV during the breaks between *Coronation St.* these people watch *Coronation St.*, they like *Coronation St.*, they're Lucy's friends, but they don't want to hear about – and they get angry about it. So I think that's – in that sense it is political. The North Yorkshire shows [...] the act of doing it is political I think, does that make sense?

[End of relevant speech.]

Interview with Alex Fleetwood, Artistic Director of Hide & Seek, completed on the 24th of February 2012.

H: So my first question is if you could tell me a bit about your background and how you go to where you are now?

A: Well my original background is music, I studied music and I was very lucky to study at York University which has a very interesting experimental music course so encountered lots of non-standard kinds of performance. And performed and produced all kinds of crazy things while I was there. And that led me into working in contemporary opera, I've worked for an opera competition which was a very interesting grounding in how creative project, artistic projects begin, I then worked as the project manager for a then small new opera company called The Opera Group and I did a little bit of helping out at the Almeida Opera Festival, which used to be a thing. And those elements were all exciting and I loved a lot of the art that was being made in that context, but my personal yen, I realised was to be more engaged with what I felt was the kind of culture that I was living in. And the opera scene, especially the contemporary opera scene, is very content to be an artistic niche that's a long way from the main thrust of pop culture and other kinds of culture.

H: Mm, I've never been to the opera-

A: And that started to drive me a little crazy so I thought working in television was the answer, you know, from one extreme to the other. And I got a job working at a television production company, and then for reasons – basically I saw this opera which I'd actually worked on back when I was with the opera competition, this is when I was very young, back when I was 26 – and I saw it and I was aware that at that stage Channel 4 were looking for film opera projects. And I saw this opera and I thought this would make an amazing film and pitched that idea with a TV production company to Channel 4, and that kind of brought those two strands together basically, TV and film. So then I was engaged in my first

sort of artistic project as a producer, as a partial grown up which was all about translating this amazing stage opera which I thought was really incredible into a more distributed more accessible format and taking the grammar and language of a stage work and turning it into a film work which is this very interesting creative process – you've got to rip out one set of principles and insert another and that's a very sort of – turns out it's a very gnarly and interesting thing, much harder than I realised when I started it. It took five years to get the opera creatively developed and funded, particularly, before we actually started the production process in earnest, and at the start of those 5 years I basically took a – I had to, because there's unsurprisingly no money in producing film operas for Channel 4, I was also, weirdly, working *for* Channel 4 in a different department, in a very commercial bit. And I stayed at Channel 4 for the 5 years it took to get the film funded, ended up working in their DVD team doing a commercial job, acquiring the rights to distribute Channel 4 programmes on DVD. So weirdly working for both ends of this public funded, commercial company, the very arty end and the very commercial end simultaneously. And this was the mid 2000s and it was what I slightly jocularly refer to as the 'first great linear content panic' at the broadcasters where there was suddenly, everyone was running around going 'nobody wants to watch telly anymore, everyone just wants to be on the internet, and be on-'. You know, it was just as Facebook was getting started, I guess, but you know, user generated content was The Thing, back then, everyone was like 'everyone just wants to make their own content and be on Youtube' and all of that kind of stuff that we're very aware of. Generating a huge amount of anxiety within Channel 4 and lots of really exciting animated conversations that were happening in the canteen about what new formats might look like, what Channel 4 might do to fuse telly and the internet and gaming and make experiences that people could interact with and engage with whilst also being kind of authored cool experiences. And that's when I saw my first Punchdrunk show. And Punchdrunk; this was 2005, it was the *Firebird Ball* and it really kind of blew me away; both as a punter, because I'm like 'ah, this is so exciting!' it's one part first person video game, one part super kind of fancy theatrical experience, and one part warehouse party, and I at that time really, really liked all of those things so the idea that I could have all of them in one go was a big treat. But also as a producer, it really struck me that they were solving – in the physical environment – a lot of the problems that Channel 4 was really struggling to solve in the digital space. And so I – this is such a long time ago that Felix Barratt's phone number was still on the Punchdrunk homepage – so I rang him up and said 'let's meet for a coffee' so we met for a coffee and I said basically: 'I think as a route from straight theatre to film which is what I think I'm kind of mining with this opera project, so I think there's a route from what you're doing to something on the internet, some kind of game experience'. And that was a lovely conversation. Didn't really go anywhere until about 9 months later when I started playing *Perplex City*, which is one of the first ARGs to hit UK shores, and this was another big Eureka moment, because

here is this – it's narrative, it's interaction, it's real world experiences, it's bits of TV and media-

H: Was it an ARG run by, for a film, or-

A: It was an ARG run by the Hom brothers for a company called Mind Candy who tried to make money out of *Perplex City* as a standalone thing. You bought cards to participate in an element of it, but it turned out to not be a good way of making money, so Mind Candy canned series 2 of *Perplex City* and decided to put their money into this crazy thing called Moshi Monsters, [laughter] which has turned out pretty well for them! So *Perplex City* was amazing and ground-breaking in lots of ways, and deeply flawed in lots of other ways, but basically I went tearing back to Phoenix and went 'ARGs! They're the future! We should make an ARG!'. So we pitched a load of ARGs to various sources, Channel 4, we pitched an ARG idea I'm still deeply in love with to the Jerwood ArtAngel open, and got all the way to the end of the pitching process and didn't quite manage it. And the reason we weren't being quite successful, I felt, was because we were pitching all of these ambitious things which made all of these kind of confident pronouncements that 'a million people will come and look at this internet site, and half of those will turn up to a remote location in Hertfordshire and then they will do this' – and we didn't really have any, beyond our instinct that this stuff was cool, and the future, we didn't really have any meaningful backup. So we – I attended the inaugural *Come Out and Play* street games festival in New York in Autumn of 2006, and came back really fired up and 'this is what we should be doing, this is the kind of punk rock, DIY version of all these fancy, big kind of baroque structures that we've been pitching, so let's start figuring out what we can do for 20 people, before we start figuring out what we can do for more.' I also just loved the fact that it was just games and the city, you know, playing in public space, and the experience of being in New York as a *player* was revelatory and exciting to me, because you know, I'd been to New York as a tourist, and I'd been to New York as 'on business', but I'd never been there and raced around the city, and just that experience of New York as a backdrop to that experience was very, very, very cool. So into that first Hide & Seek festival went all of these different strands, of, you know, kind of my cultural interests about taking artistic live experiences and making them more widely available and distributable, this journey of thinking about how big media companies and theatre companies were all facing this same question of 'how do you tell amazing stories whilst also making things that are meaningfully interactive for audiences?' A mix of commercial and cultural aspirations, you know, that I always kind of hoped that Hide & Seek would be a commercial concern as well as a culturally exciting one. And we did the first festival, and it was amazing, we had a weekend where we got artists and game designers together and they just made some stuff, and it really, it just struck a chord with people, both with the makers and with the players. The makers were like 'ah! I've been doing this on my own and I thought I was the only person doing it, and now all these other people are doing it too and that's exciting'.

- H: And where did the makers – what kind of areas did they come from?
- A: It was really primarily theatre, it started out with a very theatre flavour, and then the audience was a very even split between gamers who were curious, and confident 20-something cultural types who were used to the Punchdrunk type of experience and who were willing to give something playful and in the street a go. And that first festival was actually produced with an offshoot of Punchdrunk called 'Gideon Reeling' which was their commercial arm – because there was a very long time where I might have joined Punchdrunk, or we might have formed a new thing together, all of that kind of thing – but eventually it became clear that Hide & Seek, Hide & Seek's DNA was different to that of Punchdrunk's and the two things weren't destined to be one, so it all split. But at that stage it also still was coming out of almost a Punchdrunk subsidiary, basically. And that was – so, that was the kind of impetus, that was the first thing, it had all of that stuff in it.
- H: So how would you describe the work that you make now? A complete stranger says 'what does your company do?'
- A: We're a game design studio.
- H: Game design studio.
- A: So we have – our strap line is 'dedicated to inventing new kinds of play' – we are, I often describe Hide & Seek as a 'T-shaped' organisation, we have this very deep specialist understanding of game design – game design as an abstract design practice like architecture or product design, there's a lot of principles and things you can absorb and understand, and what makes us distinctive is that we have a broad range of environments in which we can apply that knowledge; part of what Hide & Seek is about is saying that games are a cultural form, games are part of mainstream culture in a way that existing cultural authorities haven't still fully taken account of in a very – you know... It's – radio went through it, telly went through it, film went through it, novels went through it – the sort of acceptance by the cultural authorities of a new cultural form always takes a certain amount of time and involves a certain amount of hoo-ha -
- H: So why invent new types of play – what it is it about play that you think brings to people's lives, aside from being a cultural form in it's own right, why do you think it's a thing that should be done?
- A: Well, it's – there is an abundance of evidence that it is incredibly good for you in a vast number of different ways; it's good for your brain, it's good for your creativity, it's good for your relationships, it's good for your physical health, it is literally the way brains evolve – it's the way a baby's brain evolves into an adult's brain, through playing, and it's also the way that brains evolve over time. So, there's an amazing book called *The Evolution of Childhood* by Melvin Konner which is all about play and experimentation is how, is how humans learnt to use new tools, it's how, it's written into the way culture develops. We have this twentieth century blip of people not playing together physically, relatively speaking, and broadcast forms of communication being the dominant medium, and

we're shifting back to a more playful society, it's in some ways that new idea that's the ludic society, homo ludens, and all of those things but it's also an incredibly old idea that – the Dionysian impulse to be on the street and do something. So – there's a cultural argument, there's a kind of evolutionary argument, there's a scientific behavioural argument. There's huge social arguments you know – we see games changing peoples' behaviour and that force, culturally, is often used very negatively by companies whose sole intention is profit. And it's important that – it's *culturally urgent* that – there are games studios who are different from that. And that you know, I often liken where mainstream understanding of games is right now to a bit where our mainstream understanding of food was 50 years ago; we used to not really care where it came from, what we ate, and in that time period, through the organic food movement, and through chefs championing sustainable production methods and all of these different things, you walk down a high street and you have all of these different incredibly clear understanding – this super nuanced understanding of what food is and where it comes from and all of those things; gastric pubs, organic ventures, etc. etc. And the two places you find play on the high street are fruit machine kind of arcades, and William Hill – it's still like we're still kind of really comfortable as a culture with these worst kinds of play being part of the – that that's the mainstream diet. So I think there's this big journey that is starting where we educate people that if playing is to your mind and your relationships what food is to your body, shouldn't you care a bit more about what you put in? So, yeah, that's a bit of rambling answer but there's a lot of reasons why it's-

H: No it's okay; you're touching on questions which I'm going to maybe ask fully later on.

A: Sure

H: I've at least read your interests correctly... So there's the whole narrative vs. ludology argument.

A: Uh-huh

H: And I would be interested to know where you situate yourself on that; like, story and games, are they related, is it an important question, is it a question we shouldn't really be thinking about, do you inhabit a story universe when you play-

A: I mean we have a really diverse slate of games, and again, in a diverse set of environments. We engage with story an awful lot, we made a project last year called *Dreams of You Life* which was barely a game at all, but we worked with an author called A. L. Kennedy, and it's a very sophisticated piece of writing with some rather smart game-like mechanics that lead you through it in a particular kind of way. It could only really have been made by us, I think, by a game design studio, but what we ended up with was something where the 'story' was primary, I think – so my understanding of that kind of, certainly I have been on a personal journey where I have emerged from a narrative-first mindset, into a game-design-first mindset. And I think the primary problem with most interactive theatre is that it is made by people who have a story-first mindset. You

know, the story-first thing is ideologically so powerful in theatre communities, that simply saying that you can relinquish control over what the ending of your story is going to be because it's embedded in the game ruleset and it's whatever the way the game plays out, is a thing that pretty much all the theatre-makers I work with don't buy into. You know, they want that authorial control, they want to be crafting the minutest nuance of how that experience is going to play out over time. So our work absolutely exists through the lens of thinking about games and game mechanics first, and we very much distance ourselves from interactive theatre companies on those terms, having said that I guess a lot of our work – you know we might make a suite of games and experiences that sit alongside a film, or you know with the Opera House we were making a game that takes place backstage – there are lots of ways where rather than thinking 'game vs. story' in a single unit of one distinct experience, bits of games and bits of stories and bits of things taking place in spaces are all part of a slightly more complex inter-operating system that to me – the game vs. story thing only really works as an argument if you hold with the idea that everything must be contained within one single unit, and so many transmedia experiences – game experiences now – operate game and story in lots of different spaces, aggregating into one kind of totality of experience in the person who's interacting with it's mind. It's less of a fight then, I think, the things 'game' and 'story' coexist much more readily.

H: So, this isn't a question, this is a reflection on an answer that you gave earlier; there's a quote by Janet Moulthrop, which I've never fully understood, and still don't, really, she said in the 90s that 'we're moving from a society that is all work to a society that is all play' and that's a 'deadly game'; and it's that second bit that I don't quite understand.

A: A 'deadly game'

H: But I'm just saying that out loud because something you said about how we're moving in society brought that up in my head. So, the Sandpit events, they have a venue base but they're mostly games that are spread throughout a city, or city space, or they inhabit a venue in an unusual or different way – than normally they do – so you'll be in the foyers actively, as opposed to a route through – is it important to you that you're inhabiting the city in that way, or is it just a product of the stuff that you're making that likes to exist between worlds?

A: No, the physical space embedded nature of our work turns out to be probably the most single important thing about it. As Hide & Seek's current practice has developed we have made purely digital works, we have made public projects, we make commercial projects we make cultural projects, and there was in my mind a kind of assumption that we would gradually tend towards more digital projects because more digital projects would be more distributable, more accessible, more commercial, more kind of *viable* somehow. And the problematic nature of a live event in terms of its limitations in terms of access and experience would hold us up from continuing that. It turns out that it is absolutely integral to Hide & Seek's work as a studio to make stuff in public space, and to make stuff for

people to come together and play. It embodies every element of our politics as well as our design processes and we'll always do it, and where we are now, actually, is we are rejecting making purely digital projects to focus on things that have some kind of person-to-person play element. That might manifest in lots of different ways, it might manifest in a Sandpit event, or in something like the New Year Games.

H: They looked *really* amazing online

A: They were, it was, it felt like the moment when Hide & Seek's work went mainstream, you know, 1200 people of all ages just doing it, it wasn't niche, it was, but anyway – *The Board Game Remix Kit* is an enabler of a physical play experience, and a creative play experience taking remix culture into physical realm, and interestingly, all of our commercial aspirations, it turns out, are carried out best in the physical space too. You know, with the advent of print-on-demand services, and 3D printing, and custom creation of artefacts, we think there's really exciting ways that we can create real world play experiences and then sell people physical stuff to make those real world play experiences better or more interesting and that that's a kind of, actually a much more sustainable business model than trying to make and sell things on the internet where the cost of everything is tending to zero.

H: Or advertising

A: Yeah, no, yeah, we can always exist somewhere in the slightly anxious sandwich between giant internet businesses that don't know what their business model is, and product sales business that don't know what their business model is, and there's really a surprising number of money and people between those two things. And you know, they're all very clever and they're all making a fist of it, and they're all earning enough to keep going. But it turns out, like I really want to get into manufacturing and sell things to loads of people, like my main goal now is to have a big call centre somewhere in the regions, with lots of people facilitating game experiences – anyway, I digress.

H: So, talk to me about your politics and your design process that you mentioned; why it's important that you do stuff that's real person-to-person interaction. What is it that's integral to your politics and your design process which demands that?

A: Well, being wedded to the human experience of play as an impetus to design, and as a kind of celebratory experience – I learnt how to make games by making games in the Sandpit and watching people play them, and you see when it works and you see when it doesn't work. And there's no greater feeling than watching a game you've designed for Sandpit take off – people run around, having fun – watching people have fun is just one of my favourite things. And you see when it doesn't work, so (and that's brutal) so there's something, you know, I go to a Unitarian Church, which is non-conformist offshoot, and it's where I got married, and we've stuck around there. And I really don't agree with everything that Alain de Botton says, but the need to come together with groups of people who you aren't connected with via your friendship network or your

professional network and do something is tremendously important, and I think that there is a component of that 'gathering to do something that you haven't decided what it is', that comes out in Sandpit, and that I really like. I really like the fact that the traditional boundaries of artist and audience and curator and spectator and the kind of sacredness of the art object as an inviolable thing created in isolation that it is up to others to interpret as they – as best they can (which is this for me bizarre privileging of the artistic class as somehow the receivers of greater insight and wisdom than others) – is completely blown apart within Sandpit. Where I go from playing, to running a game, to watching a game that I've designed, to talking about games, you know, I am in charge, I am a player, I am a spectator, I am all of these roles at a Sandpit and I tremendously like that. It is in a very small closed format, a little lovely social moment where the hierarchies of stage and auditorium don't operate. There is a lot about the politics of playing in streets, playing in cities, it is – you become aware of your environment in a very particular way when you play a game in a city and you become aware of the operating system that is The Law, and the other uses of those spaces. I think there are also problematic elements to street games and public play, that the transgressive nature of it is exciting and the fact that you're doing something different to what everybody else is doing, and I think that this... We're trying to design games and experiences that harmonise, successfully, existing uses for public spaces, with the new uses of public spaces that we're trying to propose. But it's still it's an experiment in hacking public space, using it for other purposes, and that's a really live political issue; governments are currently exercising more and more control over what you can and can't do in public spaces, you know, increasingly public space is being corporatised and privatised, teenagers in particular are demonised. You know, you see signs in shops that say 'no teenagers'; if it said 'no blacks' or 'no Irish' or 'no women' we'd be up in arms, but it's all right to be-

H: They have those things as well, I can still hear them, those horribly high pitched things that-

A: I know! Yeah. What are they called – dragonflies or something aren't they?

H: Yeah, I don't go to Morrison's in Leicester ever because they have that horrible thing outside I can't bear to go in.

A: And so I think there are all kinds of staggering prejudices at play in every single public space, and I do think that some highfaluting aim of our work is that we're proposing different more convivial uses for public space, and that is a thing that I value and I think there are lots of much more real political forms of... you know; Occupy, protests, marchers, riots are all on, we're very much at the lightweight cultural end of that spectrum but I think there is a kind of thread that you can draw.

H: So as these – because there's a definite trend, also, in the interests, the private interests that are interested in co-opting that space and, also are corrupting; gamification, basically, is what I'm trying to get at, and do you

think that games are resilient enough to stand that, do you think there is resilience built into what games are? Or do you think that there is a danger that has to be actively fought that gamification will 'steal the power of games' in those spaces?

A: Well I definitely don't think that there is, you know, somewhere a kind of holy flame of the power of games that gamification can Gollum-like sneak in and rob, it doesn't work like that, but I think, collectively the next great frontier is the mind and behaviour and the socially constructed nature of our identity and our lack of free will, and all of these- the enlightenment concept of the rational self-seeking individual that was then doubled-down on by John Nash and kind of written into management theory, it's already blown apart, but it's just unequally distributed in how over, how much we've overcome that idea of the rational actor as the kind of defining model of how we think and how we act. People are using the – games are these systems in which we act, and therefore being a game designer is in part being a behavioural economist, and it's part – our material is people's actions and people's choices and given – we can provoke people to behave in certain ways, through systems of incentive or challenge or friction or social proof provoke – and it's very much working with all of these materials of the mind and social forms of behaviour. People are going to keep understanding that better, some people are going to use it for commercial or political purposes, and some people are going to use it for, hopefully, for culturally interesting healthy viable purposes, but it is without a doubt a battleground of sorts. And you know, the role of government and public intervention, with something like the BBC, is to prevent a race to the bottom in terms of what telly was going to be. Film and telly could just have been a commercially driven thing and we know that when content is dictated by commercial forces it tends to occupy certain formats, it is really deeply problematic that nobody thinks there should be such a thing as a public service games commissioning entity, and a kind of public intervention that can create games with a higher purpose than the ones that are kind of commercially available. You know, the BBC just cares about television, the government cares about making an assload of money so it's only really interested in investing in games as a business, it's not interested in investing in games as a cultural form. So right now it's interesting that – I've forgotten what the question was... [Laughs].

H: Resistance to gamification.

A: Yeah, resistance to gamification, there is a huge wonderful indie games industry resisting gamification by making really good games. You know the best answer to gamification is 'gamification is stupid, it's boring, it's not very fun, it mostly-' gamification is actually a really good idea, if you really – it's like what Mahatma Gandhi said about European culture 'it would be a really nice idea' – it's exactly the, games are amazing, games are incredibly powerful, they can be applied in all kinds of different ways and all sorts of different environments and that's what we do, but it's a serious, deep business. It's not just the application of points and badges to make someone some money. That is a shell game and it doesn't have a

very long shelf life, the question is what comes next, is it more devious forms of gamification for commercial ends, or is it more interesting forms of gamification that unite products and services and modes of engagement with the best elements of what game design can offer.

H: I suppose, reflecting on my question, no one asks the BBC what they're going to do about Sky, really, in that same way I've asked you 'can you resist these forms' – the idea is to make good content.

A: Yeah, I mean all we can do is keep putting out games that are good, and good for me means that this – it's thinking about games the way we think about food – it's that kind of, you know, ethically sourced, sustainably produced, considered to be good for you, and trying to define what that means for us as a studio. And trying to embody that in our work, I mean I'm not a political animal in the you know – parliamentary protest and that kind of stuff – but I am political in the sense of wanting to embody what I think is important about the world in the work that I make.

H: What kind of audiences do you reach, and are you interested – is it important to you to reach others, are there people you feel like you're missing out? So like, not just male, female, age, kind of thing, but class, area, all that kind of thing.

A: [Sighs] I mean this is a really thorny question, and it's particularly thorny because of the Arts Council, because we just didn't get our funding for Sandpit, for this year, and one of the things they picked us up on was we didn't indicate in our application that we were going to make enough significant efforts to reach diverse audiences. And I have a real question about whether an unfunded, six-person design studio trying to support a network of artists and make a particular kind of work in London, should be held to the same standards that the National Theatre or the Royal Opera is, but that's the way the Arts Council's thing manifests. We've made games that have been played by hundreds of thousands of people in China, we've made games with teenagers in Brixton, we've made games in all kinds of contexts and all kinds of environments. Games are without a doubt a universal cultural form, I love having games, and I love having conversations about games and I love making games with all different kinds of people, what I am resistant to is the expectation that we should instrumentally diversify our work as a matter of course, as a – that this funding application for work that is acknowledged by the Arts Council to be culturally important, and doesn't get through on that kind of category. I think we'd love to do – you know – I'm not ideologically opposed to our work being more diverse and more distributed, just we have incredibly limited resources, and our first goal is to make great stuff.

H: Yeah, yeah, and that wasn't a criticism of a question-

A: Yeah, no, I know, I appreciate – but it's a, you know, if there were a more significant public intervention into the idea of games as a cultural form, and games for public good, it would be much easier to get ... you know, there's nothing holding really large cross sections of the population back from enjoying the kind of stuff that Hide & Seek makes. We've never had

any problem once we can put it into people's hands, but we're fighting against some pretty powerful forces in terms of getting it out there.

H: So is it discovery or willingness, that you think-

A: Discovery, I think it's totally discovery. It's categorically a discovery problem whenever we get the thing into the hands of people, old, young, you know, different ethnicities, gender, it's never an issue, play is universal, and people playing together; people like playing together, they just do! New Year's Games was a real positive evidence of that, we didn't have a discovery problem there because it was smack bang in the middle of Edinburgh on January the 1st, and there you go, thousands and thousands and thousands of people having a great time, really, really going for it.

H: I don't think this is a very good question, I might not ask this...

A: Why don't you ask it and then we can agree

H: I think it's a bit leading, I think it wants you to verify a point of my thesis. [Laughter] it says 'what is the connection you see between play and current trends in digital technology?'

A: I don't think that's a leading question. Erm. We are gradually shifting our identity from consumer to participant – that's the big social shift – and it's not really any one piece of digital technology, it's just the internet, you know, we can consume but we can also share and perform and respond and distribute and all of these different adjectives that just imply a more active participation in the world. I think about my parents generation and this comfort which came with being the receivers of stuff, and they were the receivers of an awful lot, that generation; house prices; anyway – you know, I think the generation we're in knows its living in a very complex world, knows that engagement is a different order of magnitude problem for us than it was for our parents, and I think we see the internet as an incredibly powerful tool in helping us to collaborate and participate. And play is the kind of cultural offshoot or that, it's the – or it's the thing that you wrap all of that stuff up under. Play is such a giant word, it's such an all-encompassing world, but I don't think it's surprising that games are the first thing – games are the thing that people build to design the capacity of any new piece of technology; *Base Wars* the original MIT game, first computer game, arguably, was designed to test the super computer that had just been installed there. Tom Chatfield [Chapfield?] writes about this, it's a thing humans understand that exploits the processing power of the technology. There's a meaningful relationship between those two things and that always paralleled and present. It's what Tom Armitage – one of our colleagues – was talking about yesterday at LIFT about games as systemic artworks, that you can embody elements of a system and invite people to reflect on their place in that system in games, much more effectively I think that you can do in linear broadcast kind of art forms. I think you go to see a piece of David Hare verbatim theatre about a political issue and you come out thinking 'well that's terrible', but you play a game that inhabits that same political space and you're forced, I think, to reflect on your place in that system and what you would do if you

were in the shoes of that person in a much more visceral way. I think X Industries [47.09] McDonald's game where you're trying to run one successfully, and you want to do it, so you know, you're injecting poison into the feed and clearing rainforest as fast as you possibly can. *Sweatshop* is another good example – a Channel 4 commission game – which is a tower defence game with child labour and you know, again it's that thing where you want to win and you try to win without doing the shortcuts and then you inevitably take them and I think those things force a dialogue with systems, and systems are what the world is all about; climate change, financial crises, banking, politics; these are all big systemic issues that we've got to think about at that level, and a narrativist view of the world doesn't help you enough to make sense of what could and should be done.

H: So I'm thinking on a small tangent, here, but I think, to me, this is like a – it would make a nice paper, as opposed to my thesis in terms of how I think about it... so a lot of your games, from the [*London*] *Poetry Game*, to the *Babel*, to the *Delhi Games* have played with language, and then there's also in that video online where you talk about the collaboration with Punchdrunk, the 'multi platform immersive etc. etc.'

A: [Laughs.] We were young then

H: You talk about the language of a room... And I just wondered if there is anything in terms of the language of games, or language as an interest within games that you felt like you could talk about?

A: I'm just going to get a thing to read to you, Hannah. This is quite long, but I'm just going to read it anyway, this is, er, from a book called *Supersizing the Mind* which was published by a professor of philosophy at Edinburgh University last year called Andy Clarke. 'Coming to grips with our own special cognitive nature demands that we take very seriously the material reality of language: its existence as an additional, actively created, and effortfully maintained structure in our internal and external environment. From sounds in the air to inscriptions on the printed page, the material structures of language both reflect, and then systematically transform, our thinking and reasoning about the world. As a result, our cognitive relation to our own words and language (both as individuals and as a species) defies any simple logic of inner versus outer. Linguistic forms and structures are first encountered as simply objects (additional structure) in our world. But they then form a potent overlay that effectively, and iteratively, reconfigures the space for biological reason and self-control. The cumulative complexity here is genuinely quite staggering. We do not just self-engineer better worlds to think in. We self-engineer our- selves to think and perform better in the worlds we find ourselves in. We self-engineer worlds in which to build better worlds to think in. We build better tools to think with and use these very tools to discover still better tools to think with. We tune the way we use these tools by building educational practices to train ourselves to use our best cognitive tools better. We even tune the way we tune the way we use our best cognitive tools by devising environments that help build better

environments for educating ourselves in the use of our own cognitive tools (e.g., environments geared toward teacher education and training). Our mature mental routines are not merely self-engineered: They are massively, overwhelmingly, almost unimaginably self-engineered. The linguistic scaffoldings that surround us, and that we ourselves create, are both cognition enhancing in their own right and help provide the tools we use to discover and build the myriad other props and scaffoldings whose cumulative effect is to press minds like ours from the biological flux.' Erm – *that* – when I read that, well, when I'd re-read it about 5 times and figured out what the fuck he was actually saying, really – I've always been passionately interested in words, my main – York you get a lot of freedom to do what you like and almost all of my essays were on the relationship between words and music in some way, and music is this abstract symbol language that follows the morphology of emotions very effectively and language is this very precise describer of specific things, and it's those two things taken in tandem which produces unique artistic emotional responses in people, a song, an opera, or whatever, and the relationship between those two forms – words and music – has always been of tremendous interest to me. I spent a lot of time writing and thinking about authors that use musical type structures in their writing, so Beckett and Joyce and Mallarmé and people like that. So it had always been a subject of great interest to me, and a thing that I had been thinking about. *The London Poetry Game* was the first game I made, that was the thing that I made for the 2007 festival, and that is now *Hinterland*, and *Hinterland* will – in the very unlikely event that the Arts Council give us any fucking money – culminate in a tour starting at the Southbank in October, so that's kind of 5 and half years of work on language in games, and it is an endlessly rich area that I'm – it's deeply relevant to my own person artistic practice, but I think relates very strongly to all the political and social and cultural things that I'm interest- I guess that's why it is an endless thing to investigate – the political power of language is very interesting, the fact that I don't live in London, I live in English Speaking London, specifically I live in English Speaking University Educated Creative Classes London. Which is an incredibly narrow slice of London and one of the prime goals of *Hinterland* is to make all the other Londons materialise for that English Speaking Creative Class. To force those people like me who have the resources and the native confidence to rock up to the Southbank Centre and participate in a game that requires them to go and talk to strangers who speak languages other than their own, which is another thing that the game investigates that I'm very interested in. What is the nature of that border, and what is over the other side of it, you know, the word 'hinterland' means 'the undefined space between two defined areas' it originally comes from the kind of marshy land behind a port, but it has come to mean one's personal hinterland, one's history and character and formative mental experiences, but also a border, a crossing between two nations or an airport are forms of hinterland and one of the understandings of the word 'hinterland' in that project is 'the space between my communication in a language other than my own and its perception in the mind of a speaker who it native in that language'; that

experience when I'm trying to speak my shitty schoolboy French and an idea forms in my brain that I cannot realise, or maybe just once, very luckily, I might get a sentence out that actually functions properly and I get answered in proper French, as opposed to dumb-ass French, and I have no idea, because there's that world that I'm hindered from participating in. And obviously, very interest- it's problematic, isn't it, that we're anglophones; we have a native assumption of our linguistic superiority inculcated into us from birth, and not only is that just problematic, but it's also increasingly untenable, you know, we're all going to be – Chinese will be the most spoken in 20 or 30 years time, English won't be. So, sorry, I could go on about *Hinterland* for a very long time.

H: No! It's interesting, and my experience of the game was really interesting, I kind of had to leave Edinburgh so I couldn't quite finish it, but I also know that I could have tried, but a lot of my dropout had to do with not wanting to seem racist to people. And it was interesting to think about that in the first place, actually, I can passively not be racist, but there's also an active not-being-racist which is understanding cultures better, making a conscious attempt to understand the difference between how Korean people look, and how Chinese and Japanese people look, or – all those things – so...

A: The Korean one is really interesting isn't it? Because suddenly you're looking at all these people and going 'uh-' and, we are – one of the developments for *Hinterland* in the next levels of it – is actually working with communities in the cities in which *Hinterland* will run to map language and content and the form of the game slightly more closely, but what I'm trying to achieve in those interactions is to de-colonialise the nature of the original interaction the game had which was it was an English poem and a game by an English game designer where it had translated all the lines into languages other than English and all you did was go out and find people who spoke those languages and get them to translate it back. Which is just, 'hey, do this job for me'. And the construction of *Hinterland*, I think what was really interesting in testing it with Korean speakers is that they were thrilled that there was this bit of experience of content in their language, actually, it cedes power to your interlocutor. And that's very important, that you cannot progress or participate without the aid of another. But you know, this is why we're not – I'm not at the end of that design process, I'm still pulling at 'how do you make an experience which is going to be initiated by someone like me, inevitably, rich and meaningful and rewarding for the strangers whom you encounter en route'.

[Off the record discussion about the difficulty of the Arts Council's understanding of Hide&Seek 59:30 – 1:09:00]

H: Two questions left, is there something about gameplay itself, or the games that you make, that thrives in urban spaces, have you ever made any for rural spaces, do you think its weight of numbers that's the important thing, or-

A: We have a – there's an offshoot of *Hinterland* which we're hoping to do which would work perhaps not in rural spaces, but certainly small urban spaces, you know, market towns, little towns, a town like Leystone where I grew up it could work, 10,000 people. IT's cost and distribution and acc- we're not going to get the money to do a thing in a place like Leystone where I grew up, whereas we are, with this thing that we're making works with standard mobile phones and a little content management that anyone who knows the town well can set up to make work.

H: How powerful it would be in a space like that, though, because all the different languages would be the takeaways and the corner shops. Like, where I grew up anyway, and-

A: Yeah.

H: The kind of people that just are in that space but don't have a community and don't talk – no one talks to them, like *actually* talks.

A: Yep. My friend Tachon at middle school whose parents were Chinese first generation immigrants and just had the shittiest interactions with people, you know, anyway, yeah. People who like doing this stuff tend to congregate in cities, they tend to congregate around universities and creative jobs and that kind of stuff so there is a – on some level an unarguable association with the urba- what it is to live in a city in the 21st century in the kind of stuff that we do. I mean we make – the game we made for National Theatre Wales Prestatyn was a lovely piece of evidence that it doesn't have to be so. That was a really nice game and an interaction that was deeply rooted in that community and people came out and played it so... I think there are forces that drive it to work best in urban environments but I don't think it's exclusively the case that it should be so. And increasingly what we're interested in working out ways that we can create the kinds of experiences that we create without us having to be physically present this is both a cultural access imperative, but also a commercial imperative. We're sort of, I'm giving really serious thought to trying to develop a platform for pervasive experiences, that we can both create a lot of content on to distribute that creates a way that wherever you are, whoever you are you can run fun social games for your friends using the kinds of tools and software and stuff that we create. But also that becomes a kind of Etsy for experiences that our networks and hopefully wider networks can use as a revenue generating platform. So you know, that's a hope for the future.

H: Ok. My final question is what role, if any, do passersby have in the games-

A: Ah, interesting question! So, if you haven't read the inimitable Imomus' post 'Pervasive Urban Gaming: Count Me Out, and In' then I heartily recommend that you do – so he, do you know Imomus? Nicky Curry – he wrote the best blog on the internet, ever, it was – I should have mentioned it, it's completely formative for me – it was my equivalent of art school, just start at the beginning and read it all, it's so great. Anyway, he – probably still, one of the high points in my kind of life was when he – reviewed Hide & Seek's emergent activities in 2007. And one of the things he drew very clear attention to was the danger – that there is an

authoritarian danger in the transgressive nature of pervasive gaming, play, becoming the norm and he cited Nathan Barley as the – actually the ultimate, in some ways he's kind of a loveable character, he's kind of crazy, but his total lack of awareness of anybody else's space is a powerful part of what defines him as an individual, he's always yelling into his phone on the bus about how fucking great his thing is, in just this – so you know, Imomus wrote about the danger of Hide & Seek being an 'inner city Butlins holiday staffed by Nathan Barley and his gang of redcoat assistants'. And he nailed something problematic about pervasive games, so yes. It has always been a deep concern to us, about how we design effectively for existing users of public space. Very early on I remember the *Daily Mail* writing about a water pistol fight in Leeds City Centre that went wrong and trashed a municipal gardens. And always, said to everyone we've worked with, 'we're one *Daily Mail* article away from not being able to do these things anymore'. And so yeah, it's very important to be aware that there is a flip side to the excitement of playing in the city which is that one person's frantic dash to avoid being caught by a zombie is another person's being elbowed out the way by some bloke with a fluorescent headband and not knowing what the fuck is going on. This year the theme for sandpit is going to be – if we get funded – games with audiences. So explicitly inviting designers to acknowledge passersby in the work that they create, and to create work that is as enjoyable to watch, as it is to play. And moreover to create tracks through which audience members can become players and vice versa. So not just going to a circus carnival, you know, spectacle, plus onlookers, but to create things where there is a fluidity and people can – yeah, that sort of transient roles thing that works very effectively within the kind of – and this is central to what we're trying to investigate in public space at the moment. Because we know that for every one person who wants to play, there are 9 people who aren't so sure, and Hide & Seek's work can't really continue to develop in the mainstream unless we take into account those other 9 people and welcome them, and embrace them, and find ways to rekindle the playful spark that we are confident exists within them. And so, yep, that's very much something that we have always thought about a lot but are trying to address directly.

H: OK. A good answer, thank you, I think we're done!

A: Cool.

[End of relevant discussion]

Interview with Andy Field, Co-Artistic Director of Forest Fringe, and solo artist, completed on the 6th of February 2012.

H: Could you tell me about your background?

A: Yeah, well, at university I studied English literature and history. Which, I mean, history was always my major interest, and in both cases, very much

an emphasis on twentieth century history and literature. That has always been useful, bearing in mind the stuff I've done since.

But I suppose, at university, I came from a background where we didn't go to the theatre, at all, really. I used to do drama classes on a Saturday morning but we didn't go to the theatre. The context in which I grew up, my idea of fun when I was growing up with either running around my local village playing made up games on the street, or playing sort of, War Hammer, things like that, or watching terrible Hollywood movies with my family and others.

But then when I got to university I became more interested in theatre but as a total naive and sort of started directing and performing in things and reading as voraciously as I could, about theatre. I suppose I very, very quickly became increasingly fascinated by, sort of, the things that you can, the ways in which you can... gravitated away from the, sort of, circumscribed naturalism or symbolic social realism of contemporary... the majority of text based theatre. Or at least the, kind of, the pervasive impression people have of what theatre is: People in a pretend room on a stage, talking to each other, and occasionally crying, and all musicals.

I became increasingly interested in what you could do with an audience and the roles you could invite them to play. There was a point where by, my fourth year at Uni, there was a little project that I did, with Debbie [Pearson], where we had this little theatre we used to do things with, in Edinburgh. Where we used to spin around, we sort of spun the whole theatre round and the audience sat on the stage, and Debbie sat on her own in the audience, and had this sprawling, quite strange narrative. In which she was trying to justify the fact that she had witnessed some horrible act, and hadn't done anything about it, and was trying to get the audience to come and sit with her and then offering to bribe them. They eventually did and it sort of looped round on itself and the fire alarm went off. So it was already, by that stage, you know, I sort of seemed to kind of quickly gravitate through the, what for want of a better term might be considered mainstream theatre and then quite quickly sprung off in this different direction which with hind sight relates much more the things that I was interested in and with, before I ever came to theatre, so it's almost like theatre was a useful foothold at a particular moment, before clambering back into some of my fascination with games and America.

So that's where I came from, and through that I became increasingly involved in performance, and I had a year working as a press officer in the BAC. By which point I was already making games and unusual instruction based performance work all over the place.

In the very first year of Forest, I knew Debbie because she'd come over to the UK after we'd had a year together in Canada, so I'd known her very well... and this is very meandering, sorry, but the point being that I was involved in the very first year of Forest which I'm sure Debbie talked to you about, and then I worked with her in the second year to officially launch it as the thing that it's become, and used a lot of my experience, having had a year at BAC and some of the artists that we knew through that. Support from some of the producers, like Laura McDermott, so that where it really came from.

H: So how would you best describe Forest Fringe?

A: It's, I think that Forest Fringe is deliberately evasive, in its definition, in order to allow it to be all the things that it needs to be, or is able to be in any given context. It's not technically a business but it's not strictly a collective either. It's not a venue but it's not a producer. It's much easier to, sort of, define it by the things that it isn't. What it is, is essentially, a loose network of artists, a community, if you want, of artists. Of which, Debbie and I are the kind of, maybe like the leaders and the administrators within the specific context of Forest Fringe.

Basically, Forest Fringe becomes an umbrella term to represent the activities of any, and all, of those artists in a variety of different situations, and the rules and affordances of Forest Fringe are very much constructed in response to whatever the given context is. For example, the most well known things that we do is this big, we run a venue in Edinburgh for the last five years, the politics and the rules for that are such that, everyone does it for free and we don't charge anybody and we don't charge the audiences and for the last five years we had the space for free as well. So it's an almost cashless economy, in which we're fully aware that the value of that experience for artists and audiences is... the other kinds of value are far more significant than monetary value that comes from being in Edinburgh. And so it's been constructed around the idea that, if you bring all these artists together and you make this huge event that is very exciting, and very resonant, for the artists and for audiences then that becomes a very significant thing that continues to have a value long after it.

Then we also do things elsewhere that work on a very different basis. That is, again, entirely dependent on whatever context we're working in. So for example, we are now beginning to explore international projects. And the way in which, again, Forest Fringe can be a useful umbrella name for a variety of artists with, sort of, shared interests and maybe some of a shared aesthetic. That can allow those artists, or create a context for those artists in big international venues and festivals that individually they perhaps wouldn't have the profile, or experience, or confidence to work with, and on that level it's very different. We're working with far more producers or maybe even guest curators in that context. When we're working in a big venue, we'll curate a bunch of artists; we'll oversee the fees and everything else. And as a consequence we'll pay ourselves a producer's fee. So it's probably... The short answer to that question is Forest Fringe is a kind of managed community of artists that remakes itself in response to any useful opportunity that comes along.

H: I'm pre-empting myself, remind me that I'm doing that later on, do you think that, because you are, out of necessity partly, you're reworking your Edinburgh presence quite dramatically this year. And the obviously there's things that you're working in Portugal and you're working at the Gate. The current changes that are happening to how you are as an umbrella organisation, do you think they are reacting to a certain thing within the wider ecology?

A: It's interesting, I think it's a confluence of things, I mean Forest Fringe has continued to evolve through its entire existence, I mean there hasn't been

a single year where it's remained static. And it's continued to be for Debbie and myself, a creative project, I mean my artist practices has very much, over the last few years, gravitated towards the sort of, the relational and the collaborative, and towards the curatorial as well. I'm interested in the ways in which Forest Fringe becomes a form of curatorial artistic practice and which, in seeing things such as the travelling sounds library, which you know about. And through the project that we're gonna do in Edinburgh this summer, which is going to be a curation of event scores, by twenty, thirty different artists. Which you can't buy or get given, you have to go and volunteer an hour of your time for a charity in Edinburgh, then at the end of your hour you get given this, what I've been describing as a page bound festival of DIY performances.

So you know, so Forest Fringe has always changed in response to its circumstances and I think that there are several different sets of circumstances, some that are political and some that are more personal, that have necessitated the evolution of Forest Fringe. The two most important things are; the PhD that I've been doing, funded, for the last three years, that has allowed me to essentially work for Forest Fringe for free over the last three years is coming to an end, and there is no money any more for that. Which was always going to necessitate a big change in the way in which Forest Fringe was organised. Because for all the... brilliant and earnest ideology around unofficial artist led, anarchic, subversive organisations, which has always been very important to us, that we challenge people, everyone from the arts council to the total theatre awards panel. The very essence of Forest Fringe challenges people to reconsider the way in which the structures that exist and to make people aware that the structures that exist to support art, only support very specific kinds of art.

So that was always the ideology, but at the end of the day, we only existed because I was working full time for free for three or four years. So that necessitated a change, either in terms of changing the organisation into a more conventional business model. By which I become like a full time employee or myself and Debbie would, or some combination of the two. Or it involved shifting the way in which Forest Fringe was run, so it became a totally unashamedly amateur, genuinely collectively run entity. By which I mean that it became some that Debbie and I were to do whilst holding down other jobs, and that becomes far more of a shared enterprise amongst us and the artists who have invested so much in it over the last few years.

That seems to me the choice, in really simple terms, that was available. And as a consequence, there's a long letter on my blog that I wrote, as a consequence of the political climate, both within and beyond the arts, I felt that the latter model was the more resonant. As in, there are plenty of interesting alternative theatre producers and festivals in the UK. People like Fuel, Trigger, up in Edinburgh, who have recently started, which is Kieran and Gary and various other people. People like China Plate, Arts Admin, etc., who do that very well. But the idea of continuing to be this awkward and slightly subversive network of artists who are bound

together by nothing more than their shared commitment to what they are doing felt like actually a much more resonant thing, at this time. Both in terms of the idea of a union and to have an entity that exists outside of the present industry economy, present arts economy, I mean. But also in terms of thinking about the way in which the structure of organisations becomes a means to utopically dream about post capitalist ways of organising society, that actually, its felt like that's the right thing for Forest Fringe to continue to be. And for it to continue to be held together only by the enthusiasm of the people who are involved in it. And when that enthusiasm dissipates, the whole thing disappears, that feels to me, good. And that doesn't mean that we aren't going to work... that we aren't going to do paid jobs and take on commissions and whatever else. It simply means that we want to resist the kind of ...

H: The way that companies work?

A: - Familiar conventional organisation of and arts organisation-

H: You're this big and then you get this amount of money then you do this and then you get that big and then you're a NPO and that means you need this and that.

A: Absolutely. And in very pragmatic terms, what that means is Forest Fringe will continue to just work on a project-by-project basis. And what we're trying to do more and more is to find the ways in which the artists that are involved in that project take ownership of the means of production, as it were. So for example in this instance, we're going to do two weeks at the Gate, that's coming up soon...

H: I saw the line up, looks really good

A: - Its going to be fun, and that's just the beginning. In that situation, what we've done, we're working with two headline artists and they're basically working with us to curate the whole event, so I don't have to do it, with a few suggestions here and there, and whatever else. And so the three of us are doing it together, so that becomes a sort of shared labour, and none of us are being paid particularly well for that but we all want to do it because it's something we're interested in.

H: Yeah.

A: And I think that's got to continue to be the thing. The same thing, we're going to Latitude later in the year, we're doing three nights. Laura and I are going to do one night, Bryony Kimmings is going to do one night, and [can't hear] and his girlfriend Brit are going to be one night. And again that night is entirely up to the individual, there is no greater entity who are paying you, is very much about what opportunities the name and the network Forest Fringe can afford to artists, to do their own thing.

H: Because I was talking to Debbie about Portugal, and what interested me, I think, was definitely the idea that you also worked with local artists in that space... So, Performance in the Pub, I came up with the idea, I tell the Internet, I get about five different emails from people like, including the junction, and some kind of venue Birmingham saying 'you should bring it here'. I sort of go, well, I could tour this. That has kind of a lost the point, the point was, I was making this for Leicester because it had this hole. If I then bring it to you, and you have this hole in your community for this kind of work, then isn't it better if you make it and continue it, rather than

I come once? And that kind of feels like the difference between Portugal and your microfestivals, is that the microfestivals kind of came and they were brilliant and exciting, but there's a real difference in going to Portugal and working closely with people there, I wonder if that's the direction that Forest Fringe are interested in, I wonder if that's the reaction to DIY grassroots etc. Etc.

A: I think the first thing would be, to be very honest about what our collaboration in Portugal actually consists of at this stage is not a great deal. Basically, what happened with Portugal was Francisco, who was wonderful, who is the theatre programmer of this big venue in Lisbon, which is like the barbican of Lisbon, basically, has really wanted to work with Forest Fringe and Forest Fringe artists for a while and I've been thinking about the idea of International microfestivals for a couple of years... He approached me with the idea and we worked to develop it together, the form that it would take and I thought it was really important that within that, that there is a working, and so did he actually, a work in progress element, as in, there is a part of the space of the event where an artist is developing new projects and showing work at an early stage. And we both thought that it would be really important that they will be Portuguese artists in there, both to encourage them to think about the possibility of showing work at an early stage, and also to feel a part of this, this community of artists, coming over and taking over the venue. Beyond that I haven't really had any contact with those artists, at this stage, obviously that will change dramatically when we are actually there and working together, on top of one another. But at this stage, I haven't had much contact with them, so I don't know how much of an influence Forest Fringe has the potential to have over their work. But yeah, it is very important to me, and I think that... That was always the impression with the microfestivals from the start, was we would work with a combination of the national artists and local artist, and it would be the touring of an idea that were then go off in different directions.

I know for a fact that when we did the microfestival in Swansea, where it was one of the guys we worked with them, a guy called Brent, has gone off and made his own scratch performance night. Having been a part of that, called scratch that itch, or something. Which is something that Swansea never had before, or never had in that particular form...

Forest Fringe has always been, in some ways it's a kind of, in some ways it is very theatrical in that a lot of the things we do, I feel, the way they are done is sort of performance in and of itself. And I quite like the idea that it becomes, a sort of, a bit like a kind of, actionist, the situationist, the fact that we are doing it, is part of the statement, of the interest of saying, of challenging people to, to think differently about how things might work, to actually try things themselves, to steal wantonly and compulsively from what we have done. And if people are doing so the that is fantastic, I have nothing invested in forests fringe, in the IP of Forest Fringe, and I'd much rather see what we do stolen by everybody, and hopefully therefore improving the wider performance ecology, than I would to become token a specialist within our particular niche.

H: Do a festival called 'steal this festival'

- A: Yes, absolutely, because I think that's the view that it towards curation, that it is the... I quite like the playfulness of these things that you can do, one of the other things I wanted to work on for a while was a festival called 'I can't do this on my own', which is a festival of solo performance, and thinking about artists who work on their own, how they do it and all kinds of bits and pieces.
- H: Dan Bye is curating a festival of solo work.
- A: Is he? He has probably stole it off me then.
- H: For whatever university he is at.
- A: That's cool, I think it is something very interesting, sometimes you can you can feel things in the water, and I think that is where Forest Fringe came from, there is nothing particularly special about it, it was just that Debbie and I, had this unique opportunity, and you could feel the wind changing. You could feel people were at their wit's end with Edinburgh, as a space in which to present work, and people were desperate for something different and we provided it.
- In a grotesque way... This is a weird of example, whatever his name is, the guy that is played by Justin Timberlake in the Facebook movie, who started Napster, took lots of Coke, allegedly, whoever that guy was. He was asked why Facebook had taken over from MySpace, why Facebook became so much more successful. And he said, which I thought was quite interesting, it was because we never stopped changing, even though it irritated some people, even though it seems to be constantly irritating people all the time, Facebook's updates and innovations and changes. People spend their entire teenage and early 20s seemingly exasperated by every new software update, I know it's not software but every new update that Facebook put in. And that's exactly the reason why they have been successful, because my space had a model and they did that and it stood still, and it didn't change, and that was it. And I feel like that is the same thing that we, I suppose, approached Forest Fringe with that recklessness, that sort of interests with constantly changing things, even if it tics people off. Because you are constantly responding to what feels like is the ever-changing political, social, personal context in which you make them work.
- H: So leading on from that, you have a particular tendency to use traditional art spaces in non-traditional ways, why is it you inhabit buildings in the way you do, why do you hold the work in the streets, in non arts spaces, so particularly thinking of two micro festivals, the one at the Battersea arts centre, the one at Bristol old Vic, sort of in the paint room.
- A: So the question is, why look to try and find a way of to fit a square peg in a round hole, rather than going to find your own square hole, Somewhere Else.
- H: Exactly, additionally to that, although I will talk about the city in a bit, why not go and make a square hole or a round hole, whatever it was, somewhere else that isn't an arts building, why particularly reclaim arts buildings in those ways, is just a context thing?
- A: For a number of reasons, one is purely pragmatic in that arts buildings aren't going anywhere, not for the time being anyway. And that, the proportionately large degree of subsidy that those major arts buildings

receive in relation to independent artists, and unusual unconventional spaces, is not going to change in the short term at least. So, in the short term, one of the aims of the micro festivals, as you know, was to try and create the context within those organisations, both within the physical space of the organisation and the institutional space of organization, to allow them to accommodate the kind of unusual work that we really liked. It's essentially, you're looking to erode the edges of the square page, if you want to, so it fits in the round hole.

That's a pragmatic way of thinking about it, in that there needs to be a way in which these big organisations, which the large amount of funding, can present and support this kind of work. And maybe we can help. Point 1.

Point 2, I think there is a real value to arts organisations, and this is something that I have thought about a lot, because a lot of my practice, especially my earlier work, is very, very resistant to the idea of arts institutions. It was sound walks that occurred in found spaces, in parked cars, a lot of my work still does. The last piece I made, *Zilla*, was made for a number of warehouses and the streets and wherever else.

So there has been a process of thought in that, and thinking that there is a real value in arts institutions and no one speaks about this more eloquently than Chris Goode. The civic role played by major arts organisations, as the centre of a community, and how it could better serve the role is somehow that is interesting to me. How can you reconstitute that organisation from the inside out, because I think that the architecture of a performance space enacts or performs a certain kind of socio-economic relations.

So for example you could go to the national theatre and all of the backstage areas and offices and everything else are hidden away, you can't see anything, you are very much in the front of house, and the front of house is deliberately designed to be on a series of mezzanines that allow you to be people watching in a bourgeois peacock-ish display of who's doing what, who's behaving and in what way. You go in, you see the piece in these very neat auditoriums, you consume this piece, and then you leave, and then there is a real definite division between the social space out front and the performance spaces. And all that is coding for certain kinds of behaviour within that space, which I think diminishes the potential social role, that that organisation, that that building can play within people's lives. Or it perhaps reinforces pre-existing modes of behaviour, in terms of our relationships to each other, in terms of the relationship between the arts and society, and everything else. that perhaps if you're go in and you find those old spaces, and you find interesting new ways to use them, then you can help to revive the central civic a role that those organisations might play in society, or rather you can rewire, the civic role that those organizations play to be more in keeping with your own political ideology.

And on an artistic level, when we have tried to put on... I have worked in and around festivals and events, and if you want to do work out on the streets, and in unusual spaces, it often is much better to have a base because it much easier to get an audience, if you working out of the old

Vic, people know where the old Vic is. So we still sent people off out into the streets to do various projects, and we will continue to do so. The project that we are doing in the micro festival in Portugal, we're doing an action hero show in the car park, downstairs. It is 'watch me fall' were doing it in an underground car park. We are doing, Tanya El Khoury's show above a bookshop across the street. There are various other pieces, around that. In terms of trying to retain a degree of accessibility for an audience is quite useful.

H: So you are, leading on from that stuff not in theatre buildings, you did seem like, not this last festival, but the one before, Forest Fringe in Edinburgh. There was your piece in a car, there was Ant Hampton's piece in a bench, there was Duncan Speakman's *As if it Were the Last Time*, there was another thing that I have possibly forgotten. Did you feel like something was coming together? Do you think there was a point at which everyone started thinking about taking stuff out into city space, there was any kind of conscious, working with or questioning city space, interrogating it, or do you think that all was just a accident of circumstance? Because it is sort of, pre all those, sort of, riots, revolutions, but also tipping point in technology, if you ask me.

A: I'm hesitant to say that it was because, whenever I am fully aware of how much brilliant and how much higher profile work used city streets in interesting ways, for many years before that, through Janet Cardiff, Graham Miller, through Blast Theory, through Wrights and Sites, everybody else. Mainly that is because that is all the work that is the seminal to me.

From the curator's perspective, if you look back, there was a very conscious effort... The first year of Forest Fringe, I was involved in, in the writing around forests fringe and the way that it was hosted, a lot of emphasis on a Forest Fringe as this little island, this little oasis of cosy feeling niceness in the midst of commercial brutality of Edinburgh, but we were somehow this little island. And in the two years following that there was a definite emphasis on my mind on trying to extend beyond that, on saying we don't want to be an island because that is a sort of, slightly smug and slightly bourgeois...

H: Well yeah, you're not easy to get to, an island, are you?

A: Exactly, and you can all feel very good about yourselves by what are you really achieving? There was a very positive effort to, which is a slightly different your question in terms of the streets, this was more a sense of wanting to reach out in general, and we collaborated with a number of different organisations and he worked with a number of different spaces and contexts and one of those is working out on the streets. Actually having a presence on the streets, the city, and saying the streets is as much a space that's colonised by the corporation of the festival as much as anywhere else, we can be out there and we can find ways of subverting that, resisting that.

In terms of whether I feel there is something in the air in terms of creating work on the street, no, I think it is always been a kind of continual interest in using the streets and if anything, I think perhaps what you're seeing there was the pervasiveness, the technologies that allowed you to do that

becoming affordable enough that they opened up the possibility of a range of interesting things.

H: So fringe people can afford to do it, as opposed to...

A: Yes, as opposed to having to be funded by the ICA, or whoever else. So for example Duncan Speakman can do his piece and that just requires lots of people to download a thing from the Internet. And can do the bench and that just involves him posting as a box full of iPods, and actually they don't cost that much to actually have them. And similarly the car show involved me having to buy a battery-powered amp off the Internet, and sticking in the boot of a car, we took it to Latitude as well. But I think that perhaps that was... And in terms of editing technology in terms of the Internet allow you to spread information and such. If anything it's the kind of, affordability of technology and it's pervasiveness in terms of people's familiarity with it, which made the difference there, I think people have always had an interest in how we can relate to and transform people's relationships with the streets, I think if anything our means of doing so had just become... there's been a real, in the last few years, there's been a real expansion in the tools that you have at your disposal, to allow you to do that.

H: The Fringe in my experience, Forest Fringe, that's what I mean when I say 'Fringe'. Forest Fringe, in all its different guises, has seemed to have tended to host a 1 to 1 audience centric, formally inventive, intimate or otherwise non-traditional performance experiences, what is it that draws you offering a space for this work, what interests you in this work or is it just as simple as this cashless economy providing room for people to do such expensive...

A Yeah, I suppose I have been, coming back to my mini life story, I have interested in those kinds of practices for a while, because I'm interested in how meaning is conveyed through the form of an event. I'm interested in how, I'm interested in process and I'm interested in how any piece of work generates meaning through... Or how any piece of work...

I suppose I'm interested in the way live performances uniquely, and a lot of digital work now as well, as that has its own kind of liveness, is able to, has so far greater scope in terms of its ability to condition different kinds of relationships with an audience than other forms. There is a real range of interesting things you can do, with audiences in live performance. As a curator that is something that I've been increasingly interested in, which is not to say that... there are sit down theatre shows that equally do really interesting things with an audience, but those kind of one on ones, those Durational encounters, those sites specific pieces...

I have always had a real curiosity with the potential that those pieces have to transform the way that an audience encounters or produces an experience of the world, in quite significant ways, and I think I have written something about this before somewhere, that the... OK, looking for an example, an analogy, that the way in which photography transform painting, in that photography, took away one of paintings essential purposes, which was the recording of people and landscapes and anything else. And almost freed painting to become far more about the act

of painting, the texture and quality of the paint, and almost allowed a kind of, slippage of reality in terms of what painting was able to be. But I might say that the pervasion of the Internet and 24 hour news, and the increasing expansion of the broadcast media, have taken away any purpose art might ever have had for the imparting of information. Or at least, and that is quite an extreme, but I see it as sort of an allegory there in terms of... Photography became a much better way of recording people, and landscapes, and I think the Internet and everything else is a much better way of imparting information, or at least specific kinds of information, knowledge, whatever you want to call it.

And so I think that, for me, one of the most interesting if not the most interesting thing that art can do, is to be exploring modes of reading, or modes of production, or how we use knowledge that knowledge or that information and how we filter it, and how we function. And I think that if there has been a kind of, in Forest Fringe, an emphasis on the those kind of a one and one and pieces like that, I think it is because the good ones are absolutely concerned with that kind of stuff. And I think that actually footfall and audience size is a misnomer, there is far less of a difference between 1000 people seeing a show at the national, and five people seeing 1on1 show at Forest Fringe. I mean, what's the ratio there... Like 1 to 200, right? Then there is between 1000 people singer show at the national, and six million people seeing a clip of a cat on YouTube, that's like 1000 to 6,000,000, I can't do the math... It's more.

H: Three zeros off a million, which is, how many zeros in a million? Six? So 1 to 1000, I guess.

A: But you see my point, if you talking in purely in terms of the number of people that a piece can reach, a theatre show is always going to be useless, even in the biggest auditorium, anywhere. You're still going to have more people sitting down to watch a rerun of *Porridge* on UKTV Gold then you are watching a big show at the national. It's Got to be about the quality of that experience, what that experience is doing, and that's where I'm interested in process and everything else, and the way in which live performance has the potential to practically transform people's lives and I think that that comes and not when David Hare is telling you how bad the war in Iraq is, I think we fully know how bad the war in Iraq is...

H: Through a probably terribly drawn female character...

A: Yes, I think that we all have ample evidence that that is the case.

H: And actually the problem *is* that we have ample evidence.

A: We just don't know how to use it.

H: Yes, we just look at it and go all that's another photo of that thing which happens over there.

A: Yes, I think that... So that I suppose is a very, very long way of saying why we are interested in that work, because I think it is part of a wider, sort of, wider political ideological approach to performance that I take, as a curator.

H: And then there is also something in there I suppose that we can write in terms of your interest in War Hammer, like games, and that experience of bodily actions having an effect on something. Do you think that is linked

to how you programme, or do you think that it's linked more to practice. Or as a way of dealing with this world with 24 hour news...

A: I suppose, Yes, I don't know, I don't know if I really understand the question.

H: Okay, so, drawing out from you talking about why you think you host one-on-one, audience centric work; painting changed when photography happens, theatre change when film happened, and now all of these arts forms are changing in the advent of the information age, as they would like us to call it. And you think these intimate, these value-full experiences, a way of communicating in a world which we are slightly numb to information, and cannot even have an approach...

A: They are one way of doing so, which I find interesting to...

H: And I suppose that intimate, one-on-one stuff is, you don't often have much of a degree of agency, they are not interactive in a true sense, they are reactive but they do place you at the centre of them, is there a further extrapolation of powerful forms which goes into the world of games, where you have agency as well as of value-full, and in fact a value-full experience comes from agency.

A: Yes, when we... Okay, let's take a step back, differentiate. My interests in Games Workshop was never necessarily in the battles themselves, for me they were the least interesting part. And I didn't actually really play that often, and quite often, when we did we made up our own games, with our own set of rules. I don't, and in the games that I have made, as a maker, I don't have all that much interest in providing, sort of, say for context in which people can play with their rules set. I am not entirely satisfied with the idea that there is a sort of agency within the safe space of games that becomes almost, sort of, an allergist to an agency that you might have outside of that safe space of games. I am far more interested... The way in which the form of the game becomes a means by which to encourage an agency which transcends the limits of that space, that gaming space. So in the context of games workshop for example, it was far more about, what's that allowed was... That there was a wider thing going on, in terms of the painting and the relationship we had with other people through it, the generation of an army, of the selection...

H: So I guess, like an emergence is the theoretical term, it isn't rule sets, it is game systems that allow you to...

A: Yes-

H: Invent new play.

A: That is a good way of putting it. I think the best one on ones, and the best pieces of, quote unquote, immersive work are always dangerous in the sense.... Any agency that you have.... The set up of those pieces, their success is always predicated by the possibility of the kind of, theatrical frame collapsing, and it becoming... That danger, the danger of the theatrical frame lapsing, is the most exciting thing about, about games, about one-on-one encounters. The possibility that the safe space in which you are inhabited and becomes something more than that.

H: Surface tension.

A: Yes, absolutely. So for example something like *Checkpoint*, which was a game that we made, and we did at various places. Which basically was

about smuggling things from one place to another place, that game becomes.... That the action that take place as part of that become a way of animating the entire environment, that involve both people that have agreed to play and people that haven't as it were. There is a piece that Laura and I are developing for Latitude, it's Latitude, so it is a big festival, so we have to keep it quite simple. It is basically an 'the end of the world rave', where we're going to have these angels of death all wandering around the site, and you have to go and find one. Then you listen to a 5 minute long recording, and while you do that they would dress you up with bruises and blood, and or whatever else. Then you can go through to the tent, or go and find the tent where we will have a party and provide lots of free beer. What is interesting to me about that, beyond the way in which you actually are moving through the whole festival in a different way as there is a different emphasis, is the fact that you, we help, we'll end up with dozens of people who look like they're covered in blood and bruises wandering through the middle of a big festival.

H: And quite a middle class festival at that.

A: Yes.

H: If you go to Hevy Festival you expect to see people like that.

A: And a festival that has very bad reputation over the last couple of years, because of some very specific events that have happened. I am interested in that in a way that almost... I like the way in which games seem to be able to play on the edges of irresponsibility; I think it's interesting.

H: I'm glad you think it is interesting, I'm writing a PhD. on something similar. So, three questions, one of which we touched on, but I will ask them anyway because of bits in them. Do you think there's been a recent and a growing interest in intimate interactive work, and if so, why do you think that is? Have we touched enough on this to go past it or?

A: I think it is an interesting question, I think you'll speak to a lot of people, who will be very cynical, and tell you it is all about the increase in the valuisation of the individual and that we become....

H: Hyper local

A: Oh, not even that, just the sense that, in our own ego driven society it always constantly have to be about you, and no one is able to just be anonymous. No one wants to be singular her any more, in aspiration, in the individualistic society everyone wants artistic experiences that are entirely about them. There is probably a grain of truth in that, but I think that equally there is an interest in...

I think, at the end of 100 years, where we have constantly been talked at by people in positions of power, through radio, television, and film. That sort of, broadcast model of power has become increasingly pervasive, about a million people can march on London to prevent other legal war, and it can have a fuck all affect because they have already told us what is going to happen, because that is how broadcast works. It's often remarked upon, the way in which the politics becomes increasingly about the way in which you deliver the decision you have already made. I think that, undoubtedly, there is a shift taking place in terms of, the broadcast media are in crisis, in a lot of exciting ways. And that the Internet, as it becomes more widely accessible by people in positions... disadvantaged,

powerless situations, whether that be working class people who have blackberries and are able to text each other to let them know where they are during a riot.

H: BBM is such a ... Because it's free.

A: Because it's free, or people who are able to coordinate their actions on Twitter during a revolution. When those means of communication become accessible by people beyond the compliant middle classes, that actually there is a reordering, or a potential reordering taking place. And I think there is a degree to which one on one experiences and those kind of performance encounters may be become a means of testing your own relationship with power. That actually, rather than that one-dimensional relationship between an artistic audience, what you are generating there is something far more complicated and interesting. And the best work, the best work of that kind, I think, is not the work that replicates, such as punch drunk for example, which is very much predetermined and you're just wandering through it. The work that actually comes a product of those people who have taken part in it. And I think that maybe there, that kind of work is contributing to a wider, messy, not particularly joined up at this moment but may be getting so, discourse that is taking place around the question of finding a new means of engaging with structures of power that stopped listening to us about 50 years ago. If that makes any sense?

H: Yes, that does make sense. Yes. So, talking about these online spaces, here it says 'your most recent' but it is not that one, it is the one before: Edinburgh. You, I don't know if this is you as you or you as Forest Fringe, but you made that ghost festival. I was wondering if – that used an actual digital space to create it – and if that was affecting the way you work, or you curate, or if that online space is now to Forest Fringe or you, one of the spaces, like the arts buildings or the streets or the things you put stuff?

A: Yes, absolutely. That was me as me, but you know, me taking advantage of the wide... It was almost like me working within the online space that is Forest Fringe in a way that me might work in a physical building, like Battersea arts centre, using the affordance of their, forests fringe's, wider social network to further it.

H: That Matt Adams idea of cultural space, these are no longer technologies or interfaces, they are now a cultural space that we can...

A: Yes, that is a nice way of thinking about it, because there is a moment at which the communicative aspect of digital and online facilities is... Coalesces into something which is more than just a way of talking to people, it becomes an entire thing. And I think that it is definitely something I am very interested in.

H: Wasn't really much of the question, was it? That's fine. Okay, so the last one has sort of been answered. There is a strand in the work you present that seems to be tending towards the political activism in art, would you agree, and do you think this kind of immersive etc., audience centric, one-on-one is suited to addressing politics and activism? And I think we've

dealt with that, but I suppose I would rephrase that question in terms of, where next?

A: I think that we have definitely increasingly interested in trying to use Forest Fringe as a space in which you can bring together lots of different people to think creatively about the dangerous grey area between real world activism and similar strategies when used in context of performance, how that can become one.

I think where the next is about utopic spaces that are both at once artistic and political. Something like the *Bank of Ideas* for example. That is at once, both an artistic space and a political gesture, and is very flawed in lots of ways, but I think that rather than thinking about acts, which seems like if you are doing a soundwalk, that is an act, you are moving through space. And things like immersive, one-on-one encounters which are very interpersonal, between two people. I think there will be an increasing interest in the idea of the utopic spaces, sort of, how does a space itself, in a post-Occupy world, in which the idea of transforming, in the way we were just saying, that online becomes a space that transcends its purpose as a tool. When activism and art, or activism and/or art together or separately can become... Transcend the contingency of the actions and gestures and relationships, and becomes an actual space in which we can sit or stay or even live. then that becomes very exciting, and I think that there is great potential for all of us to be working together to think about, in real terms, what those spaces might look like. And how those spaces will operate, not in a commune in the middle of the country but actually actively in the middle of our cities. I think it is interesting because there is a lot that I find Quite, I am a big fan of De Certeau, for example, and he talks a lot about how the whole idea of creating a circumscribed place for yourself is deeply problematic. And the rhetoric of Occupy has been taking advantage of by lot of people from Adam Boulton to James Dellingle. And that is why I think there needs to be this... If we were to try and think about the space beyond, a utopic space beyond the capitalist, socio economic spaces that currently, that we have available to us then what would it actually look and feel like? How would it not just be a replication of that same...

H: We are back to, 'how do we stop making capitalism?'

A: Yes, exactly and I think that activism is very good at doing, and art is very good at imagining, maybe they could get together and hang out? I think that something that will become increasingly interesting and increasingly important because we have seen some really remarkable ways of temporarily transforming spaces through flashmobs, through the Sultan's Elephant, through Tahrir Square, through the Occupy movement. How do we create something that can not only create these ruptures within the fabric of capitalism but how do we live in those ruptures?

H: Good quote, Mr Field, that will go at the end of the chapter.

[End of relevant speech]

Interview with Annette Mees, Co-Artistic Director of Coney, completed on the 9th of February 2012.

H: Tell me about your background first.

A: Chequered. Which I think is what's relevant. At 16 I worked at a local TV station as a cameraman, and then as a director because I wanted to tell stories and I wanted to... And I was very curious about things. So I worked up a very boring repertoire which in retrospect... But I was utterly excited by it. I particularly remember a reportage about a cookie factory, not the most exciting but I loved it. So I went from there to the Royal Arts Academy in the Netherlands to do video and film which was both amazing and not amazing in that I was, when I applied they said 'please come back in three or four years' and I thought that was mental, I got in any way, argued my case and got in. And I should have gone three or four years later, to have the best, to make the most out of being in the Royal Art Academy doing that, but there is no better place for a 17/18 year old to be, than the Royal Art Academy in the Netherlands at the age because it is incredibly formed by that sense of experiment and that sense of layering different media on top of each other to tell stories. I remember in the first week sitting in a class where we had an hour long discussion about the colour red and what it all meant, which is amazing to me.

So I was there and when I came out I sort of knew that I didn't want to make a film, so than I did lots of different things. I went into education again for a little, I was almost like producing, post-BA, blah, god knows, how it fits into the English system but post-BA, which allowed me to look at different... It was sitting in a theatre school but I looked at different media and I started experimenting with digital... I work for, my apprenticeship with a company called Submarine in the Netherlands who make amazing online multi-platform stuff. Come out of television but have been really successful in merging different media, I did a beautiful project with Peter Greenway doing a CD ROM. They make very beautiful and interesting stuff, so for them, when I was there, I worked on something called *Crisis*, a Dutch television show which you had here as well. I think it's a Dutch format but they basically invited people like the mayor of Amsterdam and the finance minister and the head of the fire brigade in Rotterdam to come and pretend they were the crisis team, which really exists, there is a crisis team in the Netherlands. I presume you have it here as well. What would happen, they would implement the crisis plans, they are like the HQ of crisis. And it would take on, not their own role but another role. The head of the fire department might be the mayor of the city, and together they had to solve this crisis which would unroll in sped up real-time, but often the programme lasts for an hour and the crisis would last for a few days, and they would go through it. We made a game that was real-time... There was a real-time crisis where you could be part of it, and you became one of the characters, which was quite blatantly... You in a chapter with lots of other people, we are now the firemen and we now have to decide. With five or six characters, I can't quite remember, and a crisis via your phone and roles – and we had news updates which were shot different ways, because of what could happen, and there was radio updates, which was completely responsive. Which still is quite a

large influence on my life, but also next to that, I started directing more theatre, which are sort of rolled into... Because I happen to be based at a theatre school and I found my love of storytelling with actors, I just find the process of making theatre much more interesting than the process of making film, and the process of making media, as a whole.

H: how did you come to Coney?

A: Talking, really. When I... I came to London for completely different reasons, was making work around an interactive performance lab, because I hate interactive acting, it is really bad most of the time. So I went to investigate that, I had done a really big installation in the Globe and was fascinated by... I had sort of worked on scale but it felt like I hadn't really... I was responsive within the moment to my audience but I hadn't built a responsive narrative, so I was really fascinated by that. And then I met Tassos and I think Tom as well, I'm not sure if, if Tom was there the first day at D&D [Devoted and Disgruntled]. I had stumbled upon Rabbit before, so I had an email exchange with Rabbit but I hadn't really followed it up because life got in the way. But in D&D – which is the full open space, but you know that, just started talking and *A Small Town Anywhere*, which wasn't called *A Small Town Anywhere* at that point, was on the books, and as the team was gathered I was invited because of my background specifically with actors, I mean it was working with actors at that point, come in with that specialism and look at what I could do. I think someone dropped out; there was a last minute place. I was doing, at that time, a masters in theatre directing, here, because I had been working in new writing a lot, and I was building, always, and experimenting with form and trying to break out of the theatre space. I had some Arts Council funding to develop some of my work but, sort of, failed because I was never trained as a theatre director and I wanted to do that so I was doing that. I think that was in my first year of a two year one, and then started working and kept on working with Coney and I think during the process became one of the co-directors. And here I am, never left.

H: What is it about interaction and play that captures you? You just mentioned wanting to break out of theatre spaces as well...

A: I think, for me, my initial attraction was slightly different from what it is now. I think, coming out... I come out of art; I come out of film, very author-led. And what I found really exciting when I started, making theatre, had turned out to be really quite experimental immediately. In when I was doing some small things in Amsterdam, because I was like 'Oh, all this stuff I have never been able to do because this is live, we are all in the same room. How cool is that, that's what this medium is about, it is not about...' I was surprised to learn later as I became more professional, that a lot of rehearsals are aimed at ramming out the liveness as much as possible. 'Let's block, and set up, we can do the exact same thing every night', which seemed ludicrous to me. Not to say that I don't block part of my work, because I do like things being really lit at a nice moment, and is good for you to stand in that light then. But it is about the liveness in the end. So that was my first attraction to theatre which very quickly leads to

being quite audience-centric, if it is about the liveness and the fact the audience is in the room with you, it becomes about the audience.

So I started making more work like that, I notice to both myself, as an audience member, and with audiences to my work, was what people talked about later was when it was about them, when something about them was revealed. Not that something was revealed about Hamlet that happened to reflect on them, that something was revealed about them because they had made an action or they had had a particular exchange. I think that is what, in essence, is at the heart of all my work and I think all good is about the audience. And I think there is really exciting, because it means that I only half author the work I make, and with 'I', I mean us, the team, whatever the team is. We create this framework, this world, there are so many different words you can apply to it... This story that is unfinished and will be different each time, and will surprise us, and will take on new meanings with every single audience member because different themes... Because, you know, when we put in themes we think quite carefully about it, but different themes are highlighted in different nights with a different chemistry and something surprisingly beautiful or surprisingly shocking is always about to happen, I think that's a really exciting, both for the audience, because it's about them and I think there is a direct dialogue between them and what did piece's about. No matter what the theme it is always about the dialogue between you and that theme... *Theme's* story, and for me it is amazing because it keeps surprising me, and it is incredibly exciting to see...

I always think that this work, if you have something to say, this is not the best work for you. I think when you have lots to investigate, this is the best place to make theatre in because it allows you to investigate the world, with the audience and keep... I think interactive work sometimes falls down, for me, and this is, I know this is a taste issue when it wants me to do something, or what we do have an opinion, or even wants me to have opinion A or opinion B, and that sense is something about me. I'm more interested in work that allows me to move within that, and is clever enough to let me reveal things about myself to me, by surprising me how things twist and turn, then work that is trying to channel me down a certain path.

H: ...About showing an audience the affect they have on the world?

A: Yes, but also, in a way, the ideal is as if it's a mirror... One of the best post-pub conversations I've had about work, and this, to be honest, is a thematically reoccurring... Is to say: 'oh my god, I can't believe I did that' and that is the best response to the work. 'Oh my god, I can't believe I did that, because I was thinking this, I wish I had acted, or I wish I didn't...' It is those mirrors that are being held up to you as an audience member, which can only happen if you had agency within it, up because if you didn't have agency you could never have done anything else are so it doesn't reflect you in any way.

H: It would be like showing someone a drawing you did of them.

A: Yeah, when you look at theatre, you can go 'aw, today I really can really understand where Hamlet's coming from' and another day you can go 'today, I can really understand where Ophelia is coming from' and it takes

a slightly different meaning, which is a very different way of reflecting upon who you are, because Hamlet is a mirror image, but actually and this kind of work for you become your mirror image. It is holding actually a mirror rather than an icon in front of you.

H: And do you think that is important and needed in a wider global political context, or...? Is it something you're interested in?

A Well, it's a big question isn't it? I think there's a lot of things I think we need. I don't think this is particularly something that is more needed than other things, I think this is a really exciting terrain that is growing. I think it is a really interesting way, and it opens up a really interesting space for people to reflect in. It allows them to quite actively think slightly more nuanced than the normally do and more interestingly than in just a debate about choices and big things. I'm currently working on, I'm in the very early stages, *Early Days of a Better Nation* is the full working title, which comes from a poem which I'm not going to go into detail because that's another story there. The full sentence is, work like you are part of the early days of a better nation, which I find an incredibly inspiring sentence, from a self-help level. And that sentence combined with looking at *Passport to Pimlico* a really old Ealing comedy, in which Pimlico goes, 'we're independent, because we found treasure, so fuck you Britain!' And Britain goes 'oh really? Fuck you' and trouble ensues, obviously. Combined, actually, with what happened with the Arab Spring, and to a certain extent Occupy, looking at what happens if you are now, what would happen if you are now in the early days of a better nation? Don't put this out yet because it is not for public consumption yet, but basically you enter and become part of a group, a series of groups but they all have together gone through this revolution and there is a big... You've basically entered the space just post-revolution, there is this charismatic leader, think Nelson Mandela-esque... This is what we left behind, this is what... We can change everything for the first time we have grown up with this dogma, and that dogma, and that dogma, and now for the first time we can choose how they want to live our lives. This was the constitution let's change it, let's take every single one of these roles and change them. Of course, unfortunately he gets assassinated, as happened with charismatic leaders. And you're basically left with a leaderless crowd trying to figure out how they can to live together, what the nation is about. But, simultaneously, there are also those who are trying to bring in power struggle, big powers, all these really interesting interactive work, who goes for self, who goes for group. That for me always comes back to my work, even if I don't start with it. It is also about utopianism, in a non-naive way I am very interested in utopianism. I always think that the world's currently quite pragmatic and quite small thinking even within politics there is no big ideas being pursued at the moment that I'm aware of, there is a little bit of open source on the Internet community but actually on a broad level... I am fascinated by William Warus who I got slightly obsessed with in a research round, early days, he just went, 'okay, I'm going to set up utopia' and started making crafts with a little factory in which everyone shared – it was really successful – tried to literally create a better world.

I think, I don't know why I started this story but I think, what this type of story is really good that, and I think why I used *Early Days* as an example because it is quite literally that, is to create an alternative space, to set out of his self and think differently. And for artists and makers to create these spaces where, let's be quite radical in what way of thinking at right now, so that is political...

H: So do you think there is a important distinction between, if you do that task to people sat around the table and the fact that it is with the and this sort of, story overlay for playful contacts to where people are using the whole bodies...

A: Yeah, I'm a strong believer in the physicality of thought, I think it just is different. I think it is really hard to surprise yourself at a table, but it is really easy to surprise yourself in space. I think that some really interesting research about brainstorming being incredibly ineffective, which I found really interesting.

Basically, that sitting around trying to think things up actually gets you down particular grooves of thinking collectively, it is harder to break out of that. So I think a light dusting of narrative is a really good way to A) get rid of the particularness sometimes, and we're not talking about the Tories and Labour here, we are not, it's not about that. So we don't have to have that argument at least, can we just talk about what is at the heart of it. Plus, it also allows us to simplify the world, I think *A Small Town Anywhere* is not the world, it's incredibly simple. But it's a microcosm of the social network, but because it's so simplified, because it is has to be, because it is a story rather than the real world. It allows you to hone in on a particular elements of it rather than having to take in the whole world, which seems to be a bit daunting.

H: yes, because I have some questions about *Art Heist*, which was in Birmingham wasn't it?

A: Walsall, next to Birmingham

H: West Midlands. It leads on directly from that actually, was the question about the idea of using a familiar format, because you use the heist format, everyone knows what that is and if those ideas of using the formats and big recognisable stories allow you to effectively invite people in more easily to playing?

A: I think it's good to bring this up, what we were just talking about, it's a simplification. If I tell you, 'you're going on an art heist' I don't have to explain a lot about what it is we're going to do, you have sort of got that. It's exciting, and some people have seen *Thomas Crowne Affair* [...] *Mission Impossible*. You sort of know what we're talking about, immediately, we can then imaginatively investigate that. Now, *Art Heist* was about who is art for, who owns art? Who owns... Does the gallery own it? Does the artist own it? Does the audience own it? Is it our cultural heritage? Is it owned by the person who paid the money for it, or more by the person who made it? Whose opinion about what's good, what is valuable, what is it worth? Both on a social and monetary level. Who has more to say about the future of this work, of those parties?

So there was a private collector, the gallery, literally a gallery, because that is the place you robbed and also the character of a curator. The

audience has the people and a character that is the artist. It became a struggle in which the audience had heisted the gallery, they had created a forgery, the world would have never known or could have never known but it became their final dilemma about who this work should go to. Would it go to them, was it to go to them and the gallery on conditions of Them or would go to the gallery on condition of the artist, would it go to the artists who would have just destroyed the work, or does it go to a private collector who has paid for the whole heist take place and has invested monetary into it. That was what the piece was about, the fact that that was an art heist a) made it really exciting, and made people willing to engage... If I was to advertise, come do this thing about the value of art and what it all means... It is much harder. And to get people excited about moving into a world and making that world really sophisticated and complex is much easier than going, 'this is really sophisticated and complex' and then making it fun afterwards. So it is useful for that, plus people bring a lot of their own imagination to it, if it fits somewhere in the cultural reference frame. We all have a vision about what a small town is, we all have a vision about what a revolution is, we all have a vision about what an art heist looks like. Mine is going to be completely different from yours, but we bring that, we bring something to it. *A Small Town* had a lovely invention that, especially in the beginning, it seeped out a bit later, but slightly French. Because it was based on a French film actually, the original story-thread. And some people just went for the Frenchness of it, sort of, ohh laa laa, foxy nurse. Which is really quite fun, but simultaneously then you are doing all the things and starting to look at what is a group, when does an individual become a group, when does society pull you, when do you produce for yourself. I always think that my work is about you, me, us and them. When do I become, with you, become an us and whose them and went of them become part of us, and who is them then? And how do we choose to move within that framework, and the different us's that I am compared to your us's and when some of our us's overlap. I think that's fascinating, and I think the choices that people make in that are very revealing and are the fabric of society. That sounds really grand but you know what I mean.

H: Yes, I think there would agree, cool, we're doing all right to time, we have 15 minutes. Is it *Art Heist* I'm right in thinking somehow that began beforehand, didn't it? You got messages and things like that. And the same with *Small Town Anywhere*, you get emails and have discussions about who you are in this world and who you might be, and developed your secret and things. Is that important to you that it bleeds into people's lives like that, from the beginning?

A: It's interesting, I think the thing we talk about a lot is a story starts when you first hear about it and stops when you stop talking about it. There are two ways of looking at that, one is: that's true, because you start experience in as soon as you see the poster of something you start experience in it, start imagining it. And to fill that space with content is much more interesting than just waiting till you show up on the night. And also to have echoes of the show reach you afterwards, to particularly

alter or shift your experience a little bit or feed something. I think is really interesting.

Secondly I think there is something different about fictional things that come to you in your real life is different than you going to visit a fictional to which you bring your real life. There's a difference between what that experience does for you, with you and I think I'm interested in both. I don't necessarily have to combine them on all projects but I think in an ideal world I would, because I think they resonate with you as an audience of a different level. And I think something that comes to you, that the bleeds into your life and becomes part of something more daily, more yours, more routine. Yeah, just inserts, insert story or themes or you're thinking. It alters that in a way, I think, that is really, really interesting.

All of us hope, maybe we have just taken it very literally, every artists in whatever medium hopes that when you're finished, the product, you then take it with you in your head. And it alters you, or stays with you in some way. Even if it doesn't alter you it just stays with you, it is now part of you. I think doing what we do, has taken that slightly literally, sort of sending it to you before and after, so it is already with you or stays with you quite literally afterwards, in a different manner than actually physically being present in the space.

H: Do you think that, do you feel like you're reacting, like the forms you use, do you think they are reacting... Obviously, all art reacts to society now, but particularly to this drive towards personalisation, the hyper local, or the increasing interactive experience is that we are thrown at, the gamification of this, and that...? Do you think you're staking this is a cultural space as well as a consumer...?

A: Yeah, I think that would be a nice way of putting it. Because I don't... I think this is a really interesting space, a really important space, and I think it should be made a cultural space. It doesn't mean that there isn't another space where it's not incredibly, in my Eyes, raped for other purposes, like selling stuff. I also really don't like gamification, making us better humans by playing, I find it incredibly dystopian.

In that sense, I think it is really important that this is a cultural space and if I'm doing anything... I don't think I'm doing something in response to the other things being there, there is this new space opening up in which people have experiences and I think is really interesting space. I think it's a great space for reflection, and I think that is where art and theatre... Where we come in. We should put our little flags down, standing there and go 'come to our shoppers is going to be amazing.' if I was driven, very much in response to other people working within that space I think I would cry myself to sleep every night. Because I do think there is ugly stuff out there and that is really worrying. I don't think I'm driven particularly against that, although I don't like it, it is more a positive impulse in wanting to create work, in this exciting new space.

H: Are you concerned about the greater ethical decisions involved in bringing people more wholly into something, rather than something that they are just looking at?

A: I don't know... Yes and no. Yes I am concerned because I take it incredibly great care in my way, with how I deal with that. Which obviously points towards the concern that, if you don't, it's going to be unhelpful at best, and dangerous at worse. And I think danger is a really big word in this context. I also think that is the only thing that I can do, I have been on the stage a couple of times trying to answer that question and I've never fully... I think this work is powerful that's why make it, that means that it can be power for good and power for bad. I think that it is really important, I can talk a little bit about how I think about care or pastoral care around it, or how to think about audiences, but it has to do about your attitude to your audience. We talk about love, which is loveliness which is not a pink fluffy bunny, if you lead someone to a dark place to make sure there is enough facilitation that the piece itself brings them out, and to keep checking is there anyone left behind. And we're very careful with that, and I think it is incredibly important. I think there is some bad work out there, I think bad theatre, to be honest I'm yet to see the bad theatre, interactive theatre shows that will push people over an edge that otherwise they might have been pushed over at bus 243 on a particularly grim Friday night. That sounds horrible, I don't mean that, I just mean that... I am putting it in the most horrible way. I mean that there is only so much you can do to create a safe environment. And even when you fuck that up, there is only so much damage you can do with it. I think if someone is going to be aggressive in interactive theatre show, there is something that they bring with them to that show. I have never seen the work that made me go, 'god, that completely altered my personality, it showed me something about myself'. But I do think, I do have simultaneously a big worry about, there is a lot of work made that there is no care is taken for the audience. And I think it's not fair, and I just don't understand how you want to make work that is so audience-centric and then don't give a fuck about your audience. I genuinely don't get it.

H: Do you think there's any context in which it could be truly damaging? Like some kind of participatory theatre experience in a very different culture or a very different context?

A: I think, hypothetically, yes. But it sort of feels like you really need to try, because what you create, in participatory theatre mostly, or at least at the brand that I'm part of, is a community in a room. Which will, even if you as a theatre... Let's just say that there is now theatre being well meaning but utterly shit. The audience will band together, and also the fictional will be broken really quickly. I remember being, I've been to one really shit show, and funnily enough, I was in pre-rehearsal with some actors who were talking about contracts with audiences. And someone else brought up that show, as a particular example where [they] got it completely wrong, and it became really ritualistic and a bit freaky, and also you really didn't know what to do. You didn't know what to do because that was exactly what they wanted you to do, which all felt a little bit totalitarian basically. But basically, the audience didn't go with it, because they weren't... I think audience is a very good is switching themselves off, especially collectively, sort of going, 'humph.' And then it becomes embarrassing quite quickly, it

just become slightly embarrassing. There is something else about one-on-one shows that, because there isn't their support from your peers, that goes 'really?' Because you only need one person to go 'really?' because everyone else who was thinking 'really' will join them in that. I think one on ones may be, I have made less one-on-one performances so my thinking is probably less acute on it. I think there is a more dangerous territory, because I don't have a peer group that will help me rise up. I went to see Ontroerend Goed's... Was it just called *Audience*? And my audience as having nothing of it, and it was quite clear. I think the audiences are quite good at asserting themselves as long as they have the safety of being an audience rather than an individual.

H: So, got 5 minutes, so this is the following question. Which is fine because I think I asked everything that wasn't also filled in by [Tassos]... He said, very emphatically, that this work is powerful. What do you think it is that makes it powerful?

A: Because it is about you. And a response to you. I think there is a big difference between a lot of art and this, is that not only can you lose yourself in it, which is what art has over reality, it also responds to the way you lose yourself in it. And it starts reflecting you back, which will then alter you again, which will then alter it again. And I think that dialogue is incredibly fascinating, and incredibly exciting. And I think that, is for me, with the power lies. The work is not about the human condition, it is about you. It is also about the human condition, but it about you.

H: And how you are that human condition.

A: Yes. Also just in this point on time. Tomorrow you might have a completely different show if you had to come again. I also think that it's a much stronger shared experience to be active together than to be passive together, so I think how people respond and look at each other as an audience in interactive work, or as an audience in non interactive work is completely different. And I'm really interesting that dynamic as well. Both *Art Heist*, *Small Town Anywhere* and *Early Days* as well have, something I feel really strongly about, is a space at the end where people meet each other. Where the story sort of stops, and it is almost like a meta-place. That sounds really grand, but it basically meant that we were serving wine in a room after *Small Town Anywhere* and it always involves wine. And with *Art Heist* we have a special secret room where we all have a drink together. With *Early Days* there was something similar where there is a moment with a group, can reflect on being a group, in all its dimensions. I think also, because what I think is really interesting, is that the work has so many different resonances, because it is partly authored by a group of clever people, like all art is, where one or X amount of clever people coming together and create something for others to *consume*. Horrible word. But with this work there is that, in my case always, group of people coming together making something that I think he's beautiful and has some values on different levels. By then it is finished far more than anything else, and I have know I've had this will people say, but all theatre is only finished in between... But it's not. It is, but on a very different level than this. I think the co-authoring the role of the audience,

even every individual audience member is very much bigger than anything else that I have seen that is interesting. There is a Haikou role authoring football as well, I'm sure. More in a way. Although it is very cathartic I'm told. It is less meaningful, and it is less about exploring worlds and it is less... It's just a game. Which is great, and games are really exciting and really good, but I think what I am really interested in is not making just a game. But somehow reflecting the world and reflecting you, and creating a space in which you can reflect on the world. And yourself and your role in it, and how... To be part of this network that may be or may not represent them that would that you're part of and the wider world. So that...

[End of relevant speech.]

Interview with Ant Hampton, completed on the 24th February 2012.

[H: introduction, explains ethical requirements, explains thesis chapter, etc.]

A: I'm thinking already about that, that in a way I'm happier with 'interactive' than 'immersive'

H: OK

A: I've been thinking about this quite a lot, haven't really managed to articulate things very well myself either, but-

H: And my questions are, erm, I think I have much better questions about *This Is Not My Voice Speaking* (TINMVS) than I do about other things, because I came across *Wondermart*, at Inbetween Time, or Mayfest, I don't know-

A: I couldn't say

H: Because that's not you, is it-

A: No that's Sylvia, although I, although we started working on it together, we did a research period in New York and we – it was pretty interesting but actually that was just at the time when we decided to call it quits, after *Etiquette*, and yeah we basically there was a decision that I'd carry on with the piece that I was making; *Guru Guru*, and that she would carry on with *Wondermart*, and I think that there, it has been through various different versions – I think she did one for solo, the solo one then became the main one, but when it first started it was for two people, then she stopped doing that, then I think she made it for two people again, which I haven't yet done.

H: I think I have it for one person, because the title of the track is 'WM_Single', also it only involves one person, so-

A: Yeah, OK, so anyway there's that.

H: So I think that the best place to start is for you to just tell me a little about your background and where you're coming at things from, and how you've got to where you are now.

A: Yeah, yeah sure, yeah because it's all pretty much in a line, it hasn't really been so, I come from a theatre background and not an academic one, I went to university in Hull and quit after 4 weeks, and just went to Paris to train as an actor and, it was sort of actor's training; the Le Coq school in Paris. So I did the two years there and then after that I just started making work, and then I met Sylvia in '98 and we began working together in '99 and had started Rotozaza just before that, and our first work was – the first Rotozaza work was mostly sort of quite fragmented, deliberately not particularly narrative lines, I guess what you would say at the time was 'visual theatre' – and but very quickly, very early on, what happened was that I was invited to – you may have read this on my website, I don't know, the stuff about the instructions and where that started from – but it was just to do something in Paris in '99 at a friend's festival, and I didn't know what I wanted to do, except that I had some friends in Paris, who I loved, artists who were very inspiring to me, and there's this one guy called Henri, who's still a very good friend and he's sort of totally in, you know, totally on his own terms artist, you – sometimes he'll do things and you wouldn't even really know they're art. Like he rearranges weeds in this kind of urban wasteland, and then sort of categorising these things, all sorts of strange things like that, and then he's, he's not at all a performer, but I just suddenly thought of him, and thought how exciting it would be to see him onstage, what – and immediately I was thinking 'what do I mean by that?' The idea of him actually rehearsing with me and asking him to submit to the whole kind of theatre framework was just sort of horrific, that didn't appeal to me at all but what did was the idea of him just being himself onstage, and people understanding that he was being himself and just looking at this guy, on stage, and so I thought 'how are we going to get to that?' And I thought maybe if I devised a way to make – to basically lift all responsibility to assume the role of an actor in a situation from his shoulders, but nevertheless, to kind of, use the kind of theatre framework so his essence in a sense comes out. So I thought well I'll just write a list of instructions and ask him to, to follow them, and I worked with a very close friend called Sam Breton, who I still work with, and he and I made this pre-recorded list of instructions with quite peculiar, particular voice, who I ended up using quite a lot in the following year. And we tried it out, in the festival, in French the first time, and it was fascinating. And we, we actually set up three nights with three different people, because we thought if we're going to do all this work, there's no point in only doing it for Henri, let's try it with other people and see what happens. And the second night we did it with an actor, and the third night we did it with someone else who wasn't an actor, and it was just fascinating each night. To be honest the second night was just kind of ridiculous, he wasn't a great actor, and there was a screen that went up that sort of said 'it's ok, I'm ok about being here, because this is my job', and that screen just came sort of crashing down at one point, so that was a completely different dynamic to what happened with Henri, because he just, it was incredibly beautiful to see somebody who really couldn't give a shit about whether people were watching him or not, whether people bought a ticket, but at the same time was happy to invest and was in the

thing, had understood that it was only going to be interesting if he really tried at all points to do these things, but he was relaxed about it in a way that I don't think a performer – a professional performer – could ever be; really relaxed. There's thing alike, he had to come down from the top of ladder through this kind of a lot of noise towards a basket that came down from the top, and there was the sound of a baby, along with this kind of music, and it said take it out of the basket and unwrap it, it turned out to be a watermelon, and he held out the water melon, and a knife comes in behind on the floor and says 'cut the watermelon to bits' and so he doesn't – he looks around, he didn't see the knife, and so he checks his pockets, and his pockets – were all loaded with stuff for later, he's constantly in the show being told to 'look into your left inside pocket, tell us what you find' – and he pulls out this gun from one pocket and puts it back, and says 'oh, how am I going to cut it to bits' and so, and then he finds the label from the supermarket, and he just peels the label off, and details like that it was just so – and then he just, he held it above his head and just let it fall on the floor, and it broke perfectly into two bits, and it was just this kind of fantastic... I mean tiny little details like that, just finding someone, and of course at the time I didn't really realise what I was doing, and later, well, bit by bit I started to understand that it was a lot about an equalising power balance between the stage and the audience and the- what was interesting to me was not to – was to set up a situation where the audience were not being dominated by something. And where you're sharing in the event. In the sense that you really do not know what's going to happen next, and neither does the person onstage, normally there's this idea that everything's all prepared there [on stage], they know what they're doing, we just, take the effect of their skills and their inventiveness, and their ability or whatever, whereas here it was more just sort of like following someone negotiating a structure, so there was still craft as a backdrop, which was our work, but in terms of performance there was a risk being shared, so it's fundamentally, I mean this is the thing that really stayed throughout all my work, is this idea of trying to negotiate this power balance and what it means to be sharing in a shared risk situation like that, so then this show for 2 or 3 years we would go back to doing the visual theatre kind of stuff, and then I would be doing instruction based stuff, and then we also did a lot of quite large scale site-specific things, and then the instruction stuff, working their way into the theatre work and looking at more lyrical ways of playing with instructions within language and stuff, and where else do instructions occur, in that comparative form, and that sort of thing.

H: And is this all happening in theatre buildings at that point?

A: Yeah, sort of, pretty much. Yeah, theatre buildings, and spaces that have been converted into theatres. We used to do quite a lot of stuff down with Shunt in the first space they had down in Bethnal Green, that kind of thing, and yeah, some of it was without Sylvia, some of it was with her. I did a piece – this first piece was called *Bloke* – and it was always actually for men just simply because it had been written really with Henri in mind, and it felt like ok to transpose that onto other men, but it just, I think it was also because there was an element of gender confusion within the

piece at a certain point where he, he puts on a tutu and this kind of strange mask with rosy cheeks and – so there's this kind of really quite standard stupid theatre props, sort of deliberately quite kind of poor, like that – anyway so that was the first piece and it sort of set everything up, then I did this other piece with Glen Neeth (??), called *Rom-Com* for two people, that was involving headphones, and in fact, *Bloke* had various different variations and when we came to do it in English for the first time we incorporated headphones into that, and so I started becoming interested in where are these sort of levels of – you know you can give an instruction and the audience is aware of what that instruction is at the same time as the other person or the person on stage, or you can conceal the instruction, so there's all these – and you know, if you conceal it and you then only get the effect of what's happening, in *Bloke*, in fact, at a certain point it says 'what's in the bin?' and he goes and looks in the bin – there's a pair of headphones in there – and it says 'put them on' so he puts them on, and then from there on you don't hear the voice anymore and you just see, you see what he's hearing as text above, so it's saying 'stand on X, look at the audience, hold your hands out, smile, relax' and suddenly there was this distance and it was really easy to watch all of a sudden, it was really strange to see this because before you're hearing the voice and totally imaging what he might do, and how he might negotiate each of the things one-by-one, and suddenly there was a slight distance. And then we started to lie with the text we give the audience, so it said 'look at your – look at the image on the wall' and he'd already drawn a rough stickman version of himself on the wall, and it says 'what do you think about that?' And he runs over and hugs the image, you know, so just starting to play with this discrepancy, and you start to think 'oh ok I can't trust the sign after all' so you're having to start putting yourself back in the situation, it was about kind of leading the audience through in a way that wasn't the – what the stakes were with these different modes of presentation were in a way, you know, what was being concealed, what was easier to deal with but what you were losing out as a result, where you were no longer directly in control of what you were perceiving, and so all that kind of thing started intriguing me, and then, the big thing that happened was when I was invited up to Sheffield to help out with a week of work between Forced Ents and Jerome Bell (??) and it wasn't a particularly successful week for Jerome, he was trying to look at ways to create a second 'the show must go on' I don't know if you know the show -? 20 people onstage, a really fantastic piece, and he was trying to make a second one, but the way that the Forced Entertainment lot were really just taking apart ideas, and the way that there was just room full of 30 people just thinking for minutes on end without anyone speaking, I was just like 'oh my god, finally, there are people here who are alright about doing this' because I think that the whole thing with Le Coq there's this whole kind of stigma about not being on your feet, like constantly having to just do, don't think, this kind of anti-intellectual approach, which had always bugged me but at the same time I realised that I needed to kind of push myself into that and get away from my natural comfort zone. But finally there I saw that it was possible, it was good, it was worthwhile, and

so I wanted to do that. So I went back to London and I set up a research thing for a couple of weeks with like 7 of my favourite people, basically, from different fields in the arts, and to research all the different potential applications of this way of making theatre, basically the unrehearsed performer. And, one other thing that's probably useful to say about this kind of work because we subsequently made about 8 years of work around this sort of thing, many different kinds of work, choreographic pieces, and one quite elaborate one called *Double Think* which mixed rehearsed performers with unrehearsed ones and so on, but one reason, major part of it which we'll come to in the more recent stuff with headphones and things, is it wasn't an improvisation – like I – a lot of people would say when I tried to explain it was that this is some kind of improvisation, some kind of game, and I'm personally not interested in gaming, at all. I'm not interested in sport, or really any kind of competitive thing, I know that there's now more of the drive towards exploratory gaming, all this sort of thing, but I don't really feel like I'm interested in that either, because what it all comes down to is this onus on sort of, inventiveness and-

H: Mm, there's certainly a difference between games and play, in that games are – I think Tassos from Coney describes games as crystallisations of play, so they are formal structures in which play happens, and that's what a game is, and, whereas play is, a very different more slippery thing that is – at the heart of -like people are sort of, yes, when I saw the video of TINMVS, people playing with the record player, they're playing with things, but it's not a game, even though it's a structure, that they're playing in because it's not, um, like the formal presentation of the definition of game is thought to be something along the line of 'opted for obstacles, that you choose to tackle'. So it's the difference between organising a pack of cards in suit and ascending order, and playing solitaire; the end is the same result, but the obstacle with solitaire is that you arrange them in a certain way, and you only reveal them in a certain way. And you have to try and do the thing, so I don't think I'd ever describe your work as a game, but I think I'd describe it as playful, but probably not in the terms that you want to reject, which is-

A: Because the thing is that I was – in a way, it's not so clear cut, in a sense I tell the guy to stand on the X and smile, and there's not really much more that you want to happen, but at the same time it's never just smiling, it's like 'how do you do that?' There's just so many different ways. And even if the guy is sincere, you have a hundred people sincerely smiling, and you've got a hundred different smiles, and in a way those sort of, any kind of basic thing like that is suddenly a frame around their individuality, that they're – so it's a window into to seeing them for who they are in a way. So these shows for me were more about celebrating the people who were doing them, and their particularities, by not allowing them to do everything that they want . And for me a big part of it was saying, 'here's people who are not trying to be clever, who are not trying to be inventive, they're just trying to get from A to B and just deal with the situation'. Because I think that as soon as you do have further inventive stuff happening on stage with an audience watching, then that relationship –

you've basically got an audience thinking at a certain point 'oh, I would never have thought of doing that', and yeah, that can turn into an entertaining experience, but more of the same circus that we have everywhere else. I mean what's curious to me is to see struggle, to see, to kind of frame the clumsiness and to sort of heighten people's awareness of the contingencies involved. And so – that's all there. And at a certain point – actually very early on to be honest – in 2001 we had this idea to make *Etiquette*, and we tried to make it, and we gave up because it was just at the time was just beyond us. It was a lot to do with technicalities and practicalities of – and in fact when we came back to it 7 years later, even with all the experience of working with the instructions and that experience meant that we were much more aware of what we had to do, but it was really hard because you basically, within the audio, you have, rather within the experience for one person, you have between the two people, and within the half hour that we set ourselves, you've got stuff for them to hear, as in just pure content, the instructions which they need to understand and transfer into either speech or action, and the audio or the performance, coming from the person opposite them, plus an awareness of what's going around them in a space because it was a kind of site-specific thing in a café. Plus a kind of, you know, time and space to reflect on what's actually going on in total, so there's all these different things that need to be balanced, in the – in every moment that they're involved in it, and in a certain way we thought, 'well actually it's kind of interesting to saturate the time as well'. A lot of people will find with these shows that it's more than you can deal with in the moment and in a sense you kind of – you sort of push the moment of reflecting on it for later, you deal with that afterwards. Which I've always – I'm always really kind of glad about that in a way, I quit like being able to fill up the experience, so you're right on the edge of being able to deal with it. And *Etiquette* was always the idea for that piece to begin with was to create a sort of more of a marketable object which – we always imagined it would be a little box with a button on it and two headphones coming out of it, that we could just sort of sell, as a thing, but we gave up on that idea because we came back to having a lot of faith in the theatre framework, and more than anything else the special investment that people have when they go to a theatre, or they go within the framework of a theatre festival or something and say 'well, ok, this is part of this programme, there's a curator who's deliberately put that in there, there's, it's here for two weeks'. And subsequently in the other shows there's always been this sort of 'do we just release a download of this,' and I've come to really not – I mean I've got tonnes of people's work on my computer, that I still haven't done, that's been there for months, like all these Guardian podcasts, that I still haven't done any of them, just because I can do them whenever, so don't.

H: Actually most of the Guardian Podcasts I can't do, because I don't have bath, I don't live near like the landmarks that are required, and –

A: So, but the whole idea with *Etiquette* was, and really for me it's pretty much the rule with anything I've done, is about – not just to do audio-walks and – you know I love all that stuff, when Janet Cardiff's piece first

came out it was a big inspiration, the Art Angel piece that she did – but for me it was always about, it is always about unrehearsed performance, still -

H: Is it a kind of rebellion against the idea of 'experts'? That's important to you?

A: Sort of, sort of, I mean I really dislike, I can very easily become allergic to actors, let's say, and actors performance's...

H: I'm very bored of Actor Voice at the moment.

A: Yeah

H: When you sit in a small theatre and people do, like, voices that would carry in the National.

A: Yeah, yeah, and even on Radio 4 and god knows what, that kind of thing, but then on the other hand I still love lots of theatre so it's not so much that. It's more, I mean in following the line through all the different work, a lot, basically we did all these different shows; *Double Think*, *Oof*, all the *Punta* – 1 2 and 3, many different shows like this, *RomCom*, and all the performers who were in it they would just say how interesting it was to kind of be relieved of responsibility, in this situation, some of them were professional performers, others were not, some of these actually needed more of a professional approach, or, you know, they could even become a kind of performance sport sometimes, but only insofar as they actually had to pull back from what they normally, that what on the job they normally did. But it was this idea that suddenly the experience of being unrehearsed, and committing to instructions, and just letting yourself be guided through this thing, that that was in a way entertaining, for a start and that, then we suddenly thought 'well, we can mix that, we can give an audience both sides' you know, we can give them the side of normal audience watching an unrehearsed performer, and then just switch that and have it the other way round and that's what happens in conversation anyway, and we can do this anywhere, we can stick it in a cafe, and wouldn't that be strange because then this, this very unusual experience was happening in a public space, and no one else would be that aware that it was happening, so that's how *Etiquette* came about, and that was the thinking around it, and I've tried to, in a way, be quite careful about what I'm exploring with my work since then, to not let it just be about audio, not let it be about just headphones or... And in a way this is why I'm, I'm not so interested in the idea of immersive theatre, because to me it kind of goes hand-in-hand with the idea of effect, and not really being that interested with where you are.

H: So you're interested in the moment more than the experience?

A: Erm, well I think that it's such a wishy-washy term, to say 'the experience' because for me the experience can be absolutely about the moment [...] I do distrust, generally, live work which is kind of more than anything geared towards representation – generally I just feel like it's kind of a waste of time, there's so much better done in the cinema, and other performance. So if I'm – and right from the start I was thinking if I'm going to be doing – if I'm a live artist, then let's assume that and let's say 'what's the point in doing something in live form', like what can you do live that you can't do in any other form.

H: And yet you play so much with the recorded.

A: Yeah

H: And that's a massive feature of TINMVS, it's kind of a re-revelation what recorded actually means.

A: Totally, and going right back to *Bloke*, the decision to have that voice recorded was really key, because it meant that there's a – and you're right this is a big thing in pretty much everything I've done, then it pits the human variable against the non-variable fixed structured craft, which is what we do. So, and subsequently then, more recently I've been kind of more and more interested in a more philosophical look at the voice, and the pre-recorded voice, especially, and our relationships to these things which are basically, still, to most humans, very uncanny, even if we're totally used to having voices all around us, they're still weird.

H: Yes, and that repeated line in TINMVS which is 'this is normal'.

A: Yeah, yeah.

H: Which is just-

A: I mean that's lifted from your average instruction manual.

H: But still, doubly you think this is normal, but actually you just synced this up. And this is a man speaking with a woman's voice, you know-

A: Yeah, sure.

H: So it's not the act of listening on headphones that interests you, it's not the interfaces which are of interest to you, it's our functional way of getting to people, both committing performance without rehearsal, and watching it.

A: Yeah, I mean, I'm constantly kind of attracted to new forms and the whole idea of headphones, generally, of course it's interesting to me. But in terms of what I'm really trying to look for, and do, it's much more about negotiating this step-by-step thing of instructions and even together with someone else, and sort of dividing up the experience so half the time it's you struggling with this thing and half the time it's seeing someone else struggling with it. Sometimes not even- sometimes it's not even about struggle, but there's a challenge there. And the challenge is itself performative, so it's a constant, generative, give and take thing. Whereas for me, immersive theatre *generally*, and I'm sure there's loads of exceptions to this, and it could be that I've not even really understood, but to me it seems like immersive theatre is more about work which – pretty much kind of sews up the whole experience in terms of 'this is the environment' – maybe starts from the real world but kind of puts a filter over the whole thing, and takes you away somewhere. And for me that's only interesting if you're going to cut the strings at a certain point and come crashing back down and deal with the real world.

H: So are you interested in embedding, or is there something about making people re-aware of the everyday world which is...

A: Yeah, yeah, definitely, absolutely – it's a bit of both, and for that quite often you have to tweak and make strange again the world, it's a lot about de-familiarising, and de-familiarising the everyday, and, or what has become the everyday, but which is actually in fact quite strange, so it's more what humans have made of the everyday. And, I mean yeah, it's also about how back when I was doing *Bloke*, it was, in the couple of years

after that which was also a lot to do with meeting Tim, and getting to know the Forced Entertainment work, one of the – just sort of understanding the difference between the work that says 'you're not even here' and 'this is not the person in front of you' and the work which says, you know, 'you are here, this is the room where things are going to happen, here, I'm looking at you, I'm speaking, what about that? And now I'm going to pretend to be someone else, what about that?' And, you know, call it what you want; post-dramatic, non-representative, performance art vs. theatre, you know, all of this thing it's – I sort of realised really on that I was interested in at least playing with that line, I didn't want to be purist either way, but I definitely introducing the idea of not trusting, but pure representation. And for me the idea of immersive work, too often doesn't ask enough questions, really, of what is really going on, it's more just sort of plunging you into some kind of 'wow' thing.

H: I think some of it that – like Coney's *A Small Town Anywhere* – Tassos always talks about the thing that games do well, or that play does well, is holding the 'what is' and the 'what if' in the same space – because instead of just watching something, by being immersed in it, you're doing it as well so you are the 'what is' and you're asked 'what if' – but they always provide, like, decompression areas, like afterwards, so they'll buy everyone in the audience a glass of wine and provide them with a place to drink it, and that's where the reflection happens that, he thinks, that sort of turns it into something that's, that's when you are asked to examine 'yeah, I did that' and 'what does that actually mean, to me, now I'm not 'what if', I'm just 'what is'. The tension between those two places is sort of managed, so I think it can be managed, but mostly, it's kind of at the more escapist end of immersion it can be more problematic.

So your kind of interests which are sort of coming out are this idea of levelling between those on a stage, and those off it, or those performing and those not performing, instructions, re-revealing the everyday and playing with public space. Is that driven by an overall politics that you have? Or is it all sort of aesthetic? And obviously aesthetics can be political and stuff so... Do you, are you 'anti capitalist' are you 'railing against the messages that are sent to us by cafes' and that's why you're putting people in there, or is it more of a kind of-

A: No I'm very capitalist. I have got a lot of capitalism in me. And to be honest I don't really know anyone who doesn't. Of course I have my political thoughts, and I'm interested in this or that, but, I just, I actually I love cafés. In fact most of the shows that I've done have been for places that I love in some way, I want to look at why people go there, and what is it, what is it about these spaces that pulls out certain things from people, and the kind of conversation that you have in cafés, the idea of people just losing, in a way, the other people, that through a good conversation, is interesting to me. Because it's a different kind of, a different kind of going away, where you can come back into the coffee and appreciate 'wow it's been two hours' and that sort of – that sort of idea of going away was kind of more interesting to me than any representation – this idea of a bubble, that kind of public/private.

H: And that's definitely in the library piece, as well-

- A: Yes, sure, exactly, yeah. But no it's not kind of guided by any on particular kind of political -
- H: And is there like a social intent to any of it?
- A: I'm not sure, yeah insofar as what I've described about the mistrust of representation and the – I mean it's fundamentally also about trying to understand how people are living, and being in the world, and, of course one of the biggest challenges now is to try and get people to be more aware of media, what media is, and actually the whole idea that artists now are choosing what media to be in, or finding themselves in one or other media is funny, because so recently there was basically painting, maybe music, but even music was live, there was no recording anything and suddenly through reproducible media we've got all these different forms, that feel very carefully laid out in all their separate fields, but what it comes down to is that you've got live work, and you've got work that isn't live. You can talk about 2D painting, photography, cinema, whatever, but I think now the key thing is whether or not it's being done live, in front of people, and so the fact that your average person spends at least 8 hours a day looking at a screen, it's, in a way you think, 'well, ok, it's not just the arts which are a minority, it's the actual experience in people's lives which is a minority' – like of actually being aware of what's happening live, around you. And of being rooted in the world in that sense, and of course this is from a totally kind of privileged so-called developed world perspective, and so on. So I mean, from that side of things, of course there's like a lot of social interest, and also now I'm working more on actual specific content which is more trying to be precise about certain issues, like – but this, I could very easily start talking about another strand of my work which is not until now, hasn't been that related to the auto-theatre work that it's this whole thing that I worked with Greg a lot on, called *The Other People*, and the new work that I'm doing is going to be a sort of fusion of the two, basically an encounter with some Chinese migrant workers, who had been working on the iPhone plant who were poisoned, and you sort of meet them through a holographic auto-cue situation whereby their faces are kind of overlaid over yours, so you meet them by them sort of occupying your faces and so on. So it's a sort of half live portrait, half live encounter, sort of documentary, thing, I'm sort of trying to break down these boundaries, these singular ways of the Victim, or one of millions, or generally, faceless, anonymous people.
- H: Or people who don't enter your mind at all.
- A: Yeah, that their work is around is constantly as well.
- H: Whose hands touch the things that you touch.
- A: Yeah, totally, totally, so this is something I'm working on now, but I would say generally that the starting point of the work, for me, for the work that I do is not, it's not a kind of political, one-message thing on my mind, no.
- H: Do you think that you're responding to the rate of change in the 'digital age' – like how pervasive media is becoming? Like you're not challenging the message, but how it's a fact that it's there, and that we should look at it, as well as through it.
- A: Yeah, yeah, exactly, because there is no 'one message'.

H: OK, cool, I think I have a handle on that... [Pause.] Are you particularly interested in duo-experiences or group experiences or is it just what kind of comes to each project as feeling suitable, so did *Etiquette*, the library piece, sorry I can't ever quite remember it's name.

A: *The Quiet Volume*

H: *The Quiet Volume*, I keep on coming up with 'The Quiet Voice', or something – that was for two, but then the TINMVS, although it involved two sets of instructions, I got a sense from the video that more than one pair were in at any one time.

A: It's either 2, or 3 or 4.

H: OK

A: But there's always just one or zero

H: OK

A: So there's 3 – if there's 4 people there's 3 zeroes and 1 one, there's always only 1 one.

H: I guess because they're the-

A: The zeroes have a lot more to do, if they have help then that's good.

H: Yeah.

A: But you know, generally it's not, it's completely based on whatever the project is for yeah. A lot of them, the one-on-one situation is very often the most obvious to turn to for the generative approach because it's just – there's just a very nice flow that happens but yeah, there's 3 pieces now that are group pieces; *Guru Guru*, a piece called *OK OK* and TINMVS, so all three. I mean it's very clear when you see them that it's totally about the group dynamic and what's happening there. I think that TINMVS is quite different, actually, to pretty much everything else I've done, with the auto-theatre work, also because there's actually very little room for error. So, actually that's not quite true, it still is actually quite flexible, but it works well within a group dynamic, but also for only two people, so that's curious. And similarly a lot of these pieces will work fine for strangers as well as two people who know each other, or a group that know doesn't. It makes for a different experience, but it works fine both ways.

H: Talk to me more, then, about Auto Theatre, and what that means to you, why you felt that you wanted to create a name for it...

A: Basically because I wanted to define for myself what I was doing. In what way that different from existing audio work, like audio walks and things. I wanted to just say what is it I'm actually trying to do.

H: And what is that, to you, how is it?

A: What I described before, that it should be, that it's not just about first-person experience, but that it's about doing things as well as sharing the experience with someone else who is also putting themselves in this risky situation of saying 'yeah I'm unrehearsed and I will follow these instructions'. It's basically the first response to being given an instruction is 'why should I?' And I don't think that enough artists think enough about that, personally. The number of times I've done stuff with headphones and it's said 'ok, do this, this and that' and I'm thinking 'I don't even know what, why I should do this' – of course I *do* know, because I'm an artist and I realise that what the plan is, but I feel like there needs to be a contract, in a way, a contract of goodwill, and of understanding somehow

set up within the work and otherwise it's like, who are you? Why am I doing this? And I think if there's just two people, in a way that's already answered, because you're doing it for someone, you're not just doing it for yourself, or for – if you're told, if you're on your own somewhere and you're told to go somewhere and you know, scratch your leg and there's no one watching you, you think 'I can imagine myself doing this, I don't really want to *do* it'. So-

H: It's not just a conversation between a recording, and a person, there are two people at least, so there's someone else who is the purpose..

A: Yeah, so, if I – right at the start of *Etiquette* it says 'put all 10 fingers on the table' and then that becomes the sound of a piano, and for you and then you put the finger on the table, and then that sound gets kind of sucked away, so you kind of immediately understand that you're just going to do these things, and you don't know why but it will come, and if it doesn't come to you then it will come to the other person. So that there's a – it just sort of immediately sets up, or tries to answer that question of 'why should I?' But for me it's about this setting up – the auto theatre idea in a way is just this idea of how you can make a generative piece and the fact that's how we interact anyway, as humans, we give and take, we give a little bit, and then we shut up and we take a little bit; and in conversation at least, and of course that's how we work with all sort of other things.

H: So, having written the instructions, how much authorial control do you think you retain, are you interested in retaining

A: Authorial control?

H: As author of the thing.

A: That's interesting because I always, I'm always, I mean I always love the idea that the show, itself is not live, it's always there, if you own the experience, so it's, and that makes it quite strange in talking about it with people who have done the show. They say oh 'I loved the show' and I think, 'well that's great, and I'm really glad to hear it, but in a way that's good for you, because, because it's yours, because there wasn't anyone else around.' I mean for me this is also part of this whole idea about that if people don't say 'oh, well what you do is improvisation' they'll say 'it's participative theatre' and of course that raises people's hackles because – it's just so-

H: Scary!

A: Yeah it's this idea, but I think that's primarily because most people think of participatory theatre as 'here's the stage with actors on stage who know what's going to happen' – and then you're part of that, and you don't know what's going to happen, and they do. And for me that's what's cringe-y – that's what's uncomfortable, it's because the shared risk is not there, whereas if you and I are alone, negotiating this thing, both exactly on the same level, neither of us having done this before, neither having any idea what was coming then it's a completely different thing.

H: You said you weren't interested in games, so I'm going to assume you haven't played *Portal*?

A: No.

H: Just, it really reminded me a little bit of – *Portal* is a game, *Half Life* was the main game and then there was this extra sort of bonus disk that had a

couple of games on it, one of which was *Portal*, which is a very short puzzle-solving game where you shoot 2 types of gun, and you get 2 holes and you can warp through them, and it's about getting to *there* by shooting through *here*, and jumping through *there*, and it's that kind of thing.

A: Oh, no I did hear about this.

H: And you follow the voice of a computer through all of it, and you follow her instructions until a certain point when you realise that actually she's turned on you, you haven't realised, because you just wake up in this place and – that's the classic start to many video games, because then you learn with the character, you don't feel separate from it, but there was that feeling that I got from the voice in TINMVS – I don't know what it was that made me feel it – but that she could turn on me. And actually – it's that re-examining what it means to follow instructions thing that was important, that I think was the disruption of gender, in the voice, the man speaking and the female voice, and the other things like when it went to a Dictaphone, that only one person could hear, and stuff like that. Would you never have the instructions turn on someone – like how far do you push that, and I guess the ethics of what you ask people to do?

A: You haven't done *Guru Guru* have you?

H: No.

A: Because that's pretty much the closest you get to that.

H: When was that?

A: That's pretty much what does happen. That was the first piece I made after *Etiquette*, and it's still pretty much the most extreme, and you could say, even, ambitious. I mean I really, I really love the piece. Actually I could send you a video of 5 people doing it in a similar way to TINMVS, but less, you really have to be in it, really, to know how fucked up the experience is, really. Because people come out of the show really, like, they can't really speak because they feel like they need the voice, and yet the voice has been totally like chewed up, and spat out the wrong way within the show, so it's totally about trust in systems, and trust being – that trust being... what's the word?

H: Betrayed?

A: Betrayed, or rather... It's a piece about the history of psychoanalysis, and the history of it in reverse; so it starts as a focus group, as this is where we've got to, with Freud's ideas, and it sort of goes back in time until it becomes a group therapy thing, kind of 60s style. But basically what's happening is that there are 6 people, you don't know who you are or what the situation is, you've just got headphones and are sat in a semi-circle looking at a TV, and you start to say 'oh no I think we should have bigger nostrils', 'we'd like a bigger mouth', and this and that, they start building a face through this focus group, a very cringe worthy focus-group situation. And then finally there's the face and they choose a voice for the thing and they say 'yeah that's the voice we want', and it starts speaking to them. It turns out that they're building a therapist for themselves – they're based on received ideas of what a therapist should look and sound like. And then when this therapist is made, it starts to ask you who *you* are, and you find out by the words that you say, and it turns out you're in some kind of

dystopia where in order to deal with the problem of stage fright (because you're all out-of-work actors, with stage fright) that you're wearing headphones which would help you with that situation so it's a kind of medication, or treatment. So it's this very strange kind of dystopia, absurdist environment, which is also quite disturbing – and you've got the voice telling you what to do that knows you really well and the – the 'Guru' character onscreen, but it's not exactly a benign presence on the screen and it starts to want to know more and more about you. It's this idea of – in a way – personal information and data and the kind of currency of that, and that this general idea that it's sucking it up out of you, before you've even really understood what it is yourself. And, and this voice that's guiding you is starting to be corrupted by this system – so over an hour it starts to get more and more chaotic until you're pretty much bereft by the end of it. So that, I could show you that, I should have sent you that before.

H: That would be really useful to see.

In TINMVS, why non-digital formats?

A: Well that was mainly, all these auto-theatre pieces so far have been collaborations with different people, and they're all completely marked by those people's backgrounds and interests, so I worked on that piece with Britt (??) and she has been very heavily involved with research into last generation audio visual gear. Not necessarily vintage, but it's, some of it is, it's interesting that the particular – the slide projector, you still get people using slide projectors sometimes, but it's already it's 'oh, haven't seen one of those for a while' you know. When in fact there's kids aged 18, who have never put a record on before.

H: No, I hadn't, I hadn't heard a record play until about 2 years ago. But I have since bought a record player. Because I got really into a DIY punk scene that only put out tapes and records. I don't know if that's an exclusionist thing, or if it's cheaper, I don't know.

A: But I mean fundamentally it's about the – yeah the same thing we were talking about before, making people aware of – let's just say focussing attention on the – what it means when we say 'solid state', this kind of, either it works or it doesn't. Either it's there or it isn't. Either the voice is there, crystal clear, or isn't there at all. The point at which the sound begins and ends is just like [makes a slicing noise] that. And you don't see anything, your body has got nothing to do with it, your body in a sense that it's either there or it isn't; it's not like you can help it – it's not like you can see the tape trying to go round and all it needs is a little bit of jiggling. It's just either there or it isn't. So it's in a way it's like – it's sort of going back to this idea of a voice in a box and the human voice in any way, all those things to do with identity and the voice, as a kind of lever of thought, yeah, the voice seen from a psychoanalytical perspective. And but also thinking well, what's the difference between the voice coming out of a machine which is as precarious as the human body, and the voice coming out of the machines that we're used to now.

H: I suppose that as – with the digital 0, 1, binary kind of thing, has taken over, the gap between 'what is' and 'what was' – which is what the recording is – has like you say, become 'on' or 'off' and when you use a

non-digital format you're sort of aware of the space between those two things; you can affect a record, because you can spin it faster or slower. I guess it's widening that gap again so that you perhaps more recognise that these are different spaces... is that kind of what you're getting at do you think?

A: Yeah

H: Disagree, if you think that I'm taking-

A: No, no, yeah that's definitely part of it, yeah.

H: OK, so what is your interest in, in the voice, then?

A: I think more than anything else I feel like it's something that is taken for granted, and both in terms of the fact that, both in terms of its effect and the discomfort people have whenever they actually pay attention to what there voice is and what it does. And insofar as it's such a – it's a central component of our identity, and how we read others' identity – I find it kind of amazing that it's not really talked about that much. Even in philosophical terms, there's only a few people who have really made any kind of study of it, one of them is a person whose book I really recommend. This one:

H: *A Voice and Nothing More*

A: This is a great book. And I ended up talking about it with – er – do you know Christoph from Lundhal and Seidl?

H: I definitely know Lundhal and Seidl but I don't know-

A: Yeah, he and I are both quite into that book, I met him, did a job for an art biennale called 'The Manifesto' and one – for various reasons I had to go and record this guy speaking some of his texts, well I asked him if he would do it, and he agreed and we met and became quite close, and yeah, I really enjoy talking with him – I've been very lucky to get to know him. He's a good friend of Žižek, you know Žižek?

H: I just read the quote on the back, yeah [laughs].

A: It's so brilliant, I love it. Yeah and he really goes into this idea of – I mean I could send you a bunch of stuff later about this, but it's really it's to do with, in a way, if the voice is – you've got the kind of aesthetic side of the voice and then you've got the practical side of the voice, as in it's what we use to communicate in a linguistic sense; there's a code.

H: And also the philosophical meaning of 'having a voice' and that kind of thing, I suppose?

A: Yeah, but that's not really in a way about 'The Voice', that's, in terms of the actual thing, the object Voice, you've got the aesthetic qualities of it, as in, is it a nice voice or not a nice voice, what can you do with it, in a sense of can you sing, or whatever. And the effect that has on people. And then you have the effect it has on people in the sense of what words are people using, and the fact that we use words and we rely on our voice to get them out, but then there's this other part of the voice, and that's what he basically looks at. As in – of course there's all this other stuff that comes under 'voice', there's neither one of those other two things – and it's so much about this weird kernel of our, of our identity and our existence, and it's about interiority – becoming exterior – it's about the impossibility to really put your finger on whether it's inside or outside, and in that sense it can be seen to define a – you know, the problem of human

consciousness about our existence, in such a kind of, in a deeply uncomfortable, uncanny way, I think. And the fact that now the whole idea of the recorded voice is so, is such a step towards some kind of attempt at immortality, in a way, there's a fantastic paper all about the history of the recorded laugh; canned laughter; and in a way that encapsulates it in a really nice way because it's so much more tangible, because it's easier to talk about laughter, because it goes beyond the subtle things to do with personal identity and gets into the realm of human spasm, and the point at which the body is out of control, and the fall, and all these things. And of course it has such a clear role in performance as well, especially in terms of its power over an audience, that there's this direct contagious effect of the recorded laugh. And the fact that it's recorded, I mean there was a point where these people would come into the BBC, and they'd operate this weird box that had all the laughs in. And all these recordings of laughter were by people who had actually died by then, so you know, this guy was kind of orchestrating this box of dead people laughing, so even in the backstage technical world of the BBC, it's become a kind of occult object.

- H: I sometimes wonder about the Wilhelm Scream man, and if he's still alive.
- A: What's that?
- H: The same scream used in – I mean if you just YouTube it, you get a compilation and it's like in Disney films, it's in *Indiana Jones*, it's in every action film that you've ever got, and it's just this same scream.
- A: Oh really!
- H: That's used in really like early kinds of stuff as well.
- A: Oh, really, I didn't know that, [writes it down].
- H: Wilhelm, I think... yeah, and I suppose that's less haunting than the laughter of dead people, but, it's an interesting one.
- A: Yeah and I could go on about the voice speaking, and I mean there's the other stuff to do with I guess, more the Beckett side of things; the internal voice and-
- H: People are always freaked out to hear their voices recorded.
- A: Yeah, I mean, of course, because it's the – it's completely outside them, whereas we know our own voice, when they're on that kind of timpani(?) kind of area, neither in nor out, and when you heard your voice, it's totally out.
- H: I wonder if I – I was ever surprised to hear my voice recorded, though. I'm aware it sounds differently, to how my voice sounds – but I don't think I've ever been freaked out by the sound of my recorded voice, and is that something to do with me as a person, or actually, as I was growing up, is it because I was using computers a lot to make -- there was this thing called 'Movie Maker' which was this thing I used to play with when I was about 11 or 12, and you had little digital characters that you moved places and you gave them voices, and you gave them lines, and it was basically make your own movie, but with little avatars, it was like the Sims but you then recorded it and you put clips together and you made a whole movie. So I've actually been listening to my voice recorded, since I was 10, I guess. And I wonder if that is a different, if that's why I have a different relationship maybe to -

A: Yeah, it's interesting, that.

H: Yeah.

A: I think that's quite unusual, even now perhaps, I mean I'm sure that there's more reason for young people to record their voice.

H: Not *just* their voice though, I think that you're right, it's videos, at which point you're just looking at yourself more than you are listening to yourself. Podcasting, I suppose. But it's not really a 'young person' thing to do, is it, a podcast?

A: No, not really, I mean there's probably lots of young people doing it. Yeah I mean for sure the whole thing of recording oneself is so much more ubiquitous now, but I feel like I think for most people it's still quite a weird remove.

H: Yes, I suppose answer machines are the one that everyone would encounter.

A: Mick Dundee: Hello this is Mick Dundee, actually no it's not [laughter] yes all my references are from horrific 80s films.

H: So I think I probably only have 2 more question areas to chat to you about, how's your time looking?

A: Er, I should definitely get going, soon

H: OK, so, these shouldn't take too long, so, the first one: is your interest in clumsiness, and I just wondered if you could talk to me a bit more about what that interest stems from ..?

A: I think that's more to do with, I've got nothing against good craft, and hopefully all my work is crafted well, and hopefully also people can appreciate that when they watch the works, but what I – what I do believe is that and this goes back to the point of making live work, and you know if you contrast it with everything else what defines, in a way, what we're kind of fed by TV, film, all that, is 'slickness', where there are no gaps in the presentation or in the production, there's no clumsiness. Vastly generalised, but generally speaking, you know, how messages are given to us from politicians, from advertising, and anyone else that manages to find some space in between that, is generally the attempt is to do it as slickly and as micromanaged as possible, and for me performance is definitely a chance to celebrate and frame the more – the less sort of polished aspects of how we are, and yeah, for sure, if you're going to be looking at someone onstage or in that sort of kernel model of what it is I'm doing, the relationship between the audience and the performer, yeah, a big part of that is being able to share and accept the idea that somebody is imperfect, as opposed to the slick improviser who's, whose line is it anyway kind of approach. 'Well how does he do that' – it's all going against that in a way. It's a lot more about the gap really between aspirations and how things really are, and how we really are, how difficult things are as well. For me it's the same as Beckett for example, I mean I would always go back to that, again, *Waiting for Godot* is the perfect play, but it's all about clumsiness, it's all about a guy not being able to get his boot on, and even he does, he's in pain, and you know, all these things that are very funny, but only insofar as you don't really know whether to laugh or cry, it's that kind of divide.

- H: You should check out, if you haven't already, *The Oh Fuck Moment*, I think it's at the Soho, soon; it's Chris Thorpe from Third Angel and Unlimited and a poet called Hannah Walker, and it's a piece about fuck ups, massive, massive fuck ups, and it goes really, probably quite literally, but fun, and interestingly, into the idea of the stock we don't – of that we don't put enough stock by failure as a society, and that's the bits that are broken about our political systems and our education systems now -that they are about not admitting failure. And there's- you might enjoy that anyway.
- A: It sound like it, yeah – at the Soho?
- H: Yeah, I think it might even be this weekend or next weekend. So my final question for you is around the idea of event and/or narrative, and if you think that you make events, or if you think you make narrative frameworks, of if you think you make events from which narrative arises, like how do you see your role in making an experience or a story or both.
- A: Oh, well for me there's narrative and then there's story.
- H: OK, so tell me-
- A: For me narrative is just a way of structuring an event, and yeah it's essential for anything that you're doing. And I've never really understood all of these conversations about non-narrative theatre, because I really don't think that it can exist unless you're really doing some sort of 'whatever' thing. I mean it's more that – that in terms of stories, I usually really can't be bothered, either as an audience or as a maker. I never really bother to follow stories, I always get into trouble with films, I'm a very slow reader because I'm always reading the same paragraph over and over again, because I'm interested in how it's been written, or the implications of what they're saying, or, you know. That said, I mean it's not true, I'm a sucker for a good story, but in what I do it's, I'm more interested in the unfolding of an event and how that happens rather than a story necessarily, and for me I personally feel like there's way too much focus put on story in generally, in British theatre, it drives me up the wall. That's why I'm leaving. But yeah, it's I mean, stories are stories, you can – I think to be honest it more often comes down to the thing again of if you're doing live work then, the fact that it's happening live, is always going to be more interesting than any kind of story that you're trying to spin out from that, or overlay onto of it or get inside it, it's more just, let's deal with actually what's happening, in the event, and see where that's going. And for me that's really – I don't know if that answers it?
- H: I think it does. Yeah. And so how would you describe your work, finally?
- A: How would I describe what?
- H: Your work, sort of, finally, is it, an interactive event, or, because obviously you don't like the word 'immersive' – is it-?
- A: Oh, I see.
- H: Is it a theatre event? Is it, uh-?
- A: I think I'd probably have to pass on that and say it would have to depend on which project.
- H: OK.
- A: But I've tried to define the work with – for example the auto-theatre work – that sort of all falls within fairly kind of succinct, a fairly succinct framework, and you know, what I'm trying to do with that project is fairly

clearly defined, and that you could call, there's various different things that I've written.

H: You can choose to not answer that.

A: I'm not really interested in -

H: And I am sort of required by - every chapter has to start with like a billion definitions, and I'm told to write with more certainty about things, and I never feel very certain about anything but admitting uncertainty is a large part of the kind of work that I'm trying to discuss, so-

A: If I had to sell it to a kind of audience who actually cared about those sort of things, which is not very often, it would be, yeah I might use the word interactive, I would definitely not use the word 'immersive' because of the reasons we've talked about, I'd say - I don't know, how is it described -

H: Maybe instruction-based or-?

A: Yeah, self-generated, performance piece for two or however many audience members. [Laughter].

H: Don't worry about it

A: There's probably some examples out there.

H: Brilliant, ok, thank you.

[End of relevant speech].

Interview with Cat Harrison, founding member and artist of the collective 'Non Zero One', completed on the 9th of February 2012.

H: So, Non Zero One is a collective?

C: Yeah, Non Zero One is a collective of six artists. There's myself, Fran Miller, Sarah Butcher, Ivan Gonzalez, John Hunter and Alex Turner. Three boys, three girls. We all met at Royal Holloway University. We were all on the same course, although we all have different skills in different areas. So, my focus is more on live art and performance, well, contemporary performance, which is why I work at arts admin as well. But, as well on the team we have is and Works predominantly as a comedian, John and Sarah are both photographers, Fran trained in dance, Alex more in traditional theatre. So that is kind of why we call ourselves a collective, we try and bring all of those skills together in what we do.

H: So, a performance collective? A theatre collective? What did you say? What kind of collective?

C: An artist collective.

H: Okay, cool.

C: I think we have been told we are theatre and we generally get moved into the theatre category. I think because we tend to have done performances

in theatre buildings, but not necessarily in their performance spaces. So for *Would Like to Meet* at the Barbican we performed in all the public foyer spaces. And went backstage of the theatre, and before that the original *Would Like to Meet* – so the playhouse was all in the bar area – and at the Bush Theatre last year we did a piece called, *This is Where We Got to When You Came in*, and that was done throughout the whole building, going onstage and offstage and stuff. So I think we get pulled into this kind of theatre category, because we worked in those kind of buildings. But I don't think we have ever called ourselves, I don't think we've identified with that just yet, not yet.

H: There aren't many of those places with buildings in the same way, are there?

C: Well yes.

H: Many genres, I suppose.

C: We have done... What we were allowed to do with *The Time Out* and *Hold Hands, Lock Horns* – which is kind of a development piece, a small 10 minute development piece as part of *The Time Out* – was that, because they both more installation based, it wasn't so site-specific, is we were allowed to take them to spaces that are a bit different. So with *Invisible Flock* we took to a shopping mall in Leeds, and *The Time Out* was performed in more like, festivals, and the kind of outside, inside, that kind of thing. Depending on what piece we're doing, I think the higher, kind of, the bigger pieces, the more well known pieces are all being done in theatre buildings. Yeah.

H: So. You have begun to answer my first official question. I have to say that these questions were written a while ago, because they have to then go through an ethics process.

C: Okay... wow.

H: My first question was just tell me a bit about your background, so I guess Royal Holloway is where it...

C: So, royal Holloway is Non Zero One's background. Yeah, we all knew each other, we weren't necessarily best of friends. I think we have become closer now that we are a company, although I did live with John and Fran at the time, when we formed Non Zero One. And actually, it was quite a facilitated coming together, we... As part of our degree, at the end of it, as part of the undergrad, we were asked if we wanted to do a written a dissertation or a practical dissertation. And the practical dissertation was: form a company and make a piece, and that was when we formed Non Zero One.

We made our first rendition of *Would Like to Meet*, which was this very small scale for six people, because we had six examiners, and that was why it was for six people, and taking people in and around this particular area of the university's 'Boiler House'. Which was one of the kind of theatre spaces. And the idea was... The main concept around that piece was, can you miss someone that you have never met? And make a relationship with the voice rather than someone you have met. But at the same time facilitating those six people to make interactions with each other, to see if they felt that that was more of a meaningful connection

than one they were making compared to the voice that was speaking directly to them.

So that was our background and then from that we all happen to get jobs all within the arts, and so now we work fulltime, most of us, in administrative and assistant artist jobs in the arts. And then do our Non Zero One work outside of that. And that is mainly our background... In the three years the journey that we took is, that we came out of university and we noticed that the Southwark Playhouse was just kind of doing lunchtime showings of pieces, we thought it would be fun to try and see if we could recreate the piece in a very different space. So we just did that on a whim, And then it just so happened that a Barbican producer came and saw the show. Because she knew one of the guys, Alex had done some work for her in the past, Alex asked her to come and she really enjoyed the show and commissioned us to do a piece for the Barbican. So that was kind of the September of 2009 and by April 2010 we had done our first show at the Barbican. Which was a whirlwind, I don't think we really expected to ever be able to do that. And then from that we became supported artists at the Basement, because a few of the guys lived in the southeast, and a few of us lived in London. And now all bar one, live in London, so a little bit like 'maybe we shouldn't be South East after all.' And then we became supported artists at the Basement and they really supported us and making an Arts Council grant, which was successful, which allowed us to do *The Time Out*. Which was our first piece that we had done, that we were able to tour, and then we got a commission at the Bush Theatre to do the last ever show in their old space.

H: I definitely read about that.

C: In a pub theatre, yes. They had the space above a pub which they were there for about 40 years, and we did the last piece there, which involved us interviewing a lot of alumni and things like that. And since the Bush piece, which recently won an *Off West End Award* at the weekend which is great – an Offy, apparently. We now have a commission to do a piece for the National Theatre for the Inside Out Festival, which is sort of on all the terraces. And we are in talks about doing maybe a commission for a hotel, but that is in pipeline and then we'll return back to the Barbican in October to do *The Time Out* in their rehearsal space. That's kind of full history. Sorry (laughs).

H: No, that was really useful. To get a sense of actually, that you are quite, like really new. I didn't realise you are so...

C: 2009 we formed. So we're just coming into our third year. Yep.

H: This isn't a written down question, but it... I am really interested in that you would, you doing such formally inventive work at undergrad uni. It's like, I work with a lot of students and I worked with them on making some sound pieces, but only because the proper lecturer had decided that, that's the thing he wanted them to do. And are basically had to force them to do it, by saying these are the remits that you have, you have to do one of these kinds of pieces. Is it something that you had seen, or is it what you're reacting to that made you want to play with...?

C: The story behind that was, obviously it's like a few different things. I think one was that we have a couple of really supportive and inspiring

lecturers, that we both still keep in touch with now. One lecturer called Karen Fricker, who is a theatre critic, and she was just very supportive of our work, and kind of... She's a critic, so she gives us good really good feedback on it, basically.

But another lecturer, Emma Brzezinski, run a course called devising theatre, that... All of us took? I think all of us took. And that was the first time that we had been introduced to artists like Lone Twin and Blast Theory. And as part of that we all went to see *Rider Spoke*, which was on. And we did – as part of their course – we did a piece on top of a car park. Which was very sort of loosely based on... What was it loosely based on? I can't remember, what I remember there being a red carpet and people having their photos taken. But it was kind of installation based and very much away from 'capital T' theatre. And I think that was the first taste that all of us had of this alternative, sort of, world. I guess.

And then, following that, the year after. It just so happened that three of the group, Fran, Sarah, and Alex, and the other three me and John and Ivan, we were put in similar classes, that were also along with the idea of devising. So I think Emma Brzezinski's course was called something else, maybe he was called 'Performance Installation'. And then we did this devising course, and we were both, we were all on this course but in different kind of classes for it. And the piece that we made, me and Ivan and John and some other people, was a durational piece. Ivan really wanted to do a durational piece... But it was a 24 hour thing that was all about self improvement, and it was called *What A Difference A Day Makes*. And the idea was that we had 24 hours to create the perfect versions of ourselves, through various means. And I think that was a real turning point for us, in a way, and for the university, in a way. Because what we demanded from them in order to make that piece, I think changed it, because we were like, well we need the green room but we need it for 24 hours; we we're going to sleep in it, we we're going to eat in it, we're going to put a microwave in there and it's going to be PAT tested and you just going to have to cope with it. We're going to stream it all online, and people can watch it and you're not going to have be worried about what people can see. And yes, the university were very... They didn't fight it, but they were worried about it, concerned about it. I think these are the guys who are like, stage managers who, they were expecting us to come with the lighting plan and a sound. And instead we were coming and saying we want to take over the whole room for 24 hours.

Which doesn't sound like a lot, but for them it was kind of a change.

H: No, I can understand that.

C: Yes, it's an institution, so it is playing the rules in a different way. Luckily Emma Brzezinski, who was also the convener on that course, allowed us to work within that framework and pushed for others to be able to do it. And the stage manager's as well, Sean Brennan and Dan Jones, also, equally, concerned, they had to questions we had to change some things but at the heart of it, there were very supportive of what we did.

And I think that then, allowed us, long story sorry. That then allowed us to, when we came to *Would Like To Meet*, originally we just sat down as a six, and we were like what if you want to, do a piece about what are our

experiences. We are all from different backgrounds, we all from different kind of... Different sorts of histories between us. But one thing in common, that we had felt especially at that point in our university career was a very strong feeling of absence. At the time there were people going missing from our university, there was... It's not funny but, so don't put that I laughed at it but there was a guy called the Hammer Man, and there was an urban myth that he would knock goals on the head with a hammer if they were walking through the streets at night. But it just... But there were also a couple of suicides was in the university, and it's a very small university. There's about 7 or 8000 people at that time, so you knew of everybody and although these weren't people that we were greatly friends with, but I think that kind of affected it. We were all away from home and for some reason absence became a theme of what we were doing. And we came to this conclusion of, that absence of the performer and that we came to this conclusion in our piece. We didn't necessarily want a performer to be the thing that you were watching, we wanted people to really try and experience this feeling of absence. And what is that? And I think In some ways we achieved it, and in some ways we didn't at all. We got a bit side-tracked, but that was the original thinking. And what I think, because we had pushed the university a little bit with the piece that we did, the 24-hour piece, and also the piece that the other guys did as well. Which was a little bit more traditional in terms of performance, but they pushed it in terms of the technology that he wanted to use. I think the almost expecting our year to push them in a way. And it was difficult, originally we had wanted to do a piece that was, every 5 minutes people could go in to. And they said that we wouldn't be able to do that because we had to have finished the whole piece, everyone had to experience a 20 minute or half an hour experience, but and also had to have finished and 3/4 hour. So there was no way we could get six people through and have them finish in that time.

So then we did this thing where they all experienced different things, the examiners. And they really struggled with, how do you mark something when it is an individual experience up from someone else, because you have seen different things. And again, luckily, Emma Brzezinski and Karen Fricker had helped is pushed through that, as we are making over a period of six months. And they really allowed us to push that a little bit, because they were a bit concerned about how they would accurately mark something where six people had seen totally different things, and experience different things. So I think we were really lucky in that sense, from the university's point of view we had such support.

H: Yes. Although that is so... How I think universities should work, they should be supporting...

C: Yes, completely...

H: Inventive and innovative work.

C: And we argued our point, up to that point we have been encouraged to try these different things, the courses that we had taken a lot or encouraging you to think outside the box. So that was our push, it was like, we were thinking outside the box so deal with it, a little bit. And I think as well, we

were a bit sneaky, in that we came so far with it, and didn't really tell anyone. And by the time we got up there we were like, well this is what we have done (laughs), let's hope that you can do with it. And they were great. And in fact all of our lecturers stayed with it, there was really... we had another lecture as well called Collette Conner who actually didn't really enjoy what we did, at all. And was constantly asking us why, I don't like it is individual because you have to, in order to make this individual you're making assumptions about the people who do it. As soon as you stand up and make a piece that involves people walking around and going up steps, you are assuming that that is something that they are able to do. And that was a very good point, and something that stayed with us. And something that is inherent in immersive, if you want to call it that, theatre, or theatre where the audience is no longer an audience but a participant, or a passenger, then you are making assumptions about what that person can do.

H: That is a really big question of mine, and a part of every chapter is looking at this idea of accessibility. Because yes, you actually do have to... Like something that speaks to an audience of 200 from one position on stage doesn't have to assume that much else than they are a brain I guess. Because you can still quite easily translate that into audio captions and many of those things. But the second of things get person specific, not least are you dealing with people who may not be able to walk when you give a description of walk, and if you have asked someone to walk they may be able to move from here to hear and the second you say walk they are completely thrown out of the act, it's not an action they can do. Aside from accessibility, things like that, which are incredibly important, there is also basic assumptions about identity and the things that you are willing to do and let go of.

C: I would contend that a little bit actually. Only because, I think something... I think one of the magical things about what we do, and the thing that I feel very passionately about, because of the framework of it being a theatre piece, or an art piece... Is that total suspension of disbelief. And because you are in this constructed world you challenge what you able to do within that. And so although you're making assumptions about what people can do; so if I asked you, would you throw yourself out of a plane and do a bungee jump, your initial reaction might be no, that's something I'd never do. But in the construction of a world where anything can happen and actually are just posed with that. Initially you might well do it, and I think it's something that *You Me Bum Bum Train* explore with their piece quite a lot. You always have to allow for the 'get out clause', because yes you don't know what people can do, you don't know what individual phobias people may have and really not be comfortable with. So you are always offered a get out clause, but there is something that is powerful and there is something that kind of inhabits you as a person when you put it this position of being in immersive piece of theatre. You can be yourself and you can also be the self that you want to be, or want a test.

H: I think I agree with that to a point, but I think I am thinking more about... So I did a really simple pervasive game for Larkin' About in Manchester.

And it was, and not very good is a memory names and places but it ends in 'field' in Manchester and the surrounding areas, something-'field'...

C: Oh really? I can't think of anything.

H: Not like Enfield, but somewhere like that. Maybe are making that, anyway. It was a place where it was a really, really deprived area basically. And yes, willing suspension of disbelief is a total and useful safety net, when you have the language of a theatre or arts in the first place. But there is a whole load of people for whom identity is a much more fragile thing, and my piece was working with teenage boys. Which, in terms of getting them to play and look a bit silly... There was this one bit with they had to hold hands, and: just no. 'That's gay. I'm not going to hold his hands.' And it was just a blank spot. And I guess there is a... Fragility isn't the word, I think the word I mean is 'brittle', where being able to suspend yourself is a well and good but there are some situations in which the self is so fundamental that it's hard for people to... So totally, yes for most people, what you say applies, if you go to an incredibly working class area and work with 50 year old men, or if you go to the slums of Brazil, where actually walking down the street is somewhere you could very easily get shot. Like how would doing a soundwalk or playing the pervasive gaming that space, how would that work? But again I think that I am pulling at extreme examples, and that's not to say that it would still not work, it's just say that there would need to be different tactics, I suppose that you use.

C: Yeah, I guess so, from that perspective, yes. You're completely right. And whenever we make a new piece we always interrogate who we think our audience is going to be, and there's a certain democratic demography of people who you're going to have that's very simply like the audience that we were always going to have. At the Bush Theatre it was always going to be a very different audience than we would have at the Barbican Theatre. And, as local as that, you can understand. So yes, then, when you think of teenage boys, and when we were taking it to shopping malls and stuff like that, yes you have a different type of audience. But I think that was partly why we moved away... Well we have moved away from a pre-recorded voice, more into live voice, and being able to respond directly to those audiences that you get. Because we might do *The Time Out* for a school audience and it'd be a group of GCSE giggling girls and stuff like that, but something that I've learnt is that, those audiences and those demographics have always completely surprised me as well. And something that I feel, personally, about (and this isn't necessarily the views of Non Zero One but) is that, I really enjoy taking our work to audiences that haven't experienced work like it before. I find that the people who are used to that, kind of participatory, these are all terrible words, and immersive, kind of work, completely view it in a different light than if you take it to somewhere that they haven't experienced it before. But that's just me, I mean we still love doing it in different spaces and a lot of our passions with architecture and things. So a lot of the pieces that we do are also because we love buildings. And yeah, I can completely see that but, for example, if we were doing a piece for a fundraising event, where we have lots of extremely wealthy

people, who might not have done this before. The assumptions that we make, might make of them might be that maybe they wouldn't want to take off their shoes and run through a corridor with something. And actually we found that if you give people that opportunity... And if you give people... There's always a get out clause, there needs to be always a control test, like in a science, for example. There always needs to be a kind of, get me out of here, kind of response.

But people really challenge themselves, and I think sometimes they challenge that identity. Like in a certain way, it's not because those boys are afraid of holding hands with each other, it's just that in that particular setting they found it uncomfortable. If they had gone to see the...who's it by? The piece that was a few years ago, it was a holocaust piece, it was really heavily criticised... Probably rightly, I didn't see it. But basically you're barked into orders and you effectively experience and walk into a gas chamber. If they were told to hold hands then, they would hold hands. Do you know what I mean? I think a lot of that depends on context and what piece it is. And options you're given...

H: I think there is definitely a difference between being immersed in a story and games system, because in the games system you're still, I think you're more yourself.

C: Yes.

H: And you are playing more as yourself, you don't take on a character in the same way, and a character, in some ways, can be a bit of a shield.

C: Yeah, exactly. If you go into something, and you think, right, I'm playing this character. It immediately changes the way you're doing it, so yeah, I think you're totally right.

H: So my next question is, is a bit annoying, it's not really well phrased. How would you describe your work? Is what I have written down, but I don't mean, is it this? Or is it that? I mean, what provokes it, what informs it, what inspires it? That kind of question.

C: Yes, we really struggle with this as well, we have just rewritten our mission statement and put it up and website, the about us bit. And it has taken us about four months, because we... It's just such a tough question. Because you can't... It's very difficult to talk about your work without betraying yourself. And sometimes your inspirations, the completely twist and turn upside down. But having said that, what inspires us are... Initially, we love people and finding out about people, and maybe in that social experiment sort of way. How people respond to different things, I think that's a base human instinct and also this idea of challenging relationships between performers and audiences. That something we'd like to challenge, and again I'm not sure if we have quite got there yet, Like how much can you give over to an audience whilst still retaining it as a piece, as something that is happening. Whether that be a piece of theatre, whatever you want to call it, immersive theatre, and that is kind of something that we try and test. And sometimes it goes too far and it just runs away, and sometimes it's too controlling.

What was the, rephrase the question, what was the full question again?

H: I have written down, how would you describe your work? But I guess what informs, what inspires and what provokes it. Like what is it that you're reacting to in the world do you think?

C: Okay, oh yeah, that is tough. What do we react to? In the world? Fuck. That is just everything, isn't it? What do you react to? Err...

H: Because, I guess you were saying your first piece reacted to the idea of absence.

C: Yes, very much so. And actually, yeah. So our first piece very much responded to that idea of absence, our second piece, *The Time Out*, responded to our first piece. And the people that we met, and the people that we saw do the piece, in that... We would just exploring absence with that first piece. And then watching people try and do this pre-recorded journey, that was very specific, we timed it to the second: that you would walk down the staircase and that takes 8 ½ seconds, and then you walk... And everything was timed and that's correct filled by that time. So we knew exactly what that person was at the right time, and it went wrong all the time, people got lost. No matter how much you describe something, it's very difficult to actually put people in the right place at the right time. And people, non English speakers or people whose English was a second language or third language or whatever. You could see that they were just that fraction of a second behind everyone else, and that kind of changed that. So what we came... So what have we learnt out of that experience of making that piece was that we were really, really fascinated, how can we really talk to people, how can we... I always saw it as a triangle of the performer, or you artist at one end, and then your participant at the other. And most participatory or immersive theatre, that kind of theatre or performance, there's usually a two-way reciprocal relationship between those people. Good work would have reciprocal relationship. And our work, we would say something and they would respond to it, and the way they responded meant we would respond this way. And that was how *Would Like To Meet* worked a lot. So you might have an MSN conversation with someone, or something, and that would determine then what would happen later on.

But also, what we wanted was then the participant, or participants to respond as well. And to tie that in, so you have got a full triangle of interactions and responses going on, so that then those two participants are really having a connection and you can really engage with someone, on a fundamental level. From going and experiencing something together. And that was then what inspired *The Time Out*, and how do you become a team of people, and does it work?

We always wanted to keep those questions open, and I think that allowance for failure is really important as well. Sometimes in *The Time Out*, it doesn't work and people come out and they just go, run off, and nothing happens. And sometimes people go for a drink and they get to know each other, and that is interesting. I'm not saying that so right or wrong, I think it's an interesting response to those kinds of things. So I think that inspired us for that kind of, those relationships that happen within a performative, kind of construct.

And from that we just are now just finding other inspirations from that further. So a lot of that is relationships that people have with buildings, and why is it that the building can provoke such a strong emotions in people and to people fall in love with buildings, or do they fallen out with people and buildings. Like what makes that happen? I guess that was very specifically tailored because we had a particular commission from the Bush to make a piece about history. I think it kind of came about from that but we were also edging towards that a little bit.

H: And I guess that is quite interesting, in a context where it feels like buildings are becoming something that people want to break away from, in formally inventive performances. Lots of stuff is moving to streets, or I guess non-theatre buildings. So do you think there is a reclamation at the heart of your age work with buildings, it about redefining what can happen in them and where it could happen.

C: I think so, I think definitely that is a really nice way of putting it. Is that reclamation, and the fact that they are kind of... And to make them kind of alive in a sense that they have not been before. I think we are interested especially in those kind of holding spaces, because if you go to the national theatre, you go to sit in a particular room to watch a particular thing. There is always of the spaces that you go through that have been incredibly well thought out, and detailed, and fun, and have certain kind of quirks to them. And the people but also hang out in those spaces as well, have a sense of ownership over that. I think it just, there is something interesting in that kind of public spaces within private institutions.

H: That's interesting, yeah. I have never felt welcome in The National, never. I always sit there and feel like I shouldn't be there.

C: Or that is particularly waiting for something, you never turn out to The National 2 hours before a show.

H: It feel like I'm the wrong kind of person, like I don't feel, I feel like I'm not rich enough to be someone who goes to see show at the national. I feel not cool enough when I sit in the Royal Court, I feel like I'm not slim enough and not wearing...

C: Not smoking enough.

H: Yeah. But obviously that's a personal thing, but definitely The National doesn't make me feel at home. And I make, live and breathe theatre and it still feels like somewhere that I would get looked down on.

C: Yes, but there is people that hang out in The National and The Barbican especially that, because they are just two buildings that I know very well, who don't go and see the shows, they just go and sit there and hang out, and do some work or... That's the only place they can be, because it is warm, or stuff like that. And it is interesting, those kinds of other people that have relationships.

So, for those people who only have a relationship with that public space, what does that building...? You know, it changes their viewpoint of a building. So, sorry, these are very long-winded answers.

H: Its find its fine is fine. [...] So my next question is actually leading some going to rephrase it. But it is looking at the idea of what I see in your work, so you have made a lot of the use of sound, and you are... Don't feel

bad for saying the word immersive, like I think it is like the word interactive...

C: It's just used a lot so you pick it up...

H: Exactly. And you just need to, like it is my job as an academic to find the nuances of the word 'immersive', or 'interactive'... So I'm going to use the word immersive in this context, so you sound... You're very often described as immersive and you use – to me it feels – like you use game mechanics quite carefully in order to structure these experiences. You might not refer to them like that, but it seems to me... And what is it about these three things that interests you? That seem to be very a large part of how you work?

C: I think 'immersive' is very easy, actually, to answer. Because, for us, we always want to make work that we wanted to do and we wanted to be touched by, in a very selfish way. So anything that we make is something that we would want to do. And we found that in the past, we have been touched more by work that speaks closely, as individually as possible to you, rather than sit in a room and watch something that 3000 other people are going to watch. But, not to belittle that work, because sometimes that work does touch you. And it is incredible, in the same way that you can go and do something it and it can be someone talking to you directly and you can still not get anything from it.

That was our initial kind of reason why we went into immersive, is because we were like, we really want to touch people with the work that we make. I think the easiest way we can do that for the time being is that we make something that speaks to each individual as they come through. And that is the aim, I'm not sure we always manage it but... I think with immersive, that is kind of where that came from. And also very accidentally in a way, when we were talking about absence, that was when we talked about using headphones and voices, and saying how can a performer be present in the work with out being there. And then we thought, oh, well maybe headphones, and the voice is a way that that could happen. And then that was how we fell into the immersive aspect that... And sound as well, and I think that we are a product of hard time, we are all between two years of age between is, we all the same age, we have all experienced similar things in terms of, we all from between working class and upper middle class backgrounds, but we have all gone through the same experiences in terms of the world changing, and Internet, and to new technology being available to us. And sound is something that has become a big part of our history, as twenty-somethings. Like we had all been through that thing where we had a cassette tape as a kid, and had a Walkman, and then had a... You know those Walkmans and so you had to hold the CD player up, because they were so jumpy. And then moving on to the MP3 players and sound was a big thing, it seems like that kids... Especially growing up with TV – visuals and sound are things that I feel that our generation have been encouraged to use. I think that was partly something that came through sound. None of us have any kind of experience in working – not before we made *Would Like To Meet* – none of us have been in a band or had recorded anything before, other than a couple of voiceovers from one of the girls who had worked as an actor. So

it was a real experiment for us, but we were willing to learn about technology. And again that technology was like openly available, you know, we are in an age where you can record something and listen to it, listen back to it, just on the phone. So that was something that seems like it was freely available to us. So then we were able to play with it.

H: I suppose that's the real difference, as well. You get a lot of work from the 90s, the eighties and the 90s, like the Wooster Group which seem to be quite obsessed with television, and the experience of the television. But the experience of television and incredibly different one to the one that our generation have which is personal sound.

C: Yes, exactly.

H: It's not group sound, its sound on your headphones which is a part of... You'd be hard pressed not to see someone walking down the street with headphones on, in any street in any place in the UK.

C: And its... Yeah, that's a big part of why... It something that we are constantly surrounded by, something that we have all been brought up with and yet because that technology... If, say... We played with bits of film and stuff as well, but there is something about sound that we felt, you can be really personal with sound. As soon as you have your headphones on you are in a different world, and that meant something to us. What it was to be in this world here, as opposed to that world there. We played with it, sometimes you're in this one, sometimes you are sort of in another one... So yes, I think the combination of the two being a product of our time and also having the technology for us to use and play with. Like we all had software on our computers the allowed us to do it, that we could just get for free and swap with, in a way that didn't make it feel like it was alienating or difficult. So that is sound and immersive, and the other one was?

H: Game mechanics

C: Game mechanics, yes! This was because... Well, I think partly because again because we wanted to do something that people would enjoy, but also because as soon as we found that we were asking something of our audience it became very clear that the reward needed to be there. If you asked someone to do something they usually need a reason to want to do it. And often because there wasn't quite reason enough. Most of our game mechanics come from that simple, you will be rewarded for taking the plunge, if you do this something good will happen. Or something intriguing will happen, or something like that. So I feel that that was kind of the game mechanics. Ivan and Sarah are both work for Hide & Seek, and John works for Blast Theory. So they actually know a bit more around academia, academic constructs of gaming, and know a bit more about it than I did. But certainly that kind of reward system became apparent very early on in our work, and we would just like... We never set out to make people feel uncomfortable or scared of what they were doing, which is difficult when you are trying to challenge people, but we didn't want people to feel bullied into anything. We wanted people to do our work because they wanted to do it, rather they felt they had to. Which again, talking about that kind of, how much can you give over to your audience without losing the piece as a whole, is quite difficult finding that balance.

So I think that is the whole idea of games theory... Maybe it is just the easiest way out. It is just like an easy thing for us to...

H: Well it is a format, isn't it?

C: Yes it is a format.

H: You may not see the reward, right now, but there is an endgame.

C: Yes, exactly. And it might just be that you are rewarded through... And if not quite sure how it will be rewarded at just that seconds, but you will be, which encourages you to do it later on. And yes, just trying to, keep people... I mean, originally, as well, we always make our work in mind, for people who've never done anything like it before. So it is to kind of ease them through that sort of process a little bit. Like, you find with people who have done a lot of immersive participate we work before that they are... They get their instructions and they don't necessarily ask why, because they are used to that reward construct. So you know that if you are told to get on a bike and cycle to this particular place something good will happen, or something interesting will happen. Whereas if it is the first time you have been asked to do something, you are more inclined to go: 'why what happens when I get there? And what is the competition here?' I think that was something that we... I think there is something that became very clear, because we didn't want to... Some people are very much in the business of challenging people, to a certain extent. So that, until you say no, you go as far as you like until you say no. And that wasn't what he wanted to do, we kind of wanted to encourage people as much as possible, and not really feel like they are alienated from something.

H: Cool, thank you. In *The Time Out*, the voice that you hear is sort of like... Kind of, positions itself like an odd combination of internal and external monologue. Like it's a part of you but it's not like another character talking to you, and it is not like there is an all seeing eye talking to you even though they can see all. Is that voice situated in the same place for your other pieces that use sound?

C: No, it's not. That was a different role for us, it was actually two voices, that speak to you through *The Time Out*. They just happen to sound very similar.

H: Oh, no, I think I did notice that actually yes. Both female, though?

C: Both female though.

H: Is it important that you notice they are different?

C: No, it isn't. We thought that people were just noticed because we thought they are different people, but actually a lot of people don't notice and think is one voice. And that is just like a fun outcome, but it is not really what we intended to do or not intend to do. It is the same script, it doesn't matter who... they're basically the voice of A and a voice B, but the only reason they are two voices is more for technicality than for effect. So it just allows us to be able to speak to more than one person at the same time, that's why we have two voices. The thing with *The Time Out* was that there was a really, other than *Hold Hands*... It was really the first time that we were using lives voice speaking to people, and we wanted them to be able to react to what was going on. And it is a tentative approach,

because we still very much follow a script. But, whereas in the past, with the Bush Show in the Barbican show, the piece was very much were written as a script that is timed to the exact seconds, and you record it and through trial and error if you get everything to the exact second. So that you know that at 20 seconds this person is coming through the door and 23 seconds another person is able to come out the door and they won't meet or they both meet at the same time and that allows that to happen. Whereas, *The Time Out* was a more different style of writing for us. It works as almost like a... Like one of those *Choose Your Own Adventure* books, where when we get to a point, however the audience reacts we then jumped to a different section of the script, depending on what they do. So, it makes some assumptions about what the audience will or will not do, maybe they'll do it or maybe they won't, some other outcome. And there will be a...

H: Can you give me an example?

C: So, for example, gosh it's been a while since we have done this piece. So, for example, if at the end someone is asked if they want to go into a secret... If they want to continue on and one person can go. And there is a section of script for if a person stands up, or a section of script if no one stands up, and a section of script for if something else happens, like if two people stand up. And there is actually a few different things, a few different sets of script that are written, just in case something else happens. That is a very simple explanation. Similarly if, later on if people choose to do a workout video, there is one thing that happens if they refuse to do it, something else happens. And you find that, because of the way to the written and there is... People are encouraged to do certain things, there is kind of like the plan A, but then there is also a plan B, and also a planned C. And also, because it is live, what allows us to happen, is to sort of try and respond to whatever goes on, and be a bit spontaneous with it as well. There is something that happens.

It isn't fool proof and it doesn't always work, but it was a new test for us and how you work it. And it is literally, backstage there are pages everywhere, and you're just going, 'where are we? OK were going to this bit right?' And hopefully people...

So, in that sense, the voice was a totally different written voice, but also this idea of it being a facilitator, rather than a dictator as well, which when you take part in the Bush Show or the Barbican Show, if you didn't to follow it then it kind of fell apart. If it asked you to go to this room and you didn't go to this room, or got lost, you missed part of the action.

H: And when people do that they always seem to think that they are the one at fault.

C: And they do, and something that we would always say, we have a very particular kind of script that we work on for people before they start the show, for the Barbican especially. And with that we would say, there are no wrong answers but, if you get wrong... If you feel that you got lost, someone will come and they will find you, don't worry about that. If you want to leave you can leave, you do this. And offer those options up to try and allow people to feel that they are not done it. There is a famous, well not that famous a story, there is a story with us that is funny. At the Bush

show, I'm not sure if I should say this but I will, At the Bush show we were all on radio, to allow things to happen, because some people are hidden, to tidy up rooms and allow things to happen, because it works on like a conveyor belt of people. So every half an hour at different audience come in, and because the pieces are an hour-long you have got two sets of audiences in at the same time, that don't meet. And then we are kind of trying to arrange the journey so it happens. So basically, we are on radio, and if someone does stray off their path, there is a code name 'pineapple', so that there would be a pineapple on level two, or something. 'Pineapple in the writer's room, please can someone, please John, can you go and sort this out.' Just to make sure that they are OK. And Fran's mum came to see the show and got a bit lost, and they picked up something, or for some reason it hadn't worked. Maybe their MP3 had stopped or something like that, it wasn't their fault. And she ran out of the door, shouting: 'I am a pineapple, I am a pineapple!' (Laughs), so that was very funny. And she was very worried about... People get worried about doing it wrong, and there is something that we would hope that people wouldn't feel. But you can't help it a little bit...

H: So. Are you speaking to each individual mind, or are you speaking to each individual body? Are people's bodies important, do you see it as putting people's bodies through it as well as their mind, or do you think that...?

C: I don't separate them, ah, I've never been asked that question before. And I don't know what the others would say...

H: Is doing, or listening any more important than the other?

C: Erm... It's a stupid answer but I think it depends on what the show is...

H: That's not a stupid answer

C: For the Barbican show for example, if they had chosen not to do the whole thing, it would be a shame or, but if they listened to it hopefully there would still be something there to listen to. I mean the sad thing is if they don't do it then other people miss out, because it is all about them interacting with each other. Whereas for *Hold Hands Lock Horns*, it can't, it doesn't happen unless you do something. You walk along a choice map, so you're given an option of two things and you choose by following the map, and that is how you go down. So if you don't physically do it, it ceases to go any further. So in that context, I guess the doing is important.

But I don't think we separate minds and bodies too much just because... Just because they are people, so it is about all of those things. So in that kind of accessibility way, if for whatever reason they can't do it, we will find a way that they can do it within the context of the piece. If they are willing to do that. So we have taken blind people across it, and we have done it for... But we can't do it for totally deaf people, we get hearing aid friendly headphones. We can do that and make it as accessible as he can, but if someone comes and can't hear it... so far in all of our pieces they wouldn't be able to do it. Unless maybe someone stood next to them and signed the whole time, where they had to go. If someone else was with them and listen to it and signed it. So Yes, I think that's probably that.

H: Which sort of leads on to the next question which we have already touched on, so if you don't want to take it further that's fine. What steps do you take, if any, to help lift the burden of the responsibility of world

creation for your participants? That's a bit of a mouthful isn't it? So I guess up that it's back to that idea of, 'I'm going to do it wrong.' Or this rests on my imagination right now, when 200 people sit in a room and watch something, 200 people create an alternative universe. But each person has their own universe to support in this kind of work. Do you think certain strategies are required to help make people feel OK about that?

C: Yes, I'm not sure if they are required. But I think that we feel that they are good to have in, so we will always introduce the work in a certain way, there will always be a period of introduction to say, this is sort of what you're going to be doing, this is you get out clause, this is what you do if you feel uncomfortable. And just by stating those kinds of things hopefully it will these people into being able to let go of those burdens that you come in with when you do that and just allow them to enjoy it. If you need the toilet, then do this, or something, you know. We are not in the process of making people feel uncomfortable, we actively want people to feel comfortable during our pieces. Which I don't necessarily think is necessary of all art, but just for us that is not the point of our work.

So I think the introduction and similarly the steps we put in place, we do a thing called a chaos list, which is; different levels of if things don't go to plan. So, it is a little bit like a risk assessment but specifically for that show. So if people decide that they can't do it, or want to go out, we try and create a thing that is are in keeping with the show, which means the whole, the walls of the piece aren't completely broken and allows people to respond as they need to.

H: And that's definitely leads on to the next question, which is; when you make the work what are the most useful tactics in creating forms which are supportive enough to encourage and thrive within so many unknowns.

C: Yeah, I think a lot of it comes down to that idea of being objective that we were talking about earlier. In that we test. And test. And test. All of our work, we have a pre-production test week for all of the show's so far. And that involves just getting people in and trying it, and trying it with different audiences and getting their response. Because once you have got to a certain point of making that work, you forget what assumptions you're making as you going, so it is very important to get those people in to test it.

What was the rest of the question? Just kind of tactics?

H: Unknown factors, how you create a form that supports the unknown, as opposed to tries to eliminate it.

C: Yes, well I guess in a way we do try and eliminate it to some degree, in that we have these chaos lists, and we do test runs. So the kind of get, try and get a straw poll of how most people react to the show. And things like, to eliminate any kind of confusions that we could just accidentally in a voice in the script says left actually mean right. Those kinds of, just particular mistakes that we need to correct. And then in terms of the unknown, the real unknown, that is the exciting bit. When you asked someone to do something and they do in a totally different way because of the way you phrased it or something, that is exciting, I think to a certain extent it is

about eliminating out the boring bits so that what you're left with is the exciting unknown, as opposed to the, 'oh well we didn't know they were going to do that because we haven't even said it.' And I think there is something exciting about that, I think maybe as well, for those audiences who are a bit more used to immersive and participatory works then they seem to be more likely to be the audiences that challenge that. Because they go, 'I've done this before and what's this? No, I'm not going to do it.' And that is interesting. And I guess for us, there is always just this excitement in the spontaneity of going, 'well we didn't know they're going to do that, how are we going to deal with it?' And that is partly one reason... I don't think necessarily everyone gets that, especially with the pre-recorded piece, I think people are going to assume that if you stick on headphones and you press play and everything happens, and that it runs fine. So for example, with one of the shows, we were asked to extend the period of time of the run. We were unable to do that and they said, 'well could we take the piece and will run it with different people, and you can train them?' And we had a discussion then and we felt that there wouldn't be a Non Zero One piece then, because it is about the way we react to those kind of unknowns, keeps it a Non Zero One piece, as opposed to... It's not like a... It's not a script but you can follow even if its people are listening to a script, if that makes sense. Because it is happening in that time...

H: How... That is kind of the same question. How do you ensure people feel confident enough to interact, and do you have trouble getting people to cooperate?

C: Oh yeah. Most of the time, no. But, it is funny, it is really good fun, seeing who will respond and who doesn't. God, we get so nervous about some audiences, and they are great. When we did *The Time Out* for a group of GCSE girls, they were absolutely fantastic, they were just like, we thought maybe bit feel awkward about opening up, and the questions we were asking were too personal... We changed some bits, like some of the questions were a bit inappropriate for 16-year-old girls. But they were really supportive of each other, and it was really a interesting process. And when we did *The Time Out* at the Tate Modern, the Tate Britain sorry, we have a totally different audience, they weren't there to see the show they had come to see art. Not even modern art they had come to see 'British Art'. It was all a walk-in audience, and an audience and arts with a capital A audience. And there was such a different response to that, and some people actively fought participating in it. When we performed at the Tate Britain we had one walkout, we have never ever have a walkout before. Usually people get lost, or don't want to do it, or don't want to do parts of it, or feel uncomfortable and then get into it. And we had one walk out, which was brilliant, and it was absolutely hilarious. And it was great for us to respond to as well, it was just like 'oh, what is she doing? She's taken headphones off...ohhh, she's gone!' We're going to have to respond to it, we're going to have to mention it. And we had to talk about it and it turned out that afterwards the audience thought it was part of the piece, to help them, because they felt they drew together more as a team because this person has left. They all were like, 'why has she left? Is she

too good for this?' And we would just like, 'yes, that's exactly what we planned.'

H: There is a plant in the audience. Okay, that is really interesting thank you. Okay so, in *The Time Out* you work with both group and individuals. Was it just something about the idea of discussing team that made you split the experience, or is it something else that you're interested in?

C: Partly related to, I guess we were interested in how people respond to each other. And we were interested in this idea of team as an expansion, so you are talking about how you need to know what you are doing as an individual, to the know what you're doing with one other person, to then be able to know what you are doing with a group of people.

H: How the team is an organism.

C: Yes, exactly. So that was kind of the point being able to speak to one person, and also just... I think we were really interested that we were able to do that and keep it a little bit... And have that moment of discovery of knowing that it wasn't just one whispering to everyone. that you are special within this thing. And I think we had looked at team structures and stuff and team psychologies, and one thing is that you need to feel you are valuable as part of that team. You can't just feel like it is a constant robot, if you feel that you are valuable part of that team... That kind of makes the team stronger as a whole. So it was that idea of that is well behind it. And I think it was almost the link to teams, I think there was a little bit of romanticism about the technology as well. Especially the kind of, some of the other members of Non Zero One are, they get especially excited about using different bits of technology. And we tried loads of different techniques to try and get that to be able to happen, originally we didn't want wires, we wanted it to be wireless and using Bluetooth and that didn't work at all. That is why I used wires in the end, but even that, we are using a sound system in a way they haven't been used before and stuff. So I think probably a little bit of that as well.

H: Cool. I don't think I'm really interested in this question any more. Maybe I was when I wrote it...

C: (Laughs).

H: I'll read it out loud: the author voice of *The Time Out* is reasonably self referential about the process itself, particularly regards to the coach's performance. Do you find this level of comment on it artifice of the situation is useful?

C: Yes, I mean we felt it was useful because we didn't want... Because as the voice is a facilitator we wanted to be able to speak to people and not pretend, and not be pretentious in a sense of not pretending what was happening. That people kind of got this... What was important to others at *The Time Out*, *The Time Out* is not about water polo. The whole water polo, dressing room... Not a dressing room, locker room kind of facade, is all a facade just to bring you together. And he wanted that to be relatively clear, it didn't matter that you have particularly had water polo caps on, that it was all about water polo, that you should know about water polo strategies and water polo as the game. And I think the only way that we could work out how to do that was to be self referential, to say, 'hahaha, isn't it really funny that there is this guy with the ridiculous accent and

whose pretending to be a coach when you've just come here and you know that you are not trained, you know that you haven't had this experience, so what is going on here?' And that was kind of our way of dealing with that, I think. Because it wasn't meant to be two separate worlds, it was meant to be one separate worlds and then the other just being in the present, being like, 'well this is actually what it is kind of about.' But we felt that we couldn't just launch into that blurry moment, because we felt that people had to have something to work towards. Like a team has to have a goal, a group of people, in order to change from just being a group of people to being a team, you have to have a goal. So our goal was that you are going to win this water polo match, and yes it was a facade and it was a false hope, I guess. But we wanted to make that obvious, that it is false but also you... This is what the working towards. So I hope that kind of explains it.

H: Yes sure. We're on the last few questions now, if you're feeling out of it, I would get to the bit where my brain can't form... Can't articulate any more after a certain point.

C: I'm more worried about your head I've just been blathering around.

H: You're being very good. So, I'm not sure if I want to ask that or that. Which ones do I want to ask? So do you feel like your work is influenced by the digital, that it is about finding cultural space in the digital, or that just as people what have grown up with digital technology it works its way into your work?

C: Yes, I think it is all of those things, I think about what we said before about being a product of your time. To be creative you need to use what you have access to most of the time and we grew up in a digital world, like that's what we have access to. We can get voice recorders, we can get all this stuff, and that is exciting. So I think that is probably mostly that, but also some of the best... Some of the things we get really excited about as well, is just when you see something that you have got, like an MP3 player or something you have experience before, and is used in a totally different way than you would have ever imagined. Like Subtle mobs, like it's a really... At the heart of it it's a really simple idea and it is not beyond anyone really, in our society, to have come up with the idea. Because we all kind of a party to that technology and all that kind of thing. Or of our generation anyway.

But it totally is sort of kind of mind blowing, in a way, how they do it. In the same way that *Riders Spoke*, and Blast Theory... You know, Blast Theory have been moving more towards using mobile phone technology as well. And that is really inspiring to see people do that, and go, 'oh well maybe I can do that, maybe this... Maybe there's more to this kind of thing that I had originally seen.'

H: Matt Adams likes to call mobile phones a cultural space, doesn't he? I've heard him say a couple of times, that idea of saying, 'we can redefine the uses of these spaces.'

C: Yes, completely. And he is right because it is a space, because when you see someone walking down the street with a phone, they are not in that space they are in a different space. So he is totally right, in the same way that I kind of think, with headphones and sound there is something in that

and I think that is very closely related to first person kind of thinking. I think it is a real tool for appealing to individuals because if you know that they... Only they can hear something you already speaking to an individual anyway. So yes, I think it is partly being inspired by such an amazing, amazing company of people that I really creative with the use, and that, we have grown up with it. And also because it is part of our language now, in a way that, in a way that, theatre isn't necessarily. So if someone calls you on your phone or texts you, that is something that... That is a tool by which we can communicate now, whereas if someone, less so, if someone stands on a soapbox and gives a speech, you are less inclined to listen to that now. That's what I feel, I mean I don't know what it was like in the past, so I don't know if that's true but there certainly doesn't seem to be as many of those people round as it was claimed to be that...

H: No, they all have blogs now don't they?

C: They all have blogs, we all go and listen to people via blogs and stuff like that. Not that many people actually, but yeah. So I think is part of that as well, that is what speaks to people and a lot of the time you speak to people through... or we do, we speak to people through Internet and iChat and whatever, different uses of technology. So why ignore that as soon as you start to do something artistic? It seems a bit backwards.

It's like the David Hockney iPad drawings, I think, I haven't seen them but they are probably rubbish (laughs) don't quote me on that. But why criticise him for doing that, it doesn't make him any less of an artist if he's using a tool that is an iPad as opposed to paint and brush. But just because he can use the paintbrush doesn't necessarily mean he can use and iPad to do it, and I think that is kind of for the fun thing as well. Like we are not sound artists because we don't have that training, and we don't have that expertise. We have sort of trained ourselves to a point but I don't think we are experts in that technical aspect of the field. We had just used garage band, and whatever came free on our computer when we got it and stuff.

And I think that is important, and I think that it will happen more and more. What I think is interesting at the moment is that there is a real divide, and you see it a lot with other countries as well, with certain kinds of cultural divides. In that, for those people who haven't embraced that change in technology over the past 10, 20, 30, 50, 80 years, there can be a real divide there if you're using technology in your performance. Like I remember at the Barbican part way through the piece it might be that your effectively MSN-ing someone else, like in an online chat with the stranger. And on the instructions it didn't say 'press return at the end of your sentence.' And some of the older people that came to do the show, we would find that they had answered all of the questions and were writing to that person but didn't know where the return key was on the computer. Because they were used to writing with typewriters, so then you have to use a QWERTY keyboard absolutely fine but didn't know how to use a computer. And that was a real moment actually, where we were like, well we have made an assumption... Because we are making pieces that we want to do that are like for... That's the original kind of goal, when

people don't have the same experience as us we need to kind of keep that alive. And that is kind of interesting, I think, that what might be interesting is the more people use digital technology in the arts, kind of who are the involving in that. In the same way that Hide& Seek did a piece for *Tate Trumps*, which was for iPods. And they do, they totally do it, you can go and hire them so you don't need an iPod to do it, but really you need to know and have the knowledge of how an iPod works. And I mean, I'm saying older people but they aren't necessarily older some of them, because they have never had just experienced that kind of technology before, but like, par exemplar, my granddad wouldn't be able to know how to use that, and it's interesting. He can still go to an art gallery, but he couldn't experience that type of work.

H: Last two very short questions, the last one I think you sort of answered at the beginning, so you can tell me if you think you've already answered that. But I'll ask them both at the same time. Why immerse people, and why personalise experience?

C: Okay. Yes, I think attached are mainly on the immersive thing was that because we feel like it's a way you can really touch people and have them involved. But I have a slight theory, and this is my own personal theory, that people... That we live in a more personalised culture. That people want to feel that they are getting a personal satisfaction from what they're doing. And I think that is kind of... I think that might be because people have more of a... Because I think the notion of community is changing in that is expanded and also kind of shrunk as well.

H: Kind of atomised.

C: Yes, exactly, that's a really good way of putting it. And I think that is kind of a new thing for us, especially in cities like London where you don't necessarily know your neighbour, and you don't necessarily go to neighbourhood things or know people. We don't all go to the same shops for example, it's not that you would all see each other on a Saturday, and Tesco. There has to be certain things, there has to be certain kind of features now, as a community and that is kind of changed recently. And I think because of that, there are certain groups in society that I feel that they need more of a personal touch, and I think one of those could be, like our generation, like sometimes I feel that it is really nice to be able to speak to someone 1 to 1 or have a phone call with someone one-to-one. As opposed to a generic Email that sent to everybody about the same thing. Like I am really bad, like if I get a Facebook invite to a party I probably will forget it, whereas if someone tells me about it then I might go. It might also be related to the fact that people are particular about their money at the moment, and people want more value for their money. And there is a certain amount of value that is put in for personal experience, because you feel that there is something luxurious about being the only person who is having this experience, or only one of 12 people having this experience and that exclusivity. I think again, that kind of works more with things like *You Me Bum Bum Train* especially. Like people are willing to pay for that. But I think that for others, at the heart of it, it's just that that's what we enjoy. None of us really relate to a kind of, traditional art or theatre setting. And find it a bit kind of, stifling, that

you have to conform to certain rules if you do a piece on a stage. Is not necessary. And we always saying we wanted a piece that goes on stage but for now at least, it is definitely just the thing that we feel that people engage with the most. And the thought that you can engage someone in work that you're doing is by far more valuable than just kind of making a piece for yourself. Which people to, but it's good...

[End of relevant recoding].

Interview with Duncan Speakman and Sarah Anderson of international arts collective 'Circumstance', completed on the 14th January 2012.

- H: So my first question is very simply, tell me about your background.
- A: Who first?
- S: I can go first if you like? So I come from a musical background, primarily as a performer; strings, violin, viola; and a composer. And that is how I came to work with Duncan, was always on musical projects before we started making Subtle mobs together. Yes, that's what's relevant with me, but yes I do a lot of ensemble work of and band stuff, and I'm a recording artist... Yeah.
- D: I am from a sound engineering background and from there into documentary and interactive art, and a natural progression from working with digital and interactive stuff and then trying to bring back in music and sound into that. Yes, it's the kind of basic background of what I've come to. But I started as a musician, and then to sound engineer, and then artist, artist by accident.
- H: Just a side question, but you don't class 'musician' as 'artist'?
- D: No, in terms of... No, I do, but in terms of the art-world approach, in terms of the gallery, theatre, rather than pure, just music, I guess music in different contexts really. No, I think I am I documentary maker, but no one believes me.
- S: No, I'm beginning to.
- H: So where did the first ever Subtle mob... When did it happen and how did it happen? Was it, *As if it Were the Last Time*?
- S: No, it was pre- *As if it Were the Last Time*, it was kind of before I had properly came on board...
- D: Yeah, it was, the first one happened as part of another piece of work. So there was another piece called *My World is Empty Without You*, and that was locative media... A drift kind of piece. Where the audience drifted through a city and there were rehearsed and trained performers who would be in the streets. And the idea was that they had little beacons in their pockets and when the when near audience members, who were also in the streets, they could trigger off recordings of their voice in the audience's ears. So it was this idea that you were hearing other people's

thoughts. And the Subtle mob came because I wanted to have a sense of déjà vu in the town, this sense for everyone who is drifting through and specifically meeting the performers that at the same time there was a sense of otherworldliness in what was going on. So, decided to kind of use a lot of the techniques I had been making for soundwalks, and wrote to a load of, essentially, sort of jobbing performance companies, and said: 'come and help take part in this, download this file, turn up at this location, we will send you off into the city, follow these instructions.'

But I didn't want them to be slave performers, essentially, so we made that a narrative as well and we used some of the sound track that we had written for *My World is Empty Without You* for the main piece, and gave it a different narrative. So they were having their own experience, it was almost like putting on two shows at the same time in the same part of the city and seeing what happened. People who took part in the Subtle mob enjoyed it immensely and so I just thought that, well maybe we won't go to all the effort of putting on the other show and just do the Subtle mob and at the same time we got this commission from the Vauxhall Collective to make a new piece of work. So it was... So then we developed *As if it Were the Last Time* from that.

H: To you, is Subtle mob Like a form, is it a form or a brand?

D: It has been a funny thing because we... You know the word was a play on flash mobs and partially as a marketing tool, to be really honest about it as well. Everyone is interested in flash mobs, let's call it Subtle mob and that will bring in another audience, but at the same time it was a response to the idea of not trying to make spectacle, and trying to make *experience*, for the people participating rather than the people viewing it.

H: Like a deeper experience.

D: Yes, exactly. So we did have a lot of problem with people thinking we were 'Subtle mob' and that has been part of the reason to change it to Circumstance, because we wanted it to be an open format, with other people making Subtle mobs. I think that is much more pretentious than even us saying, 'that's our company name.' But to say, 'we want to make this and other people to think it is so cool that they want to make them.' But it is, there is kind of a few people making them now, which is great so that is really exciting. [Coffee arrives].

H: How do you work together to create those?

D: Badly (laughs).

S: It depends on... We are discovering as we go through our projects at the moment, but I guess, at the start it was always creating soundtracks together. You know, cinematic soundtracks, and then working with texts that Duncan had sketched out... And text isn't really where I come from initially, so that tends to be something that Duncan would work with, with other practitioners such as Emilie Grenier and there was Tassos Stevens for the last piece, for *Our Broken Voice*. And then we would all come together to thrash the ideas out. And there's lots and lots of sketching ideas, going out and walking around, trying out really, really rough early stage ideas, because that's kind of the only way we can get a feel for what is working and what isn't. And lots of walking with other people's sounds as well, that is kind of often how we'd start a piece: we would have a idea,

a concept, a rough thread perhaps. And then take out music that inspire us or we feel might fit with the work, and then go back in the studio and copy it. (Laughs) and then loop it, and then add some strings... no. The last one, *Our Broken Voice*, the one that I focus on when I think about our working process, and that was really... That was a very rich process, in that we had so many different people involved and it didn't feel so confined to mine and Duncan's work. Because you get quite stuck, you can never really have a formula with the work that we make but you figure out a way of working with the sound and you find you quite quickly get stuck in lowercase with it. And having other people coming and just go, 'yes but this pieces and about that,' or you know, that is kind of incredibly beneficial.

D: It was quite interesting I think, from the source point of view because with *As if it Were the Last Time* the process was more that we started with interview text material, so real world interviews, and then we sketched some music, and then we worked with performers to devise the physical instructions based on the text and the music we already had. Whereas with *Our Broken Voice* we brought in more people from the starting point, so we brought in someone who works with play, Tassos, we brought in Lottie Child who works more with public interventions, and Emilie Grenier, who works with writing. And so, that shift of saying, 'ok, let's start with them and then rather than devise it with performers, we'll keep doing tests with audiences.' And so, see how the thing kind of... See how running it as a real experience actually informs the piece. I think that was quite a nice change actually.

H: So that was an on-going... More like in software...

D: Yeah, we ran it every week for a month, pretty much, to different audiences who were up for coming and trying it. And it changed an incredible amount. We would rework it, rewrite it, restructure it, and then run it again.

H: That was, artistically, did it feel like an ethical or political decision, as well? The work with others, or was that just the demand of the form?

D: I think it is kind of what Sarah said, that idea that, you bring in other people to change the way you work, I think that's maybe what it is. And there was a definitely, kind of... One of the things we don't do... You know, we worked with gaming to some extent, but let's bring in someone who works with that all the time. We worked with public intervention to some extent, but we have a very specific take on that, let's bring in someone who approaches it in a really different way, and so on and so forth. I think the political decision was, let's take the things we're doing already and let's find people who do the same things in very different ways.

H: Like, pretty much the defining feature of a Subtle Mob is you stay invisible, or, that was really emphasised in all the copy, and stuff. Why is that an important thing to you, is it...?

D: For me it's the love of the everyday, and it's a love of the idea that, if you... It's kind of fundamental reasoning is that the reason everything is wrong with the world is that people don't pay attention enough to each other and the places around them, and the people around them. If you put a

spectacle on, in a place, then you are focusing on that spectacle, so it is really about, well how do you make people pay attention to what's already there? And the way to do that is just to keep doing what's already there, so the invisibility is... I guess when we say, 'try to remain invisible,' it's just, it's a way of saying, 'try and just be part of what's already there, try and blend in, with this intention that you make everything as important as something that's being filmed.'

H: And would you describe that as, some of the political intent of a Subtle Mob is, this is here and you walk past it every day?

D: Yeah, it's a really... The core basis of Subtle Mobs came from this idea that mobile technology is... Connects you to remote places but it distances you from what's around you, so how can you hack the basic devices that we use to make you connect to what's around you? And cinema is... We're both really interested in cinema. And I think that in a media literate culture, then if something is being filmed and put on screen, then we pay more attention to it, we deem it as being more important. And so if you make... If you use sound and music in the moment to make the everyday seem like a film, hopefully that means people will also give it in the same importance that they would give to something that's being filmed, I guess. And the other part of being invisible, is really that it means that, anything else that we haven't choreographed or we haven't organised, becomes part of it as well. And that's really important, that idea that, there's enough space for the rest of the world to keep happening, and if we have told everyone to just be part of the world then every part of the world is on the same level as them.

S: There is also, perhaps, that the focus on the soundtrack, and that's in effect, is what is supposed to be moulding what you see, not the clown jumping out from behind a lamp post or... It should, if we've created an effective Subtle Mob, be bending what you see in your ears, as opposed to planting things outside.

There's also this... We're really interested in the serendipitous moment that occur. So in a few of the pieces we'll ask people to do things, they might be actions that you are asked to do, but not 'perform' as such. Just everyday things that you may find yourself doing, put your hand in a pocket, pull out a notepad or... Go to a shop window and stare at your reflection. All these things happen anyway, but sometimes there is a really nice moment where you see things happening more than once or perhaps, afterwards, you look back on it and you realise there was something that was slightly highlighted, or emphasised. But nothing unnatural, I guess.

H: And the obviously the ones I have done have been group experiences, is there something about it being a collective that interests you or is it just a matter of practicality?

D: No it is definitely interesting, because it is... It becomes that shared connection thing. And if there is a group, and do you don't know that group, then that makes the group open to anyone. So that also means that you can quite easily read someone else as being in that group. And what I am interested in is, if you see someone who is not part of the group, you don't know, you make that kind of connection whether it is just through eye contact or the way you sort of you connect with them... That sort of

brings them in and you connect with that person. And that only works if there is a group that is large and you don't know who is in that group. If you go with four people, you know those four people, you are in that world and they're the people involved. So yes, there is a practicality in it.

I mean, we do... It's interesting, we have been... For *Our Broken Voice* now we actually limit the amount of people that can sign up, because we have been doing it in train stations and you can't have too many people signed up, because then it just overruns the station and the balance goes off, and then it is very clear who is in and who is not in.

And there is also an interesting change from what you would have experienced in Bristol, which is where the instruction at the end probably wasn't quite as clear and people tended to cluster around the exits of the buildings. What we try to do now it is, the last instruction really send you off on your own through the city, it's a very isolating and lonely ending to the piece way you really leave that group and you head off on your own.

H: And having said that you use certain other things at the same time, *As if it Were the Last Time* is an intimate thing between two people as well. Did that just reflect the subject matter for that piece or is there that thing again about intimate or powerful moments within a collective? Is it about that wider thing of connecting people to the everyday? Like how do you get that connection without some kind of emotion, prompt or highlight?

D: That's a tough one actually because the pair thing in *As if it Were the Last Time*, partially was a practical interest because you can create... It's easier to create images with pairs of people. You can create a wider variety of things because you can create relationships between people, visual relationships between people. And we have tried to do that with *Our Broken Voice* by coordinating it so that strangers interact and you see those moments between strangers.

H: But there is something about being a character in that one which is very... Because it feels like much more intimate series of connections in *As if it Were the Last Time*, because it is you and someone else, playing yourselves, whereas you're playing someone else in the other one. And at that point it is demonstrative not intimate.

D: Was the intimacy...? I mean it was always intentional...

S: It was intentional, it was always intended to be quite a kind of warming experience, I think, *As if it Were the Last Time*, that there was... There certainly wasn't that sense of, kind of, danger, perhaps, that you get in *Our Broken Voice*, kind of being... Yes you know, the safety of knowing that you are with someone who you know, you have arrived together and you are both pressing play the same time in your... And if no one else is there at least you have got each other, sort of thing. I think that...

D: I think that is what it is, that's the thing if no one else is there you have got each other...

S: I mean maybe there are things that cropped as we actually witnessed it ourselves for the first time, when everyone was there but now seem very relevant to the piece, but noticing couples everywhere and the sense of belonging and connection within a crowd. That was kind of a big part of it, and also the moment where you are then asked to use your initiative and go away from your partner, that becomes a very powerful tool as

well. That separation is just as a strong thing and then reuniting them again and that... You can't really get that unless you have a sense of, a starting point, belonging to a pair in the first place.

D: I think it is interesting how romantic the piece became, it was definitely supposed to be really about a connection with anyone and it naturally became... Mainly just because of the people participating in it, actually because I do know people who have done it with complete strangers and have had really, really powerful the experiences.

H: I did it with pretty much a stranger – someone I met at a gaming event in Nottingham, and we both wanted to do it and I didn't have anyone in London to do it with, so I... And there were those, for me it was interestingly, I'll use this word again, which isn't quite the right word, it was quite an 'indecent' experience. Because you were looking at someone in a way that you would never look at someone... But that kind of nakedness of looking at in someone's eyes, that kind of thing.

D: An indecent experience (laughs)

S: My brother and his male boss found it quite an awkward experience. (Laughs) and making them slow dance at the end was our little bit of fun.

H: Do you think that it has been a progression from that two-person intimacy to a wider crowd experience with roles that you can play, or do you think that's just with a... That was just that form, that's what suited there and that's what this is about, it suits a different audience?

D: The latter, yes, it's definitely not a progression, it's not a progression. It's a progression for us in terms of learning, I think. But in terms of... You know, there are probably things that, there is probably technical structural things that we have done better in *Our Broken Voice*, but there's also things we have done worse. So it is kind of... We have learnt some things about it but I don't see that the next one is going to directly follow on from *Our Broken Voice*.

S: It was also pushing us to see how... Because it is something that really hasn't been tested before. This idea of multi-strand storylines running in parallel.

D: In a random bubbling space and you don't know who's taking part!

S: Incredibly complicated we found quite early on, but persevered. With trying to create these moments of contact and these interactions, when you have got four practically unknown characters trying to interact with each other, and you just... Yeah, that was a bit of a mine field.

D: And your constant concern for the quality of the experience, in that, what if you don't have that moment of connection. Because we can't, we try, but we can't make it happen for everyone and there is still enough of an experience without that moment, and I think that is...

H: I think that's why you apply several moments, so you hit one hopefully...

S: It's also, going back to what we were saying earlier about being able to have a rich experience from what you see in the every day anyway, so these moments shouldn't, it shouldn't be reliant on seeing the woman receiving a book from a stranger, from a strange man. Or these little key moments of interaction that we had written in there, we had to keep reminding ourselves that if that doesn't happen it's still... There is

- potential for, even in your mind's eye, to be able to experience that scene, so hopefully... The feedback that we have got does seem to suggest that...
- D: It's a really interesting, because I always find that the... Not, maybe the most negative feedback, but the experiences were people who felt it wasn't a *complete* experience for them. Are quite often where they, where something hasn't happened to them. But what is interesting is that usually it is because they find out from someone else, that it should have happened, and before they knew that they were okay, and then they find out that this happened to someone else and then they feel the frustration. So there is a mark that says, OK we have made a complete and good experience, but then when you find out that you didn't see something...
- H: Do they think that they have...?
- D: Failed.
- H: Yes.
- D: Yeah.
- H: It's that video game thing, where, 'I didn't find this Easter egg...'
- D: Yeah.
- S: Do you need that concession, I mean yeah, it's that question that we...
- D: It is really interesting, all the people who say, 'Oh, we got it wrong.' I always find that really interesting.
- S: But there were no rules in the first place, you have nothing to get-
- D: Is really hard to, yes exactly, but how do you explain that in a way? It's kind of like when someone sees a film and misses part of the plot and goes, 'oh, I missed that part of the plot'; they think they should have been paying more attention. It is kind of similar to that, with ours they think that, if they miss an instruction... But generally it is not their fault. It isn't their fault, not paying attention is usually down to luck and coincidence, and it just couldn't have happened but they feel that same frustration, as if they failed, and as if they weren't paying attention enough. That's not what we want people to feel.
- H: Did they feel like they had a linear path and they didn't manage to follow it?
- D: Errr, I don't know if it is a linear path, usually it something about, people... There is obviously something in the language we use that sense of a certain amount of expectation, because quite often people say something like, 'oh, I started mine 30 seconds late and so I was behind everything that was happening.' And we have always written it in such a way that... Or we have tried to write in such a way so that it is OK if something happens. So we learnt that in the first one that time delay, that fluttering is a really nice thing. What becomes interesting is, and I don't know if this is something to do with people's imagine of what the group experience is, they think: 'oh, we're in a massive group experience we should all be synchronised.' And people might come with preconceptions like that because they go, 'oh yeah, I heard the thing about the book, but then I saw it a bit later, so I was obviously wrong.' No, that's fine but it's, I think part of that does come from preconceptions, but maybe we don't describe it openly enough in the beginning.

- H: I think in that context, I'd want to compare orchestral to jazz music- or ways of being part of a group making things, like, when you're in an orchestra you play that, and someone else plays that, and they go together. It's more of a loosely collaborative experience.
- S: Interesting. And being aware of other people's input and experience, without being intimidated by it, because I think that's a... There's that constant- I mean it's something that we haven't solidified yet. People aren't used to experiencing, for example, a film with the idea of the book that accompanies it, that you have to then read alongside it or somebody else in another room is watching the film in reverse and the experience only become a whole when you come together at the end and discuss the whole... The sum of the two halves...
- H: Yeah and there's not been that two-player, video game where you can wander off and come back and complete the same task, and do things elsewhere as well.
- S: No, but I wonder whether that's the way to approach it, perhaps, is that the gaming experience is that you're all... You have...
- H: I supposed stuff like Counter-Strike, sometimes you're doing stuff together but...
- D: I don't know if I've ever played counter strike. Funnily enough I've never played proper multiplayer games... oh no, no, no, I've played them with pairs of people, but that's different, in the same room.
- S: Yeah, sort of, internet gaming...
- D: I haven't done the internet online gaming, which is funny considering I'm always trying to make experiences for strangers to come together, but in a real place, in a physical... Not real, I hate that word. I always have to be careful with that word.
- H: Have you heard of *Sleep is Death*?
- D: (Laughs) I've heard of it as a concept...
- H: It's a game by, I've forgotten who by, and it is, one person writes the game and the other person plays the game, and you play it online together...
- A: That sounds very much like, like the old world of fantasy role-playing games, you have a dungeon master who...
- H: Yeah, yeah, it's basically, one person is the dungeon master and the other person is... But it is online and it is cute and pixely world. I keep on meaning to do one with Alex Kelly from Third Angel... Anyway, here's a question. Would you call what you make, theatre?
- D: Yes. (Laughs.) (A lot.)
- S: I didn't think it was quite that straightforward
- H: I'm calling it theatre in my thesis but I have to ask these questions.:
- S: Okay. Without wanting to sound too presumptuous it's more like cinema without screens, I would say it's more a cinematic experience that we are creating. Theatre, to me, suggests that it is more performative, which it shouldn't be.
- D: I think the reason I respond 'yes' so quickly is because...
- S: Is because you want to get booked by venues... (Laughs.)
- D: No, no I don't think I'm never really going to convince the theatre world that it is theatre, but the reason... The reason I say theatre is because it's

a live performative event that happens in a space that is shared by audience and performers. Those roles are blurry in this situation, and I hesitate to start working out where those lines are drawn, but I think both things exist. I think there are audiences and I think there are performers and it is happening in a specific moment, and it is not recordable and it is very experiential. It is very much about that presence, and for me that is what theatre is, so I would, as Sarah says, I think it is more like cinema, we draw more from cinema and we definitely create a cinematic aesthetic, maybe? But it is not actually a film in that is not a celluloid recorded thing, so that is where it is an interesting thing, I think if I was going to describe, not the genre, but... It's really tough...

H: I guess 'pervasive' answers that performative thing, where you don't want people performing, just being, as part of something, I guess the phrase 'pervasive' theatre answers that.

S: Sure.

H: The term I'm using in my thesis is First Person Theatre, as in first-person gaming, first-person this or that. I'd be interested in what you think of that, but I haven't formulated it very clearly yet though. But it is just stuff in which you are...

D: I think that is really interesting, I think we... What is funny in that for us is if you look at *Our Broken Voice*, that would be, if we are sticking with those analogies, that would actually be third person theatre. Because it is never talking about you, it is telling you about someone else that is asking you...

H: It still your body at the same time, in computer games you have different levels of reference...

D: But, OK, but the differences, the reason I was saying its different is because in a first-person video game you never have... You're seeing outwards all the time, you're seeing what's around you. You never see him how your legs are, or how your arms are or how your head is. Whereas in a third-person game you are moving it, you are there, you are controlling it. But you are seeing and looking and the way we framed *Our Broken Voice*, is always talking about you externally, so we are always saying: what you're wearing, how you are moving, how you're turning. So I think there is a little pull backwards and forwards between the external view, that you then embody. So yes, I think first-person theatre is a really interesting approach for the...

H: We talking about levels of reference, so the second-person reference in *As if it Were the Last Time*, as opposed to that very definite third-person in *Our Broken Voice*, did that feel like a progression to you or it is that a more suitable form...

D: Suitable form, yes. They are different, it's not that we don't want to go back to... I mean this piece we're working on at the moment is much more in the mode of, *As if it Were the Last Time*, it is much more about you see this, and it talks about the other person... But it's definitely a 'you'. Or will be when it's a bit clearer, but at the moment, it is still, 'you look at this', 'you see this'...

- S: We explored that a lot for *Our Broken Voice*, a kind of, can you be instructed to do something that is clearly not your natural actions, by being told that 'you are going to walk to the...' You know, it didn't... We did a whole load of drafts, did we not? At the beginning that were like in the style *As if it Were the Last Time*.
- D: We didn't get on to the CCTV until quite late actually. I think originally it was just describing...
- S: A lot of early feedback that we got, was just kind of like, 'I lose belief immediately if I'm told to do something, I don't want to be told to do something that isn't to my actual self acting this.' So we... It was kind of really clear to us at that stage that it was going to have to be in the form of an avatar that you're playing, that you're being told about, *their* actions, not *yours*. And then that leaves you with a sense of agency and you choose whether you want to do that or not, and if you don't or then you don't. But the chances of not wanting to do it are much less than being, than if you're told you will be doing that. Does that make sense?
- H: I'm going to just read this question out, because I've made it a really long one. You speak in *As if it Were the Last Time* quite often about drifting, having people have inhabit what is usually transitional space in a non transitional way. What are you aiming for when you asked people to explore urban space like this?
- D: Can you say it one more time?
- S: I was hoping he would ask that.
- H: You speak in *As if it Were the Last Time* ...
- D: In the context... In the text?
- H: Yes, about drifting, and you ask people to inhabit what is usually transitional space, in a non-transitional way. What are you aiming for when you ask people to explore, particularly urban spaces, in this way?
- D: These are the kind of questions where you feel that you have to sound really intelligent in your response. I think the drift is a tool, for me the drift is a tool for letting people... It sort of comes back to this idea of getting it wrong, by saying, 'just feel free to drift through the streets,' they can't go the wrong way, they can't take the wrong corner, they can't walk too fast or too slow. So what it does is it says, it's a sort of sandbox thing that goes, 'okay, this space is where you are but, just view it in whichever way you want to view it, we are going to try and shake that view through the sound track. And we're going to let things happen around you, but we don't want you to really concentrate on a task, we are not asking you to go to here or go to there.' So I think in terms of the changing of transitional space... I just don't think we, I don't think we have ever really thought about that difference between, the idea of these being transitional spaces. What we look for when we are site recce-ing and choosing the places, is we are looking for mixed use – is almost part of it, isn't it? It's like trying to see how many different ways a place can be used, and the more ways a place can be used the better for us in terms of location. So we look for somewhere where there are stationary positions, and there are places where people are actually still, a bench, steps, a café. We look for places where people naturally are moving; pavements, walkways. We look for

commerce and habitation, so the ideal spaces for us are... It's less about it just being a transitional space, it's about trying to have somewhere that has as many different ways of using a space as possible. So when we are looking at the urban environment it has about trying to find those spaces and urban environments that are really mixed, because you get more, I think you get more in urban environments than you get in anywhere else. In an extreme example, in a field you don't really have many options for how that space is used, likewise in a housing estate tends to not get used in that many different ways. If you are studying it you could go down into the minutiae, of course it's used in lots of different ways, but on a visual level, for the content and we are making, it's not about it just being transitional space it's about it being multi-use. I think. And that's what the drifting is to let you explore that feeling like there is something you are supposed to be seeing, or that there is somewhere you are supposed to be going.

S: I also, if I remember correctly, that generally being told to drift would happen to a stage in a piece where you have already had some framing explained for you. So perhaps a way of looking at your space, and the people around you has already been hinted at, so when you're suddenly left to drift, which is such an open action, that you already have a sense of how to use that time and that freedom.

D: Yes, we would never start with a drift, I don't think.

S: No. Lights go up, 'just drift.' (Laughs). We should try it.

H: And then narrative for *As if it Were the Last Time* and *Our Broken Voice* to a point, I wouldn't describe them as linear narratives. I mean *Our Broken Voice* was maybe several branch narratives crossing over, but *As if it Were the Last Time* felt like a very non-linear thing. Is there something about fragments all collages that you either find particularly interesting, and/or think is relevant to today?

D: Oh god, that is a big cultural statement. I don't know how to, I'll think about the relevant question. I think *As if it Were the Last Time* was always supposed to be a slice, like it was always supposed to be this idea of a snapshot. So there was this idea of a collage, in that all these moments, are sort of happening simultaneously. So you are listening to them one after the other. There was a kind of meta-narrative in there, a very buried meta-narrative of a lifetime and there were these different points in this relationship between these two people, but it wasn't a core to the experience, it was just if you looked for it you could probably find it. But it was more about a series of fragments that come together to paint a single image of, when we first made it, of England today, for want of a better word. Yeah, *Our Broken Voice* is definitely linear to an extent. It has this kind of reverse the timeline thing, where we tell you the ending the first but essentially it is four linear time lines.

S: Perhaps, what that there in that, is that it is an awareness of what is happening outside of your experience that is at the same time...

H: You play a fragment that is part of a much...

S: Part of a linear storyline, timeline. But at any one moment there is more to it than what you are. I guess still that snapshots thing...

- D: Yes but things definitely happen one after the other, they are definitely kind of linear.
- S: That is kind of the point of that piece as well, in that it's timed to the second, so that should be quite important to it.
- D: The pressure, the oncoming pressure of the hour, I guess is... It's funny – thinking of the idea of it being relevant today is... I don't know if it's something I would specifically subscribe to. I think what I found interesting is that we think we can do these non-linear or split storyline narratives, and I think we forget, I mean I felt this with *Our Broken Voice*, that the sort of films that we are looking at as our references, whether that's going back to *Rashomon*, *Babel* (?), or *21 Grams*, that kind of work. These are kind of films and narrative structures that have been written, and people watch them with 100 years of film experience, of having seen these different narratives play out. And there is an understanding that when you see this character young, after you have just seen them old, we are looking at the previous point in time. With an audio walk type experience, where someone is not even... You know, I'm not trying to be big headed by saying these are new genres, but in the history of media they kind of are new genres to be performing and to being something, and it just being audio and happening... There is so much for people to deal with in that experience as it is, and then we have tried to throw at them the same complexity of narrative that you would have in a book you could labour over and read slowly and carefully, and think back, or a film, where you are already used to the language, what's the word, the repertoire, no there is another word...
- S: Formula?
- D: Don't know, techniques of... And I think that's the thing that we forget sometimes, is that we need to actually step back a little bit and say, 'OK this is a complex experience anyway, for the audience; just listening to something there that... We are told to listen to in a room, that's complex enough.' We need to make simpler narratives and experiences. Once people are used to this, then we can make these bigger jumps... Or we just need to do it better. There are probably things that we have learnt that we missed, and the things that we will probably know when we are making other ones, where we can make them more complicated but the hand-holding you have to do is much more than you would think.
- S: Yeah, that's true.
- D: The first time I watched *21 Grams*, I had a headache in the first half hour of that, and that's a really, that's an amazing script writer, and a film maker making that. And I was still going, (pained noises) and then it all came together in my head. And I was just sitting at home on my own, on a screen watching it. No distractions. So I don't know about it being relevant now, but what I do know is that, it's trying to do the fragmented things that we are used to seeing in other media, is hard if you're trying to add on a whole other level of experience.
- H: In terms of those audiences, in as far as you can tell, are they theatre goers, or cinemagoers, middle class, working class? Are they arts people?

- S: It seems to be really crazy cross-section. I guess initially a lot of it comes through our networks of people...
- D: I think in England, and in the UK, it's definitely more of a kind of arty, maybe up or experimental theatre-y type of audience, at our performances, probably. Maybe not in Milton Keynes, I don't know who went to see it at Milton Keynes actually, that's another question. But internationally, it's been a much wider range of audience. I can see that in the feedback, in terms of just the fragments of audience feedback we get, we can see by the way people respond to it. It's either a sense of: a) I haven't done anything like this before, it was amazing because it was so new. But there are a lot of people who are just talking about the experience and what they got from the experience and couldn't care less about it as a genre or a form, as a 'theatre piece' or 'experience'. They are just talking about what they went through with their friend, how they saw the world. Those, for me, are the beautiful moments, where you see that sort of audience take it on.
- I would, so far, that's definitely, *As if it Were the Last Time*, and that has been... It's part of the pressure, and it's one of the... Another reason why I'd say it's probably not a progression, it's just definitely different. *As if it Were the Last Time* taps, or seemed to tap into something that more people can connect with, and this kind of romantic idea of being in the moment, and saving that moment. The connection with the here and now... People really connect with that.
- Our Broken Voice* is a more challenging piece, it's not as much... It's not as warming. And we're definitely suffering from, maybe not everyone, a lot of people come to *Our Broken Voice*, especially maybe the non-theatre audiences and go, 'yes, this is really exciting, but I preferred the last one.' We get a lot of that.
- S: And there is also been a lot of, 'yes, I was really kind of freak out at times.' And we were like, 'yes! That was supposed to happen.' I think is really hard to... We are not really in the business of keeping our audience happy, you know playing to the... I don't mean that. You know, playing to a formula or trying to...
- H: Is that true when the piece ended with a more connective moment, did you really intend the sort of bunching up at the end.
- D: The intent with that, that was a concession to the audience. And that was definitely a concession, because I thought, this has been a whole piece about sharing the moment with all these people and we sort of almost want everyone to realise that they have all shared this together. And it is a little bit flashmob, but we were sort of hoping people will be spread out after adding wouldn't be a mob.
- S: But we always intended there to be a dialogue after the piece, that's something that we kind of started to work, especially after Edinburgh, in the new revised piece, where we instruct everyone to meet up afterwards in a pub and talk about it. And wear name badges, you didn't experience that...
- D: But it is definitely after the piece, is not... The piece finishes and then...
- S: But then perhaps that's a bit of a concession as well...

- D: I think that is something Tassos talks about as well, that there is this idea of decompression, which is this idea that if you put someone through a certain kind of experience it is almost like... You can either just throw them back into the world, but that can be a bit 'oh', or you kind of take them through stages and you let them process it. So it is a bit of a concession, yes but there is also...
- S: Because of the multi-strand...
- D: We use the past tense, people have name badges but it's always, 'my name was Alex' or 'my name was Grace.' It was definitely talking about it as previous experience not a kind of... You don't just get 'Alex,' you know it's finished or done.
- H: Then non-participants, the people just walking by, how much thought do you put in for them. Are they witnesses? Are they backdrops? Are they...
- S: They are extras.
- D: Extras (laughs) yes, potentially, they are extras. They are extras in the sense that they are part of this film, this experience I would say and definitely extras are part of it. I think with *As if it Were the Last Time*, there was the dance, where people would be looking at everyone strangely and that. But really it's all the other parts that are important, it's where you walk along looking for someone to smile back at you and that just brings anyone else into the experience. Not in an abusive way, not in a spectacle way but literally a direct connection with someone. With *Our Broken Voice* it's really just, there are bits where you, actually we haven't succeeded in that yet but we wanted people to interact with people who weren't taking part and that doesn't happen yet...
- S: It has happened.
- D: Oh has it?
- S: Yes, but rarely and it has always been awkward. It felt like they did it wrong.
- D: Yes, which is a shame and that's the language problem for us. We are doing something wrong in the instructions where we want a person to give a book or a note to a complete stranger, because we want someone else who was just sharing that space to also get something from this piece we are making. Even though they haven't heard about it and they are not listening to it, but we still want them to connect with the world and they just do... That's facilitated by someone we are giving instructions to. Sometimes we are trying to make it as much for the extras as for everyone else.
- S: It's an incredibly hard thing to orchestrate because you... Wearing headphones, although at times we really succeeded in breaking down that boundary of being in your own private world, in your own thoughts, but it is very hard to, for example, go into a shop with headphones on and pay for something. Like even just that simple act of, you don't even have to really talk but it is just that we had thing of...
- H: I do that all the time, though.
- D: (Laughs.)
- H: I think I'm just a dick (laughs).
- D: There are limits, there are problems with what you can do.

- S: But walking up to a complete stranger and giving them something with no dialogue, with no interaction other than a look and an action. I think most people find that incredibly awkward, and a bit kind of disorientating.
- H: Is that a useful disorientation?
- S: Well perhaps it is in something, but we haven't found it.
- D: We wanted to... It's not what we wanted to achieve, so yeah it could be, as Sarah says, in the future. But right now, no. We want people to be, we want this to be... We don't want people on the street to just be bemused. You know there's a lot of times... And it has happened, definitely happened in parts of pieces we have done where, people who just happened to be in the area are bemused. With the Vicinity Songs it definitely happens, but that's a very visual spectacle piece, so there's definitely some bemusement going on, I hate the word bemused. I hear it a lot when people, especially critics' write up of events that happened in public spaces, they always talk about the other people as being bemused. And I just think, maybe they aren't all just *bemused*.
- H: Maybe they were *amused*...
- S: Or horrified.
- D: I think, yes, you know. That's not, we don't want to achieve something where people passing by don't understand it, they are like, 'oh, this is strange.' We want them to engage with people in the same way, we are almost trying to get the participants to engage with each other. And that's really hard.
- H: And you talked a lot about this idea of an audience doing things wrong, and there's a thing in this form, whether you want to call it first person theatre or you might call it pervasive theatre, because it all rests on that one person, they are creating this world, this slightly alternate universe out of the instructions they have in their head. And they are applying that; they are augmenting their own reality. Are there any specific tactics which you think lessen that weight; make people feel like they can't do things wrong; and do you ever consider the ethics of asking for someone to invent themselves into a story because you don't know what baggage they brought to it?
- D: Mm... The second part I could definitely answer, there are... We didn't take *Our Broken Voice* to Japan, just after the earthquake, purely for that reason. Because the baggage we'd be asking a group of people who had all gone through a traumatic large-scale event, to then coming to a piece of work about a large-scale traumatic event, and certain events leading up to that. A different event but still it was very much... This isn't supposed to be about that subject matter, that wasn't what it's about and so the ethics of, yes we don't want people to come to it without values because it's not like watching a film. It saying: 'you're involved this time and it's happening around you', so yes there are definitely times where we have considered the ethics of what we are putting people through. And on a personal level there are people that I have advised not to come and do *As if it Were the Last Time* at a certain point because I knew it would be quite an overwhelmingly unhappy experience for them. Later they did it, which was fine.
- H: But I suppose those people that you knew...

- D: Yes, exactly, yes. With Japan it was easier because we knew that they had all gone through... The tactics... Sorry, was it?
- H: Sort of, having to negotiate that weight of world creation.
- D: I mean one tactic we used in *As if it Were the Last Time* was to just say, very clearly at the beginning, 'you're just playing yourself, this isn't about performing or whatever, this is just being in a film but it's you.'
And I think with *Our Broken Voice* the tactic was almost similar in that, we are saying, 'this has already happened and we are asking you to re-enact it.' So it was actually more about saying, 'it has already happened to you can't do anything wrong, we are just asking for your help in re-enacting it, but as it has already happened it doesn't matter.'
The weight of world creation, you asked me about that once before I remember.
- H: It's probably a really annoying question.
- S: The weight of...
- D: The weight of world creation... Like it is the weight we're putting on people's shoulders when we ask them to do the piece.
- H: Because all of the suspension of disbelief is yours, it's not a collective act of people sitting in front of a stage.
- D: Oh, okay. Well then they... Okay, that's the tactic then, we try to reduce the suspension of disbelief as much as possible. We try to, I mean this is just with *Subtle mobs*, not with other works, but with the *Subtle mobs* we definitely try not to describe things that aren't actually there, we try not to get you to visualise things that aren't there. Everything we try to get you to do is as believable – in the sense that it is real as it can possibly be and that is, for us, how you get around the suspension of disbelief. We put you in a train station and say 'there is a taxi driving past', and holly moly, there really is. And those tactics take away the 'world creation weight' because you don't have to imagine the taxi, is there in front of you, you don't have to imagine all the people rushing around you. The specific actions we asked you to see, hopefully they'll happen and you will see them, and yes so I think the way we relieve the 'burden of world creation' is by using a world that's already there. That sounds sensible.
- H: That's a good answer.
- S: No, I think that's a complete world. And then also if you don't happen to see things, by that point you can imagine that they can happen. So it's not, you know, nothing...
- D: I think it's also quite gentle in the speed of things, in terms of how we start introducing instructions and ideas. Early instructions usually are very simple, and they definitely progress. It never like, you come straight into it, and it says, 'right, chase this person down the Street,' or whatever. It usually starts with, 'just stay where you are,' you know, 'this is fine, stay where you are and look around'. And it's like, 'I can do this,' and people are like, 'I can do that, okay.'
- H: It's like a slower version, like if you can just readjust your pace, read just how you see the world very slightly by looking at it differently.
- D: I think both pieces have a... I mean *OBV* had the news reports, after that there it has the same, *As if it Were the Last Time* where kind of just describes it like, it describes things that are happening and that you see

with a very traditionally cinematic swelling kind of music. That is that first stage of immersion that you don't really have to do much, and it does most of it for you hopefully.

H: So I have this quote which I will read out, but I'm sure you both read it because it is the first thing on the page which you got handed out.

'There are these strange intimacies in the city, those moments on the escalator, in the lift, in the subway, all those moments when stopping at traffic lights, we glance to the car opposite and are close enough to speak, even touch. The fascination of those moments is simple, that our machines have brought us together and held us apart.'

That notion of, our machines having brought together and hold us apart, technology I'd use as a stand-in for machines in that sentiment, do you think that... Are you purposefully exploring the modern city with or against the technology that exists in it?

D: Yes.

S: All of them.

D: Yes (laughs) you want a more interesting answer...

H: I must've asked a very leading question if you can answer 'yes' to it. (Laughs).

S: Is that a, with, for or against?

H: Does that sentiment, that Tim Etchells quote, does it chime with you?

D: Yes. Exactly, I mean it's, you know what I was saying earlier about communication devices, is that's exactly what they do. They connect us but to people who are far away, they separate us from what's right next to us. And I guess we're constantly trying to use those same tools to reconnect with people.

H: And what's the interest with the MP3 player in particular is it because you wanted to work with sound, because you wanted to interrogate that piece of technology?

D: There is two reasons, one is because is an interest in sound, it's a way for us to deliver music which is what we're interested in. But it is also for me, it is very much about, it's a technology people have and it's a low common denominator technology in that, we could busk on the street, we could just play music on the street but that has a... That couldn't be invisible, that couldn't be structured in the same way and it would be hard to tell a story without it becoming an audience thing. So an MP3 is, aside from radio, radio would be the other technology to do it with but I sort of like the democracy of, everyone is controlling themselves, and they make a piece happen. There's no broadcast, if there is a broadcast then that broadcast still happens even if no one is listening to it. With the MP3 everyone decides to listen to it, so that moment is owned by the audience because they own the technology. And I think that idea, that they own the technology, is what's interesting. It's both interesting to me on a level that, they don't need to think about the technology because is already something they know and they know what they use it for. But suddenly it's doing something different in their lives, they have used it for one thing and now they realise, 'oh, it's doing something different.'

- H: Whereas if you hand out MP3 players, it levels it more, in that people like Lyn Gardener can do it and people who can't afford MP3 players, who live in a incredibly deprived council estate, can do it but they are doing something that you have given them.
- D: I guarantee they have got MP3 players (laughs).
- H: Yeah, I sort of, homeless people then, probably don't.
(Pause.)
- S: (laughs).
- D: No, but it's true, it's interesting this, I find it interesting in our piece that the people who don't have the MP3 players are not the...
- S: General public
- A: Impoverished or destitute, or they are the older, upper-class, middle-class kind of theatre goers. You know it's funny, I think it's probably just a generational thing really, to be honest. We don't see many OAPs doing Subtle mobs it has to be said. Now and again, a few old, older generation, but rarely.
- H: This isn't written down, but I have recently got interested in accessibility, in terms of disability, and sound experiences.
Having been asked by the library about *The Umbrella Project*, 'is it accessible for the hard of hearing and partially sighted'? That kind of thing... And very simply, if you can't walk, if you're in a wheelchair, you can move somewhere but if the instructions say 'walk there,' in that moment you completely thrust out of it. Have any of those considerations... Occurred?
- D: Yes, to an extent, we have wheelchair access. We have thought about it, most of the time we have always done it in situations where it would be okay. And we have had numerous people in wheelchairs do pieces, actually. I have seen lots of people in wheelchairs do OBV and *As if it Were the Last Time*.
- H: What was their feedback?
- D: Yes, it's funny, no one has ever mentioned the walking aspect. The most common feedback I have heard is it was fun dancing, because one person is in a wheelchair spinning around, and the other person is dancing with them. That's the only comment I have remembered hearing, I mean I haven't spoken to everyone who's done it in a wheelchair.
What did the people, you know the people at Edinburgh, that actually did it in a wheelchair put at the station?
- S: Oh, she said lots of other criticisms, completely, I don't think there was anything...
- D: It didn't matter about the wheelchair?
- S ... She didn't mention that.
- D: The hard of hearing... The sighted one is the one always gets me, every time, not every time, but a lot of times people always go, 'oh, it would be really great for blind people' And I just think, no, because it is going to just completely destroy the way they understand the world. You know I'm really interested in acoustic ecology, the Subtle mobs are doing that, but other work we make does deal with the sound around you and the sound of the world. And that is something that is really important to us.

Yes if you say to someone who can't see, 'oh, we're not going to let you listen to one, we are going to ask you to try navigate it.' That would be terrible, but the same time, no one complains- no one ever asks painters if they make their work suitable for blind people. And as soon as you make something like a new medium, people... Always find it a challenge.

In terms of physical accessibility, we use an almost cheap excuse, which is because we work in public environments generally, if it's in public space, it's as accessible as the council have made that environment. We're working in a private space, then that is up to us to choose the right space and take that on board, but if we're in a public space, we have to say, well...

S: The only time that has actually come up, when it has been an issue, was when we were testing radios here, and lift... Was it radios or GPS or something? But wheelchairs going, travelling in lifts you lose the connection. I think that was the only thing, we were kind of like, 'ooh, that wouldn't work for radios in a lift.' But apart from that there is no reason why...

D: In terms of hard of hearing, to be honest, if you're... I mean obviously there's a big difference between deaf with a small d and deaf with a big D, hard of hearing, partially hard of hearing. But if you just play it louder and you have pretty much the same experience as everyone else...

H: Has anyone ever signed it?

D: No, not that I know of. I've never seen anyone sign it.

S: No, I'm just trying to think is that could even...

D: I know Phil, he is pretty deaf, he's not...

S: Phil Shepherd?

D: Phil Richards. And he did it, and he was fine with it, but he wears hearing aids normally so it's just replacing your hearing aid. We are giving you that soundtrack instead of the world's. Signing is a tough one because signing would really change the visual aesthetic of it.

S: It's possible, in the same way that signing during a film.

H: If it was possible would you prefer heads up displays, so the words run across your glasses?

D: Yeaah. Always. Yes, I think that for everything, just in general, heads up display glasses would be good.

S: That's a good thing to keep in mind for our *Blade Runner* piece.

D: Are you going to invent them?

S: Er, yeah. We just did!

D: Were they big or? If they're small that would be so cool. We have got a long-term plan for a *Blade Runner*-esque experience, yeah you're right, that would be...

S: That would be amazing.

D: Either way there will be glowing neck bracelets that would countdown something, and exploding heads.

H: I have written down here, interest in reuniting body with surroundings for a medium that usually takes you elsewhere or muffles it? I realise that's not actually a question...

D: It's true.

H: Is that another one of my leading ones?

- D: It is a really leading one. That's exactly what we're doing.
- S: It might be worth talking about Vicinity Songs a little bit. Something is going to get work done and expanded now, which isn't headphones based, so it doesn't really relate to that but...
- H: I am interested in... Because there is a sort of reclaiming of MP3 player as cultural space that happens in a Subtle Mob, but it doesn't feel like you interrogate headphones in the same way, as a way of receiving, as an interface.
- D: No.
- S: It is an exclusive, basically, the work that we are making as Circumstance.
- D: But it is not... I know what you mean, we're not, it's not about the nature of listening on headphones. Like, the Subtle Mobs aren't about listening on headphones, we just use headphones but it isn't about headphones. It's about...
It doesn't interrogate the... Well, I say that, there is something about it, which is this idea of the shared secret, which is about headphones, which is the hierarchy that happens when you wear headphones. Because when you wear a pair of headphones in a public space people don't know what you are hearing. And because they don't know what you're hearing you have a knowledge hierarchy, you know something that they don't. And this is one of the theories about why we hate hearing people talk on mobile phones, because it's got nothing to do with the volume or the noise, it's because we can't hear the other side of the conversation. And we, and there's a power hierarchy set up, where they know something we don't and we get annoyed and frustrated by that. So what we do interrogate is this idea that, well, if I've got a pair of headphones on and I see someone else with a pair of headphones on, and I think that we are listening to the same thing. Then we suddenly start sharing that space, even if we're not, even if it's someone who is not taking part in it. And this has been really great at train stations because so many people have got headphones on. What that does is it starts looking at this idea of shared hierarchies, that you are in a different space to people without headphones on, but you're sharing this space rather than your headphones being used to cut you off. So I think there is a little bit of... There is an element there that does interrogate what it means to wear headphones in a public space. The content of the actual piece itself isn't, you know, the music and the text but the form, Subtle Mobs do fundamentally question that idea about, when you're cut off with headphones do you actually connect somehow with everyone else wearing headphones?
- H: Is there a... Would you suggest there is a political intent in the Subtle Mob, are they stories about a better world, about finding a way to a better world?
- D: No they are experiences about finding a better way to a better world, because stories are, the stories touch on ideas around that but at a fundamental level the experience is about that, I think.
- S: I'm not sure that really rings true with me, *Our Broken Voice*... I mean, it's more about your actions and your experience that you can then take on with you afterwards, is that what you're saying? Then, I mean the piece is, a better world and a better...

- H: I mean, I guess a lot of post-apocalyptic stories to me are about saying, how do we *not* get here? Or, were close to this path, do you want to be on it? I guess.
- S: I don't know if that works, necessarily.
- D: I think it does a little bit. I mean, *Our Broken Voice* definitely looks at absence of connection, which suggests that with absence of connection people blow up train stations (laughs). So it does that a bit.
- H: It would be really amazing to see the new, new texts.
- D: Yes, I can send you the, I can send you all four scripts.
- S: I mean, with diagrams if you want.
- D: Oh yeah.
- H: I love diagrams.
- D: I think we are, I mean, maybe I'm just too much of a naïve hippy about this but I think the intention is about getting to a better world, because for me, it is about... Yeah, it goes back to that question of saying, all the problems of the world come from a lack of observation of each other, and a lack of awareness of each other. And the whole point of these is about becoming more, you know, on a base level, is about becoming more observant and aware.
- And the content so far, *As if it Were the Last Time* was about really appreciating those moments of each other, and those spaces which should lead you to a better world. And *Our Broken Voice* has been about disconnections and the tensions that lead people to take negative actions. God, it just makes me wonder about what *Our Broken Voice* is all about again.
- H: This is my last section that I'm coming to now. So I can feel brains are melting slowly.
- D: We need to make that ageing one, at least we know what that's about then.
- S: Well we do at this stage, it's only halfway through the piece, making the piece that we forget what it's about.
- D: Oh yeah, that's true. *Our Broken Voice* started with the question of, 'how do you make the world a better place?'
- S: Yeah, that's true.
- D: And there were two options. It was, make people smile more, or blow up banks. And we just decided to go down the 'blow up banks route' and see where that went.
- H: That's definitely going in the thesis, definitely, best quote ever. Last section this, and it's about the city. Do you aim to change the physiology of the city?
- D: Sorry, you have to remind me. Physiology means...?
- H: Just the body, and how you move through it as well as what it feels like to be in it, I was just using a wanky word.
- S: This is definitely your question to answer.
- H: But there is definitely an incredible power of the music, and how it affects us, because it asks you to feel a certain way, as if a film soundtrack.
- S: Absolutely. I mean, in that respect I would say that listening as you move through your city, yeah then definitely that, I guess we intended to change the way that people do that. But yeah.

- D: I guess it changes the way you move, and the way you look and react. So I guess it means yes, because it changes... If everyone or a large group, well it only takes one person to effect things but, in our case one or more people changing the way they move and experience the city, does change the physiology of the city.
- S: I mean I can't see that everyone would have this experience but I certainly, having done a lot of work on listening and walking, I get incredibly emotional whilst walking through a city. I live in London, and I do it regularly, without headphones I'm talking about. So just the walking to the train station, in fact that route, for some reason, I think we did a lot of work on *As if it Were the Last Time*... No, OBV, around that area. And I experience it in a completely different way these days, than I did pre-subtle mobbing.
- D: So hopefully, everyone does, then.
- S: So hopefully, everyone does, but a lot of people, well friends that I talk regularly about the stuff with who experienced it all say that they have these flashbacks, and these moments of re-swelling, and looking in a different way.
- D: We *are* making the world a better place. (laughs).
- S: or were making people really emotional (laughs).
- H: It's that psychogeographical thing, isn't it? I very confidently describe a Subtle mob as a psychogeographical tool.
- S + A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.
- H: I'm glad you agree (laughs).
- D: You can be confident away, yeah.
- H: Would you better describe it, a subtle mob, as immersive or embedding? Are you immersing people in a story, or are you embedding them in their own city?
- D: I'd like to say the latter, but I don't know if it's true, I think I'd like to say, mainly because *everyone* just talks about *everything* as being 'immersive'. And it's a funny word, because...
- H: It's like interactive; there are degrees of... sort of thing.
- D: Can we be both? Can't we both? Maybe, here's what is: we are immersing people in an audio work that in turn, embeds them in their city.
- H: Lovely.
- S: So I guess it's that there is longevity in the work, but it's not just the piece, you take something else away with it if it's successful.
- D: So therefore, even when that immersion is finished, you are more embedded in the place.
- H: I have seen from today, this is one of my questions, but it's going to be sort of answered by trying one of yours out at an early stage, today. The music is as responsive as the writing, I guess, you came here, saw the places, and wrote the music while you're here, right?
- S: Yeah, last night. Yeah, we've been spending a lot of time in Cambridge over the past five months something. So it's definitely been a reaction to the city. It's funny because as is so often the case with film soundtracks, or even theatre, musical accompaniments, you don't really notice them if it's working well.
- H: Like a city, I guess.

- S: Right. Okay, exactly. I used to get a bit upset that no one mentioned the music, but actually because we spent all the time making that music work for that space. And it is always relatively location specific. So I would say it's as important as making the text work for the environment...
- D: For me, I still think more... I just think that... They are soundtracks, for experiences. And the text is only there to help guide your experience. But ideally... It's a tough one, because the text really does help give a contextual frame, but I'd quite happily just write music and say here's something to listen to when you're out and about. Here's a soundtrack for 8pm in Liverpool Street station, here's a soundtrack... And we probably will do that when we are bored.
- I mean, I'm definitely doing that with the book, two of the pieces in the book have no text and they are just sound pieces. One is for walking as it goes dark, and one is for listening to on a tram [...]. And they have no contextual text apart from that. I always like this idea that it says all the things that words can't. That sounds really romantic.
- H: Talk to me (there are four questions remaining) about the act of walking in a Subtle mob.
- D: The act of walking?
- H: Yes. What's different from sitting on a bench for half an hour, and talk to them about something...
- D: Oh! I see what you mean.
- S: Some movement within the piece.
- H: And moving on that very individual bodily level, as opposed to moving in a car or on a train.
- S: Which has happened, which is something that has been explored but...
- D: It's about agency, and I'd say that's an progression, ah no, let's not think about it as progression, but definitely *Our Broken Voice* had this idea of agency in that, it tells you where to go, and you can only we get there by walking. And so it kind of embeds you in this idea of, it's you moving, it's you walking, and it's you choosing when and how to get somewhere.
- There is such a legacy and history in walking, how it changes the way you think, how it changes the way you perceive things, for us is also a bit: moving camera. If you are just sitting somewhere, that sort of, one camera view, and so actually, walking is also used to navigate people to, what we have described as different shot sizes. I mean, you could do it on a bicycle but it's sort of impractical, but to go from a small corridor out into a large open space is a cinematic experience, that's changing from a close-up shot to a wider shot. And you could only do that by having people move through those different spaces. So more than anything it's about moving camera, and then tracking shots, and sort of moving through a street, they are all kind of camera movements really. So I think that's partially what the walking does.
- S: But also, on a basic level, just the physicality of being, touching the space that you're looking at... Like whatearly stuff we were doing with Lottie. The exploring the space with your own bodies.
- D: Yeah, but you have to navigate the space, you have got to be constantly aware of it, and respond to it. You can't just watch it happen, you have got to interact with it, if you're walking you can't just keep walking in a

straight line because there might be a person or wall or a dog, or a bus, which forces a level of interaction with the world.

H: In a Subtle Mob, would you say the city is a performer or a backdrop?

S: Both.

D: Yeah. I find it funny, it's a funny word when you say 'the city', because you can talk about the city... If you talking about the city as a whole, then yes, it's both because, the architecture of the city, the physical structure of the city is backdrop. But the way the city exists, and the way the city is animated by people and by traffic and the way spaces get used, that's performer as much as backdrop. The crowd is part of the city, and that's both a backdrop and a performer.

H: What's the sort of, this is the second to last question, the penultimate question-

D: That's a theatrical question, that's an interesting thing then. Thinking about the city, trying to consider whether the city is performer or backdrop is a theatrical question. But I think it's not ever a question we have asked us, I don't think the talked about like that.

S: I mean the time when we really have to think about that kind of thing was in Hong Kong. Where that was one of the busiest most vibrant streets I think we have ever performed *As if it Were the Last Time*. And it was impossible to just to see those streets as a backdrop, it was so interactive, so alive and everything seemed to be... It might also be a cultural thing but definitely, to me everything seemed like a performance.

D: I think we have ever just seen everything as a backdrop though. I don't think we have ever kind of not considered how those things are interacting with you. Definitely there is a mood, but that mood is not a visual backdrop, I think that's why... I think that's probably slightly from the cinematic approach. Yes, I don't know... I don't think we think like that personally.

S: In a solid, architectural structures that obviously can be our film set of sorts, but it's the way that is all interacting with that I guess...

H: What are strongest reactions you get from people, in the Subtle Mobs what are the most...

D: We have had lots of people breaking down in tears, but as a good friend of mine once said, you can kick someone the balls and make them cry; it can't be a way to measure the reactions to your work.

I think the strongest, for me the strongest reactions are what Sarah was talking about earlier; it's the coming back to it. I love it when people have an experience in that moment, and they say, 'I really connected with this place.' So for me the strongest reactions are where people come back to that space later and they see it differently, when we hear about those, for me, those are the strongest ones. Because that really talks about the idea that, it does have an impact on the physiology of the city...

I'd like it if people 'got' the story in *Our Broken Voice*! If that ever happens, that's an amazing reaction! That's a strong reaction. (Laughs).

S: We did have a pretty incredible that the feedback from your mate, is that Phil?

D: I don't know, what was the feedback?

S: Something along the lines of, 'exquisite storytelling,' or 'exquisite...' I think it might have been, 'genius,' actually.

D: Cool!

S: No! I think they texted you, or no, it might have been a tweet. Once again Circumstance

D: I don't know, no, Peter Petralia, no?

S: Possibly

D: Where was it, in Edinburgh?

S: Yes! Yeah it was, it was after that one.

D: Ah, Peter, he loved it, he loved the writing. You see, that was really nice because actually, very rarely do people talk about the content. That's a really funny thing for us. You know, we *labour* over these kinds of details, and the sound, and the music, and the content. And people generally just talk about the experience, which is fine, that's what we are creating. So for us, it's just... You see, this wasn't the question; the question wasn't what our favourite comment. The question was, what's the strongest reaction you've had?

S: No but that was a very strong one.

H: Well what are the overwhelmingly common reactions?

D: With *As if it Were the Last Time*, the overwhelmingly common reaction is that people come away is saying, they have reconsidered their life. You know, those are the strong, they are just like, 'well I have never...' Actually I'll tell something that is strong and common, is 'I have never looked at people that way. I have never looked at things that way.' We get that so often, 'I have never looked at people that way,' or comments about realising, wow, no one smiles back at you. You know these sudden realisations are, I think are the really strong reactions. With *Our Broken Voice*, what's a strong one...?

H: I'm interested in how people really have respond to a series of imaginative moments, but *Our Broken Voice* was much more linear.

D: It's just not that great a story.

S: It feels more fragmented because there is so much that seems not make sense.

D: It's just bad storytelling, I don't know about this 'exquisite storytelling' malarkey.

S: I still kind of feel like it's something that needs to be experienced on loop four time....

D: I have to say, everyone who sees it twice thinks it's much better.

H: It's very elliptical storytelling, but I love that kind of storytelling. I like storytelling that asks you to work with it, not...

D: I guess not everyone does (laughs).

S: I guess to our disadvantage, we had already got this bit of a tight following from *As if it Were the Last Time*.

D: Yeah, there was definitely an expectancy...

S: People, like we were saying, who aren't particularly au fait with that type of theatre, and they really, really connected with it because it was hard not to, perhaps. And they just struggled because they were expecting one thing and they got another. And it wasn't something that they...

- D: There is a little bit of, okay, 'we saw the *Sound of Music*, we loved it, it was a film, let's go see another film, oh it's *Saw 3*, hmm, didn't enjoy this one as much. *But it's a film as well, I thought it would be the same*'. That's the struggle we had.
- S: That's the struggle for others, but then we had, and the same time we will always slightly nervous about that idea. It felt like we were sort of aiming at a slightly educated audience, which is not necessarily the way to do things. And maybe there could have been a slightly easier way into that next step in between, but we jumped straight to it.
- A: There was one comment I heard from a student in Ghent that really struck me, which I thought was really interesting. He said he really liked *Our Broken Voice*, he said it really felt like he was an action movie, like he was Jason Bourne or something. He said, but he prefers *As if it Were the Last Time* because it was about that moment he was in, it was actually about that moment. *Our Broken Voice* happens in that moment, and it's something for you to do in that moment but it's not actually about that moment. Maybe it is a little bit in my head, but for an audience I can understand why it's not. I understand why to have an experience that is talking about where you are right now, is a really strong experience.
- H: Last question: where next?
- D: With Subtle mobs? Or with everything?
- H: Subtle mobs, I think...
- S: Geographically? Or conceptually?
- H: Conceptually.
- D: Well, we want to do one about ageing.
- S: We've got a few in the pipeline. With Subtle mobs, was it, specifically?
- H: Yes, unless you feel like it's relevant to the discussion.
- D: I think what's interesting, we want to do one about ageing, and what's interesting about it for me that we haven't done is about the physical choreography in the detail of, in that you move differently at different ages. This is all we thought about, we haven't thought about much else, but that's what we feel that we might want to make one about.
- H: I found that really interesting, because I did a lot of watching when I was collecting stories [for *The Umbrella Project*] as well, and asked people a couple of times to find someone who is older, and follow them, and try to inhabit the speed that they move. How you move differently when you've got a family around you, and that kind of thing.
- D: I think that's definitely what we're looking at.
- H: Your herding them, aren't you? Slowly.
- S: It's going to be an interesting one. We started playing with that a little bit in *Our Broken Voice*, observe and mimic-type exercises. But yeah, we're not sure yet if this next piece about ageing is actually going to ask you to actually age. It's that same question of do we... Are we plonking a fake reality onto...? Or are we trying to get you to embody something that's real and here, and now?
- D: I think we kind of-
- H: Is it a fake you, or a fake reality we're putting you into?
- S: Yeah, exactly.

- D: At the moment which is very concerned about really pushing the other projects we are making, so we don't get thought of as only making Subtle mobs. Because we definitely see it as one type of work that we really enjoy making...
- S: But the pieces we're working on here are definitely, hopefully going to be bridging those gaps, drawing on all the other stuff we're doing.
- D: Yeah, I mean *Vicinity Songs* is definitely more... That's something that is exploring some of the same spaces but everyone has speakers, so it is about shared sound-spaces. Rather than on headphones with just music. And tomorrow... I guess, is more, we go back to using real people as performers, and the stories of real people. I think that's what's next for us, we still will keep working on Subtle mobs, but will probably change the kind of narrative structures. And will probably just do the same as with *Our Broken Voice*, try 1000 new experiments and it won't work quite as well and we will always struggle with the difficult second album, and the difficult third album, difficult fourth album...
- S: Just to keep touring *As if it Were the Last Time*... 'So where next?'
'Yeah, we can do another... we can do the sequel to *As if it Were the Last Time*... *As if it Were the Next Time*'
- D: '*This Is The Last Time*'
- H: Brilliant, thank you ever so much, that was a lot of talking and thinking for what was an hour and 45 minutes.

[End of relevant speech.]

Interview with Deborah Pearson, artist and co-director of Forest Fringe, completed on the 25th January 2012.

- H: So the first off, just very simply, tell me about your background, and where you've come at this from?
- D: OK, well I – I went into theatre initially to be a playwright, and, I was also doing a little bit of performing. And the way that Forest Fringe kind of, arrived, was I guess, like a combination of those two things, because I went to the Edinburgh Festival in 2006 and I'd written a play, and we'd taken it to Berlin and we had a good cast, including Andy Field, actually, that I was, was happy with. And a friend of mine was like 'oh, well we can offer you a place at the Bedlam Theatre if you want, but it's going to charge – it's going to cost you probably all told around 6 grand, to bring your show to Edinburgh', and I mean like the Bedlam wasn't going to cost a lot – or maybe she said 2 grand, either way it was more than I had, 2 grand, 6 grand, either way it was too much money – and I just thought like 'that's crazy' and she's like 'that's nothing, that's nothing compared to what people usually pay to bring their shows to Edinburgh. And the other

thing was – was that I was doing a puppet show at the Bedlam – so I didn't bring my show to the Bedlam – I just was like 'no, no there's no way I'm going to do that- and I was also doing a puppet show, at the Bedlam, and volunteering at the Forest Cafe, and through doing the Edinburgh Festival as like a puppeteer, and deciding not to do it as – as a writer or an artist, I realised that the Edinburgh Festival is an amazing festival and had a lot of potential, as like a platform for people to present new work and take risks and stuff, but that all you needed was a space that people could use for free, that was relatively central, and the Forest Cafe had a space like that and asked me to curate it the next year, in 2007, which I did, and then – and Andy was one of our artists, and then in 2008, Andy and I decided to become co-directors on it, and he was working at BAC [Battersea Arts Centre] and they came on board as supporters, and then I suppose because Andy was working at BAC, a lot of the work that we ended up taking on was BAC type work, that year. Which started us more and more onto producing live art. But it was also because the concept of the venue was that we wanted to support work that would have a hard time coming to Edinburgh otherwise. And often – and work that took risks – and often that ended up being more live art than new writing, I guess, and it just seemed to work better, in the venue. And after seeing a lot of work like that, I also started really liking that kind of work, and making some of it myself, and 2008, after the first year we did Forest Fringe with BAC, I invited some producers to see a little show that I'd been working on, and they really liked it, and they started supporting me as an artist so, yeah, so I suppose that's how – that's the story of how it – the circuitous story of how it happened.

H: And, how do you think it's developed up to where it is now, do you think it holds those same aims or do you think it's developed into something -

D: I think that for the most part it does, I mean I think that one thing that's interesting is that I think that the longer Andy and I did it for the more – the pickier we started to become about work and what might – and the more we also started to understand that we had a bit of a brand identity I think, or a certain thing that people expected when they – we had a specific audience, I guess, we had an audience and they had certain expectations of what a Forest Fringe show looked like, what a Forest Fringe show would be. But we've turned down shows which are definitely Forest Fringe-type shows, and that we think are really high quality shows, because next to another show, when we would evaluate the two shows next to each other, we would say 'which of these shows, needs us' you know, 'which of these shows needs us as producers, needs our specific model'. If the show doesn't need us then maybe it's not, maybe it – Forest Fringe isn't its home, if it could easily find a home at Summerhall, or at Traverse, or at the Pleasance, then what's the point in taking this show over another, over maybe a less experienced artist who definitely couldn't come to Edinburgh without Forest Fringe. So, yeah, so I'd say that for the most part that we try, that we try to stay faithful to our aims, definitely.

H: Cool, and in a, in a snippet, how would you best describe Forest Fringe? Is it festival, is a, you know-

D: Well, Forest Fringe is an evolving, is an ever-evolving thing, I think it's best known to people as an- as a venue at the Edinburgh Festival that is not part of the official Edinburgh fringe where artists can present work at any stage in its development – and which is artist led and which artist also cooperatively work at and stuff, but Forest Fringe has also done a series of microfestivals, throughout the country, and we continue to program work at other places and try and empower our artists to program and curate work. I mean we really want, one thing that we're moving towards is trying to facilitate artists to become curators because that's something that happened to Andy and I and we think that most artists can do it, and should do it, and it's the, sort of the future of the way that we're going to be presenting work. So yeah, so we've been trying to enable artists other than just Andy and I to curate work as well, like what's happening at the Gate, for example, in April, and we're also, now we've been offered a lot of opportunities from international organisations who want us to come over and who are willing to pay our artists well. So we're also starting to offer international platforms, and then we did the In Transit Festival, too; pretty much anytime we think there's a good opportunity for our artists that they wouldn't have otherwise, we take it, usually. If we think it's going to be a valuable opportunity for the artists, then we, we go with it.

H: Yeah, and I'm sort of interested in what you see – I told you about Performance in the Pub didn't I?

D: Yes

H: I got a annoyed so now I'm going to curate my own performance night in Leicester, because I got annoyed that there wasn't anything going on, and then I suddenly realised 'well I can do something about that' – that isn't just moaning – so what is it that you think is the value of curation for an artist, and I guess, for – go for artist first?

D: I guess I think for an artist it gives you a wider sense of the – of the ecology of what's sort of happening in the theatre scene at that moment, which is amazing, and I think – it's a really empowering thing because making your own art is a very vulnerable position to be in; being able to support other artists is, like, an unbelievably empowering position to be in. First of all because you see their work, which is great, and it's always easier to judge or think about work from the outside, but secondly because you're also able – it's very difficult to support yourself, but it's easy for us to support each other and I think that when artists begin supporting each other, it's just, amazing things happen. You know I think most artists are quite good at supporting each others' work, but not that good at speaking about their own work, and are quite good at finding contexts for others' work but have a hard time finding contexts for their own work.

H: Yeah I would agree, and then looking from a slightly different point of view, from the outside in, what do you think the value is for places, for the ecology of a scene, or for actual – you know for The Forest, or Edinburgh; what's the value of artists curating for-

D: Ah, well I think it's always interesting to see, first of all it's always interesting to see what an artist curates, because curating is a creative activity so like – as much as anything else – it's like anyone who has ever made a mix CD or a mix tape knows that – so it's sort of like they're making a mix CD or a mix tape of the kind of performance that you enjoy, or that you think is important, and what you find to be interesting influences. So I think that as an audience it's always interesting to see what somebody curates. I think as – I think also as audiences there's something a little bit more – it just feels a little bit more like the genuine article, I don't know but I think when you go to see, I think when everybody is involved – when everybody is thinking of it as a creative activity as opposed to a commercial activity it sort of shows. And it's unfortunate because it also makes the activity a little more vulnerable, Forest Fringe is certainly not profitable – I mean Forest Fringe is not in the same financial position as other organisations who don't even have as much profile as we do because they think a little more commercially about their work. But [...] Forest Fringe, you know, I think that when audience members come to Edinburgh they recognise that there's something, there's something a little more genuine about Forest Fringe. There's something a little more genuine about the choices in terms of the artists that we're using, and the way that the artists are working together and supporting each other. It's like going to an independent record store vs. an HMV or something, I mean you do feel a difference I think.

H: Yeah, that's really good, thank you.

D: Grassroot thing.

H: So my next question is – really long, let's see- so you have a particular tendency to use traditional arts spaces in non-traditional ways, and then also I'd not sure I'd call the Forest a traditional arts space, but the way you inhabit it is still I guess non-traditional; why is it you inhabit buildings in that way, and is that a particular, is that an ethos, is that a choice and is it important to you?

D: Interesting, so why would you say that the Forest isn't inhabited in a traditional way?

H: I think it's the nooks and crannies thing – there are different kinds of things to do in different places – the year I didn't go you had that installation where he climbed up the ladder in the sort, in the foyer, and back down again – it's probably got a title that I don't remember, I'm sorry-

D: Yeah I mean every space is like a possibility for a performance

H: Exactly, and there are extra things as well, pick up and play kind of style things, or, and I'm also thinking, I saw the microfestival both at, I think I saw three microfestivals, I saw one at Broadway in Nottingham [NB – this was a mistake, that was a Hide & Seek event that included one of Andy's games, not a Forest Fringe microfestival] and I saw one at Battersea Arts Centre, and I saw one at the Old Vic, and that's definitely what I'd call

traditional arts spaces being used in non-traditional ways, it was the toilets, or it was there, you know, it was all over the place...

D: Yeah, so I would say that the – first of all I've never really worked in a traditional arts building, you know, as admin, I'd say, or as a producer, so I learned how to produce through doing it, and doing it with Andy essentially. I guess Andy did work in a more traditional – in a slightly more traditional space in that he worked with BAC, but even BAC is the kind of place where nearly everywhere could be a space for performance. So for me it seems that if you are a performance venue, and you're interested in intimate work, or you're interested in immersive theatre, or if you're interested in any kind of theatre that does not follow or fit into a kind of, a new writing model specifically, then I don't see why you *wouldn't* use every single space that you possibly could. Like it seems like the obvious way to use a building – that you use everything, if that's the kind of work that you're interested in. So I think that the, I think that in a way the building is inhabited that way because that's the kind of work that we support, you know, if the kind of work that we supported were a – plays that happened, that always happened on the stage, then we wouldn't inhabit the space in that way, but that's because we wouldn't need to. So I think that in a way it's through necessity, it's through a necessity of the kind of work that we produce, that we end up inhabiting the space that way.

H: And, and do you think – do you see the work, do you see a trend in the work that is this kind of thing pervades as opposed to happens *in* space if that makes sense?

D: That it pervades the space as opposed to happens in the space? You'll have to explain what you mean by 'pervades'.

H: So, like, I guess visual images are the best way I can use to describe what I mean by pervades; like smoke, like smoke is pervasive because it creeps under doors and you know, it fills a space rather than in the middle of it like in some kind of discrete way.

D: Yeah, Yeah. Well I hope that the reason that the work pervades the space rather than happens in it is because the work is strong, usually, you know we're quite picky about the artists we use and I think that the artists that we use also are, I mean we work we work very often with people who are interested in inventing form, and being innovative about the way they use spaces and the way they approach forms but we don't work with artists who are gimmicky, and we don't work with artists who are going to put something in a toilet stall just for the sake of putting it into the toilet stall. People use those spaces because the idea belongs in that space, kind of thing, the idea has been inspired by that space – so I think that the reason it's pervasive is because we have a high quality of artists who are very thoughtful about the way that they use spaces and aren't just doing it for the sake of doing something different.

H: How often do you deal with work that takes art out of arts buildings?

- D: Often, yeah, very often I would say, I mean I don't, like very often, every festival there's at least, I mean every event we've done there's probably something that takes art out of arts buildings, to the extent that I don't even think about it, like I don't even, it's funny, that like speaking about site-specific theatre for example, being a genre, I don't, I think *all* theatre is site specific, like I think all theatre happens in a site, and the site is a part of the audience's experience, so I don't even necessarily notice when things happen outside, because for me; that's just where the piece happens. I 'm more interested in the piece than where it happens, in a way.
- H: This is a, one of those slightly annoying questions because I have to do definitions, you have to define things a lot in PhD; would you call what you put on, theatre?
- D: Yes.
- H: Yes. Good, because that's mostly my argument – like half of my PhD is having to argue that I'm allowed to call these things theatre
- D: Well I agree- I call it theatre, definitely, yeah, I would say it's theatre.
- H: Cool. Is it important to you that access to Forest Fringe is free at the point of access?
- D: Free at the point of access, whose access, the artists' access, or the audience members' access?
- H: The audience members'
- D: Yes, it is, yes, it's the ideal, it's the ideal situation. It's not always what happens, we have to charge tickets for some of our events just because – I mean we never charge for tickets at the Edinburgh Festival, but we have charged for tickets at, like, microfestivals for example, but it's important to me that there's always, like, really good value for money, because I'm stingy, and that's just how I think about, say, but I – my ideal is that it would always be free, if we could make it that it was always free then that would be great.
- H: And what was the drive behind the idea of the microfestivals, and do you think, do you think the form was effective as a touring form?
- D: The microfestivals, yeah, I think it was, it was funny because Andy and I have continued to work somewhat with the idea of microfestivals, but not in the way that we had initially thought we would when we piloted them in 2009, I think it was an effective form, I think it could have been more effective and I think hopefully Andy and I learned a little bit from it, since doing it. For example now we've learned, I think what we learned about was value, like at the microfestivals we weren't always able to pay the artists, and now we realise much more that, it's ok to not pay people at the Edinburgh Festival because they're going to get quite a lot of work from that, but then there are other contexts in which it's important that artists get paid. So, so yeah, I'd say that it was a model that was, it was a model with some really great ideas but flawed in some other ways but I would hope we have fixed them since.

H: And do you think, because I sort of, I made this big noise about Performance in the Pub when I sort of launched the idea properly, and I started getting all these emails from, like, the Junction in Cambridge, and a couple of other companies and venues saying 'well yeah, how about you do a Performance in the Pub for *Sampled Festival*, or how about you curate this, or bring it here or bring it there, and I sort of: 1) I thought I should try and make one happen in Leicester before you all get so excited, but 2) actually the whole point of Performance in the Pub is that it's DIY, it's me going 'my community is missing this thing, and I'm going to make something for that' and now if I tour it, if I bring it to your community for one day and then I'll be gone, and it won't be responsive to the kind of things... I won't know what your audience is like in the same way as I know what Leicester is like, so actually it would be much better if you set up your own Performance in the Pub, and you can use my logo, and you can put your information on your site and all that kind of thing. So, I'm sort of thinking about touring forms and stuff, and although I think that the microfestivals are brilliant, and great, do you think there's a way to a more sort of – I'm thinking about the word site specific in that context and it doesn't really work – a more community-specific reaction to-

D: Well something – I mean for example we're doing this, the first, we're doing the thing at the Gate, which I haven't been so involved with, because I'm sort of on a bit of a – we're going to make it official soon – I'm on a bit of a sabbatical from Forest Fringe at the moment, as a producer, but the Gate piece I think is interesting because it's going to be two weeks. It'll be a week each for 2 main artists and then they're going to be curating the events that happen around the work that they're doing. Which is very different to what our microfestivals looked like before, because it's longer, there's a longer period of time so those two artists can make more of an impact, and it's also, they're able to kind of platform other artists who they work with, and who they think deserve and will like that platform, which is great. What we're doing in Lisbon is we're working – we've asked Culture Guest to help us find a few, a couple of Portuguese artists, and we're offering them space to work in alongside the British artists who we're bringing over with their shows. So we have started kind of, I mean ideally you always want to work with the community that's there, who are there. And I think especially if it's about trying to kickstart a little bit of a scene in a place where maybe there isn't that scene, or there are the beginnings of that scene but it isn't as full blown as it is maybe in London, or Glasgow, or Bristol or other places; it's great to bring work that comes from those other scenes, whilst also supporting other work, you know like supporting artists who are interested in making that kind of work in that community.

H: Yeah that makes sense. So this was actually, when I was writing these questions, because I had to hand these questions into the ethics process about a year and half ago, so these questions are responding not to the last Forest Fringe, but the one before, there was Andy's piece in his car, I think?

D: Yes.

H: Were there some sound pieces that took you out in the city? Duncan Speakman's piece was part of the Forest Fringe, was it?

D: Yeah, the Subtle Mob? Yeah it was.

H: So this question is, does the Forest Fringe – do you think it does, or do you think it tries to, interrogate something wider about art as part of a city in city space, as part of a wider ecology, and if so, talk to me about it?

D: Yeah, I would hope so, I mean that year we had several, that year we had Rotozaza's piece that was on a bench, this was in 2010, we had Rotozaza's piece that was on a bench in Abbey Meadows, we had my piece that was in a video store where I used to work in, in Marchmont, we had Andy's piece that was in the car, Duncan Speakman's piece that was out on the streets, Abi and Mel's piece that was in a cinema. We had quite a lot of site-specific, that year, we had like a whole section of it. And I think that that work, well one of the things is that Andy and I both lived in Edinburgh, before doing Forest Fringe, and so we both have personal relationships with the city, and what it is, and that goes past just the Edinburgh Festival, and I even have a personal relationship with the Forest Cafe that goes past just what we do in the Edinburgh Festival, so I think it's always been important for us to just highlight that during the Edinburgh festival so that people see that it's not just a month, it's a city. And we put that – that's like a verbatim quote that we had in our program this year which was things to do in Edinburgh that have nothing to do with theatre, basically, and so I think that's – we've always been interested in highlighting the beauty of Edinburgh as a city, and the community in that city, and the fact that it is a city, and it's not a playground – it's just not a playground that exists for one month. And, when we did the piece in Bristol, as well, we had one company who, I didn't get to see this piece sadly, because I was working but we had one company who took people out on the streets where you like answered a telephone, and you like had to hug someone in a hood, I think...

H: Oh yeah, I think I did that one, they were from Wales, I think, weren't they?

D: Yes, yeah. And we also hosted them in 2010 and they brought people into pubs, or like somebody took me under an umbrella to this really strange part of the city where he told me it was this piece of art which he'd created when it was just like a random square in the city [laughs] which was really great. So I think we've always been interested in working with cities, not just cities though, I mean I know Andy has a dream of doing a Forest Fringe in a very rural space, which is kind of also an interesting idea. Yeah, we always want to work with the landscape that's already there, ideally, because, you know it's one of these things, like something that Andy says a lot, that like spaces aren't empty, they're full, they're very full of history, and where the space *is* is not empty, where the space *is* is important, is part of the context of the audience's experience.

H: Yeah, the world doesn't stop at the doors of a theatre building.

D: No, definitely not.

- H: And there are political decisions and contexts that allow you to even to be able to walk in in the first place.
- D: Yes, exactly, exactly. Yeah. It's sort of about trying to take it out of that microcosm of what happens in the theatre building, your building, as you said, exists within a wider context.
- H: Cool. The Fringe, tends to host lots of one-to-one, intimate pervasive, or otherwise non-traditional performance experiences – that's a mouthful isn't it – what is it that draws you to offer a space for this work, and what are your interests in it, and do you think it has a growing relevance to contemporary life. So that's three questions, there, so the first one is – what is it that draws you to offer a space for that kind of pervasive, one-on-one, audience centric, immersive work?
- D: What draws me to it, I mean, I don't think I – I'm interested in work that is formally inventive and I've always been interested in work that is formally inventive, so in a way I'm only interested in something being pervasive, or a one-on-one or whatever insofar as that form – insofar as that theatre maker is taking a risk, and is doing something exciting, and that they find exciting, a little bit risky, and is engaging with the audience in a new way. So I'd say I'm not, you know for example I used to make a lot of one-on-one work when I first started making work, and now I don't really make as much of it and I think part of that, part of it is financial, part of it is that I haven't had any one-on-one ideas for a while. And then another part of it is that one-on-one work is now very, is much more widespread than it used to be, so I don't really feel like it's as much of a risk anymore, to me it doesn't feel as formally – just to do something with one audience member isn't as exciting, isn't as much of a risk as it was, say, like 3 years ago. So I think that the reason, the reason we have, historically, supported that kind of work is because it was risky work that was different, but I wouldn't say that we go out of our way to say that we support one-on-one pieces unless they're formally exciting, you know? If they happen to be one-on-one, that's great.
- H: OK, do you think that – the forms that you support and you invest in – this notion of being formally inventive, and obviously with that form always supports the context, so the content of the work is changing as well?
- D: Yes, yes.
- H: Do you see a trend, is it reflecting something larger, is it responding to something larger about politics or the way we live our lives, or the way we go through our lives now?
- D: I think that, yeah, I think definitely, I think that even the desire for things to be formally inventive is – reflects the way that we live our lives now. Because I think that we have a real desire for things to constantly be new, you know [...] we always want like the new thing, the newest piece of technology, we want that moment, that magical moment when you interact with something in a way that you've never interacted before. And I think that's – I think that that's kind of like one of the – I mean it's like a problem – it's part of that 'how do we stop making capitalism?' question, I

guess... But I think that there is a sense of like, today's human being needing that moment of feeling like they're in unknown territory to feel at their most engaged, and their most alive, but also needing to feel like that unknown territory is safe, somehow, and I guess theatre kind of reflects that. Which is a little bit depressing (laughs) but I think a safe risk kind of thing, but I think it does – yeah – I think it does reflect like definitely interactive technology, definitely the way we're changing in terms of interactive technologies also, we have so much information now, and we have so much information thrown at us all the time, that in order to make people engage with something I think that you have to present that information in new and exciting form, you know, you have to keep rephrasing the same sentence so that people hear it, so that's part of it.

H: Cool, brilliant. That's a good answer, very supportive of my theories in the thesis (laughs) so how, in your experience, I don't know if you have any measures for this at all, but how do audiences react to the work that you put on at the Fringe?

D: Audiences react differently, I mean-

H: I know audiences are not one – they're not a monolith...

D: No, I mean we have different- we have some people, you know, I think that Andy and I now are aware of the fact that – it's great – we have some Forest Fringe groupies, we have some people who just love Forest Fringe, and will like go to anything we do, and that's brilliant. And then we have other people who sort of – we have a lot of people who have heard about us and never seen anything but sort of know what we symbolise, and like that. And they'll be like: 'oh I love Forest Fringe' and I'll be like: 'what did you go to?' And they're like: 'nothing, but I heard so much, I really like what I heard'. So that's good, I think we have really good word of mouth, but I think that we have had... I mean one thing that I always hope is that we can be really welcoming to audiences. I would never want anyone to ever feel like it's a clique or it's a thing that, you know, it's a *thing*; it's experimental theatre and they're not welcome. I want everyone to know that they're welcome, but I think it's inevitable that you end up with, we end up with sort of a slightly more Live Art, we end up with an earnest Live Art kind of crowd, you know, people who like are into Live Art but not necessarily seeing someone self-harm or something. I think that that's those are the kind of people we end up with, or people who are into the work that's somewhere between theatre and Live Art that's sort of on that, yeah, on that fringe. But then I think, so we probably won't end up with the comedy audience, for example, or we won't end up with the new writing audience. I want all of those audiences to feel welcome, and I'd want to know that if any of them came into the building there was something that they'd find interesting, and that they enjoyed interacting with.

H: And how do you – are you interested in expanding your existing audience – would you take something into a community centre in Bradford, or, like how do you – do you make an effort to make those audiences welcome?

D: Yeah, that's an interesting question, I mean I think it would have to depend on the project, I'd want the project... I would be so careful about if it was a community centre in Bradford, because I would never want – I'd want to make sure that project felt like that was where it belonged, and that it felt as though [...] that people were really going to enjoy it. I get a little bit nervous sometimes about artists coming into areas, where you know there isn't usually that kind of work; I think it has to be done on a level, you know what I mean? I think the audience and the artist have to be on the same level, there can't be some sense of the artist being like 'I'm better, I'm right, I know what's what, I know what's good, and I'm going to tell you audiences what's good'. I think that it's, I think that's why that relationship has to be facilitated, and in a way that feels organic and appropriate to that community. So I think that we would bring work to a community centre in Bradford, but I'd also want to be, to spend some time in Bradford first. I'd want to have a sense of, I wouldn't want to descend on a place that didn't have any experience, or didn't have any desire for this kind of work and then it's foisted upon them.

H: Because I guess that question – I mean I use Bradford as an example – but I suppose what I'm pointing to there is class, as opposed to geography, and that in every, even when you do things in Bristol, and when you're doing things in Battersea Arts Centre and stuff, there are a whole swathe of people who would not enter that building, and wouldn't know how to encounter something in the street, and I suppose there's an answer to that which is well you're going to Portugal and you're working with local artists to find a way through to that, so maybe if Forest Fringe were to go to a community centre in Bradford you'd work with Theatre in the Mill to find local artists...

D: Yeah, yeah,

H: I wonder if-

D: I think context makes a big difference. I might not want to be in a community centre in Bradford, like, I might want to be on the streets of Bradford, I mean and maybe not call it theatre, just call it... Like, I mean one of the first kind of Live Art pieces I made without realising it was Live Art was when my partner and I first moved to London we set up an advice booth on the Brick Lane market every Sunday and we had a little typewriter, and it was a pound to get advice, and we'd give you a lollipop at the end of each advice session and we'd type up your advice on a typewriter, and there was never, we got people from like all, all different races, all different classes; we'd have people from the Bangladeshi community like telling us about like – I mean we had some pretty intense questions (laughs). People would ask us, but you know nobody – everybody wanted advice, and nobody seemed to – there was no sense of 'oh, I'm welcome for advice', or like 'I'm not welcome for advice.' Everybody was welcome. And that was probably the most inclusive experience I've had like that, or the most – like the experience where I've met the greatest variety of different types of people. And I think that was because we were just on the street, and we were doing something that

people recognised from comic books, and wanted to be part of that (laughs).

H: It's a Snoopy thing, right?

D: Yeah, yeah. So I mean why be – and I think that also worked within that context, I guess, so if you're really want to engage with audiences in exciting – or participants even – or unusual ways you have to be really careful about how you contextualise things. Because some people are rightfully scared off by anything becoming too institutionalised, or anything becoming... Starting to seem too artificial. Everybody wants to have an unusual experience – everybody wants to engage with the world in a way that they haven't engaged with it before, but not everybody wants to do that under the umbrella of live art or theatre, so, yeah, I suppose that if Forest Fringe were to go to an area that didn't have a context – I'd want people to be making work that other people just... I mean Brian Lobel made a piece like this that worked really well, in the Brixton market; I'd probably want people out on the streets, you know, in shops, in places, out of institutions, out of any specific place.

H: That piece, that was where you sold him an hour of your life or, no- a minute of your life?

D: Yeah, you sell him a minute of your time for a pound. And I mean he also had people, all sorts of people did that project and not everybody saw it as art, but everybody saw it as an experience that they wouldn't have had otherwise, and I think that, that to me was like the kin do fork I do find really, really exciting, and really interesting, I think that the reason the audience for that is really interesting is because it isn't – it's because it isn't under the very safe, and very comfortable umbrella of an institution.

H: Have you seen Slung Low's *Knowledge Emporium*, have you caught that at all?

D: No, I haven't

H: That might be of interest, it's a similar-ish thing, they have this big, sort of silver caravan thing, you know the very streamlined kind of caravan type of thing, anyway, Alan from Slung Low loves it, I think he made the piece as an excuse to keep the caravan. Anyway, it's called the *Knowledge Emporium*, and they've kitted the inside out so it looks a bit like if, Willy Wonka's chocolate factory were a caravan, so it's all very bright and there's lots of things, and basically he collects knowledge from people in the street, and you come in and get a sweet or at something, in exchange for some knowledge, and you can ask for knowledge and, sort of, he'll read it back to you. And they just rock up at places in the street, and he says the question that most people ask first, is 'is this art?', and, after they've donated to the *Knowledge Emporium* they don't care about the question any more, they just, had fun.

D: Yeah, that's it, you just want to have fun, I mean I think it is, exactly, it's such a funny... Art is such a tricky, it's such a slippery word to call something anyway, I think it does sort of alienate some people. Yeah, that sounds like a brilliant, a really brilliant piece.

- H: It's lovely, I think he just takes it to anyone who wants it, have a Google for it if it sounds of interest.
- D: Yeah, yeah I definitely will, but yeah I think I think that that's much more, I mean basically I think you have to put yourself in your brain from when you were 15 years old, right, and when you didn't know, you'd gone to the theatre a couple of times or whatever.
- H: Some Panto.
- D: Yeah, you'd gone to see like, exactly, and if you were like, like how would you go, how would you be interested in interacting with this kind of work. You know, whereas you might walk up to an amazing shiny caravan on the street, you might with your friends laughingly say 'oh go on, let's go get some advice from those random people'. You probably won't walk into a building, you know, that puts on this kind of work, whether people are all intimidating and like artsy, so I think that that's, a good way of thinking about it.
- H: Yeah, that's a useful thought actually. 15-year-old me had no idea.
- D: Exactly, what would 15-year-old, how could you get 15-year-old you to come see it, or to do it. (Laughs.)
- H: And then the problem becomes, though, the problem becomes but the people in the Arts Council for the most part, and the people who make art in big buildings, probably 15-year-old them had been to the opera loads and...
- D: (Laughs.)
- H: Went to the National with their parents every weekend or something, because they lived in London...
- D: Yeah, maybe, but even then it would still be, when I was 15, I hadn't seen a lot of theatre, but I'd seen some theatre, I was interested in theatre when I was 15, but you know something like what we do now at Forest Fringe I never ever, ever would have gone something like that, or even thought about it. So even if they went to the National or the opera, like, it's about getting them to that next level, how can you get them to do the really like bizarre many strange things? I think a teenager is a really good way of thinking about it because there is that giggly dismissiveness that teenagers have, but also that desire to be like 'let's just try something weird, it will be interesting'.
- H: I think there's a particular – because that's kind of when you're forging your identity isn't it, and so things are a bit more dangerous when you're a teenager, like you want to go along with the pack very often because identity is [up for negotiation] at that point. A lot of this stuff does play with, it makes some basic assumptions about how willing and flexible you are willing to be about your identity because it asks you to be a part of it in a way that [other] things don't.
- D: Yeah

- H: So I'm basically agreeing. There's only a couple of more questions left, so, don't worry.
- D: Sure, sure.
- H: Just sort of, a small question about the sustainability of the model of Forest Fringe, because you sort of started, I think I'm interested in your answer to this in particular because I've heard you, kind of speaking at various kind of open conversation events about how, about what you think about arts funding and stuff? And quite often you seem to be saying that you don't think that it is – there's too much funding around for – I don't know what you think about the sustainability of the Fringe how it is funded and arts funding in general, and what that says about us and how we make and stuff?
- D: I mean I'm definitely not against arts funding but I, I'm not against arts funding but I am against something, I think the thing that you're thinking – at *Edgelands*, something that I was saying that I still maintain, I'm sort of – I can understand, like, someone's or a person's frustration at a piece that has been funded, having a ticket price, I can understand, I can totally understand that frustration because it does seem like. Well, especially if it's not the kind of work – especially if you're a sports fan, then I guess you don't care that a lot of funding goes towards sports, and then there's also a ticket price but I might care about that. I'd love it if sports events were free, and I'm annoyed that my taxes pay for them and I can't see them for free. Equally, you know, I'd be much more willing to go to a sports event, even though sports are not my thing, if it were free. Especially knowing that my taxes and help pay for it. Equally I think, with the arts, if events that were publicly funded were free then I think that there would be a lot less, I think there will be a lot less anger, I suppose from, kind of John Doe public, about those kinds of work... And I think that that's one of the reasons that, like, everybody you know everybody defends art galleries, because art galleries are free. Because it's like, yes they are funded; anybody can go into them. And I think that accessibility is really important. So, yeah I would say that if something is publicly funded, I'm not against public funding, I think it's great, like I think arts funding is really important, but I think that, I think that tickets have to be cheap or free basically, that's-
- H: That's, yeah, I did hear half of that thought at *Edgelands*, so I'm really interested to hear that. [...] I think I agree I think I do agree, and then that, surely that goes more in favour for the artists in a way because there is, there's less of this ticket sales driving art, you know, artists make what they want and it's supported.
- D: I think it would change things quite a lot, I think that one thing would be that you would end up with, I think you end up with work, if that were actually a model that was implemented where any work that was publicly funded was free, and, other works that want to charge the tickets could not be publicly funded, you would end up with work at two, kind of, extremes. You would end up with extremely commercial work, that was obviously just there are ticket sales, and you would end up with

extremely, experimental work. But I think it would be – or maybe you wouldn't, I don't know. But certainly I think that artists would have a lot more, you know a lot more possibility of doing what they wanted, which could be quite cool.

H: Yeah, I think you would need to up the amount of public spending a lot, birds why complain when you can access every single thing that's made with that money for free, that becomes a self-fulfilling, erm-

D: Yeah.

H: Okay, cool, so last two questions maybe. So the Edinburgh before last, there was this sort of crowd-sourced meta-festival that you did via Twitter, or something? That was-

D: Crowd-?

H: There were like, everyone tweeted stuff that was happening, and I think Andy sourced it all online and then, there were little pieces of paper that you could, you could pick up which was one of these events someone on Twitter described happening at the fringe. Do you, maybe that was more of an Andy-thing but do you recall that?

D: Yeah, it was, it was Andy's project, the *Ghost Festival*. And basically it was a bunch of things that never happened that he printed out on these little cards that he distributed throughout Edinburgh, so that was, yeah that was in 2010.

H: That was, I suppose it doesn't really matter if it wasn't a Forest Fringe thing, because a sort of a preface to the question which is, how important to you are the new spaces but the digital world is opening up to the way that you work, program and curate?

D: Yeah, I think that the digital world is making a lot of difference. One thing is, well I guess there are a lot of digital pieces that we're interested in, we're interested in work that takes a, sort of, more interactive... And increasingly that's increasingly popular and effective. I mean, three years ago we were already interested in programming that sort of work, you'd end up with like very few people who were quite technologically-savvy being involved in that, in that piece, or that work, and not that many other people. Whereas I think like now, it is, you know, now there's much wider audience that kind of thing than there was a few years ago, so that's already very exciting. I'd say the way that the digital, I mean one thing is, I think something that, Twitter, I mean Twitter has really changed the way people, the way that feedback happens, like, this is much more, I suppose as an artist – but also as a programmer, you just get to know what audiences think of things immediately. I mean you can have just done your show and then you know if someone didn't like it, and that's both good and bad I suppose. But I think, to me actually, it's good, it's nice to hear somebody, to hear what people think right away, and if they like something or they didn't like something. So I'd say that's making some differences well. But it's different to measure isn't it, and then you could measure how many tweets go out about a particular events and how many people retweet something, or, you know, but I think it would

probably be a lot all statistical data, actually to figure out to what extents Twitter is really, is impacting, how many people go to these events, or participate in these events.

H: And then this year, you hosted Hide & Seek with *Hinterland*, and, their words the Non Zero One piece, the water polo one, which I did with you I think-

D: No, I didn't get to do it.

H: Oh, did you not? Who was I sat next to then? Oh, It was Laura McDermott, that's who I was sat next to.

D: (Laughs.)

H: I don't know why you're interchangeable in my head...

D: (Laughs.)

H: I think it's associations with Andy Field probably,

D: Yeah, exactly

H: But yeah, they both used, they both used the aesthetics, or ethos of the digital world a lot more than they used actual digital technology, is that of interest, do you think that reflects the most accessible way to approach-

D: The aesthetics, as opposed to the actual technology?

H: Yeah, so *Hinterland* used play, which has become more of a thing since, the interactivity that the Internet has allowed, free play through, across people and spheres and stuff, and obviously the time out was immersive but involved your answers in it, it was reactive.

D: Yeah, yeah. I think aesthetics, I think the aesthetics of technology as opposed to the actual technology is more accessible to audiences. I don't think that that's because audiences are not willing to interact with the work, the technology, I think that's actually because our technology's not quite yet where it needs to be for, to have as satisfying an experience through technology being just, like, the form in the theatre. I think maybe, you know, if I were like a prophet I would say like in two years, I would say that the technology would be where it needs to be for a, you know for an experience that you just did through, digital technology as opposed to with, like people kind of simulating what, you know digital technology does. I think it will be a couple of years before that, before just digital experience is as satisfying as a piece that kind of, mimics digital experiences whilst using, whilst not actually using it that much.

H: And yet there are these, I mean I remember very vividly that conversation at *Edgelands* about art and technology, and everyone was saying 'I don't really get it', and then we said, well, 'have you ever sent a tweet, have you ever done a blog post? That is you existing on that plane'; but there's definitely a psychological barrier... And, it's interesting that the arts – particularly theatre and live arts – are defined by their liveness, quite often aren't they, and that can be seen to be an opposite pole to digital. Which in the old version of digital, in the old version of technology, it was

video, and that's something recorded, but digital technology now doesn't mean recorded...

D: Yeah, it does mean here and now. I think it's another, it's sort of like what I was saying about the teenager, you know, getting the teenager to go along with things, I think people get very easily thrown off by the terminology, I think people get very easily intimidated. For example people would be like 'I don't really identify myself as being particularly technological or particularly digitised', but nearly everyone, in our generation (at least at the moment) is pretty, is relatively digitally savvy. You know, like, you and I are having a conversation, via a, like, video fucking thing, that if I'd seen 6 years ago my brain would have exploded (laughs).

And we're talking like it ain't event a thing. So. So I'd say that we are much more digital than we were before, it's just about, or if you call a piece of work feminist, for example, certain audiences are much more reticent, are reticent to see it, whereas if you just make a piece that is just feminist, then people think about those issues, and pick up on them anyway...

H: I think there's an interesting thing about technology, as well because actually it's a very personal thing, like often the biggest barrier to pieces where I've given our MP3 players haven't been that they didn't have access to MP3 players as much as this thing that isn't *my* MP3 player.

D: Yes, yeah, yeah, that's true, it's very personal, definitely, I mean I think that... I thought a bit about the *In Transit* festival which we did together, and I thought since that if we were ever to do that again in the future that we would definitely just make it an MP3 that anybody could download, and just tell them what time to be on the bus, you know, which is what I sort of think we should have done in the end, but we didn't do. And I think that the reason is people; it is very personal; people are willing to do this kind of stuff on their own. They think that we have, I think we do have this experience, I think we do have this relationship with our MP3 players, our iPhones, our computers that is like intimate, it's like an intimate relationship really. For some people it's literally an intimate relationship, for other people it's more just like, kind of intimate. And yeah I think there's something about making that into theatre that people get freaked out by but to be honest I've done, I've done *Skype Live Art Speed Dates* before, and I wouldn't consider myself to be, if you ask me if I make, if I make art that deals with technology, or digital technology, I would say 'no'. But you know thinking about it I have, loads of my work has actually dealt with that stuff, but it is just now becoming so much a part of our DNA it's becoming... It's like asking if you're an artist who is particularly preoccupied with you arm, you're like 'no, but actually I use my arm all the time'. (Laughs), so, I'm not like an arm artist, but I am an artist with an arm who uses it all the time, and I think that digital technology is like now our arm, it's like our new arm.

H: So this is my final question, although I might ask you about narrative, because you said that was an interest, and that sort of follows on from this. So, actually there is a, in the *Forest Fringe* stuff that I have seen, and

I'm fairly sure this reflects your and Andy's interests as well, but there's been a strand of, I guess, of radicalism in terms of politics, of activism in art. There's like Tania El Khoury and *Crunch* and stuff like that, do you think the type of work that you present, this sort of formally inventive work is particularly suited to addressing politics and activism?

D: Yes, because I think that it shakes... It makes people a little bit shaken, which I think is important in terms of... I think especially because of the last thing you want to do when you're discussing politics or activism is to come across as preachy. I think one wonderful thing about something that's formally inventive is that it kind of it removes these clichés, so that when people are dealing with an issue if they're encountering it in a way that they're unfamiliar with, that they don't necessarily know what their position in it is. I think they're much more likely to connect directly to the issue, then if you just sat down and talked about the issue. Because then they have all of their defences, they know how to deal with someone talking at them about an issue, but maybe they don't know how to deal with looking out of a window and talking into a Dictaphone or being asked to tear, watching people tear up their money on stage. I would further say that our interest in politics especially last year, because I would say last year's programme reflected that more maybe the other programs although I think that it has always been an interest of ours, is that you can't... Is that I now think that we found ourselves at a point where you can't not be political. It's similar to what I said about technology and the arm, it's like politics are everywhere and the personal is political. I think that now more than ever everybody – people – are very aware of that, and so there is no way for us to program in Edinburgh, to programme work for Edinburgh without... Especially as we were going to lose the building because they would rather have that space the empty so it can be overpriced (which is like part of the whole problem with the property market). Politics are directly impacting our lives now; we have to be aware of them. I think that the most exciting work is going to deal with them in some way. I think that you're going to find many, you know whereas before digital work and political work had their own kind of boxes, and they really seems like special interest categories, I don't think that they are special interest categories any more, now, now they are everybody categories. I think that you'll find in the next few years a lot more political work, nearly all work that you see will have some sort of, will touch on politics in some way. And probably also touch on digital technology in some way, because they're pervasive, because they're everywhere now.

H: Cool, thank you, and I guess the final question which I haven't written down; you sort of began by saying you're interested in how narrative is changing, and what it's reacting to and stuff, and just a little bit on that?

D: Yeah, I think basically my thinking about it is that because, because before the Internet kind of came around one of our major leisure activities was to watch television. Which is something that people still do, to watch television, to read books, there were more sort of, in my opinion, passive forms of entertainment. Whereas now, our major leisure activities, at

least for our generation, is surfing the Internet, is going online, like deciding, finding something interesting, like even if you find something interesting for a second you can go and read up on it on Wikipedia, which leads you to the next thing, and like your tweeting, it's a much more kind of like interactive kind of space. It's my thinking that narrative is kind of a key element of our identities and how we see ourselves, but the way they were proceeding, or the way that we're conceiving narrative it is also starting to become more interactive, and less passive. And that that is reflected in the recent mainstream-ism I suppose of 'interactive' theatre, performance, contemporary performance. So one of the reasons that *Sleep No More*, for example, was a huge hit in New York and all of Punchdrunk's work was a huge hit, over here, or that *You Me Bum Bum Train* is a huge hit as well is that we're becoming... *You Me Bum Bum Train* is a great example as well, actually, because it is narrative, in that narrative means a representation of an event, and events are represented throughout the show, although they're kind of presented, right because it's less like a presentation than an experience I suppose... But what makes *You Me Bum Bum Train* so appealing to, especially people in our age category, and people who go and see that show not just people who are interested in contemporary performance and live art in general, it's everyone who wants to see that show. It's because people have become a lot more narcissistic, we become as you said we have these very one-on-one relationships with our technology and our leisure activities, I guess, so we want to be in centre, we want to be like the star of the show, and because we've become a lot more interactive, we're not interested in representations as much as experiences now. I think that that, I think that relationship is fundamentally narrative, I just think that narrative has changed. That way we conceive of narrative, or what we require from narrative has changed now, so that we had to be at the centre of that narrative.

H: I would agree, I think that one of the points I make in one of my chapters is about, that we really need to leave Aristotle and his ways of telling stories behind, and it's much more life is like a flooded river, a series of moments, it's an immersion, and a particle and a wave. (Laughs).

D: Yes, definitely, definitely I think that's definitely true. And I'm really interested, hopefully if I get to research this, I'm really interested in looking at... So let's say that I, you know that *You Me Bum Bum Train* is narrative, I haven't seen that show I just know about it, but let's say that I said that that is narrative, and it represents this new kind of narrative form; what elements of the way that that show is constructed... Although the most successful pieces of this kind of work still adhere to some of the old elements of what we consider narrative. So for example, you know one of the things that you learn about narrative is that it's important that every, that every consecutive events kind of becomes more dramatic and bigger and better, so that the last moment is a really big moment, so does *You Me Bum Bum Train* start with quite a relaxed, or a less impressive interaction, and then do the interactions become more and more impressive as the piece goes on. Or is there like, reversal, which you

always get in narrative? Are there, like some interactions that are very joyful, and are those followed by interactions which are considered particularly difficult? I'm interested in also sort of figuring out which elements of narrative don't seem to be changing, amongst everything that is changing.

H: Because narratives have always reflected lives...

D: Yes, exactly, exactly and our senses of our identities, which are also changing, I mean I think that the way we conceive of ourselves is changing.

H: Totally, and we have fewer sort of life events, milestones, it happen in the same way, we don't go through jobs in the same way, there is no job for life and a single linear progression and, and that's why *You Me Bum Bum Train* may represent a series of moments, but there's still a beginning and middle and an end because you walk through it.

D: Yes, exactly, exactly, that's a great point actually, yeah, that's very, very true.

H: Interesting stuff

D: Yeah, so that's a bit of my thinking about the old narrative quandary, but definitely I think narrative, I mean well you've got to get your thingy, because I did also say that Hannah Nicklin is going to be one of the people whose work I take a look at in researching my projects.

H: Yeah, you can be one of the four people who read my thesis [laughs]

[End of relevant speech].

Interview with Ben Eaton, Rich Warburton and Victoria Pratt, co-artistic directors of Invisible Flock, completed on the 17th January 2012.

H: Tell me about your backgrounds, so what kind of brought to now, as Invisible Flock.

B: Er, yeah. Well, I think we've got 3 distinct yet similar backgrounds I suppose. I studied English Lit at Sheffield University and went through the gamut of wanting to be an actor, and not really liking that, and then wanting to be a director, and then getting a bit frustrated and bored of that, and then wanting to be a deviser and a live artist... Through that, stumbling onto the use of technology in what I did, and I did a lot of work just in video to begin with, and gradually got frustrated with that, and so learnt to do interactive video and got a bit bored of that, and then sort evolved out to now, what I do in the company really – which is a big

mixture of a lot of the digital interactive stuff that we do in our work. So yeah, I suppose I probably got here because I got frustrated with where I was before, and the form as it was, and its limitations. That's me.

V: Similar, I went to the same university as Ben, and studied English Lit. Finished university and pretty much went straight into wanting to be a live art practitioner of some kind, so made some work with Ben, made some solo work, that was always kind of looking at a relationship between an audience and performer – what that could be. Then I worked freelance as a performer, bit of a visual artist and a designer, and then I amalgamated those, I suppose, into what I do now within Invisible Flock. Similarly I think when I was doing more – it was experimental theatre I suppose, but I got a bit frustrated with a kind of interaction that was called 'interaction' but wasn't actually interaction. So more experimental work with performers that was more on the rails, I suppose, and didn't go far enough to let audiences change the work. So that's how I arrived here, and now in Invisible Flock I do most of the designing, and bits of the performing.

R: I did English Lit as well

H: At Sheffield Uni?

R: No, no, not at Sheffield Uni, the mighty, mighty edifice that is called Nene College, which I think is now University College Northampton, I don't know what it is these days, even if it exists. And I just bummed around for a while, actually, and then about 10 years after graduating, set up a theatre company which was very traditional black box – told simple, you know, 2-hander narratives – and got increasingly bored of that, and stumbled across more interactive-type stuff. And then attempted something that didn't work particularly well, but sort of piqued an interest in how you might make audiences, audience centric, and let them more into the experience, and then that started other stuff. But up until Invisible Flock, like with everyone else, everything had been quite frustrating in the sense that it didn't really feel like it was really pushing the boundaries of what was possible. And I was interested in the idea of game play in the work that we made, and so came to it from that.

H: And how did you all come together to start making theatre?

B: We all worked for other companies based in Leeds beforehand, and just sort of through that – well, Vicks and I met in Sheffield first, and then Rich and I met working for other companies, then we all three started work, and then sort of split off to do our own thing 2 and a half years ago, maybe three years ago?

V: Something like that.

R: Something like that.

V: Yeah.

H: So did that feel good?

B: Yeah, it's been great it's been -

V: Scary!

B: Yeah.

V: It happened very organically, actually, but it was almost like starting again a little bit, because I think we'd never had anything that was so closely ours before.

R: And certainly in terms of funders and stuff like that, it was starting again. It was 'forget your track record, it doesn't matter that you've done this and this, because that *name* 'Invisible Flock' hasn't done this and this, so you're still starting'. As far as funders and stuff like that, all those credits were meaningless, I mean they still mean stuff now in terms of other doors, but in terms of them it was...

B: We had to do it all over again

R: You have to start all over again, but that was good, actually, it meant that you weren't holding onto old practice, things like that.

B: No, definitely.

R: It was a completely fresh start...

B: Yeah.

R: And it's worked for us in that way.

B: And we sort of wanted to move, we sort of moved away from... Whereas before we made theatre, we sort of moved away from that and so we call ourselves 'an interactive arts trio', mainly on purpose, actually, because we didn't want to just talk to theatres any more, we wanted to be able to work wherever we wanted to work, and we wanted to make work we wanted to make. So I think that's been really exciting, because we've been able to diversify our practice, a lot, in a way we were never able to before.

R: Absolutely

B: And have a lot more ambition than we were able to have before, so, it's been really good. So yes, it's been a mental 2 and a half years.

R: You say the word 'theatre' and people have preconceptions about what it is.

B: Yeah, yeah.

R: Although also it works the other way; you say the word 'game', and there's preconceptions, but not being *either* of those has been helpful to us.

H: What was the first thing you made?

R: (Laughs.)

B: (Laughs), The first thing we made!

V: It was in a nightclub, in Cardiff-

B: In Cardiff-

V: Arts Institute.

B: And it was called *Follow the Bird*, and it was, a – we were told the club would have at least 400, 300 or 400 people in it, and apparently it was quite an arty crowd who would be up for doing stuff, so we made a, David-Lynch-esque inspired, sort of point and click adventure, *live* point and click adventure through the nightclub. And it turned out the nightclub had 50 people in, who'd all done pills.

(Laughter.)

Incapable of stringing a thought together, let alone follow a narrative.

R: Yeah, they were literally hand-held through it. Hand held, 'this way', point at that.

B: But it was fun, we got to mess around with a lot of things. So it started by you got given a cocktail, and in the cocktail was an ice cube that had a message hidden in it, and that unlocked some things, and that leads you to the storeroom, and Vicks played the 'Lemon Lady' and we filled this whole room with a massive yellow dress, and she had lemons in her hair, and then you open a lemon and there was a-

V: Clue in the lemon.

B: Clue in the lemon, and if you won, if you won, you had to be taken to a room where to get your prize, where there was simply a silver tray, a webcam, a chicken, and a rubber glove. And you had to put your hand inside the chicken-

R: Not a live chicken

B: Not a live chicken, but a *chicken*, you had to put your hand inside the chicken to get the prize and we live-streamed it. It was very peculiar.

V: There was one bit in the kitchen, as well, didn't we-

B: It was very peculiar.

V: There was one bit in the kitchen, where we made omelette sandwiches.

B: That was where you knew you'd won. Because basically the whole way through you collected eggs, because you were following a bird, and then you'd won if you'd got the hard boiled egg. So Vicks plays this character – we've done it twice, in a more, we did a more refined version about 6 or 8 months later, at Bristol Old Vic at Forest Fringe – but Vicks dresses as a character called 'The Gull' and it's like a greasy spoon cafe, and we stuck her in the kitchen, and you break the egg into the pan and if it fried, then you hadn't won, but you got an egg bap, and if you... (Laughter.) And if you had won, you were taken into the chicken room (laughs), where you had to take your prize from inside the chicken.

R: Which was a shit porcelain egg that we got from a charity shop. We had planned to bury it across the street but-

B: We hadn't got round to it (more laughter).

H: So obviously the next thing you think of is actually having to retrieve it from a chicken.

B: Obviously, it's the next logical step.

V: She was straight in there though!

R: She loved it (laughter); 'give me the glove! Wahoo!'

B: So yeah, it was really peculiar, it was very surreal, but it had the first seeds of a lot of bits and pieces we were interested in-

V: It had mechanics that we were interested in.

B: Yeah, definitely.

R: I can't remember how seriously we took it, as in that stage of the company, as in 'this is the start of something' or 'this is something that we want to play around with'.

B: Yeah, bit of both I think, wasn't it, a bit of both.

V: Yeah.

R: I think we finalised it – it was only about a month later, actually, about a month and a half later when we did it at Bristol Old Vic, and that's when we went 'OK let's –

B: This does actually work.

R: - let's actually try and make something.'

B: I can show you photos if that's, that might be interesting, it won't translate to the audio...

H: Um, maybe like after-

B: Yeah, that's cool, totally, because we've got them all out there, so you can reference them. So yeah, we did it at Bristol Old Vic, we did the same piece, but it was for Forest Fringe, one of the Forest Fringe mini-

H: Yeah, microfest, it might have been the one I was at live blogging...

B: I think it was, yeah, yeah you recorded bits and pieces for it, actually, that kind of audio stuff.

H: Yeah.

B: I vaguely remember there was someone talking about-

H: But I don't recall experiencing...

B: Well we were hidden.

V: Yes.

B: We were the hidden thing, so we took-

H: There was feathers, I remember...

R: That was us.

B: That was us. So you found a feather-

R: You found a map.

V: You found a map, you found invitations that were from this Peacock character who'd written-

B: That was i.t

H: Yes, I saw those.

V: Who needed help to find a lost feather, which then led you to... 50 maps?

B: Yeah.

V: That we'd hidden around the building. And so we cut it – I think there were 100 invitations, 50 maps, and we tried to cut the audience down as we went along.

R: And 25 players, and then 5.

B: And then we took over 8 or 9 spaces?

R: Something like that.

V: Something like that.

B: I mean it was great. It was hectic, and it over-reached but it was fun. So these guys played, well, Vicks played about 4 different characters, and again it sort of had, it had a coherent story this time, which was a step up. But also it was, was supposed to be, it was designed initially as a thing that people could do in-between the main programme, so it was hidden. And the idea was that there are 5 minutes between the performances, they can spend 5 minutes doing our thing, and then go and do the next thing, but it turns out it took 4 hours to play. And we were supposed to end on the stage, because at that point, we were exploring a couple of things with it, but one was the idea of 'winning' – in these types of experiences, could you actually have a winner? So one person actually gets to finish it (which is what happened in that one), so you follow these characters around, you met a bunch of characters who were all birds in human form – which weirdly has been a thing we've gone back to quite a bit, and – including the Gull, which made a reappearance, and Rich played an owl as a librarian, and Rich's wife Sidra, played a magpie...

V: We had a crying bird.

B: We had a crying bird.

V: We had a water puzzle you had to try and solve where you had to bring the right amount of tears-

R: Stolen from *Die Hard 3*
(Laughter.)

B: Yeah. And a canary...

V: Oh and the audience got little book guides, as well, little bird guide books which we'd annotated these little books.

B: Like a bird watcher's handbook.

R: And you get to keep them, you get to take them home, which was a nice idea of having a moment, something to take home with you.

B: Yeah they were really heavily annotated, weren't they, and then-

R: There was the Canary.

- B: There was a canary, hidden in the darkest, deepest pit of the theatre.
- V: Yeah, a health and safety nightmare, I don't know how they-
- R: Yeah they were very cool, they let a lot of stuff go past, like that place was a dark place, with literally, scaffold bars sticking out at head height, and at no point did they say 'you have to have the lights on', 'as long as you go down there with a torch, it should be alright'. So that could have been our first, and last ever show, but luckily it wasn't.
- B: And then basically you got through to the end and they sat and played a board game which basically was just the experience they'd just played but as a board game, which told you a lot of the story.
- R: It gave you a lot of the narrative, didn't it?
- B: Which made, tied up any loose ends. And then the winner got to go up onto the stage at midnight, and place a feather in an eye, and they saw the peacock. But we left it too late, so they'd shut the dimmers off, and they'd shut the theatre, so we had to get them to turn everything back on.
- V: The idea behind that was that by the end of it there was one winner, but that by the end of it, the one winner, you don't want to win because the peacock is this horrible, evil character and it shrieks at you when you place the feather at the end. So we were kind of going... By the end of it you want to retract yourself from the game, and this poor girl ran on stage – I was playing the scary peacock – and she put it on, and legged it out, it was brilliant.
- B: We were quite mean to begin with, weren't we? Our first two pieces were really mean...
- V: Yeah, I mean they did – they were quite mean, it's quite interesting, how people stuck with it, as well, especially when you are performing – I think a previous piece we did when we were working with a performer who got very frustrated at audience members, and ended up telling them to 'fuck off' which we were like – for us that's kind of the beginning of the end, actually, that's everything we don't really agree with in terms of, well, he dropped character as well. But with this one we were pretty harsh on the audience, but I think because it was within this real – because the characters were so over the top.
- R: Well, not as much harsh as in 'we' were harsh.
- B: No.
- V: I was! I was evil.
- R: But it was very clear that that was character rather than-
- V: Yeah, that's what I'm saying, exactly.
- B: So I think it was playful-
- R: But I think we've kept that, in terms of we've always been oblique, we've never even to – to frustration I think we always make sure that we never give the answers, all the characters were still very oblique, if someone

asked a direct question, we generally wouldn't give a direct answer. We'd let them figure it out, and I think that's still, even, *Fanfare* is true of that

B: Yeah that's true actually.

R: You'll never be told where to find something, but to hint at-

B: And I think, in a wider sense you can probably, like I think our work, there's a couple of strands, and the kind of *Follow the Bird* sort of – we refer to it as *Follow the Bird* but it's those sort of more adventure – very narrative-based adventure.

V: They're very theatrical, actually.

B: Very theatrical. But that's probably a strand of work, that we do, isn't it?

V: Yeah.

B: Those kind of things, we've got that, we did a thing for the *Crucible* recently, for their 40th birthday which was based on the same things, same sort of models anyway, so that's kind of a whole strand of what we do.

R: Which I think is the performance work, as in that, where we bring others performers in – is usually in that strand, to fill up that world.

H: So you'd call it theatrical, and performative, but sort of, just to situate yourself away from theatrical mainstream, you wouldn't call it 'theatre'?

V: I think it, I think it is very theatrical in its appearance, but we always try and base the experience around a game structure. So that's why we always say point and click adventures are the nearest thing we want it to be.

R: I mean I think the 'first person' – that's a really nice way of – I've not used that before – it's a nice way of describing it.

B: Our reference points are always games or films, we never reference theatre, really.

V: Not really, no. But then I think it still is theatre, I wouldn't say –

B: No, it's not actively *not* is it?

V: No, no. I think that's just not a starting place for us.

R: I don't know, I think it's not narrative, rather than, is it theatre by the fact that it's called 'theatre', or is it, I don't know.

V: We always say 'theatrical gameplay' don't we, instead of 'theatre'.

H: It doesn't happen in theatre buildings, but it's live, and proximate?

B: Yeah.

H: Which are sort of the things I'm using to define theatre in this, as opposed to 'stuff that happens in theatres'.

V: Yeah.

B: Yeah, yeah absolutely. And really, it has actually happened in theatres, so maybe it is theatre.

- R: Not always
- B: Our games have, haven't they?
- R: It depends what you call *The Visitor*...
- B: True.
- R: I mean that didn't have the live performance element to it. That's not because we wouldn't have put it in there, it was more to do with-
- B: Logistics.
- R: Logistics, rather than-
- V: I think it sits well within theatres because in terms of getting audiences it, I think where we did it in the nightclub, your entry points are much more forced upon your audience, are much more obvious, even the invitations are – there's that real point of getting them in, whereas in a theatre context like we did with *Fanfared* because it's people buying into an experience – it's much easier for them to access.
- R: Also-
- B: This is the piece we did at The Crucible, for it's 40th, which was ticketed, and box officed, so that was a clear-
- R: Clear entry point.
- H: Was that a very different audience to the one that you'd normally have?
- V: Yeah.
- B: Yeah, yeah it really was.
- V: Really varied, really varied, old, older women who would, how do I phrase this, very kind of – what's the word – when you feel like you have ownership over something-
- B: Yeah, definitely, it was because it was the Crucible's 40th.
- R: They were self-empowered weren't they?
- B: They were very self-empowered. It was The Crucible's 40th, and it's a very peculiar building because people feel very emotionally connected to it and we had a chunk of our audience, I think they were a breed of stage managers that they employed in the 70s-80s, who still live in Sheffield, who are often now late to middle aged women who have a very aggressive sense of ownership over the theatre. So we had a lot of 'sit down, let me tell you why everything you did was wrong' – oh for fuck's sake, but it's-
- V: Like, really quite rude, because we were working with a lot of student performers and they were just – wouldn't go with it, and they would undo everything that these performers were trying to tell them. Quite aggressive.
- B: Yeah. Everyone else really liked it.
- V: But then you had groups of 11-year-old kids, who behaved really differently, it was really interesting.

- B: It was also really interesting to have a show presented in a really formal context, actually, because I think we have quite a hectic, chaotic energy about our work, a little bit about us, as well I think but, we often, we quite like to subvert and mess around with things. And often our work has been free at point of entry, or has gone against those 7.30 starts and a box office kind of thing, so I think that was a really interesting – it was really interesting to have to do it like that, I think.
- V: Yeah.
- B: It made the expectations very different and actually a lot of what the show did – the show was somewhere between a pervasive game – like a Forced Entertainment piece, and almost like a [couldn't hear: 24:28] company piece, in that some of the moments were quite Gothic, and beautiful, and we were constantly playing with the notion of showing people the strings, and showing people behind the performance. And we had an interval and I was playing a narrator character completely outside of the world who kept popping up and talking to them, so we were playing with that notion of – it was almost like a bloody mess, in a sense that that chaos was sometimes...
- V: Well I think that's why that kind of works, because you're asking people to play in the parameters of 'you know it's not real, we know it's not real' everyone's more relaxed – where people struggle, when people aren't used to that kind of interactive work; there's that 'oh god, please don't make me do anything'; but because the whole thing was held so lightly, and you did step out and in of the world-
- B: Yeah, it's not pre-occupied with immersion.
- H: Do you think you're – to use a vaguely theoretical phrase – that 'magic circle' of game play – do you think you're interested in the membrane between real and not? Like you were talking about being mean, and-
- R: For us it's really interesting that you don't always know when – certainly when you cross into the magic circle, but where the edges of that are. So, is it at the point that you bought that ticket? Or is it actually when Ben did his first speech and made you all drink Babycham? Or is it... You're never very sure when you're in and out, which means that actually there's that – you get away with – the world looks a lot bigger doesn't it, because then they're not really sure... Because there was another show going on at the same time, and people aren't sure whether some of those pictures – I think Vicks' dad or someone came along, and there was a bloke from *Dinnerladies* was in the other main show, and he thought that maybe we'd got him just to stand there, in the corridor, to create an image, but it wasn't – he was just in a corridor – but if you hold that all lightly, then that level of where the two lines blend is-
- V: For us it's about never trying to get rid of the cracks.
- B: No, it's absolutely not.

- V: With *Fanfared* the design of it was actually quite interesting because we didn't try and change any of the theatre spaces, so the props store became a theatre cabaret space, but it was also a prop store.
- R: You're not trying to hide the real world, you're just using the real world – and I think that's the, and you're not even trying to change the meaning of the real world, like you said, it is still a prop store. It just also happens to be a cabaret room, rather than 'it's a cabaret room'.
- H: And is that interesting, that dual – the way things can be one thing or another, and both, even if they're mutually exclusive.
- R: Yeah, I think so.
- H: Do you think that there's a wider interest in that that reflects to anything else in the world; like are you trying to make a political point, or a, is it just the culture that we live in is full of those dualities that we don't necessarily notice?
- V: I think we're quite interested in making people forget that they're in – like a lot of the *Crucible* staff came to see it and what really worked for us was that they forgot that they were in their own building – and I think that, for us, is actually quite political, and what we try and do is that people can look at their surroundings differently, and it's a cliché, but I think...
- B: We talk about empowerment, don't we, in our work?
- V: Yeah.
- B: We talk about interaction as a means to empowerment; so genuinely people to participate in the work, so rather than show them something, we get them to do something with us, because we're interested in them being able to play around with it and fuck about with it, and have the same energy that we can bring to making a piece of work, but to experience in the piece of work, and then by extension in the place where it's happening. Because I think even less narratively driven – something like *Bring the Happy* in the market – we're still interested in something very similar, I think, that notion of...
- V: Definitely.
- B: Looking at a space; both the micro of the market, and the macro of Leeds as a city; how else can we participate in that space, or how else can we look at it – or what else can we do together?
- R: And the genuine reason that – about a boundary at the end of it. The reason I like it is that compared to games there isn't... It hits a wall where it saying 'well you're not able to do that, because we haven't programmed it'; you can if you want to; so if someone did want to go off completely and not – someone might be there to help them, but you can genuinely do what you sort of want. Which is what we were getting frustrated with before because you generally couldn't do what you wanted, it looked like you could, but actually if you opened the door, everything would fall apart, because you'll see the workings, but with us you can see the workings because we want you to see the workings.

- B: *Edge* magazine did a review of the Punchdrunk show they did in London recently, the resistance thing, and it's a bit of a snidey review, but they basically go for ages thinking that they'd disarmed a bomb when actually what they'd done was find a speaker, and they'd unplugged the speaker cable – and they put it back, and they talked about from there on in.
- V: It became harder to...
- B: And all they could see was the cogs and stuff. And it's that really interesting thing of, actually, you spend all your time-
- V: I think certainly when you're trying to use technology, I think that's the other side of it for us, when – because we're still finessing, I think, with something like *Fanfare* when we used something like the RFID tags, there were those moments when you could see the breakage, sometimes it did really work. Which is why I think it's quite interesting, because performance, for us, we find it quite easy, but I think you can adapt, or we do try and adapt as performers – to our audience, so they don't want to go outside, or they run around the Lyceum, and we would go 'fine, that's part of the experience' and it would adapt – when you're dealing with technology it either works or-
- H: Well there's a magic circle for technology, as well, there's just less of a gradient between working and not working.
- B: Yeah, absolutely.
- V: Yeah, exactly. And I think it's quite interesting trying to meld that kind of performance experience with that kind of technology because it is hard to get the two to-
- H: And is technology for you a function, or part of the – the form – is it a focus for your work – like this is?
- B: We're interested in what it allows us to do, rather than it in itself, I think
- V: We always used to say that we use 'hidden' technology – because we're not necessarily interested in being a Company That Uses Technology, but can the technology enrich the experience.
- B: So I think – partly because we try and do it all ourselves, partly because we learn it as we do it, I think we have a – a frustrating relationship with technology in our making process. I don't think that necessarily shows in our work, but I think in our making process we have a frustrating relationship with it – but in a good way I think, because we are interested in what it allows us to do rather than the technology per se. I'm interested in the technology but outside of our practice I think.
- V: Yes.
- R: Yeah.
- B: So I'm interested in what's possible, and tweaking and messing around with stuff.
- R: But not necessarily using it – a lot of the time we'll go 'that'd be really interesting, but not for this' so it is still, sometimes it will lead, and you'll

go 'well that's really cool', but not for this, but then you'd remember it and go 'oh, do you remember that thing that did that, wouldn't that be the perfect way of doing this?'

B: Yeah, exactly. Generally we go 'we'd really like this, this and this to happen, how the fuck does that work?' And then we have to work out a way to do it, so we work it round like that I think.

H: Because I was talking to Duncan Speakman about his headphone shows and he consciously wants to inhabit MP3 players as a *cultural* space, but it feels like your work is more about 'how can we make this thing better, more magical, more real?'. All those things – not inhabiting digital technology as cultural space in the same way.

B: No, I think so, I think we are much more interested in what they can allow us to do, but not just us, what they can allow by extension our audiences to do a little bit, so we're really interested in using text messages and mobile phones – but not so much iPhones, we're much more interested in 'what's the base level of technology that you can interact with'. And actually that notion of democratising technology, we're really interested in, so actually-

V: And again, no dead ends. So if we're creating a text game, we'd look at 'what happens if someone responds, or decides to call us, or – ' I suppose we're interested in breaking the perceived uses of interactive technology as well.

R: If we're going to use it then we need to make – we try and make sure that they'll use it as well, and so are we ready for that in that piece. And if they are going to use it and we can't accommodate that, we shouldn't use it, basically, I think.

B: We're less interested in a specific – I think we graze a lot – we use a bit of this there, and that there, and something else somewhere else and I think that's-

R: We always start with a story anyway, or a narrative idea, we'll never start with a piece of technology.

V: No.

B: No, never.

R: We'll start with 'we want to do something about this man' or, they'll be something there that's- there will be pieces that we make in the future that use no technology at all.

B: Yeah, we quite enjoy those, they're less stressful.

R: Yeah, certainly for you (B) (laughter). Apart from the basic coding that had to be put in at the beginning for *Bring the Happy, Bring the Happy* was pretty technology light. For the reason that 80% of the audience, the participants, or 70% of the participants, wouldn't be able to use technology, I mean you're asking for memories, and a lot of those memories and nostalgia are from an age that still don't use technology.

- B: We spent ages, when we were in the first shop – the project took over in a glitzy shopping centre, and we bought these touch screens, and I killed myself writing this piece of software in *Director*, and we set it up.
- V: And there was no Wi-Fi, and we needed it to run with Wi-Fi.
- B: ‘Fucks sake’, and then we moved to the market, and then suddenly in the market, nobody could use computers. And there was genuinely that much of a break, there was such a gap, you’d go ‘do you want to type it in’ and they would go ‘oh, no, you write it down for me’ and that was a real eye opener. We were sort of aware of it anyway, but that notion of – we’re very conscious of our work [... brief interruption] that notion of – if you’re presenting work in somebody else’s space, or if you’re presenting work in a public space I think there is the risk or the danger of – what’s the word – aggressively dominating that space with your use of technology, or your technological assumptions, which are then in themselves political and economic and all of that.
- V: Even it *being* the arts, I mean people in the market took real affront to it being a piece of art.
- B: Yeah, massively.
- V: Like they were being looked down, talked down to-
- B: It was an act of aggression, wasn’t it, being there as artists in the market – was an act of aggression.
- H: I learnt that through *The Umbrella Project*, I learnt that – I didn’t say ‘this is a piece of art’ I talked about stories because everyone tells stories right? And that became the way in.
- B: Definitely, definitely. We always said we were artists, but then we would never-
- R: We wouldn’t say it was a piece of art.
- V: No, no.
- R: We would say – we’d explain the concept of the piece rather than explain it as a piece of art.
- B: That is really interesting, how you dominate... But if you take that through to the more pervasive stuff, we did a piece in Bradford, that was woefully under-attended, but was, 4 pervasive adventures across a city, it ran over a month. It was 30 different installations, and too many Arduinos, and just loads of stuff, and one of the big things for that was the notion of accessibility. And Bradford being what Bradford is – it’s a very poor city, and it’s been completely gutted by the recession – one of the big things we were interested in alongside the work was actually ‘how can this type of work be accessible to everyone?’ So you don’t need a smartphone, or you don’t even necessarily need credit on your phone to play it, and so we built a lot of that into it, and spent a lot of time thinking about it, which was kind of -
- V: I think the biggest barrier we had again was that it was in a gallery.

- B: Yep
- V: I think if we did it again, our starting point would have been in a public street, or in a phone box outside.
- R: That then took you to the gallery if needs be – it was a poor, poor entry point for it, it really was.
- H: And so carrying on from that, and the audiences that you do want to make contact with, who currently are your audiences and, where do you want to go with that?
- R: I think our audiences are location-based rather than in any way gender, class, or demographic-based. I think that they're location based so we want to interact with wherever the piece is – the audience there. So rather than as in 'we want to hit young people' or whatever, we go 'well if we're going to do it in that part of Leeds, then the people who want to play are from that part of Leeds'.
- V: I think we always try and say that it's for anyone who wants to experience it, and I think that's what we always try and say.
- B: Yeah, I think so.
- V: Apart from very young children, sometimes – I think from 11 upwards pretty much most of our work, you could play it.
- B: You could have a go, anyway.
- V: I think our audiences do really range. A lot of older people play our work, actually.
- H: Do you have many people with mobility issues, or sight or hearing difficulties?
- R: Occasionally. I mean some of the stuff it just can't be – I mean when we did the piece for – *The Visitor* there was a group that were sight impaired and the leader of that came to look to see what you could play, and there was one that you could have done, a phone version, where you could have done a paired version of it, but it wasn't because the technology was the thing that was standing in the way, it was just that actually, that story and the way that it was told was in that way, so – I think there are always going to be some people that won't be able to take part in the thing.
- V: We've played with different languages in our work, so we had this phone box piece – a complicated version that we never got around to completing- where you could select one of 8 different languages, and get a different question depending on the language that you chose, and then those questions – you're communicating across languages was the idea. And with *The Visitor*, because it was in Bradford, we translated one of the audio tracks into Urdu, because again we wanted to – for that to be an option in a city like Bradford.
- H: One of my small avenues of thought in the whole thesis is always access, and wondering the more specific and tailored experiences become the more individual they are, they have to work for a lot of people, but they're

often less accessible than just sitting somewhere and watching something, because you can have audio description if you're blind or –

V: Yeah.

B: Definitely, well it's much less controlled space.

H: And I was just wondering if sometimes the answer to that is a company that makes tailored experiences for people with – so that they make games for people with hearing difficulties, or sight-?

V: Well the Crucible was quite interesting because they nearly paired our show with a signer.

B: Which would have been amazing.

V: Which would be amazing, and it was an option, and it was discussed, but we weren't running for that long; only 10 nights; but it was something that was offered, and we thought that 'maybe this is something that should be fed into this kind of work'.

B: Definitely.

R: And on a general level, in terms of access and mobility, we'll always choose a, out of one or two paths, we'll always choose a path that means a wheelchair could go. Even on little things like *The Visitor* all of those locations you could get to with a wheelchair. So rather there might have been a pretty journey up stairs, but you'd always be able to take the lift.

V: We've got a friend who makes things called 'ear films'. Like solely, his thing is making sound films for blind people, it wasn't originally going to be for blind people, but now he's really interested in that question, he's really focussed on that solely now.

R: I think we'd really relish the challenge of someone going 'make it specifically for that', but then by doing that you then would, I think, you'd automatically actually alienate another audience.

B: There's something quite cool about that.

R: But that'd be very cool I think.

H: I sort of sometimes think I'd like to see a company do that because it'd be like going 'this is what it's like for this person *all* of the time', and also if you do a piece where for everybody else you forcibly remove their sight, then it's kind of a different political experience, then, which I haven't thought about more than thinking...

R: That's why I like *Papa Sangre*, because it's that sort of-

H: Did you play *Nightjar* as well?

R: I did play *Nightjar* as well. Couldn't really get past Benedict Cumberbatch – 'Benedict, you're talking to me, Benedict' (laughter). I enjoyed them both, actually.

H: OK, so, also interested in the work you do with young people, because you do a lot of work with people in schools and stuff, don't you? And it doesn't

feel like a 'we have to do some outreach for the Arts Council Form' do you know what I mean? It's more of an integrated part of your-

R: The biggest piece of advice I was given very early on was never make your education work separate to your 'real' work, and in the past I had done, so you deliver a piece on how to make theatre, and it was just mind numbingly horrible, and the kids didn't care.

B: People have actually killed the education – the arts education sector has been ruined by companies 'phoning it in', for years. Not all of them, but certainly in Yorkshire there's plenty who just -

R: I think Nationally.

B: Who just picked up the money, and... Well, partly because the very notion of us starting up the company was about doing stuff we actually wanted to do.

R: And that actually it was really interesting to work with that, interesting to see if you can make a pervasive game for that age audience.

H: I'm interested in if they responded differently, stronger, they understand gaming more instinctively?

R: They don't have any concept of a magic circle, in that sense, that they're all, they're having lunch, and they're in the magic circle, somebody walks by, and Captain Hook has walked past that window, and they genuinely believe it, they will run up to you and say 'I've just seen him, he's been in the car park'. No 'why would Captain Hook be in a car park?'

V: They're almost convincing *you*. We stopped that part of the game, and then over lunch all the children were like 'we just found Tinkerbelle's wand in the playground!' – they're constantly trying to draw you back into it. It's insane.

B: It's absolutely nuts.

R: Which means you don't have to actually do much – you can hold everything much more lightly, actually, you just have to-

B: Turn up.

(Laughter.)

R: Actually, as we went more on with those sorts of projects, you actually learn – because to begin with there's always a bit of you thinking 'I'm in a school, what's visibly the educational outcome of what I'm doing, how – can the teacher see the educational outcome of what we're doing?' And actually we very quickly learnt that the teachers didn't actually care about that, that's not what they wanted, they were the teachers, they didn't expect us to have that, all they wanted was to basically get the kids to engage, to animate, to believe that they could- and they would do the educational outcomes of it. I mean this specific one the literacy and how that changed their writing skills and stuff like that.

B: *Storyville* was the most successful thing we did in schools, wasn't it?

V: Yes, do you want to tell Hannah about *Storyville*?

- B: The premise of *Storyville* is that the kids' school – it was little ones, wasn't it, about 5 year olds?
- V: Yeah they were very new, years one and two.
- B: 5 and 6. Their school and their village sits on the gap where *Storyville*, where all the stories live, and the real world meets, and people aren't telling enough stories so the stories are leaving *Storyville*, because the stories aren't getting told enough. And we burst in, and we're from the Story Protection Agency, and we're supposed to be protecting stories, and we're there to recruit agents to help us, because they have to be vigilant and to make sure the stories don't keep escaping, and then over 5 or 6 weeks we teach them different agent skills to make them fully trained agents. And there's always a drama, and it's always Hook who's 'dunnit' (laughter). And then every week we bring one of the stories, we've been undercover in one of the stories, so we dress appropriately and that's the beginning every feel. But when we first made it we were playing with the idea of almost making like an ARG for 5 and 6 year olds in their local village, so we did really silly little things, so we took out an advert in the local newspaper for Captain Hook looking for crew members, and we put wanted posters up around the town.
- V: We emailed all the parents as well, to hide stuff in the kids' bedrooms. So like, sugar cubes, we'd told them if you found sugar cubes it meant someone's -
- R: Someone's protecting you.
- V: Protecting you.
- R: But you didn't know who.
- V: So the parents would hide sugar cubes under their pillow and stuff.
- B: And then also, the parents started using us without us knowing it, the kids would come in and be like 'why were you on the phone to our mum this morning?' 'What?' (Laughter.) 'Mum said you phoned to say I had to get up to go to school, because it's an important day' (laughter), 'yes! yes I forgot, I was on the phone to your mum this morning' – it was really weird. But the kids just bought it, just so much. That was by far the most successful.
- V: And the whole premise for the school was if kids can be more verbal, then their writing will improve, so the whole thing for us was that they had to write the stories, because the stories had escaped, so making up new stories, and it was quite emotional, actually, the head teacher was like 'it's the most successful thing we've done, and these kids who weren't writing at all have started writing'. It was really good.
- B: Really beautiful. It was really beautiful. And, we really did – if we did have a mission statement – it was to empower the kids so that taking part in it made them feel like they had ownership over stories. And it sort of took the stories away from the books, and the people telling them, and it actually let them tell them and it was really, that's a really good thing. And

apparently you can still see the difference, as in you can still, that class are still doing that, aren't they, and they still write, which is great.

H: hat is great. And so I think there's something there about children having a greater literacy with play, as a thing...?

B: Mm.

R: Yeah.

H: Does that work with younger audiences – participants, can you take lessons from that to your work with adults?

B: I think so- I think... (hesitates)

H: 'No' is an acceptable answer

B: I think we do, I think we're very, I think we're quite interested in that wider notion of people making play at the moment. In that finding – I'm slightly suspicious of the word 'play' as well, actually, there's a new thing in Leeds called Playful Leeds, which I don't know much about, I'm suspicious of that...

H: People keep on talking about building some kind of playground or something for adults.

B: Yeah, I'm suspicious of it. I'm slightly suspicious of this notion of 'play' as a – in a Jane McGonigal sense in that it can solve all our wrongs – but also I'm suspicious of the notion of 'play' as a synonym for almost the infantilisation of things. Which I don't really agree with, and I think...

H: Play is complex, it's a complex, imaginative-

B: Yeah, totally, and I don't think play is just 'dicking about' which I think a lot of people's synonyms for it is.

R: It's that play isn't not work, isn't it? You can't – play isn't 'not work' is it, it's it's own separate thing and it can be just as complicated, and just as – have as many syntaxes and different things to it to work at, whereas people generally think that if you're working, and you're not doing something that doesn't seem to have an obvious end, then that's play, whereas...

B: And then so we did Hide & Seek 2 years ago, and a lot of the surrounding stuff around the main games is the more parlour gamey kind of things, which personally for me don't really do it for me very much, I find them very unsatisfying. And I find them – as an experience – I find them a little bit empty because they just seem to be very focussed around notions of play in that purer sense -

H: So like they're more about mechanics rather than about-

R: Well they're emergent play aren't they, they're that-

B: They're not emergent, are they? I think they're the opposite, they're the really simple – they're actually much more – it's something to do with that notion of adults reclaiming play, but in the most obvious senses.

R: All the rules are there at the start.

- B: Yeah, exactly.
- R: And you just play within that thing, there's no – it isn't progressive...
- B: No, but there's no emergence, there either, it just is what it is, isn't it? So I find that – so whereas there's something of the energy I think – and the willingness to imagine that I think we have, that we like in working with kids because it's refreshing and you don't have to – there isn't the barrier that there often is with adults, or there isn't the other stuff. But then conversely, the most difficult project we've ever did were within schools, weren't they, like Tadcaster was a bunch of grumpy teenagers...
- R: But that's -
- B: Where you are fighting that transition though aren't you. We did a project where we were teaching game design to a bunch of 15 and 14 year olds in their history lessons
- H: Is that *The Agency*?
- B: No, it wasn't actually, we were just teaching – so it was in their history classes and they were looking at the rise of anti-semitism in the holocaust and we were brought in to teach them game design to help them try and approach the subject. Which, you know, should have been pretty good...
- R: I mean the thing was there, and that was very much – it wasn't because of the age group, and it wasn't because what we were doing, it was because of those group of kids. It was very much that they were – again it was that self-empowerment. They were very much self-aware that they – they thought they knew more anyway, so they weren't that interested in exploring.
- B: I think 'exploring' is a really useful word, actually, yeah.
- R: But also because the school itself hadn't really understood what they wanted, it became very much a – we were sort of very isolated in what we were doing, we were just making, without it really being fed into anything else and so it was a frustrating experience.
- V: I think it's group mentality as well, so with the kids, a lot of them went with it because there were 5 or 6 really strong personalities within the group that would drive it, so I can't remember her name – Agent Polar Bear was one of them. And she would just rally, rally all the kids up and I think actually it's quite often the same as our work for adults in terms of work like *Fanfared* – if you're with someone who is willing to go into the experience and you go with it and I think – do you know what I mean?
- B: Yeah, definitely.
- R: Yeah, yeah.
- V: Like if you had a group of teenagers, and you know the 'cool kids' were going 'oh I'm not fucking doing that' then of course you're going to struggle.
- B: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

R: But what was interesting was that [couldn't hear – 53:20] managed to contain the people that – we never cared about people not believing it, so if a kid came up to us and said 'it isn't true' then we wouldn't go 'how dare you! Of course it's true!'... To the extent that actually even those non believers would become ... believers (laughs).

B: Believers! We'd sing the song (laughter).

R: It became more fun to believe than not to believe.

V: Exactly

R: So actually it was easier to believe and go with it than it was to –

V: But I think that translates to our adult audience, because I think that the first hour you'll get them being like that (does a meek gesture) and really kind of... But then they work out that 'actually, it is more fun if I go with it'.

H: I have that half hour with everything though, especially 'proper theatre' these days. Like it takes me half an hour to go 'why are they all shouting at me?' (Laughter.)

B: Yeah, totally.

H: And then you sort of sink into the story and you get what register the performance is. I don't know which way to go... Do you want to talk about *Bring the Happy*, or do you want to talk about *The Agency*?

V: Either.

B: *The Agency* might link in...

H: Because I only know a little about that which I think you (B) mentioned to me before.

V: We must show you the introduction trailer (laughter).

H: And that is a school project?

R: No.

B: No, *The Agency* is-

R: The ICA, Hide & Seek we made it for...

B: Yeah, yeah Hide & Seek we did it and then we got a bit of Arts Council funding to develop it and we've done it in a gallery, in an office, as a training exercise, for some corporate people. We've done it everywhere. It could work in schools, actually. It probably would work in schools.

R: Secondary.

B: Secondary, yeah.

R: You'd never get primary schools doing that kind of-

B: That started somewhere slightly, that started in a couple of ways, really, 1) we wanted to make something that was very explicitly a game. We often don't refer to our things as 'games' partly as a perception things, partly because we often think of them in terms of games, even when they

aren't necessarily a game, I think. But we wanted to make something that was very explicitly a game. We wanted to play around, we were interested in rules, and the mechanics, again, looking at those as very explicit things, and story telling in games and whether you could create an experience that was completely generated through the mechanics, basically you were setting up a framework for completely emergent narratives to sort of appear every time. All kind of framed within the context of a – I have a thing about slightly overcomplicated board games, which no one else shares, but I really like them...

- R: I just downloaded *Memory from Memoir 44* for you.
- B: Well there you go. But so it started from that and we didn't know what we were going to make, so we just made – we got 2 big planks and we drew a map on it and we got – we made a bunch of economic rules, so we decided that-
- V: It's this fictional country called 'Degali'.
- B: Yeah.
- V: And it's split up into 16 regions and we created this small backstory for each of the regions and – and the country's mascot is this whale called 'Bunga' and that's what you're sort of, fed, first and foremost.
- B: And you play as one of 6 characters, who are members of The Agency which is a shadowy organisation who's been called in, whose true intentions are unclear and who's been called in to solve –
- R: Stabilise.
- B: Stabilise the region of a fixed amount of days. Each participant has a character, has a costume, has a character sheet with some little silly details on it, and can do one thing. So if you're a pilot you can fly things, if you're a general you can move troops, if you're a diplomat you can negotiate, if you're a-
- R: The driller.
- B: The driller you can drill, if you're a road builder you can build roads, and if you're a-
- R: A medic.
- B: A medic you can build hospitals. Each region – and then we wrote some software which controls the inner workings of the country and of the economic system, so each region then has 2 stats, it has a population stat and it has a resources stat. If the population stat – let me get this right...
- R: Or the resources, it's either or-
- B: Yeah, basically, they depend on each other, so if you've got more people than resources the basically there's not enough people, so the amount of people you have goes down, because people die, conversely if you've got more then it starts to go up. So the idea is – and there's certain, fixed, victory conditions. What they *don't* realise, is – and then it's set up with them around the desk; we play the Navy Seals theme tune underneath it-

- R: Situation room fetish.
(Laughter.)
- B: And we sort of borrow the language of films and we were all dressed in lab coats and treat them all very formally, and I sit behind the computer and run the systems, Vicks is at the side of the table, and puts all the pieces on the board, and talks to them and allows them to make the decisions. And Rich is sat in the corner with a speaker and a microphone and a bunch of dice and what they don't really realise but that eventually becomes apparent is that every single decision they – they can make any decision they want and we've got a system which means we run it through a probability table and Rich just rolls dice on it, basically. And it's dice that we've made. And then the whole story just sort of goes from there. And so we literally go 'bum bum bum bum, day one, go!'
- V: And every day is timed, so the first day is 5 minutes and then it gets less and less-
- B: So it all ramps up and it ramps up but we don't really give them any guidance, we just literally go: 'go!' And then they as a group have to work out what to do and where they go. And it genuinely – no game has ever been the same, and the stories that come out of every game haven't been the same. And it's all then based on probability and dice.
- H: And so do you – does your role tell a story of the situation, or is it everyone inferring?
- V: Narratively all I do is say that there's a humanitarian crisis in the island, explain the regions, explain that there's a pirate region called 'Sharla' next to it, and that they have 7 days, and as a facilitator I cannot advise them because they're The Agency, they're the experts, and then their sheets give them the rest. And then narratively, after that, I kind of take all their decisions – they elect a speaker at the beginning, who speaks for the group, which always becomes frustrating later on, because they're always like 'oh you do it, you do it' and then they're fighting by the end of it trying to speak and I'm like 'no sorry, you've elected your speaker'. And then Rich plays all the voices over this microphone, so as they make decisions within the world.
- B: Characters on the ground.
- V: Yeah, we have a bunch of scenarios that we've pre-written, or that we add to.
- R: Yeah, the scenarios start from that it's a cause and effect, none of that's pre-determined.
- B: Yeah.
- R: So for example there are regions that you're not allowed to build a road through...
- B: Conservation areas.

- R: But you can build a road through there if you want, so if you decided to build a road through there then suddenly all sorts of consequences will happen so that's a natural-
- V: For example, Bunga will leave the shore, because it's a conservation thing.
- B: And then we hide mobile phones in their costumes and they get calls from-
- V: The rich (laughs).
- B: Other characters that offer them deals and it gradually becomes apparent that whilst there is an overall victory there are also individual victories, that they can win.
- H: So in- it is working towards 'a win'.
- B: Yep.
- R: Yeah, so there's a group win and then there's an individual win, and the individual win... Generally is in conflict to the group win.
- H: I've played a submarine game like that.
- B: OK.
- H: Where you have to try and escape a sinking submarine, and you can either work together or you can-
- B: yeah, yeah.
- H: Board game I mean.
- R: That's a bit more fun if you're in an actual submarine... Maybe that's a bit close to the, the crash [the Costa Concordia had recently been in the news]. (Laughter.)
- B: So the idea with that was that was a very kind of explicit investigation – it wasn't an academic exercise, but we did start off with like 'we really want to mess around with this, we really want to look at these things'.
- H: And how do you construct rules for an emergent system, which it sounds is what you were trying to get at?
- B: Yeah, definitely, we leave a lot of space. I mean we do in everything that we do, but I think in *The Agency* there's just loads of space.
- V: The main rule is that they can do anything that they want in the country as long as they have the money. So first of all, they're all reading their sheets going 'well I'm a pilot so I can only move planes' but actually when they realise that they can phone the president, and try and overthrow the government, because they have a phone in their pocket, that's when that emergent thing happens. So- where we start at rules, really the main rule is that you can do anything, and we will try and facilitate them doing anything as long as they have the money and they agree as a group.
- B: We never explicitly say that either, so we never tell them that you can do whatever you want.
- V: And two or three turns in they go 'oh'-

- H: And how do people react to that, can you see a process in people-?
- V: Yeah it's about 2 or 3 turns in that they go 'hang on a minute, can I ask you a question, what if I – go over to there and do that', and you go 'yeah, absolutely' and I think it just unfolds, and the phone calls help; as soon as they get the phone call from a character we've never introduced before.
- B: The world suddenly just goes 'whoosh', does' it?
- V: It sort of opens, and, yeah.
- R: And everything a trade, whether that's money or whatever. You can't do anything without a trade taking place, but those trades can become, they suddenly realise that it isn't actually the money, that actually they could trade some oil that they've collected.
- V: Or 'Woof Woof'.
- R: Or Woof Woof.
- B Illegal narcotic –
- R: A confidence, for something. So 'can I give you the skin of Bunga the whale?' So that it actually becomes...
- B: Yeah.
- H: And did it begin as – or did it have meta economics, meta politics at its-
- B: Yeah, sort of, I think it did. We were interested in the notion of choice and consequence, so we were interested in that notion of through these mechanics how can you – how can you get people to think about genuine choices and consequences?
- V: And how those people behave as a group, I think within that – the overall win is always to stabilise the country – that win remains and I think all the other stuff is-
- B: But there are great moments in it, aren't there, because from that you get people, you will almost always get one person looking at a region that's doing badly, and people are dying, you almost always get one person going 'fuck 'em, fuck 'em, they're dead anyway' and there'll be a moment where at the table every will just go – 'that's a bit weird' – and it's great, because it-
- V: It was why we were brought on to do it as a corporate training exercise, because you just see how your colleagues behave.
- H: And then we hear in the recently released papers from the 80s, Margaret Thatcher begin advised to just let Liverpool fall by the wayside, because they were fucked, these discussions happen!
- B: That's it, isn't it? That's just really interesting and it does generate that, but I think it generates that emergence, which Rich was saying, that no single action happens in a void, so that everything you do has a knock on, and that's how you generate it, so we set up these character to begin with and we set up a very loose framework, and as soon as they start to do something in it, it starts to do stuff. And it took us 2 or 3 times of doing it

to realise that actually you can't force it – because the first great game that we had was at -

R: The ICA, yeah.

V: The ICA.

B: The ICA, and it ended up with the guy who played the diplomat overthrowing the president, but being really sneaky. It was a guy stood in the corner of the ICA like this [crouches over imaginary phone] going 'yeah! Right! So!' And just thinking 'this is fucking amazing, this works so well'. And the next game after that we tried to bring that about again, but it just didn't work, it fell flat, because we were trying to force the story, and actually it wasn't appropriate to that group of players, the relationships they'd developed. We had Matt Adams from Blast Theory play the diplomat, and in that one Matt was just very quiet and sat back, and took it all in, whereas before the player had been really aggressive, and so about 3 turns it we realised it wasn't going to work, so we just shifted gear and went in a different direction, and we let them do what they were going to do.

V: It was very hard to focus, that one, I seem to remember.

B: It was, yeah.

V: Just this guy was just really into building roads!

B: Just really into building his roads (laughter).

V: I remember being like [whispers] 'why is this guy building so many roads?'

B: He'd written your name, in roads, on the map (laughter).

H: One of the things I go on about in this chapter is that I think games are a really interesting way of – a singular way, actually, compared to loads of other theatre and narrative experience, as a way of investigating community and what it is to be part of something – and how communities can thrive or collapse, do you think that is borne out by *The Agency*?

B: I think so. I think it creates very – a lot of different relationships between people in the space of 2 hours.

R: And as well as the 6 people around the desk, they're also talking about the fictional community of the places – each region is sort of based on, they're very state-led, so one of the places is clearly Iowa, farming community, and another place is clearly a Washington sort of thing, we often have those, so there's something – it's not hard, they can imagine the places they're playing with, but within that therefore you have created these-it doesn't take a great leap of imagination then to think about what community they're letting live or die as well.

H: And how do you strike that balance between curating an experience and allowing agency, so that can emerge?

- R: Well I think because we can't advice or anything like that then agency has to emerge in order to play the next stage, they have to play, and in order to play they have to do all the-
- V: And also the really basic rules, like the time of each day, and the fact that there are 6 days, and that's a rule as much for us as curators as it is for the players, and actually, those are the rules, and you've got that amount of time, and all the other stuff is dice rolls; so it's really basic mechanics that we kind of tell the stories around.
- B: Yeah, definitely, and we try to create – if there's one piece that we'd like to go back and really spend some time and money on, it would actually be *The Agency*, I think, really delve into it.
- V: Yeah.
- B: Because we wrote a lot of it in a car on the way to London. We wrote like a backstory to all the regions, and we tried to create quite a rich world that you'd want to explore as well, that would have characters in it, and it would feel like something you would want to dive into and investigate. But I think the community thing is very interesting, it started in a headspace that was – although by no means is it actually, I think it started from that kind of notion of almost simulation, in my head anyway, that was one of my frames of reference. Even though it's not that at all, the economic system – it's not really an economic system, it has some incomings and some outgoings and it sort of adds them up and then you get varied profit and things like that – but yeah, I'm quite interested in simulation and where games that are actually – personally I enjoy playing games that are quite complicated, and that you have to spend a lot of brain, I quite like old computer games that you have to think about a lot and that require a lot of micromanagement, because I find that quite interesting, that kind of simulation or attempt to simulate something I find... But only, I really like it because I like the macro stories that those tell, I think I'm primarily interested – I think we are all primarily interested in games for the stories that you can tell through them. But I'm really interested in that notion of macro stories that can emerge out of systems.
- H: And would you describe play as a way, or game, or *The Agency*, as a way of storytelling, or a way of navigating a story, or creating story?
- R: I think it's story creation rather than story navigation, because that would – that suggests that there's already a pre-set story that you go through whereas actually what there are, are probably 7 pre-set starting points that are maybe 'the president has been found with some hookers' or... They're start points but however that's resolved or how that turns into a story is completely up to them, so it is story creation rather than navigation.
- B: Definitely.
- H: Moving away from *The Agency* for now, but keeping with the idea of stories, why were you interested in mapping the stories of Leeds for *Bring the Happy*? And this is the final phase of questions, now.

- R: I think it came out of a lot of things. Originally the very heart of the idea – of the 'Happy' thing came out of a bit of stand-up that I'd started doing in people's houses, so went to people's houses, did an hour's show, that was 'can I guarantee that everyone will leave happier than when they arrived'. That was it. And then we'd been all chatting about when we were setting up, about ideas for future projects, and we'd initially seen something in Greenwich, actually, which was a community sort of based project – they wanted something that investigated that community, and stuff like that, and so these two ideas first started as a spark of well 'is there something about this?' The stand-up always ended with people's stories about happiness, so I'd ask for the person's happiest memory, they'd give it me, then I'd give that memory anonymously to somebody else, and then they'd create a picture of it. And so the end of the show was somebody else's picture of somebody else's memory. And that was the thing out of the show that had been most effective. So we talked about this idea of could you photograph people's happy memories and make a physical map that there'd be a photograph in the place of the memory, but we didn't really put in for- develop that... So when we were first thinking about projects we came back to the idea, we were really interested in a physical map of the happiness that might be a photograph, which then merged into the idea of the map with a physical marker on it.
- V: Originally when we started the project I think we were quite interested in investigating more about what makes people happy. And I think it changed as we were doing it to become more about the mapping of stories, if that makes sense. We were – that's why the metric of 1/10, 10/10 – we were more interested in investigating 'well what is it that makes people happy?' And then it became apparent that you can't really do that, and what bore out of that was a more interesting project that was about stories.
- B: Definitely.
- R: I think that place more than rating has always become more interesting – the story and the place is always more interesting than the rating because everybody – well not everybody – but naturally everybody rates stuff high, regardless of whether it's eating a pasty or not.
- V: And sort of it's when we were quite frustrated about the rhetoric that was going around about 'we're all fucked', 'England's going downhill' and we were like, well, how can we make something that actually looks at whether that's true.
- B: Yeah, we wanted to take over a shop, too, didn't we, explicitly take over an empty retail space.
- R: Or somewhere in the centre.
- B: On the high street, to fill it with – taking these spaces that were so symbolic of everything that was being used against us almost, and turning that instead into something not necessarily positive, but something that was...
- R: Reactive.

- B: Reactive, yeah.
- V: But also, a big thing was that it was a community project that wasn't a community in a sense of 'let's just shove some bunting up and that'll be alright' but we wanted to make something that physically was really impressive, and people wanted to participate in the creation of the space of art, rather than – we didn't want to feel like we were making... Although it is an Invisible Flock piece, we wanted it to be a piece that people felt ownership of as a city. Which I think we sort of achieved through the performance, and I think it was more about that for us, in that it wasn't like a lot of the responses we got in the market – we weren't a bunch of contemporary artists trying to force something upon someone, that's not what we really were trying to fight against.
- R: We didn't really have a statement, that then was going to be 'proved'.
- B: No, that's true actually.
- R: There was no statement, there was no 'you are happy' or 'everyone is happy, isn't the world great?' There wasn't a statement that you can then prove it, it was a question, so I think that helped it. And we always, we did start off in the beginning, we were very interested in the fact that it was city-centre space, but that could you make something with no publicity and the idea was that just because you had it somewhere where there was a high through flow of people it would do as well as if you put it on at the West Yorkshire Playhouse and advertised it with all that budget that went with it, place give you audience.
- B: We were offered lots of spaces that weren't -
- R: That had no-
- B: That had no footfall, so we would have got an art crowd, and we weren't really interested in that.
- R: We were bored of that.
- B: We sort of want a crowd that is other to that because- yep.
- H: And did you feel like – did it become more of a library, would people come back and see other people's stories, or come and talk to you more than once?
- B: People were actually relatively uninterested in other – I might be wrong about this – people weren't really interested in other people's stories.
- V: We did have a lot of returning people, though.
- B: Yeah who wanted to talk to us again.
- H: Bring you something else, or?
- B: Yeah, yeah.
- R: Often.
- B: Or generally looking at the map.

- V: I think you had people looking at their own city, the first thing people would do would be find their house.
- B: Always.
- V: And people who were returning would be 'wow, you can see it growing' and were interested in that, not so much reading people's stories.
- B: No.
- R: If they wanted to read someone else's story it was because it was in the same-
- B: It was in a place.
- R: It was in the same place as something that was also where they'd, 'oh, what's the other Town Hall memory?' Or: 'that's on my street, that's next to me, what's that?' And stuff like that. But there wasn't a general 'I'm interested in what other people are leaving'. But then very literally by what it was it was a transient audience, they were transient participants, anyway.
- V: I found it quite interesting that people were trying to read the installation – so the returning crowd for me would be like 'oh yeah, so you can see it's getting busy there, that must be Briggate, and reading the map in quite an abstract way, which was really nice.
- B: Yeah, absolutely. People did a quite nice thing of comparing their own sense of geography with the map, as well, didn't they, kind of saying 'oh, I wouldn't have a memory there' or -
- R: Yeah, 'I see Rothwell still hasn't got anything on, I'm not surprised', you'd get a lot of that, or 'I bet there isn't anything around there, we're filling that', 'oh, you'll always get loads of students from there'. And that became I think, for us it became, we sort of inherited that geography, for me it was an area of students, community, all people, poor people, it sort of had that sense to it over the time it – you'd think of the areas by 'type' rather than just being...
- H: Obviously I came to the performance, the performance, product – I guess – of it, and there was a real sense there of actually seeing the whole life of a city, because you had all those births, and all those students, and then you had sort of the, more middle aged people, and then you had the gentleman whose wife had died, and there was a really sense of mapping a life of a city, through the many lives and experiences of its people. Did that feel like that emerged in that last section, or-?
- R: It was always intended to be a show, but it was never intended to – we never knew how we wanted to do it. And even now I'm quite surprised that, at no point none anyone was giving me a story, however fantastic it was, did I think 'this is going to go in the show'. Partly because we had completely decided to leave it for a year and then come back and look at it afresh, but – all we knew was at some point it would probably be a show, but we never -

- B: Well if anything, at the time, we began by thinking the show would be the story of us doing it. So when we were being moved from the – from The Light which was the first place, we thought 'oh great, we've got a villain, now'; but we very quickly realised that nobody would give a shit because it's not.
- V: It's not what the project was about.
- B: No, it's not the interesting thing, the interesting thing wasn't [us], what is interesting was the people who actually talked to us, and the people who did leave us things. And that's interesting. But we had no idea what that would be and how that form would take, or anything, really. Or that we were going to track a life in that sense, I think-
- R: I think that once you put it together there started to become that natural – we started off looking at sections 'let's put all the love ones together, let's put all the death ones together' so you started looking at themes, but it wasn't until you put all those themes and worked on it that it started to have this, more of a natural arc, and then you realised that you had got, a-
- V: I think that stories that everyone, in some way shape or form can relate to or have experienced.
- R: Or haven't experienced but will.
- V: Or will, yeah.
- H: It's those rites of passage isn't it? The actual thing was set up as a rite of passage, it was a wedding reception feel to it, and it felt like you were celebrating the city as well as being part of one of the rites of passage – those rites of passage are kind of moments for reflection, aren't they?
- B: Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. I think it was very, it's kind of amazing really, I mean most of our projects I look back, and I like them all but I think *Bring the Happy* – some of the stories that people gave us, and the stories that people told us, are quite, quite amazing really. That people took the time to stop and talk-
- R: Humbling, really, wasn't it?
- V: Yeah.
- R: People tell you stuff that they wouldn't tell somebody else. Some people straight off would tell you something very personal, and then other people would use you as a sort of – the amount of stuff that's not even been written down, and stuff like that – people would come and you'd be an emotional hook. They'd come on a regular basis to tell you what was going on in their lives, or how shit it was, or, all sorts of things, or just for a place to be. But they weren't there to leave a memory, they weren't interested in the project,
- V: That's a lot of the stuff that isn't in the performance.
- R: And they couldn't give a shit about the map.
- B: No.

- R: We just happened to be in the same place as the couch was, where you were, where they could sit and talk about shit, and not leave you alone.
- H: I once worked in a Tourist Information centre, and you got people who [...] who would come to you and go 'I've got some foxes', I was like 'ok', 'I've got to get rid of these foxes' – and I said 'I can give you the council's number, if you want' and it would just become apparent that actually – and they probably didn't even have foxes – that they just wanted to sit and talk to someone because they didn't have that anyone in their life who they could sit and talk to. And I guess revealing that about a city – because that did kind of come into that performance. You did say there were some people who clearly 'just wanted to talk to us'.
- V: And also I think what was shocking for me, there's that thing that they're experiences that we perhaps haven't yet experienced, that they're not a bunch of crazies, that these are genuinely older people who don't have their families around them. Who now they live – it's tragic...
- R: It's filling the time, because there's nothing to fill their time...
- V: And, you know, it is a sense of that could be anyone, it's not a bunch of mentals who are in that area of Leeds, it's not that, it's a real transient space.
- H: And did you feel like you were making connections because you were putting them in the same context as other people in that frame, or performance...?
- V: I think we were there a long time. And I think people became – rather than the map itself, I think the map was kind of a jumping board for people to come and talk to us.
- R: It was more that you weren't selling anything, and I think that's possibly the same thing with the Tourist Information place, you're not selling anything, nothing's...
- B: You're creating a space, aren't you?
- R: You're creating a space, and that's in a city that actually, there's very few spaces in our city centre that aren't selling something.
- V: Especially in Leeds, the city motto is 'Leeds loves shopping'.
- H: Really?
- V: Yeah, that's what it bases itself on.
- B: It hosts the UK's only retail festival, which is a festival about shopping.
- R: Yep.
- H: Leicester's motto is 'Semper Eadem' which means 'always the same' (laughter).
- B: Nice! That's great.
- H: As a thing to aim for...
- B: Bradford used to be 'a surprising place'.

- R: Now it's just 'a place'.
- B: 'A place', yeah.
[Incidental talking...]
- B: But then actually I think there is some thing in that, a responsibility in actually an artist making a work in a public space about how you own it, and how you exist in it, and I think *Bring the Happy* really flagged that up, it's there is – and again it goes back to how I use technology and all that – there is the risk of there being an arrogance, or almost a – it's far too big a word- but almost a cultural imperialism. That because we now work in the public realm, or a lot of art is in the public realm, of imposing your ideas, or your aesthetics onto a public space, and I think that's really, there's something really interesting about that, but also it can be really aggressive, and even if you don't mean it as being aggressive, *Bring the Happy* actually highlighted that actually, just because you think you're doing art, and you think it's good; people don't fucking want you there. And a lot of people didn't, and that's something that's really interesting, and needs to be taken into account I think when you tell stories in public spaces. You can't just impose stories on a public place, there's a lot more responsibility than that.
- H: And do you feel like you as a company learned that from that process, do you think you were able to communicate that through the performance, or...?
- R: I think that we hinted at it in the performance, I think that we, one of the things that's quite, when we were putting the performance together. When we started out there wasn't really our voice there at all...
- B: No.
- R: We were very sat back from it.
- B: On purpose.
- R: And people were like 'well where is you in it? We're actually interested in you in it' – so actually in the end the very last thing that got added to the show was the: 'this is us *within* it'.
- B: Fireside chat.
- R: Yeah, the shout, the abuse, the stuff like that. Because there's danger of you going 'we put up with abuse, and we were there-'
- V: It's quite a difficult thing to try and say through performance, that the ethics of being in a public space. I think we hinted at it but also, again, going back to that arrogance, there's an arrogance in us telling an art crowd what we learnt from being in a public space, and again – which wasn't what we were really interested in for the project.
- R: Or for the performance, actually.
- B: It wasn't an apology, was it,
- V: No. But. I'm sure it came through.

- R: But the performance is just as much there for the people – I didn't believe that anybody who left a memory, and walked through that market would go and see the performance and wouldn't enjoy it, we didn't make a performance for an art crowd, we made a performance that we hoped everybody would enjoy.
- B: But it's interesting that as soon as you fit it in a formalised structure of an art event, our demographic shifted so dramatically.
- V: Yeah.
- R: I know, yeah.
- B: Because suddenly it wasn't free entry point, it wasn't accessible in the same way.
- H: Do you think you could have – I don't know how large the space was in the market – but do you think you could have...?
- R: We looked at that – it was too cold that time of year you would have – it turned out to be the sunniest day of the week, but when we were putting it together that would have been too cold, but actually it's not got the sight lines or the space, it's just not a performance space.
- B: Sadly, because we thought about it, we thought about redoing one in the market, but there isn't at all... So, it'd be a very different show.
- R: Because then the thing is that the question is are you then forcing that show – is it free, do you put it on, and just put it on, so if you're there you watch it, or do you still put it on, have it free, but it's a ticketed event, when there's nothing else, do you do it out of hours? And stuff like that –
- V: The market, it's got such a strong identity as well, so the traders and the council really dislike each other, we found immediately that we got embroiled in this weird war between these two people and I think again – the reason a lot of the traders – like the Nut Lady hated us the whole time – is because we weren't a stall, we weren't part of that community.
- H: You were more 'council' because -
- V: Yeah,
- R: But also because we *weren't trade* and she genuinely believed that trade – that say if we were the Greek deli, which it was, they'd go and buy olives from them and go 'do you know what I've got my olives, what I need now is some nuts' whereas if they come to us, they'd go 'well I'm having an art experience, and I've completely forgotten that I wanted nuts'. That was her thought process.
- B: Yeah.
- R: That's how – in no way, by being an 'art thing' were we promoting anything that was trade.
- B: And also because she only thought that we would attract – well she didn't think that we'd attract people, either, did she? She thought we'd attract an art crowd...

- V: But also we saw the market as public space, they very much saw that as *theirs*.
- B: Yeah, yeah, absolutely
- R: As a trade space.
- V: I think had we done the performance in there it would have been a whole other kind of...
- B: Yeah, definitely.
- H: [Explains that her next question is worded really badly, rephrases:] Tom Armitage – who you might have heard of or know – he wrote an article for *Edgelands* (which Andy Field and I did in Edinburgh last year) for the 'zine we gave out. And in it he talks about the *affordances* of digital technology – of understanding the grain and working with or against it – having to understand it, first off, in order to do either of those things. It feels like Invisible Flock work with the affordances of both play (or games) and digital technology, could you talk about what these qualities are in digital technology or play that interest you, and how and why you work with or against them. So if I was going to say what some affordances of play are; agency, emergence, and the plasticity of identity and reality that you can play with. And some affordances of games; that they can be pervasive, locative, transporting, and the same can be said about pervasive technology and stuff... So I have I actually asked a question?
- B: Sort of!
- R: Yeah, yeah I- I'm always interested, for us, how do you know what to do, and how do you know you're doing it right and don't get frustrated – because quite a lot of the stuff in the past has been – if you don't know what you're doing, you don't know if you're doing it right in the game, and stuff like that, you get frustrated and then you stop, so... Naturally I think in all the stuff we do we're looking for that affordance that you – you will work it out and the gameplay, the idea, will have its natural affordance that if I'm in this room, then I'm either going to talk to The Gull, or there's something that's there, you sort of know what you're doing within the worlds we create.
- B: Yeah, I hope so anyway.
- R: I've just read – Donald A Norman's book, have you read that? *The Design of Everyday Things*, which is all about the affordances of everyday things, which is just absolutely brilliant. But that idea that you know what you're doing, that everything has a natural... So when we made the monster, the very simple thing that the blue light would be the thing that you put the pebble on, so that young people, without – you only had to be shown something once, and then that meant you could play the rest of the game.
- V: And I think with that, we're very interested in subverting our own rules, so I think that always within what we do there's a setting up of something that then gets broken, or pulled away. Like *The Agency* becomes the – you can change it. Certainly for me when we were thinking about 'digital work' it always feels like it has a set of parameters around it and I'm quite

interested in actually when you can change those parameters, if that makes any sense.

B: Yeah, absolutely.

V: Like if we're making a mobile phone-based piece, it's like we were saying with the texting, when does it – when along that experience does it actually become something different. And I don't mean in an innovation way, I just mean in a way that I... Play... Do you know what I mean?

B: Yeah, definitely.

R: I think that for example when we use a mobile phone, we're using it because there's a voice, and it's – it's not there to give you instruction, it's there to be able to communicate – it's a communication device, and so what we're doing is working out what... Why have we got a communication device and who is it talking to so that naturally? You'll naturally want to use it as a communication device, which means that there therefore is a voice at the end of it and that we can then use that as a way of introducing character, or a way of introducing narrative that is to be expected but then play with that in the end. So, like in *Ophelia* we were expecting – because it's a text – you're naturally assuming that you're having a conversation with someone, or that someone is conversing with you. So we're playing with now, that you're going to naturally assume who it is based on all the information you've been given at the beginning, but then throwing that at the end so that at the end you'll go 'oh, it's not her'.

V: It's not so much tricking the audience – or revealing something – we often say we like to 'surprise and excite' and I think that goes through all our practice whether it's digital or theatre – it's not about going 'tadaa!' it's more about going 'oh! Well now maybe I can do anything, I can take a completely different track', or 'I thought this was a piece of theatre and now-'

B: Yeah, definitely. It's interesting, I think we tend to use certainly digital technology, but game models even if the end product isn't a game just quite naturally, I think, rather than it being a conscious decision. We use a phone, because, well why wouldn't we? I think it's just it's how we think, rather than it ever being a conscious decision of what is the medium, it just sort of arises. So I think the role of digital anything, really, within our work is because it feels like it is a voice in and of its own and so it's the most appropriate voice to use. Or I like to think so anyway, whether we always get that right, I don't know.

H: So that sort of leads onto 'do you think there are better or more relevant stories about our lives today in the type of work that you make, as opposed to more traditional theatre?'

R: Ooh, say that again?

H: Do you think there are better or more relevant stories about our lives today in the type of work that you make?

B: As opposed to normal theatre or-

- H: Yeah, or normal narrative, or traditional linear narrative, or film, or-
- R: I think that it's the – by interaction, and that 'first person' the idea that you are the protagonist, I think that there are because it's real, because it's real to you, it's happening to you, you're doing it, so you're not relating to it through a gap – you're not watching someone else experience it and then you're relating to that. You're experiencing it. It's more first hand, but I don't-
- V: Whether that's better or not...
- R: Whether that's better or not I don't know.
- H: Do you think there's a shifting culture which is towards personalisation or-?
- R: I don't know.
- V: I think people want ownership, I think, with kind of video games what they are, I think everything is gearing towards more interactivity and I think other people expect more. I think I'm talking within my kinds of tastes, though, so not necessarily a different section of-
- R: I don't think theatre's shitting itself. I think theatre will survive just as much.
- B: (Laughs), 'theatre not's shitting itself' (laughter).
- R: But I also actually think that the question actually... We're very good at not... It doesn't always make it better that you get to be in charge of it. Because if somebody said 'here's the start of a film, you finish it' you're go: 'oh fuck off, you make the film, I don't make film, I don't want to' – it also has to be that by you being empowered to do it *does make it better*.
- V: Yeah.
- R: Otherwise why would you give it? You wouldn't expect someone else to finish the rest of the Cysteine Chapel or something like that.
- B: They asked, they asked (laughter).
- R: So I think you ending that story, you carrying it, by doing that that must make it a better experience, or a more enjoyable experience otherwise there's no point in doing it
- B: I think what we try and do is I think we try and use games, or digital media, or anything, as an authorial voice, definitely, so the idea that you're going to finish it – it's not just finishing the story for the sake of finishing the story – you're finishing the story because in the act of finishing the story something else will be revealed, or the act of you finishing it is in itself a narrative conclusion, or whatever.
- R: Which is actually-
- B: Don't you think?
- V: Yeah, no, yes, sorry I was just thinking, yeah I do.

- B: I think the idea is interesting, though, I don't know how true – I know 3 or 4 years ago I was persuaded that everyone was obsessed with notions of customisation or personalisation or ownership, but it's always an illusion – same in video games, people talk about freedom or blah, but it's all an illusion, it's all illusions of that that you're given. I think what's more interesting is when you realise it's much more interesting to do things within constraints, I think. As long as the constraints themselves are well chosen, I think. That's design, isn't it?
- R: There's always fadd-ism, isn't there. It will be interesting to see what the landscape is like in 5 years time, whether this current trend becomes more or whether everyone goes back to more formal relationships or – we played the *2.8 Hours Later*, and what was interesting about that was that had generated, from what wasn't a particularly interesting or great experience, *500 people* turned up.
- H: Well my brother went to that, with a load of his mates from – he's a cheerleader and a Kung Fu person, there's these two areas of interest he has, and he also knows a load of free runners because they cross over with his cheerleading in Leeds, because Leeds is the centre of proper national champion cheerleading.
- B: Is it? Wow, fair enough.
- H: Throwing people proper high and stuff, and my brother, I talked to him on the phone, and he told me how he and his mates were preparing for it and – I was like: 'no, you can't actually do that' because he was like: 'so we're taking weapons' because it said 'dress how you would to go to a zombie thing'.
- V: Yeah, exactly.
- H: So I was like 'no, don't take your sword with you, because there'll be some kind of game mechanic that means you've killed a zombie, not actually pretending to stab them, and please don't do any actual Kung Fu on these people, because they're probably volunteers', and he was like 'we thought we might throw them around and stuff?'
- B: Wow, that's great.
- H: But it, and he would never have gone to a 'pervasive gaming event' or a theatre thing, he goes places I say 'come along' – like he came to *Bring the Happy* and he loved it, but he's not in the world enough to find out about those kinds of things, but he did find out about that, and I found that quite interesting...
- R: I was quite interested in where they'd managed to get that – that they had managed to get 500 people from Leeds.
- B: For 4 nights.
- R: For 4 nights, so yeah, 2000 people there. For what actually was a very lazy experience.
- H: But is that the voting thing? Because the thing its with *2.8 Hours Later* is that you vote to bring it to your city, so that's pre-marketing really, isn't

it? That's finding the market before you go. And everyone's friend goes 'go here, vote for this!' and then you've told someone about it.

B: Very clever. Really clever. And then everyone pays £28 to do. Which is insane.

V: It's a moneymaker.

B: It's nuts. But the problem with-

R: But that audience is generally, if that audience eventually gets tapped into in the right way, then people aren't against actually having to work to enjoy an experience. To physically actually having to travel from A to B, or to do it and to come out the end of it and go 'that was great'. It's just that at the moment it's such a-

B: What was really interesting with that was that it tapped into many more filmic shorthands than it tapped into gaming shorthand. The gaming was *so thin*, that-

R: The game was 'run away'.

V: It was tag.

B: It was tag, but you couldn't tag back, that was it.

H: It seemed too easy to break, as well, because I spoke to my brother afterwards and he said 'I opened a door at the wrong time and I almost got thrown out of the game'.

V: Because we knew the city we took a lot of back street route and we didn't see any zombies.

R: Yeah, we got bored, so we decided to not, not to play the game.

B: There was nothing there, so you spend the first 10 minutes, going 'this is fucking awesome' – because you've ramped it up in your head, but then very, very quickly what you're doing is that you're sneaking around, and then you arrive at a checkpoint, where there's like 5 or 6 other people, with a little bit of exposition, and then actually it's really-

R: And it's not even exposition, actually, because there's not building, there's no story building.

B: It's a series of shorthands from zombie movies. That they take, so in previous ones they've taken Shaun from *Shaun of the Dead*, so you meet Shaun from *Shaun of the Dead* and there's your 5 minutes of Shaun, and then you move on, and then you meet Generic Character Number Three, and then you move on, and it's sort of a little pointless, and actually, I don't know, I didn't like it, the more I think about it the more I think it was a bit shit.

R: Because it should have been good, I think.

V: I think it's quite interesting that that group of people might not necessarily be a group of people who would go to a piece of interactive theatre, say, so I think that's quite interesting.

- H: There was already a mechanic to start with; you'd *won* the game for your city.
- V: Exactly. Yeah.
- B: Absolutely
- V: In terms of audience it's really interesting.
- B: It's a bit like the audience – sort of the Punchdrunk audience phenomenon, as well, isn't it, in that sense of the actor – going and taking part becomes an event in and of itself. So we were involved in a previous show at the Barbican that had a bit of that to it, and actually your audience suddenly become a completely different beast, and not always in a good way.
- H: But it seems like the things that break into the mainstream are the things that already have things to hand off – like the Punchdrunk *Doctor Who* show, and *Zombies, for 2.8 Hours Later*.
- V: I think it's because people feel comfortable with that. As in it's not – my parents for example, I always base it on my parents when I'm talking about things like this. My parents would probably feel more comfortable in going to something like the zombie thing because it has loads of filmic framework, than going to something like ours. They come to something like ours and they go 'what are you going to make me do? I'm scared'. And we go : 'we won't do anything to you, you're fine, you're in a theatre, come on'.
- R: But we use a filmic framework for a lot of our stuff.
- V: Yeah, there is – but – if you think – you've got zombies set up, you've got *Doctor Who*, like you're saying these are things you can go 'cool, I know where I am within that' rather than-
- H: pre-existing narrative, universe, rules, *Doctor Who* will not hurt me, I won't die in this, because you don't die in *Doctor Who*.
- V: Exactly.
- H: *Zombies* are exciting, you can die, that's the point of them, so it's scary.
- V: Yeah, you understand, yeah. [...] It's real interesting marketing, I think, I mean for us.
- R: Well, we're not averse to tapping into-
- V: Well we always have to do an introduction to our pervasive stuff where you make the audience feel like there is honestly nothing horrible going to happen to you. Like *The Crucible* which is why we had to drop that in.
- R: But then it's essentially that magic circle again, it's about how you have to get that beginning right for everything else to be enjoyable, because if you get that wrong you'll spend the rest of it not enjoying it, and I suppose it's about even though our work very rarely has rules it's about explaining rules.

- V: Even with *Bring the Happy*, the reason we went for the wedding, and the reason we had the glow sticks and the sparklers-
- B: Sparklers.
- R: Kazoos.
- V: Was because we wanted people to feel they could partake in a way, but how do you do that without excessively telling someone to get up and dance.
- R: But you know that's a sparkler, so you know it's going to be lit, you know it's a kazoo and it could be blown, so everything on that table had an affordance that you understood straight away, and that there wasn't a knife and fork, so you knew, we could have put a knife and fork to keep you there but then you'd have experienced something that wouldn't have arrived. And there was nothing unexpected in that.
- V: And talking to people afterwards, they wanted to know they were allowed to do stuff much earlier, what Dave said, 'I wish you'd brought that in'. We always want the to be choice as well, we don't want to have to force them to have to interact, or have to get up and dance, because some people don't want to. It's about, I suppose, creating a framework whereby you can if you want if you don't it's ok.
- H: It's that Alice in Wonderland 'eat me' label, isn't it, 'sing me' on the front of the little book of – a simple thing like that might have...
- B: Yeah.
- R: Stuff like that – if you need a plant to do it, you've not thought of the best way, but generally the quickest way to do it.
- B: But we were really disappointed that there wasn't a plant in the zombie game – the zombie game, there were so many weird guys who rocked up on their own, like in boot camp gear, like: 'gotta be a plant'.
- V: A plant would have been genius. [...]
- B: What's really interesting, though, is that notion of people seem to think, people are very focussed on the economic model of *2.8 Hours Later*, Hide & Seek released a 'guide to all things games', the other day, did you read that? Like a PDF, it's designed for companies, to go 'this is why you should give us work', but it's like 8 pages where it goes 'there's these games, there's these games' and they talk about *2.8 Hours Later* and go 'this amount of people paid this amount of money, wink, wink'. But the notion of that breaking into the mainstream – it is amazing on the one hand, pre-marketing or no, that they generated that audience for something that isn't a million miles away from something that we do...
- R: All the theatre people we know went to see it, though, as well.
- B: Yes.
- R: So they broke into that, like most of the Leeds-based performers or artists in some ways either didn't go on the night but we saw they tweeted they all went, so they tapped into that market.

H: A load of Hope & Social [a local band] went as well.

B: Yeah, exactly. Which is really interesting. But then what's really interesting is what, what are people then going for – that notion of if it is a successful model, for example, successful towards what? So is it successful towards the notion – because we were asked this – weirdly we were followed around by a German camera crew when we did it, it was a long story...

V: I've got the video on there.

R: I've not watched it yet.

B: I don't want to watch it

V: I don't want to watch it (laughter).

B: But she sort of talked about the idea of 'could you imagine doing this every Friday night?' And it goes back to my slight suspicion about play, there's something really... Horrible about that happening every – and not just a zombie game, but anything like that, is that a success? I don't know, I don't know.

V: What, a massive game of tag?

B: Well yeah, tag or not tag, but is there something about, something about-

R: You wouldn't return and play it, that's the thing, whereas if you make something you want to make something that people want to return to and do again, whereas they didn't need to – the economics of that, they weren't looking for any repeat audience, you pay for it to go to your city.

B: No, exactly

R: And then it goes somewhere else. Which is why it didn't have to create anything which was sustainable. It was just a game of tag, like you said, that's all they needed.

B: That's right, but, like, critical judgement of 2.8 aside, as an activity there's something quite interesting... There's a video, I can't remember whose video it is, there's a pervasive gaming documentary and there's a video in it where they're playing – you might have seen this – they're in London, and they're playing something that fundamentally again is a game of tag.

R: [...] With that bit at the beginning? Hide & Seek video? Is it that one?

B: It might be.

R: With.. Hann- who's the girl from Hide & Seek?

B: They didn't make it, but she's in it, yeah.

H: Holly.

R: Holly.

B: Yeah, Holly, but there's a bit in it, where a bunch of – they're like in Camden, or they're somewhere – and a bunch of local boys are hanging out, and there's that moment where they meet and they ask 'what are you doing' and the guy's are like 'we didn't know what the fuck you were

doing, we didn't know why you were shouting and why you were running' and there's quite a thing, and then eventually they sort of participate but then stop participating quite quickly, but there's something quite interesting in that, that notion of... There's 500 people running around the city thinking they're being chased by zombies, or pretending they're being chased by zombies; what impact does that then have on the city? And what – so when people go 'it's a success', is it a success economically, or is it a success because of the number of people, or is it a success because of this notion of play...?

R: I think it's a success economically.

B: As part of the mainstream, so not *2.8 Hours Later* but next month if there was another game experience, would the same amount of people roll out for that? Is it – an activity, so zombies aside, is it, as an activity-

R: I do think that depends on the game experience, I think if it's good, and it's enjoyable and if it's robust enough to take that, then yeah, I think you would, I think it's like anything, I think it's like going to the gym and stuff, if it's a group activity and it's done well enough.

H: Well we sit down and play video games, with mates, and I guess it's about asking there was a Friday Night Play Night, every week... I mean in Nottingham, there's a group of people who get together and do pervasive games every fortnight, and then play Werewolf, and board games too, sometimes. I take your point, and also your idea of 'what's success?' Is it about crashing together those passersby and the people taking part, and what it means to be in a city, and this magic circle we're creating now, it's not that different to the one – fucking – capitalism decides to create around a shopping centre?

B: Yeah, absolutely.

H: And are you interrogating both of those things when you step into another magic circle?

B: I think that's really interesting, isn't it? And often not...

V: It's the bits I liked about *2.8* – was that anyone (it sounds horrible) but you know, you're passing homeless people on the street and you are going 'are they part of it' because-

H: And for once you're seeing them.

V: Well, yes, absolutely and then that afterthought is about what does that say about me and my city, and-

B: And what does it say about *this thing that I'm doing* in it, as well.

V: And whether the point of it is to make you see your city like that, or it is to run around and have a fun game of tag with a bunch of strangers, I think both are valid.

H: Because when some things are significant, you start going 'everything must be significant' and it's that filling in the gaps thing that you spoke about earlier, then makes you foreground everything that you might normally background.

- B: Yeah, exactly, until that's then broken for you again, though, in which case you then feel cheated because everything that you built up and you made – you suddenly realise – that's what the homeless thing did for me, it was suddenly like 'now hang the fuck on', we're doing this, while the city, for everything that it represents, actually... So the notion of the city as a playground is very much the construct – I think anyway – the construct of a wealthy middle class, that can afford to play in the city, and actually the city still continues despite that.
- V: Yep.
- B: And again, why I'm slightly suspicious of play is that more often than not it's a coercion, you're being coerced in a public space to -
- H: Do you think, *Bring the Happy* tried or does, or did needle against that point?
- B: I think we wanted it to, I mean even if not explicitly I think in terms of how we wanted people to be able to access it.
- R: There was uniformity of – there was no hierarchy of interaction.
- B: No, no.
- R: So you're – the 14 year old kid that came in, his memory had just as much weight as the – so it was a level playing field.
- B: And we genuinely tried to talk to *everyone*.
- R: And take everything, you were a sounding board for stuff that you didn't want to be a sounding board for, as well.
- B: We wouldn't – because some people were clearly doing it to challenge you or to get a rise out of you, or to just be dicks, but we made the choice that we'd take everything, so the kid coming in trying to impress his girlfriend about how like 'this is where I got nicked by the police', we just took it, deadpan. We got one guy giving an EDL march as his happy memory. And that was a thing that we, we um-d and ah-d about – that was in the performance to begin with, and then we took it out – but that was a big conversation that we had about that, about the notion of giving voice to that. What was his motivation in giving us that story and therefore should we be continuing that voice...?
- V: Should we be telling it?
- B: What's our moral relationship to that story? So it's on the map, you can find it. We decided to, in the end, not tell it in the performance, to reference it rather than tell it. So there's a lot of, we had a really long conversation about that. But apart from that we wanted to take everything as it came. Because I suppose it's the closest we could get to.
- V: I think when you look at the map certainly online as well, what it does really well is it's a portrait of those people in this – sharing the same space, telling that kind of multitude of stories. And people telling stories about people they remember being in Leeds who – I think you look at it as a whole it does – for me – reveal a bit about the fabric of the city, and who lives there. We certainly aimed for that, I think.

- R: I think even if you looked at it from a very selfish, or self-centred point of view, it still flags stuff up, not always, but with people, you know, that are – the fact that your memory shares space with negative memories and stuff like that would make you... So quite a lot of people – there must have been about 4 or 5 – whose happy memory was getting married in Leeds Civic Hall, and then they looked at all the other memories and they go 'oh yeah, they got married there', 'oh that's one bloke, who's homeless, and he lived there for a while'. And suddenly that is going to – even if it's only for that moment in time, that is going to change your...
- H: Perception of sharing a city?
- R: Yeah, yeah, yeah, your perception of that space, where actually that was the place of your happiest memory, but even simultaneously maybe, that was a space where underneath it, this man was living homeless. I think it can do that without ever feeling it's talking down to you, the beauty of it is that it can do that just by its very nature
- B: By being-
- R: By being rather than asking you to do that.
- H: By allowing you an omnipresent view of a city, which you don't normally have because you're normal just yourself, you can dip into other people... 2 questions left. So we're near the end. And this isn't written down, but just on from your suspicions about play, why then, do you use play? And do you think you can counter those suspicions of it being a white middle class affluent playground?
- B: I think, I'm not necessarily any more suspicious of it than I am anything else. But I think what's really interesting about it is that it exists across so many spaces. So it exists at our end of the spectrum, which is an art one, really, primarily, all the way through to *Zynga* and *Farmville* [Facebook games], do you know what I mean? That's one giant bracket, and then within that it's got all sort of permutations I think, but then – but so what I think is really interesting is that it's starting to permeate what we do just more and more and I tend to think that on the one hand it's great, and it's models that we use because it's a reference point that we have and it's experiences that we want to create... And I think I've had some incredibly memorable narrative experiences or even immersive experiences playing games and stuff like that, or I can remember things very vividly in the way that you remember songs or certain books. It's just a reference point that I think comes naturally to us in the kind of work that we want to make. But then conversely I think that what's really fascinating is the potential evils of it. In that I think that it can be used for genuine bad, bad things, but that isn't, but that people see that as a positive... So my real frustration with games at a mechanic level is that it is manipulation, it's doing things to your brain to make you do things and granted that's no different from a lot of other things, but I'm also very suspicious of that and I'm very suspicious of as that starts to enter our public realm and our public spaces, the way that we interact and the way that people are purposefully creating experiences that are designed to make us 'bank

more playfully'. You're fundamentally being coerced. but it's being called something else, and I'm really suspicious of that.

H: It's being called 'fun'.

B: Yeah, yeah, exactly, and I think as artists, when we make games I think we have a responsibility to make something that is emotionally affecting, or tells a story that is important, or that we think is important, in as much as a guy who makes a Facebook game's responsibility, he thinks, is to make a fuckload of money. I think we exist at the opposite end of the spectrum in the same way that Damien Hurst exists at the opposite end of the artistic spectrum from our sculptural work, or, you know, we exist as a counter (and I think we should exist as a counter to that). And I think there is a – when I did the mass form *2.8 Hours Later* – not to fixate on *2.8 Hours Later* – when I then had the experience, I was incredibly frustrated by it because actually it was an economic venture much more than it was anything else. But at the same time because exit's sort of new-ish, then allows itself to get repositioned in a critical framework, to get looked at in certain landscapes which actually is bullshit, it's someone making 6 and a half thousand pounds for not a lot of work. And I think that's why I'm suspicious of it, really.

R: I'm not so suspicious of it as... Because I'm more interested in how we fit in that, at the point of entry or the point of impact where we sit and the fact that – we might make something for Opera North, and Opera North is very much a white middle class audience, but we're not making something for that audience, the employer is giving us some money to make that, then we're making something that we want to make about Ophelia that anybody who walks past that – or any of those entry points, can pick up and play. And there's something interesting in that we couldn't have done that if we'd been asked to make a piece that sits inside the walls of Opera North because you wouldn't pass them. I think the benefits of that are actually that people – the people who are giving us the money are the people who normally you wouldn't get to access that generic audience and we're still allowed to do that.

V: Yeah, but is that true, though? Because anyone whose got a mobile phone can pick up our piece, that's still cutting out a section of the community, while the Assembly Rooms are open for free and people can walk in.

R: But realistically people don't, do they? People don't walk into the Assembly Rooms.

V: I don't know

B: It's like impressions, I suppose.

R: I don't think they do.

V: I guess what I'm trying to say is that I don't think ours is that much *more* accessible, I think.

R: I think it sits more in the... I think it also goes back to that thing we were talking about earlier that when we were in the market people came and – why did they come and sit with us when actually they could have gone to

any of the – they could have gone to the library, or they could have gone to the museum? People don't go-

V: I guess I mean the more playful stuff we do, so the mobile phones, like *Who's Ophelia*, in particular.

R: But I think if you want to, it's there, as in it isn't – it's sat in your – rather than asking you to 'come in' it's-

V: Yeah, yeah.

R: To play with it, it's there, you can still ignore it just as much but I think there's – whereas the money's coming from... *We* couldn't afford to do *Where's Ophelia*, we need people like Opera North to give us the money to do it and normally that transaction means that you have to do it within the confines of their space. Whereas we're playing with games and stuff like that we don't have to play in their space which I think is quite interesting, and I like that about it. Though I don't think we've got that right yet.

B: Yeah, yeah.

R: And I also think that if people hate it, personally I don't really mind that as much as...

V: Yeah, I was going to say that, it's quite interesting like the value people place on playful experiences in public spaces, because impressions, and to a certain extent Opera North want it because it's marketing, want it because it's kind of 'cool', and want it to be fun and quick and accessible. And that's kind of... And there's another angle to that which is the artistic stuff they're interested in, but for us it's never really about it being quick and fun, playful in the traditional 'game' sense of it. I think it's more – again going back to location – I think if it is a game where is it sitting and what is it doing and who is it talking to. Like with the *Who is Ophelia?* Project we're hiding little video screens in shop windows. And me and Rich were talking about yesterday, one of our actual main aims – without ever saying this to the commissioner – is that people playing that game spend some time in that independent shop and have a coffee while they receive their next 3 text messages, and then they move on. And I think that is, for me, that's always underlining in our work.

B: We're very context aware.

V: Yeah.

B: I think so, definitely. Which is part of the problem, because economically, as an arts company, we need to make something that can fucking tour. Because we are very context aware, I think, I think we have to be, don't you?

R: I think what we're asking, because we are always asking, that we are always wanting you to interact with your immediate surroundings and readdress your relationship with those immediate surroundings, and if you're not context aware, then it won't happen, will it...

B: No.

- H: Final question, anyone?
- R: What?
- V: Final question.
- H: Because that feels like you're moving into it, so I'll just say it, 'where next', for the company? Where do you want to progress, take the company, maybe specifically 'what's next', but also if these things are of interest to you, how do you move to those...?
- R: I think we've been talking about recently about the building of those relationships that we already have that – a lot of them have been about that first user entry where we've gone 'we know that you do this, we do this, how can we begin a relationship' – and for us it's really interesting for us to go now 'look, we've started this relationship, this has worked really nicely – what's the next stage where you can take it...' not more seriously, because that sounds a little bit unfair. But actually, 'how can the ambitions that you have as a building match the ambitions that we have? So that we can create work where that relationship is'... Not more serious, because that suggests that they're not taking the first bit seriously, but actually...
- B: The resources are more –
- R: Yeah.
- B: Instead of only being able to create a 45 minute test-based experience, they give us the resources to be able to create a 2 week long experience.
- R: That they see their main house... That they see us as the same level of importance as a main house show, but it's still not in the main house, so for instance, it's a one month adventure that goes across 20 different locations, and can accommodate 100 people a time, which is sort of how that – I think for us, in terms of the commission side of the work, that's where we're very much interested in, and then with everything else I think it's just...
- V: We're quite public art this year.
- B: Yeah.
- V: Like a lot of the stuff we've got coming up is... And I don't think that's any accident. I think we're doing a lot of stuff on the coast, and I think were interested in putting digital work in really difficult surroundings and.
- B: Unusual spaces.
- V: Unusual spaces, and...
- H: More rural spaces?
- R: Yeah.
- B: Yeah.
- V: Yeah, so like the *Sandpiler* project we're doing in Morecombe we're working with the guy who guides people across the sands, and how that's been done for 70 odd years... And using technology to look at that

landscape and tell it back. The thing we're doing in Brighton we're hoping to put a data buoy in the water that people can text and leave messages with that flash the messages out to sea at night, and obviously all the ships in that will be able to read those Morse code messages, I think we're again interested in who are we talking to and who – always, who audiences are, but I think we always set ourselves quite difficult (laughs) standards in who we're talking to.

B: Yeah.

V: So like, you know, a rural community in Arnside in Lancaster, are they, will it work, will they want to...?

B: Absolutely

R: I think our version of stuff is what interests us, you know, on a very basic level, we've made this, but 'what would our version of Peter Pan be' and that would then interest me as in how – yeah – we're always interested in... There's always something, not even narrative, but there's something at the heart of it that we want to investigate. Whether it's someone's memories, or it's their... But telling that and how we can tell that is always going to interest... The ambition of that is 'how can you make it bigger and better?' I think.

B: Yeah, definitely, I think it's about – I think it's going to be better, what we do, I think. This notion of how we create experiences that people can exist within. And how do we do that in a way that we're still interested in. That's still pushing us, and is still...

V: We're very good at not repeating our work, and that's a blessing and a curse, so, we're always like 'let's just tour something, it'd be easier to just remount it and remount it', but we don't. But I think that what you're saying is that we do improve on our own structures.

B: Yeah, definitely, and we like creating new stuff not so much because we're particularly focussed on innovation but I think just because we like, or I think we like to think we're aware of what other people are doing so we like to exist...

H: It seems like you like to challenge yourselves.

B: Yeah.

V: Yeah.

B: I think so.

R: I think the big problem for us is always going to be that we're always going to be set, at least one project every year is going to be set right on the fucking limit of what technologically is possible. As in what we can do physically, and what the technology can do physically. Which means there's always going to be that fucking element where it's not going to be perfect, because – not *because* we want to use the latest thing but because actually now we can tell something that we haven't been able to tell before because it hasn't been the means to tell it.

H: That's an artistic process, though, isn't it.

- R: It is, but-
- H: Not always telling, most people want to tell the same story but don't quite get to it and tell another way of telling that.
- V: Yep, definitely.
- R: I mean we're still waiting for something like *Janeo* [software?] to not be buggy so that we can actually do something more – we've always wanted to do something, a *Bring the Happy* version that's sort of an app. So wherever you look on the phone that memory will pop up and maybe you'll see the photographs, and stuff like that, but at the moment it's not, none of the technology sits there well enough for us to be able to do that
- H: I do know someone he's called... On Twitter he's @mdales, Michael Dales – and he's made a thing called *Place Whisperer*, has anyone?
- B: No.
- H: It's exactly that, just what you described, a piece of media attached to a certain place and at the moment – because he contacted me – and said 'can I turn *The Umbrella Project* into this because I've got this system, no one knows about it so I want some arts people to put their content in, and make something for them, so other people will see it'.
- B: That's quite cool.
- H: So if that's useful for me to put you in contact with him?
- V: Yeah.
- B: Yeah, maybe.
- H: Because he just wants to be able to say 'Invisible Flock used this!' 'Hannah Nicklin used this!' so that he can then take it to companies and then say 'pay me for this version'.
- B: That'd be really good actually.
- H: I'll write that down. And also, I think that's kind of, it.

[End of relevant speech.]

Interview with Tassos Stevens, Co-artistic director of Coney, completed on the 9th February 2012.

- H: Let's just start at the beginning tell me about your background – the bits that you think you want to tell me.
- T: So I was a geek, I grew up in a theatre, theatre family, and my dad was a favourite pupil of Dorothy Hathcote[?] of Drama and Education, and I think that's relevant, it took me many years to realise, but I was immersed in that and I was immersed in community theatre through my dad making it. I was a scientist, I also, as a kid I had it, as a teenager I did, role-playing

games; table top, particularly *Call of Cthulhu* which I liked because there was less game and more experience it conjured, and more playful as opposed to *Dungeons & Dragons* which is like, roll dice, massive rule sets... Which now I realise that that's quite interesting that there was that. I was going to be a physicist, had a white – this may be way more information than you actually need, but some of it is actually relevant – I was going to be a physicist, had a bit of a white-out about the amount of maths and non-critical thinking I was doing, basically and switched to English A-level instead of the double maths. And then basically entered a period of about 15 to 20 years of not knowing what the fuck I was going to do, which was manifest in me doing biological sciences at uni, and then specialising in psychology. But spending more time fucking around in student theatre and film, and like developing whole other sets of skills, that wasn't very good. Then went, came down to London to do a Ph.D., doctorate in psychology, and then was in a place of arriving in a university theatre that was not very good, and that my experience of being not so good at the start of a very high pressured theatrical environment meant that I both knew a lot of stuff... I suddenly realised, and also and I also felt real freedom to play because there was no pressure, there was nobody, they just did *Les Mis* badly, and, like, trying to reinvented lots of wheels, there. And then, yeah, sort of both left academia having finished the Ph.D., so I am legit, but had a sort of er – suddenly in the college I got spotted, went to BAC and started I kind of, a very rollercoaster up and down, making theatre... Sort of success followed by failure, followed by success, but like, kind of realising that it took me a while to realise that I didn't want to be a jobbing theatre director – that just didn't appeal. I ended up running (after the young directors course at the National Studio, I then landed, and started to get those kinds of jobs), I then got a gig running a pub theatre in Kentish Town which I'd inherited from David Jubb, and a kind of scratch programme which I then pushed even further, and then lasted at the pub a couple of years, and then that became completed unsustainable... So moved, but continued to sort of programme platforms of fringe work by blagging space in fringe venues and also programming very tactically, basically, like, you met somebody and then you would, I would dig to to find the idea, the crazy idea, the shit idea that you were still ridiculously excited by, and then go 'yeah! come and do that!' And the model of, was sustainable because, not, not financially, but in as much as it didn't cost anything to put it on, like it was a – it could become quite an open platform so, in a way, so I did that as long as... I think that's the way of these kind of things, like – as long as it was quite interesting it was sustainable for me, and couldn't quite find the right momentum to lift it into a different sphere, yeah. But – and also on the way through all of that, having what it made was a space was a sort of space where I could twiddle, and experiment and found that then, everything was kind of breaking in the rest of my life – you're getting way more information than you actually need... And I was temping to, and even temping, barely survived. I met Rabbit, so to speak, and the first things that started there, were sort of experiments driven by very pure intention, and very pure intention to work with somebody who lived far away, and but then what

that suddenly opened up was this space where... I think this was the first, the second Rabbit piece that happened that I was involved with was a piece called *Gathering*, which was an audience invited to a theatre by Rabbit, and then Rabbit failed to turn up, and that, and then what sort of happened in that. Which was the first thing in a line of investigation where – basically an audience in a room by themselves, and that's where it started from. It wasn't a 'let's play games' or even 'let's play', it was like 'put an audience in a room by themselves', and the fact that... One of the beautiful things about Rabbit from the outset was the author, the artist is not present, and the authority is not present, and somehow that makes space in which, well, it makes a space for awkward uncomfortable moments which then leads to people discovering what they want to do, and *Gathering*, and I'm think of this because I'm about to see him for dinner this evening, remains one of Chris Goode's favourite ever pieces of theatre, and for everybody that was there it was – yeah, a bit of a, and for me as well, like 'fuck' this is actually really – this is something, like, I don't know what this is but this is something. And resisting people calling it game, back then, and I've always resisted the kind of the game... And actually, it's one of the – when Annette started like collaborating within the world of Coney, one of the things that kind of drew us to each other was that both of us being a bit... Dissatisfied with the idea that it was all about playing a game. And that the games, games I always articulate, I would articulate, are a brilliant... They're just one little subset of a wider field of play, and that games are a tool – which is more interesting – in terms of what they can help deliver, they have always been a means to an end, they will never be an end in themselves, and been always sort of thinking about what those – what those ends might be, and I think it sits, I think it just sort of informs us, just saying it's really just that thing of the audience in the room by themselves and like and then also a desire to collaborate at distance, which meant digital communications, like by necessity; those, those were my starting points with Rabbit, rather than a 'let's play games' or 'let's-

H: Yeah, that's a – that's useful to hear you say because I was kind of situating Coney as play, and Hide & Seek as games, and I think there's a real distinctive difference...

T: Yeah, yeah, I would do that, I think I would nail flag to – and that's, you know, *brilliant* that they go towards *that* flag, and yeah, there's a sort of a sense of... Well actually, I still, I still think about that little Jimmy Stewart provocation, the *Wonderlab* thing about where, Jimmy – because obviously I didn't write that – came up with something. I think it's really interesting like about how you... Talking about this this morning actually, this guy who was interested in this stuff, but also had noted, by stalking me online that I love infinite chess, and he's sort of trying to stage the *Eschaton* game, which could, that could happen... Thinking about how that game, which is a big, like, the description of this game is that it lasts about a 100 pages of a 1000 page book and it's immense and ornate, it's like a group of kids who are tennis players fucking around with tennis balls and simulating nuclear Armageddon. It's a very, very complicated war game, but then which spirals out of control because of personal tensions and it

erupts into a huge fight basically, there just, it's just, there just throwing the shit out of each other. But the thing was actually thinking, we actually the point about that was that that game would have started, the... David Foster Wallace doesn't show you this in the book, but it would it would have started by a group of bored tennis players starting to throw tennis balls at each other and then that crystallising into something quite small ruleset, and then that crystallising thing that... Jimmy, that Jimmy Stewart piece said, which I think is right... And then, and then they play together, and it's their shared experience that kind of grows into this more and more ornate game that anyone from the outside trying to join this would go 'what the fuck', and then it, it kind of all kicks off, which is the bit that he describes, but that sense in which a game is like, it's just a little crystal that forms for a little bit along a bigger journey, a bigger – and that may stay and survive and become something that people want to pass around or may dissolve again because the original people who played it don't want to play any more. But, ah, sorry, tangent.

H: No, that's good – it's useful, don't apologise for your tangents – they're important otherwise you wouldn't venture down them.

T: A thing then, a thing then if I was to more quickly finish off, in a way... How these kinds of things come together. So there was, the piece that Rabbit did at the National, which was 6 years ago – well now approaching 6 years ago – was the first time that the gaming world; like both in terms of ARG players taking note of it... I'd never heard of an ARG before that, or I had and I hadn't really understood what it was, and also kind of [the] games industry sort of took notice, and started... Then, coming into contact with and being around in the early days of Hide & Seek, and the thing, kind of cluster of people around that... And yes, there's a scene like where we're all influencing each other and that kind of moving, yeah, moved forward from there and the rest of it, until about a couple of years ago, felt more like a car careering out of control than any kind of plotted trajectory... But at that point a couple of years ago, between one and two years ago it suddenly like, 'oh, ok, now I understand' and actually everything that I'd done, and everything that I've kind of told you about feels like it was important to bring me to this place but it was a place -

H: That you couldn't have ever predicted you were going to get to?

T: No. It is a place that uses more of me, and my interests, and what I'm sort of, what's sort of happening within The Society of Coney, and particularly the conceptual and philosophical breakthrough that was kind of a big wheel kind of reinvented towards the end of last year... And what's going to hopefully – is already starting to unfold from that. It excites me politically as well, and all of this excites me politically in a sense of what it – because it's about a... Because Coney's work, and the thing that we, like everything that's different about it, and everything that's different about the different people making Coney's work the things it has in common and the prime focus is it's about the audience. It's about their experience through it, and that's about how you think about how you make it and also – like what that they [...] what the kind of transformations that can happen in people as a result of this. And I think that the – I was also lucky in some of the work here, that developed into *SuperMe*, and *Nightmare*

High, and *SuperMe 2*, which is all, that, which is all a tranche of work around resilience... And that I'm sort of very interested in a sense of – the research that I kind of did, hauling – although it wasn't my kind of psychology – hauling that overt look at this, and the framework that we came up with that underpins the *SuperMe* work which is about trying to teach resilience to kids. And what I'm doing particularly within that is that I'm making sure it's actually trying to do the thing. There's a framework for understanding these dimensions of resilience; as 'agency', 'relatedness' and 'competence'... Bad one, I kind of like 'adaptability' in a sense of it's like growing rather than just 'competent at that' but you can kind of grow, and everything powered by a wheel of reflection... And that ultimately reflection is where transformation happens, but that anything which gives people more agency and relatedness in a sense of being connected to people and adaptability in how they grow and master new things makes them happy. And happy and interesting, and like, you know, it's a sort of, and in a lot of – I had a little bump, jolt – a few years ago suddenly realising that these principles of Coney that are the... I'm still trying to find a way to not make it crystallise into some cheesy brand formula shit, because they've all been discovered in practice, and they all feel intensely practical as a kind of guide to what I would say; making good play, and making play for good as well, within that. Yeah, adventure, loveliness and curiosity and those actually don't quite match onto those dimensions of resilience but they do in ways that are interesting, and the ways in which they are different from those are as interesting as the ways in which they're the same. Which makes me feel that this is onto something... But reflection is the key thing, reflection is what art does, crudely speaking – and reflection is what – if you think about a game as just that tight crystal, then reflection is something that games are very bad at, like you have to break that open and punctuate it in some ways in order to allow ways in which reflection can happen, so it's that – or think about the before and after...

H: OK, yeah that makes sense.

T: So there you go, that's everything.

H: You've answered some questions I don't even have to ask now, just quickly what's your official role, so when I write it down, you're like co-director?

T: Co-director, but there's also, in a sense there's HQ, and the network, and the network is that which is rumoured to play like a secret society – nonsense, obviously – and so I'm one of 3 co-directors within the HQ but then I certainly like to think that when I'm working on a project as an artist I'm wearing a different hat. So even like working on the – and each project makes it's own little world, so for the *Adventure Principle*, Dan – [Hannah ticks a question off]. Great, look at me answering the questions in the right order without even realising! Me and Dan were co-directing that, and of course I was, also co-director of Coney, but even like me talking to Contact there was a sense of like when we're talking about the project internally then we're both there, and both equal and he can overrule me, and that's what – that's the – talking about the bigger delivery of the project for Coney as it happened he would come and sort

of support that and articulate it really beautifully. But in that sense I was co-director, and that actually making that distinction is kind of really important, and one of the things that I love about overall the – Coney's own adaptability is a super weakness as well as a super strength which is usually the way of these things. One of the things that I love is that it does allow a sense in which, and this is it's weakness as well as a strength, is that you kind of don't necessarily take anything for granted. Everything is always open to be challenged or changed, so particularly, then, the way in which I loved a – always loved a thing Katie Mitchell once said about how every time you start in a rehearsal room you make a new little world, you make a new little society, and you have a chance, each new time you start again. You refresh, 'what is this society to be like?' 'How do you want it to run?' And it's possible for us to... Similarity each project within us can be quite different, like it's not really like any of us to be despotic, but something could be run like, quite dictatorially, sometimes that might be necessary for the pressures of whatever work just needs to kind of crack on. But you can make your choice how it is each time, and *actively* making a choice about it which is really important.

H: So, Coney are an agency of play.

T: Yep.

H: Officially that's what you call yourselves?

T: We're slightly – we're kind of fiddling with words a little bit, agency is tricky, sometimes.

H: Do you get put in the theatre bracket by the Arts Council?

T: Yeah we do – but we all three of us who are the co-directors at the moment or all three who share the co-directorship, which I'm trying to get used to saying – we all come from theatre background.

H: Who's number 3?

T: Tom Bowtell .

H: Was he out there?

T: No, he's had a family bereavement, but he's also been more part-time because he's held a part-time job for years and isn't going to be leaving that – at some time we're going to work out how exactly that transitions, but that's sometime – and he's... We've got all sorts of interests – but he's like worked... He's got form with young people, he's particularly... I share that interest but giving that over more to him, whereas Annette is less interested in that for herself, although the value of it for Coney is like – is key. But Tom hasn't been full time, yet but he's still a co-director.

H: Why play?

T: It was never a conscious – you mean why play rather than *games* or why play?

H: why play at all, why do a thing – why is it good to work with play, as opposed to...?

T: As opposed to...

H: Words written on a page.

T: One is not per se better or worse than the other – as you know I have done something with words written on a page recently, and continue to – it's nice, each does it's own thing and all disciplines crackle and learn from each other particularly, if people are open about how to... But I think

what I am excited about is what it does to people, like the transformations that it can provoke in people, like that's it, really. Work that doesn't have a playing audience, audiences are always playing, even if they're just playing in their heads... Because that thing that play, all theatre is play, theatre is a particular crystallisation of it, but what play is to quote Jimmy Stewart, is about being able to go 'what if?' and 'what is?' at the same time. That I can hold those two simultaneously and for that to be ok – and to be able to switch between the two and even if you go to one, always remember that there is *that* one, and the meaning of it comes from how one reflects back onto the other, both ways, and that.... If you have an actively playing audience like they're on their feet and they have some shaping over what happens, over their experience, then that is different, is a different kind of dimension to it. That doesn't make it better or worse than stuff where people sit and watch other people play in front of them and then reflect on, and get taken on an imaginative journey with them, they're both – they're doing the same thing, they've just got the graphic equaliser a bit different. I'm interested in everything. I forgot one really key bit of me is [...] improvisation which is one of the bridges between the words written on the page, and really quite literally, this kind of crucial bit of discipline for me in terms of – because my student theatre in Edinburgh got taken over by a comedian who brought theatre sports over. I'd never seen this before other than on the telly, and the idea that you could do it was like – was like revolutionary. And I did it, was not very good at it but it didn't really matter, and did some a bit of training with Improbable which was crucial for my development, I think, and Improbable generally, and the Open Space thing that Phelim has driven and other kind of process work that he has done has been enormously important for me and – are you coming to D&D [Devoted and Disgruntled]?

H: I am, yeah.

T: Good, and yeah, and then a sense in which then, everyone I knew as a theatre maker was always like playing games within the process and using games as a building block towards moving things through and the big – the one big piece I did when I was in the pub theatre was a piece called 'pub quiz' which had actors but also an actively sitting but playing audience, and making them play in terms of how they were watching, it was kind of like a natural progression.

H: So I think that – I have some questions about *Art Heist* which I was-

T: You should definitely ask Annette -

H: Yes I thought she was more directly connected to that so I'll leave those questions for her.

T: She's driven that, and to be honest, I've not experienced *Art Heist* yet so I don't – I would love to see it.

H: So in which case I was going to direct my *Small Town Anywhere* questions at you.

T: She's obviously been on that as well, and we're about to scratch *Small Town* again in May – the lighter, the travelling version.

H: Yeah, I did hear that you were touring it.

- T: And simultaneously we've now got some dates, and simultaneously, or not quite the same but one of the nights in the tour when *Small Town* is happening rather than – *Small Town* won't happen and *Early Days* which is the next big one in that line of investigation which Annette is directing, is going to scratch at BAC, which will be very exciting.
- H: I shall look out for those, I was sad to only really hear about *Small Town Anywhere* only really after it sort of happened... So *A Small Town Anywhere* [ASTA] is based on a book about a community in collapse-
- T: A film.
- H: A film?
- T: A film, called *La Corbeau*.
- H: A film? I thought it was a book?
- T: No it's a film based on a true story, and re-written as a story – the film is really interesting, I mean I can tell you it quickly because it was made – Clouzot, made in 1943 in occupied France, and it was – that's the key thing it was made by an occupationist studio, funded by the Nazis, and they thought they were getting a script that was kind of a little escapist soap opera fluff to keep the masses happy and Clouzot ... I think he wrote it as well, he made this parable and it's deliberately a parable, that's how he got it past their censors, all contemporary references are stripped, you know you're in France, it looks like the 1940s, that's it. But there's hidden little, to the – not even hidden and not even that little, but he took a true story of a poison pen letter writer that has terrorised a small town and told that parable of the town kind of tearing itself apart in that... But the film was hated – the Nazis basically went 'oh shit, we're going to have to release this' because they realised that – it was less a denunciation of the occupation so he was showing... But also unfortunately the nationalists and the left hated it because it was funded by the Nazis and it's basically everybody's fucked in it, there's nobody, the most sympathetic characters are those who have the most palpable flaws in them, even the children are evil. And so they the misanthropy, they hated that so it was actually, Clouzot was blacklisted for 5 years after the war, and the 2 lead actors were imprisoned for having been in it. So – but we picked it because it was a story of a community and that seems sensible in terms of – I mean the provocation had come from 'an audience in a room by themselves' but trying to tell a story, an existing story... And you'll probably fail, but you'll learn some interesting things along the way. That's the first provocation from BAC and the National Theatre Studio who led the first phase and then it went back to BAC and then back to the National Studio and back to BAC and that sort of followed through.
- H: Because I'm really interested in – I think a particularly, I think play is very good at investigating community.
- T: Yeah.
- H: Because we do it together, we don't do it pointing in one direction, like when you watch a piece of theatre it's a collection of individuals experiencing something in a room together.
- T: And also having different experiences of that communal experience in a way they can only piece together by afterward, and the immediate afterwards of *Small Town*, that space to be able to – at BAC one of the

most crucial decisions we made was to invest in buying a glass of wine for everybody in the audience. So that when they came out we could serve that to them in the Salon, there was a decompression zone that meant they didn't leave to go to the bar, there was a free drink, and then once they'd started conversations there they stayed. You know, at the bar they would continue to have those conversations and those conversations were the most fascinating thing because people would go 'what were you doing? What was going on?' there was – and little revelations, like 'of course!' – that.

H: And is that the reflection that to you is art? They've held the 'what is' and 'what if' for an hour or so and...?

T: Yeah – yeah, I think that's, and they need to now be freed to – and also the immersion that they've been in, that's broken so they're now free to just take it and share it and try and understand the bits that were opaque to them. I think the other thing that's kind of, I mean the – it's going to be redesigned a bit, not just so aesthetically when it goes back in, but the story-play of it's going to be redesigned – there's a thing – its started out 2007, like 5 years ago, and I didn't really, hadn't really connected experiences of making games to what this was, like game design as a form or discipline I hadn't encountered, that was all to come, that year [...] and we- it was the first piece of trying to tell a story that would... But we knew it would fail, and it failed in very interesting, very simple and interesting ways that – we had actors in the first phase, hidden, as plants – which we, because the studio give them to you, and the only way to end it the way that the film ended was to (the actors as the lead characters) was to kind of appear, and that main storyline to kind of like crystallise out, but that then suddenly went... The playing audience who were loving the stories that they were making suddenly went 'oh, ok, we'll watch this, that's quite nice but what does it have to do with us?' And that, and it became that, 'how do you end this?' The challenge then became how do you tell, make a compelling experience, tell a compelling story every night, which, or the best – of course it might not always work, but have a really good fighting chance of telling a really good story every night? But, do the audience have agency, proper agency over what happens and their experience of all of that. But the thing, the thing that, I mean there's a thing about community and it's about a community at war with itself, and it it's about us boiling them, metaphorically speaking, and seeing how they break. But then also seeing what the community became, was shown by them more than this was like in our heads, particularly, towards the end of that last phase, it's about heroism. I always get really emotional, I always feel really, because I'm genuinely moved by – by thoughts of what people are playing, they're playing, but it's still, but they're themselves and what they're actually doing, in these circumstances, and basically *A Small Town*, makes... You're making a series of individual and collective choices, and you're complicit in the collective choices even if you don't – because you're still the – it gets you to the point where you might let the fascists in. And you might string up somebody in order to save your own skins, which is – and you know you're playing, because we remind you of that, but yet, on the few times where that – and it was relatively few times –

where, the army, that always marches on the town, on the final day, but you don't – what happens then is completely, it's not an algorithm, it's not a game engine, it's basically us, behind the scenes going 'it feels like it's this, this is the end of the story'. But the way that it's then told to them is incorporating everything that's happened, so that they understand that it's them that kind of got there. So there's a few times, particularly the night that the gamers came, where it drove off a moral cliff, and yeah, the night that the gamers came there ended up being a lynch mob that strung up somebody and the fascists came in and... Sort of off the record, [names have not been used] because it's unfair to point out, but that was driven by a rivalry, an out of game rivalry, friendly rivalry, that... Two good friends who play to win, one of whom is X and the other is Y, who we kind of set up, seeing that rivalry and then re-writing – they both wanted to be the mayor – and rewriting it so that X now only got to be cast as mayor first, and we found a historian's notes, whose the gatekeeper and so you've got the opportunity to cast yourself, to make more history for yourself in a sense, so all the back stories come from the players which is crucial, we just provide them with occupations... But it's X 'the mayor', not X 'playing Francois the Mayor'. And Y missed that by minutes and was palpably disappointed, so we made Y, made a new character of the town clerk who was servant to the mayor but knows all the secrets, knew the mayor's secrets, and also a rival to him and whose ambition was just to be the mayor and just planted that. And then through that, through some other things, helped Y basically, by throwing some other things in that gradually revealed X's secret... And so that Y could (beautifully played, amazing, amazing game play by, you know, the objective of 'become mayor', masterful), Y just forgot about the bigger game, about what was happening around Y, about the country and the bigger events that were going to happen, then seeing, not, so... This was an exceptional night, and you know, Y being, like I said this is off the record, like Y also, understanding, it took Y a while to get his head around what had happened and Y kind of felt – Y's said some very beautiful and generous things about the whole thing afterwards. And what that then says – because, it's true, and Y put this beautifully, about how we've made a little potted history of how fascism happens. Y ended up playing down that path without realising. But you, you know, more times than that happened, people who were playing this tribal game – because there's two tribes in the town – when the messenger arrives to say 'it's now, there's one tribe in this town and the feathers in your hats, out, just one feather,' which is the first in a series of escalating demands... Like, [people] who'd been like, putting many feathers of that feather in their hat in that tribal game, [were] suddenly like 'no fucking way' and then coming out with their own – 'let's burn the feathers, let's all wear one feather from each of our hats', like, you know, defiance, or the individual. So you know there were lynch mobs – two lynch mobs I can remember – that got swerved away from it at the least minute by one member, one, like the minstrel piping up and going 'hang on, I mean, do we have to do this?' And that little kind of stubborn voice, like 'hmmm, yeah, we don't have to, yeah, surely' and then he didn't take part, he just basically threw

that match and then everybody else, like 'fuck, no, we don't, fuck it, we don't' and then, swerving away from that. And then another time when this guy who, I know, I happen to know in real life is gay, and who is middle aged, very gentle man, quite shy, but not, so much as to not put himself forward... It so happened, and it wasn't that his a sexuality was a thing, but it's relevant, it so happened that in terms of the secret writing in advance, that we basically, him and another player we kind of put them together so they would have had a secret love affair, a homosexual love affair, way in the past, and they were now mayor and priest, and they were enemies but they had this unspoken thing that they were both awkward about, that was kind of lying underneath. And as often happens the tallest poppies are the ones that people swipe at because they can and that's fun, so the mayor kind of ended up being, the lynch mob was baying for him and his thing was like – because knowing that it was something that was hard for him because he wasn't somebody who would, with conventional casting he's not somebody that you would, you know would... Like Y would be a brilliant mayor because he would talk for anybody... And like this guy just talked them down, and talked them down [Tassos struggles to carry on]. Sorry, it's just, you know, it's potent, that was the thing, that was not about 'save me' but 'save yourselves, don't do this, because this is what will happen if you do that.'

H: In what way is it so potent, do you think? That experience?

T: Because there's, because the people get lost, get hot in the 'what if' and yet the 'what is' is always present because it's still you, it's not, you can't hide behind the – you know it's the fact of what we're making on every level is framework that then the very people who are there step into. They're the ones who are playing. And there's that kind of weird balance between the two that means that you can, there's enough of a system and a world, and the faint outline... But, you know, literally it's a hat and a badge and it will always be, with most budget in the world we like the deliberately – it's not a costume, it's not a mask, it's not like – it's so that you, as 'you' that's the least that you need in order to be able to say 'I'm playing somebody else'. But, somebody else who at their heart is you, so it's your choices you're making... People, just like I used to play RPGs, back as a kid, I never quite understood how people acted those, like to play a character, to make decisions that a character, who always, like, your own decisions, your own moral decisions, your own intelligence decisions, like then the idea of roll the dice because you're playing like a smart elf, so, you know 'Ah, um, Flagolax, you have had a brilliant idea!' That's no fun, I can work it out for myself, or not, like and for it to be made easy, not easy, this is the thing about where the resilience theory comes in – flow, do you know about flow theory?

H: Yeah, yeah.

T: So like the idea that you're sort of kind making the challenge, so that the skill is responsively to make that as a kind of playmaster – I hate that, that, that I just said that – yeah, but to bring the challenge for the people in the room to the point where it's just within reach, and then they can grab it. But you need to be able to sort of, like, you need to be responsive in that way, that's important.

- H: Was it a specific, I guess, political decision to make something about community in that way?
- T: Originally no, but it, I think it, we kept at it because it was so interesting, and it was so interesting partly because it was political, and also originally it was a formal, you know, people... The challenge was to tell a story to lots of people, lots of character, like by definition needing equal time, potentially the opportunity for equal time within that has to be about community, so. I mean another way of looking at it with hindsight is you're making a world, and you're making a world that different people will inhabit and all those different people, and then you're just drawing, you're making... And what we were literally were doing is making the certain events that rain down on the town and then kind of like facilitating their play that, different avenues to then explore within that.
- H: That explores the politics of community, I guess.
- T: Yeah, but politics, ultimately is about – literally, is about the relationships between people, anyway, so, and that... But yeah I've always been, I mean the best thing I did at the theatre I ran – the pub quiz was a piece of political theatre as part of a season of political work which was, the *Time Out* ran a feature on the series and on the theatre and me because it was something... Was trying to explore politics in a different way, that wasn't a sort of, a play at the Royal Court, saying 'look at these people, aren't they terrible? Oh, they're a bit like you, ooooh...'
- H: Is it a little bit like, about putting people's bodies in the room, in that context?
- T: I think it is a factor, I think it's a really big factor, I don't know whether it's a deal breaker if they're not, I think that there's, in fact I don't know, it's everything's, I mean there's also something, I'm speaking slightly to the, martian like [Jimmy Stewart], in thinking about... Because I always define 'live' as being about responsivity, and not about necessarily being in the same room as somebody, but just, you know, here we are, having a live conversation, and I know I'm doing most of the talking but the – as usual – but the, there's so many more channels of communication that are happening between us that this is a more... And there's something then that is – an X factor about us being in the same room together which is about, this, different quality of encounter from a, a live email conversation, or even phone call, a voice carries different channels of emotion, but there is something which is about the whole, the whole, thing the whole person being there which is... Again back to that I'm having dinner with Chris Goode this evening – which is about the person and the person's body as a thing, which is a real concern of theatre, and what makes theatre, what makes theatre. But I think that being in a room with a dead body, or somebody who is not listening to what you're saying is a – not responding to that – is worse than communicating with... Yeah, you know what I mean.
- H: What responses did people have to *A Small Town Anywhere*? Audience, that kind of thing.
- T: I think, I mean people have, people have a, a whole set of different responses – a whole set of other response which are about how -
[Annette knocks on the door, brief conversation about next interview]

Um, all different – they're all so different, and for some it's just a piece of fun, and a kind of escape, and for some it's very deep, some it transforms them, for some, like, I know, I think we... I think there's still work to do on the piece, I think we, we are going to go back to it, so like I think that I want to, the – there's a line that we – a dimension that we sort of like, a dimension to the piece which I think will become more present in this new lighter version. It has to be, to sort of like step up to the plate because the, the crafted space of the town, and that aesthetic is no longer there... It is about a roomful of mostly strangers at the start, and then what are they like at the end, and it is actually about that transformation, and just seeing the fact, that, you know, it's an audience that don't talk to each other in the bar beforehand, but talk quietly in hushed tones to their companions, and then by the end it's like a party, and that, beyond that, you don't really know. I mean there's people that I know, like some of those people had the deeper responses, another friend who saw it three times and the first time she saw it in an early scratch. If she'd known what it was she when she came, she wouldn't have come, like she just sort of bumbled in, and then the third – she's just so shy, like the idea of standing up in public... And then one of the best endings was when she was actually the Raven one night at the final... And when the town is looking for a scapegoat it's kind of pushing towards that, she stepped forward and said 'it's me, I'm sorry' like 'it's up to you but I think I didn't like doing it and I'll sacrifice myself rather than, be the reason why you're all...' And made this speech, and again, because I knew how difficult it was for her – had been for her to talk like that, it's like – oh I think I'm going to cry – and they all went 'well, yeah they [the Fascists] can fuck off, you're alright'. And – that – that – if it's a game for the town to win, then that's how they won, that's the only way that they could win – like, was to make some act of collective heroism that would inspire the army to turn back, and change the world, change that world, the play world. They – there's one, I just want to throw in quickly because I saw that you had another bit down there [in your questions] and I know we're running out of time, and maybe we'll regain, if there's any time after, but in as much as that what that [*The Loveliness Principle*] is a very different piece, and that bridges into both a kind of core exploration of what Coney, as an organisation, is about, but also because it's something that, it's been that – it's developing, and will always keep developing, but that at it's heart it always intended to be... Because of various sustainability issues that are being sorted now, that it's a way for somebody – for the access of that to be taken on a journey that is about themselves, again, and which is about a provocation... No not a provocation, that's too strong – that is a very general invitation to do something lovely, and for a stranger to discover that that's actually wonderful and – you did it, didn't you?

H: Yeah – the Loveliness Principle? Yeah.

T: Yeah, and you get to the end of it and you hear the story, which is the original true story of the loveliness principle; about the cup of tea, and then there's a bit where you're being signed up and how that will... The thing that's kind of been missing is how that will then connect to the bigger 'you', to become part of that there's another couple of steps that

had fallen away, but will come back again, by which people become part of the wider network and are actually, agents of loveliness, or ready to be ready for it, to pull out the guns to... And how that might actually make people help people discover, for themselves, doing that themselves, and doing that, and what I've also been – the model, the version of it that I think has been so important so far is the version of the experience I wasn't at which was one in [X] in Sydney, last year. Where I'd run a version of *The Loveliness Principle* on a boat, to all ages between 7 and 70, I was able to just give them that, and then somebody else from Coney, then continued to visit them to direct and facilitate the making of a complete remaking of that piece that happened in the town and was... Because it hides out in plain sight it needs to fit where it is much more than any other piece that we make, and that ended up with – so the final interview, in the piece itself, has happened in a beach hut, and that the agent who met you with a cup of tea and sat you down to tell you the story, for 98% of the time was a local person. Who would then, there's this sense for somebody who's playing it who's also mostly local, there's that 'bom!' ah, and that is something really magical for me in that, which is about what that is doing and how these people are being given some... The opportunity to take some agency about this and make the thing their own and that, yeah, out in the world, is really, very exciting.

H: We could make everyone a member of Coney doing lovely things for everyone else, and change the world without people ever realising it had happened.

T: Yeah, what's saying that hasn't happened already?

H: (Laughs.)

T: I mean I'm a bit, I'm actually slightly unnerved by, I think, I think that the conceptual side of our society has been sorted out now, it will take while for it to be articulated properly. And it's a lot of it is showing and doing rather than telling at the moment. You have to just tell people and it will sow the seed, but I just from the kind of conversations that I'm having, both, here and on the far side of the world with people join 'oh, yeah, fuck, that's great, brilliant, let's go!' Suddenly feels like it's something that might actually start to – palpably – spread, and sustain itself because people want it to. And that could be an extraordinary thing, maybe. Or maybe not. That's all right.

[End of relevant speech.]

Appendix B: Umbrella Project evidence

The Umbrella Project: Process and Product Evidence.

The origins of the idea

The Umbrella Project was first conceived of walking through torrential rain, and wishing that the walker had an umbrella that they could give to a soaked stranger. The implication of kindness and generosity inherent in this moment of conception is fundamental to the entire project. The next thought was of umbrellas passing through many hands, of the stories of those that hold them, and then umbrellas as a potential story-collecting mechanism. This hand-to-hand method of collecting story reflected older traditions of folk storytelling, but also more modern ‘viral’ meme spreading habits. *The Umbrella Project* formed first as a manner of collecting stories from a city, and then began to move towards conceiving of a manner of theatrically re-telling these stories as several pieces of pervasive sound performance; soundwalks. Soundwalks which ask the audience in several ways to consider what it is to live in the city, and move past people there, every day.

Support

As well as being supported as part of the PhD departmental studentship, *The Umbrella Project* was supported by several people and organisations. The credits for the project are as follows: ‘*The Umbrella Project* was produced in association with Pilot Theatre and Loughborough University, supported by the FuturEverything accelerator programme and Arts Council England. Pilot Theatre is a multi-platform theatre organisation delivering critically acclaimed excellent work regionally, nationally and internationally. They inspire creativity and new ways of thinking and are strategic innovators in the field of digital networks and leaders in the delivery and distribution of work for, by and with young people. Pilot also brought on board Arts Council England support for the work. This project also forms the basis of the practice aspect of Hannah Nicklin’s PhD at Loughborough University, where she is kindly supported by an English and Drama departmental studentship. Loughborough University has an international reputation for excellence in teaching and research, strong links with industry,

and unrivalled sporting achievement. Finally, the early stages of the idea were supported by the Future Everything accelerator programme'. There was also support provided by volunteers recruited by Pilot Theatre, a key collaboration with musician and composer Simon Ralph Goff, and umbrella pick up and drop off points were hosted by the following venues: York Theatre Royal, York Explore Library, City Screen Picturehouse, York St Mary's, York Castle Museum, Yorkshire Museum, Visit York, Bar Lane Studios, Deep, Xing Smoothies, VJ's Art Bar, Licc, The Spurriergate Centre, Twenty Two Interiors, Yummy Yummy, and York Art Gallery.

The development of the idea

Different iterations of the idea were proposed and developed over the year or so before it was presented to Pilot Theatre as producers. This included:

Recording, mapping, listening umbrellas. A much smaller number of highly technological umbrellas that recorded GPS data (so they could be tracked across a map) – these would have to be passed carefully from hand-to-hand, probably through careful consideration of 'who you want to pass this onto' (although this would have created a 'waterfall' self-selection problem) due to the expense of the umbrella objects. In this version of the idea, the umbrellas themselves would record and send the recordings of stories offered. This was the most integral solution with regards to the umbrellas as artefacts, but also the most expensive, and lowest impact in terms of reach/numbers. Technology would be perfectly manageable using something like simple Arduino technology, but this option would have required expertise and funding not suited to the small Arts Council Grants for the Arts application which eventually supported the project.

Umbrellas for listening under. This was another tech-enabled umbrella solution, this time linked more directly to the soundwalks. In this iteration of the idea, the collection would be from people calling a number on umbrellas handed directly to people in the rain, but the actual listening could only be done from umbrellas specially fitted with either speakers/mp3 players and a moisture detector and mp3 shield set up that only played the audio when in the rain. This was problematic in terms of budget, and incredibly impractical considering the project ended taking place in an exceptionally dry autumn, and also considering

planning for the release of umbrellas – how does one predict when it is going to rain sufficiently? However this approach might have helped to create a more integral final role for the umbrellas, as well as give a physical lead-in to the listening part of the project. That is, a fuller reason to go out and do it *now* rather than forgetting/postponing it – because you need rain specifically.

Soundwalks to be listened to under any umbrella in the rain. Though less tech-reliant, the making of soundwalks to only be listened to under an umbrella in the rain was somewhat unenforceable as a solution, and again more opportunity for people to lose interest as they wait for a *rainy* day as well as one with spare time.

A more online-oriented approach. The sharing of all of the stories collected on the website, plus opportunity for them to be submitted (along with other types of content; video, images, text, etc.) was considered to begin with, and stayed as part of the plan for a reasonable amount of time. This would have allowed people online to contribute, and a more vivid online presence for the project, as well as enabling a more Creative Commons-driven community creative approach whereby any submitted content could be used as the online community wished. However the drive to use such material is rarely evident (the critical mass required to sustain a living contributing community is rare – for every Wikipedia or Reddit there are hundred of thousands of dead forums/wikis), ethical and data protection issues would be problematic, and from a conceptual point of view, allowing anyone *anywhere* to contribute subtracted greatly from the *locative* aspect of the project – if anyone could submit a story/memory, then the work drawn from those submissions would be much less about York as a physical, experienced place.

An app-based approach. This was briefly considered, both as a way to provide information, a place to submit material, record stories, and experience the soundwalks. It would have been an exciting add-on to the project, but with a relatively low budget, and the access issues regarding requiring a smart phone, this option was listed as ‘desirable’ but not needed.

An installation-based outcome. Outputs other than soundwalks listened to through headphones/speakers were considered; installations in theatre buildings, or in sheds that were constructed and filled with projection and sound

which might include map-based installations, touchscreens and visualisations that you walk through. However budget was again an issue, and sound considered the simplest and most effective manner of augmenting city-space in an accessible manner. Likewise and the amount of data collected in the final iteration of the idea was insufficient to create mapped/other visualised environments.

A co-production with Contact Theatre in Manchester. This was suggested at the beginning of Pilot Theatre's involvement in the project; in this version the two-city co-production would have resulted in 10 weeks (not 5) over the 2 cities, producing 6 soundwalks total. Unfortunately Contact were unable to commit due to funding uncertainties. Also, with hindsight, the workload would have been more than a little unsustainable, and the size of Manchester less effective with the number of umbrellas budgeted for (200).

Ideas taken forward

Collection

The simplest version of story collection was taken forward, primarily for access reasons. Other methods (such as an app) could have been run alongside this and still preserved access, but here budget and timeframes were problematic. Thus the method of collection was set as a series of umbrellas that you could pick up and drop off at a number of venues across a city. Each umbrella had a phone number on it that you could call, and (depending on where you were in the timeline of the project) hear one of three messages. Each message posed a different question about the city.

The handing out of umbrellas on rainy days was part of the plan until very late on in the process, the problem here was reaction times. Because the budget couldn't allow the lead artist or sound artist constant time in York, certain days had to be set as 'outing' days – so as to make sure Pilot, volunteers, and council permissions could all be organised. Because it steadfastly refused to rain on these days, the umbrellas weren't handed out on these outings, and instead they became direct story collection opportunities (under a gazebo type structure which was able to offer shelter, where stories were recorded with a mobile

microphone, and participants were offered free tea and coffee), as well as consciousness-raising opportunities.

Sharing

The final soundwalks were shared via a Creative Commons (CC) license, as per the terms and conditions of the story and creative output copyright information University ethical approval process. However the actual stories – and manner of submitting them – were kept firmly *offline*, so as to keep the project tied inextricably to the place from which the stories were being gathered – York.

Delivery

Budgetary constraints put pay to the more technologically complex versions of listening opportunities, and the wish to pervade city space meant that in-building installations were not taken forward. As such, headphone delivered sound was inexpensive, unobtrusive, pervasive, and able to become almost completely accessible (in terms of technology) by the budgeted provision of 15 mp3 players for loan from either the York Central Library or the Theatre Royal, with headphones, full instructions and maps.

The final idea:

The final form of the idea as it set out was thus:

Stories were collected through the giving out of umbrellas. These stories, recorded by phoning a number on the side of each umbrella went forward to build 3 soundwalks. These umbrellas were available from the supporting venue, and with pick up/drop off points in cafes, bars, tourist information points and shopping centres throughout the city. People were encouraged to pass them on via the label attached to the inside of the umbrella, with a list of all of the pick up/drop off points. There were also several days over the 5-week project where the artists and volunteers went out under a large *Umbrella Project* inflatable gazebo to explain the project to passersby, and record further stories.

When a member of the public called the number they were asked a question designed to trigger a memory or experience connected to a certain time of day. These times were ‘commute’, ‘evening’, and ‘daytime’. The questions were ‘tell me about a journey you took/take’, ‘tell me a story about York at night’, and ‘tell

me about an encounter you had with a stranger’, respectively. The outings where the artists and volunteers explained and recorded more stories were also timed so as to reflect these times of day (6am-10am and 4pm-8pm, 5pm-10pm, and 10am-4pm), and the final 3 soundwalks designed to be completed in their related time also.

Over the 5 weeks, 3 sound experiences were produced using the answers to these questions, and released for free download online, or available to borrow from the York Central Library or York Theatre Royal on ready-loaded mp3 players. These sound experiences were written in conjunction with musician Simon Ralph Goff who used ‘found sounds’ from the city in conjunction with piano, guitar, violin, and synth, to compose music in response to the writing.

The soundwalks are all 20-30 minutes long, and take place in the centre of York (accompanying ‘launch events’ were also planned to enable people to chat to the makers if they wished, but the walks can be done on any day, as long as the participant is in the place and at the times specified). Extensive other information and media content (trailers, snippets, blog posts) were shared online via the dedicated website, Twitter, and Facebook.

This version of the project was produced by Pilot Theatre, funded by their support in kind and Arts Council England, in association with Loughborough University and further supported by the *Accelerator* programme at Future Everything, who developed the idea over 3 mentoring sessions. The idea was first developed in a group pitch setting at a *Theatre Sandbox* commissioning event run in Manchester, and in conversation with Toby Moore of Sleepydog. The messaging service was provided at nominal cost by Leo Brown at *Netfuse*, York City Council and Central Library allowed the collection events to occur, and 16 venues (as previously named) around York hosted umbrellas.

Accessibility (performance and collection)

Geography. The umbrellas and the collection outings all occurred within the central business district of York. Although the ‘daytime’ and ‘commuter’ collections were particularly efficient at encountering a wide variety of people from within York, being located so centrally meant that the experiences collected

were more likely to be from people who had travelled to the non-residential centre of the city. This limited the people and stories encountered to a degree that meant that the project could by no means be said to represent the 'whole' of a city. Likewise the routes for the walks were simple and all began in central areas. This was mainly for practical and logistical reasons: 1) for ease of people to access mp3 players, and participate via public transport and 2) for ease of testing and writing, with a budget that would only allow the lead artist to visit a few times.

Disability and impairment. The walks would not be accessible to people with sight or hearing impairment, although Soundwalk 2 (*Daytime*) was designed with people with mobility issues in mind (it only required the participant to sit in a specific place). Because the experiences demand such integral and frequent references to the body of the participant, as well as the sights and sounds around them, they were less likely than traditional theatre to be translatable for someone with a disability/impairment¹.

Age. People under the age of 18 who weren't accompanied by an adult were not able to give stories on collection days, but otherwise the scope of submissions was well spread over age ranges, with 18-40 year olds more prevalent on the 'evening' collection, 30-80 year olds on the 'daytime' outing, and an even mix over the 'commute' day.

BME. Though no direct data was taken, from observation, the contributions and presence of contributors in the final pieces pretty much reflected the BME presence in the area from which the stories were drawn.

Technology and/or prosperity. In order to make the project as accessible as possible in terms of technological ability or access to technology, there were two ways to leave stories; the first by leaving a message on the phone line – charged at local rates – which is a highly widespread piece of technology; and the second

¹ The answer, I feel, is not to make them less specific, however, but to also produce work *designed* for people with hearing/vision/mobility impairments. If I were to repeat the work, or do more pieces in response, it would be appropriate to produce at least one that is do-able by able bodied/non impaired people but *designed* for those who aren't. I am also interested in developing a whole new project that addresses these issues within work which is so individually-referential.

was to encounter the umbrella project stall on the outing days, where leaving a story cost nothing, and sometimes also included a free cup of tea or coffee. The resulting soundwalks could be downloaded for free from the site and uploaded onto the device of your choice, or borrowed from the Central Library or Theatre Royal – again completely for free, and with full, careful instructions.

Experiences: trips out:

Story collection: Nighttime.

On Friday 7th of October the first story collection outing occurred. The team (consisting of 2 volunteers, Hannah, and several members of Pilot) went out at 5pm and stayed until 10pm. The team were pitched on a square just off Parliament Street, on a main route between bars and restaurants, and across the square from a local kebab van. This was the outing on which people were the least likely to stop and talk, it was a particularly cold night, and most people were on their way to nights out or restaurant bookings, so less inclined to stop and chat. The beginnings of the conversations – capturing and holding people’s interest – was the toughest point to navigate. ‘I’m not trying to sell you anything’ is a defensive beginning, but most people did expect that was the main motivation. Likewise the mention of ‘theatre’ or ‘art’ tended to switch people off. ‘Story’ was the most accessible concept, but a lot of people said that they simply didn’t have a story to tell about York at night.

The following individuals or groups of people were experiences that stood out:

The boy and his silent girlfriend. This is actually a series of people – there were some interested people that stopped, couples on their way out to places, and the men that stopped always seemed to have someone in *tow*, not *with* them as much as slightly behind them. One or two of these men chatted on recordings, but the partners rarely attempted to speak, and on one occasion refused to.

Question: Why is it that people freeze up/are so concerned about the idea of being recorded – or rather of being *asked* if they could be recorded (there were plenty of CCTV cameras in the area), what is it that makes people nervous?

The people from the races. There had been a race on that day so there were lots of revellers passing through, all more drunk than you’d expect at 9pm, as they’d

been revelling all day. Large packs of men in suits that I would not have wanted to approach if I were on my own. Smaller groups of laughing women who assured us they had stories to tell, but wouldn't stop to tell them.

The Christians. The first man (another one with a silent girlfriend) had a slow, pleasant, Irish accent and a captivating stare. He sat down to tell us a story about how he came to be there that night. It was a long and winding story that got more and more incredible; it involved spiritual powers, his possession by his late father's spirit, his finding of Christianity, and the moving of mountains (literally; an earthquake). It was a well-told story and was very welcome – if Christians were part of York that night the recordings should represent that. However, many of the other Christians from the same bible school the first man was from were also out on the streets that night; preaching and singing and warning people from their current paths. And the moment they heard that someone wanted *their stories*, they actually began to line up to talk to me. This is when I feel their presence became unrepresentative of the city, and also quite obscuring. None of the latter interviewees were able to understand the question of 'the city at night', and all wanted to explain how they had found God, but for the most part this story consisted mostly of 'I'm from California and my parents sent me here to study the bible for 2 years'. This was fascinating in a way, their views, the looks in their eyes, were so brittle. As was their urge to just be *listened to*. But their presence became oppressive, and they were present at almost all outings after this, too.

Marcus of Pilot tried to persuade the kebab van man, and the bouncers at a nearby pub to speak to us, but they both said they couldn't afford to stop working. It was still possible, however, to continue to observe these people in the space *The Umbrella Project* stall was sharing. The flow of people around the space, and particularly to the kebab stall was interesting and changeable as the night went on, as people got drunker.

Towards the end of the night the revellers got a little wilder, the laughter was louder, but people were still not inclined to stop for a chat. The last group of people to talk to us was an off-duty policeman, and his two mates. One hung back and didn't say anything, the other was loud and goofy and very drunk and kept

on shouting about 'needing a piss'. He seemed a little afraid of the police officer, a mate he said he had met when he was being arrested. The police officer had very still eyes. He spoke briefly about his experience in the army, in Bosnia and Kosovo. Then about being shipped to London to deal with the (then recent 2011) riots. He said that *The Umbrella Project* was on his patch. He said that the project should be about him, that he would tell us about York, about York at night, that we didn't need to talk to anyone else, that we should call him up and come out with him of a night. His drunk mate complained about needing the toilet again, his other mate remained in the background.

It did not rain.

Story collection: Daytime.

The second story collection day was between the hours of 10am and 4pm on Saturday the 22nd of October. The collection was based in the same place as the nighttime collection, but in the daytime the area was a busy shopping space; with a mini international food market, a fruit and veg market nearby, and all of the normal high street shops. There was also a military charity sharing the square with *The Umbrella Project* stand, who had a small (but 'real') aircraft in the space. This meant a lot more people came across the project, partly because of the volume of people attracted by the aircraft, but also because of the inclination to stop and chat that Saturday daytime afforded. The Pilot team were joined by the same 2 volunteers as previously, and by this time we had settled on talking about the project in terms of storytelling; i.e. 'could you tell me a story?' The question we were asking in this case was 'could you tell me a story about an encounter you had/have with a stranger?' On the whole, people seemed very interested in the experiment, and a lot more people stopped to talk. For the most part these people tended to be older, retired couples, or parents with young children, whose children had brought them over and provoked their interest in the project. Again many people seemed to think they didn't have a story to tell until the question was asked very expansively; 'have you ever spoken to a stranger? Has no one ever helped you out? Do you not pass someone every day that you have never spoken to?' Etc. This time we had hot tea to give out to people, which definitely made a difference to the atmosphere of the space, and people's

willingness to just hang around and chat. Though again people were put off very simply by the question 'is it ok with you if I record you?' There was also a problem with the volume of the generator that held the inflatable canopy in place, so much so that by the end of the day we had switched it off. The resulting level of background noise was very hard to navigate around in processing the recordings for use in the soundwalks.

The way people moved and behaved differently during the daytime in the same space (as we had collected the nighttime stories) was highly noticeable; packs were replaced by families, far more people walked around on their own, more people ambled, and the flow of people was much more smooth.

The following individuals or groups of people were experiences that stood out:

The French-sounding woman, and the tramp-looking man. This was the clearest tale of out-and-out kindness. A woman with a French-sounding accent spoke about a time in the York Disney store with her two sons, an ensuing tantrum in the street, thrown because they couldn't afford anything, and a scruffy 'tramp-looking' man, who came up to them and pressed £10 into her hand. Told her to buy her child something.

The long tale about Hanuman and Sita. This was a series of stories from a young girl and her mother, the father was also there, but he didn't speak much. The young girl had come over interested in the recording device, and I allowed her to play with it. The mother then told me about the pigeon man she and her daughter meet in the park, who had shown them how to feed squirrels and told them about the feral dove/pigeon hybrid population. Then she and her little girl told the story of her dad falling out of a tree where he lived when he was little – he had been pushed out by monkeys – and then the little girl demanded that she be able to tell the story of Hanuman. Her and her mother went through the whole story in the slightly chilly streets of York.

The woman whose hobby is talking to strangers. This woman told a lot of stories. She spoke quite earnestly about feeling like you're nobody, that you have no story to tell, and her determination to talk – and listen to – other people. She

carried Yorkshire Tea bags in a special container, worked with children with autism, spoke to homeless people and street artists. She seemed sad.

The man with the tale of the butcher's lad. This was one of the people who there were a few of, who heard the question, but told you an unrelated story, just because they wanted to tell it. This was an incredibly vivid story about York 50 years ago, and a series of incidents that occurred in one day to a teenage butcher's lad (him). There were also some brilliant stories about working in the morgue/ambulance service; lots of black humour. Not relevant, but a great sense of York and the people who lived there.

The retired couples who finished each others' sentences. There were at least 3 couples who spoke almost continually over one another, or over the ends of each other's sentences, always knowing what the other was saying. Many of them expressed the idea that when you retire, you have much more time to make room for strangers in your life.

The travelling tales. Though specifically not as useful to the piece as it drew the focus a little too far away from York, it was interesting to find a lot of people's encounters with strangers happened when travelling or on holiday – this sense of being in a different gear – having the time – which allows people to see and make space for the people around them. 'The kindness of strangers' – those moments where you expect to be thrown in with people you don't know, or also feel like a stranger yourself.

The Christians. They returned, with more questions about the project, and more wishes to talk about their spiritual journeys, but because of the influx of people they were more easily balanced.

It did not rain.

Story collection: Commute.

The third and final collection outing occurred on the 28th of October between the hours of 6am and 10am, and 4pm and 8pm. The collection site was outside the Central Library in York, near the council housing offices and on the route from the centre of the city to the train station and main 'park and ride' bus stop. On this outing the team were able to offer both tea and coffee, and had acquired a

quieter generator. The morning time period was covered by Hannah and Pilot, and the two volunteers from previous outings joined in the evening. The idea with the timing was to catch both the morning and the evening commute. The morning was by far the most productive, and the question being asked for this collection event ('tell me about a journey you take/have taken') was the one that produced the most 'on-topic' responses. Surprisingly the most talkative and useful stories came between the hours of 6am and 8am. The most difficult thing about this section was in getting people to deviate from their pre and post-work routes and routines, there were also lots of people in headphones. Men were much more likely to stop during the morning section, especially in the dark. The generator was still a volume issue, but with slightly more space in the library walkway, it was easier to move away from the noise.

Stanley. Stanley was the most talkative of the people we met in the afternoon. His English wasn't incredibly fluent, we much later established that he was originally from Poland, a Polish Jew. He was older, seemed at least in his 60s, has a son aged 28, had left Poland as a political exile in the solidarity uprisings against communism. He was a marathon runner, had in fact given that as his main reason for wanting to enter the US at immigration - that he wanted to run the New York Marathon, that he had promised his son he would. He had seen the Twin Towers fall. Didn't see his two children for years. Stanley wanted to run in the Olympic torch relay, and so had come to Britain, he was going to try and get work installing solar panels. He didn't like York. He kept on telling complicated puzzles and jokes in his broken English. He smiled, and when he didn't understand your words he watched your eyes and your hand gestures. Every September 11th he runs a marathon. The past couple of years it had been from York to Selby. He was full of many stories. He smiled like someone who knows what sadness is.

The couple still awake. A couple, young looking (early 20s) that dropped their friend off at the bus stop at about 7am. They were wide-eyed and a little jangly, and explained that they had been on a night out, hadn't been to sleep yet. It felt strange to them, they said, to be walking around still on the night before, as lots

of people walked around in a new day. He spoke about walking. She spoke about wanting to go into either childcare or gardening.

The Canadian Yorkshireman. The first person that we spoke to at just past 6am was strolling confidently and very alertly past, and stopped to ask what it was we were doing while we set up. When asked about journeys he looked pleased that he had a good answer for the question, and explained that he was back in York for the first time in several decades, for a family reunion; with family coming from all over the world. He had grown up in York, but lived in Canada for most of his life, and obviously operating on a different country's time line was awake, and had decided to go for a walk. He said some things had changed, like most places do, and some things were still the same, like some things always are.

The jogger. This man spoke with an American accent. He was on a business trip which he had stayed over for, and encountered us at about 7am. He crossed the road to speak to us, taking out his earbuds. He spoke about running through a city, and not knowing where you are, he spoke about different forms of tourism, and of tweeting earlier that he was enjoying getting lost in the city, gladly resisting the pull of Google Maps.

The walker. This man approached us without needing asking. He had a Scottish accent, and accepted a cup of tea while he tried to think of a good journey to offer us. He mentioned lads' holidays away, but then spoke about walking that he does – across the whole of the UK, just on his own, living off beans and Mars Bars. He spoke about the satisfaction of *just moving forward*.

The teacher and his smiling partner. This man told a very long story, he was a good storyteller, I think he said he was a history teacher. He spoke about how he met his smiling partner, how he had told her he was going to go and live in Australia, which to everyone's surprise several years later, he actually did. He spoke about travelling around the world, the jobs he did, the journeys he took, about the idea of being a 'lone ranger'; of knowing what you can do when you're on your own. He spoke about the first thing he did when he came home – knocking on the door of his partner's house. She hadn't waited for him. But she was still there. 'I'm just glad she was actually in!'

The woman with the walking-aid. Caught on her way into the library, assuring us she hadn't any stories to tell, suddenly she was telling us that although her body didn't work now, she had her memories; memories which consisted of cycling all over Europe, driving tanks, flying in helicopters, working in Danish nursing home and not speaking a word of Danish, sleeping under bushes. 'No one cares what I have to say, but I have my memories, at least I have my memories'. (Paraphrasing).

The people who struggled. Because the collection stall was this time set beside the central library, and by the council's housing offices, the range of people that were encountered were a lot more varied. A few clearly suffering from mental health difficulties. These stories were listened to, and the people supported as far as was possible. How their stories were dealt with is covered in the adaptation notes below.

The sailor. The sailor was incredibly quietly spoken, like the woman with the walking aid his first response was that he hadn't a story to tell. Then he quietly spoke about sailing single handed around the world. And how he enjoys his own company. 'People talk about fighting the elements, you can't do that, if you fight them, you die. You've got to work with them' (paraphrasing).

It did not rain.

Note on the recordings.

In line with data protection requirements set out by the ethical approval process, all of the recordings were deleted after the project finished.

Adaptation notes: How the content was developed into the final soundwalks.

Basic practice of adaptation

The writing: all of the stories recorded by the messaging service and the collection outings were first transcribed. Then these stories were summed up with a couple of words and added to a post-it. These post-its provided a big-picture view of the content and key themes and ideas were picked out, added and developed over the wall-sized moveable mind-map. These ideas would typically provoke a first sentence or idea which started the writing, which would

then continue for a day, before a further day's redraft, recording, and editing of the resulting vocal track. This 2-day process (twice repeated) would be continually relayed to the musician, who would construct ideas following the beginning of the draft, and on receiving the final draft of vocals write the snippets of his first responses into a fully timed piece. This version was then tested in-situ for timings on the actual route, and both vocal track and music were edited, mastered and bounced (the word for 'export' in *Logic*) accordingly.

Themes arising and intentions for each soundwalk.

Evening: The evening collection event was the one that produced the least amount of stories and recordings, and this along with a larger than normal amount of people who were *present* but *silent* (the girlfriends, the kebab men, the bouncers, the friends on the edges, the things unsaid), prompted thoughts about absence. The darkness and alteration of a city at night added to this sense of hidden and missing things, and so a general theme of people unseen, things unsaid, people on the edges, began to emerge. Though the project was about finding a voice for a city, it seemed apt that something also be written about the silences that make sound possible.

5 main 'less visible' people present in the square, or who left a message, were therefore selected: the kebab men, the girlfriend who never said her name, the mate who hung around in the background, the couple who weren't a couple yet, and a homeless man sat on a bench nearby throughout the night when stories were collected. The writing in this first walk was the loosest adaptation of the source material, and used individuals and their stories (if they left one) as jumping-off-points for mostly fictional characters.

Where other stories were not *directly* used, however, they were often used to inform language and imagery choices. For example: bats flutter across the text of the *Evening* soundwalk, just as they did in a story left by a little girl on the voicemail system; and a message about an experience queuing in costume for *Harry Potter* books at midnight while people in 'going-out costumes' also roamed the streets, provoked the text's final thought about the costumes that we wear.

There was only a single voice on this piece – that of a ‘narrator’ of sorts – this is because the characters were inspired by (rather than directly based on) people the project encountered, and so it felt wrong to manipulate their ‘actual’ voices to fit new intentions.

The use of space was deliberately structured so as to allow for both specific-sounding instructions (‘find somewhere to sit’, ‘find a reflective surface to look at your face in’) whilst also allowing each individual to take their own route from the starting point. The story was constantly brought back through these movements and moments of reflection to the body and embedded mind of the participant. In line with the theme of ‘absence’ or ‘silence’, a sense of the action of the piece being just on the edge of hearing and seeing was sought. Again specific-sounding (but general enough to actually be likely) descriptions of characters were given, and participants invited to search for them in passersby. In casual conversation with participants, it seems this, more often than not, hit the mark. The final moment asks the participant to construct in their mind one of the characters and visualise them in a particular space.

Daytime: The question that provided the provocation for the daytime stories was about strangers. Strangers, because in thinking about what it is to be in a busy city during the daytime, I wanted to probe ideas around the people we pass by without thought. It is for this reason, too, that the space is more stationary – about setting the participant *apart* slightly, allowing them to re-see the space around them, give them room to actually properly *look* at the people as they move around.

Specific-sounding (but general enough to actually be likely) descriptions of characters were given again, so the busy shopping space might be able to provide the players as well as the scenery, giving you a sense of concreteness in an otherwise *applied* experience (to bring a sense of ‘augmenting’ reality, rather than setting oneself wholly aside from it). A very useful early thought about the Yorkshire word for ‘stranger’ provided a sound starting point, and from there, the repeated notion people had of ‘not having a story to tell’ shaped the writing into an attempt to champion the lost *aspiration* of storytelling; the belief that someone who is not a storyteller *by trade*, could possibly have something to say.

Another key theme was of public space vs. shopping space. Direct questions were asked about ownership and belonging in the space in which the participant sat, and about how we move through space, what it means to exist so much in corridors (with intentional reference to Situationist concepts).

The final task – to talk to a stranger, and then pass on a story of the encounter – was an offer of a moment of praxis developing on from the thesis of the slightly more cerebral and stationary experience.

Commute: This piece had the most interesting (and demonstrative) structure, it was much more fluid – as well as using water metaphors throughout – the sound and the structure flowed throughout in an attempt to imitate the flow of people through a city. Likewise the story recordings were threaded, repeated, became motifs in much the same way the meta-narrative suggested stories and people thread and criss-cross through a city. The movements requested of the participants also reflected the idea of stepping into people’s memories, slipstreams, stories; inhabiting briefly, rather than going in search of them like the previous two soundwalks had. Characters flowed into one another, and actions too. You are asked to walk fast when hearing of someone escaping political persecution who had later become a marathon runner; you were asked to move slowly as you were invited to hear the stories of the woman with the walking aid.

A great deal of thought and consideration went into deciding how to deal with the slightly greater amount of stories from people with mental health difficulties encountered in this final collection day. Although there were ethical implications in using them, so too were there problems in *erasing* them. They, too, were part of the fabric of the city. As such there is one, slightly ethereal figure in the writing of this piece, the woman who can’t stop hearing the buzzing, the woman who feels like she’s drowning, the woman who is given a conker by a small child. Someone on the edge of seeing and hearing seemed the most respectful and truthful way to deal with these stories.

Finally, you are asked to consider both the transitory nature of our being-in-the world, but also our ability to make a mark, and read those of the people who

have left them before us. The final action – of leaving a message that someone might find – is the literal application of this point.

The final and opening metaphor, of patchwork quilts, and threads inextricably bound, describes the main thesis of this final soundwalk – moving towards the idea that we are extraordinary, all worth the telling of a story, and that we are in daily physical and metaphysical contact with other extraordinary people who are all worth listening to.

Final intentions of the work

As the key themes began to emerge in the writing, the work seemed became more about stories – the act of proximate and embedded (in a place) storytelling and the importance of it, than it was about how those stories are shared (the original impetus being the gift of an umbrella and its passing on). Although the ‘passing on’ was still important it became clear it was not the ability to *share* stories that was the problem as much as it was the idea that you *might have a story worth sharing at all*. Another main theme was that of inter- and close connections that still exist but are easy to look past in an increasingly ‘global-village’ world.

The pieces therefore emerged as a triptych on this theme; the first examining the edges of the fabric of the city, the silences; the second the spaces in which we walk past one another, the strangers; and the final, about the world we weave and leave behind us, the stories.

What I’d change

Because of the lead artists’ distance from York, and other logistical issues about volunteer and company time and flexibility, the original intention of going out and handing out umbrellas on rainy days wasn’t able to be as responsive to the weather, and so a small amount of disconnect occurred between the methods of collection. The outings, however, were by far the most effective method of collecting stories, and while the umbrellas were still important, this meant that they became slightly more of a marketing device than something completely integral to the artistic intention of the work. A longer lead-in time on story

collection and a separating out of the project aspects (collection time and writing time) would perhaps solve this problem.

Leading on from this, the sheer amount of points of contact that are bound to arise from such a pervasive project did mean that the audience engagement was spread over several *separate* aspects; collection, umbrellas, soundwalks (all stages of which there were 3 time-based versions to encounter). This meant that in terms of marketing output, participation and awareness-raising, the approach and message became muddled. Again, working out a split in process stages might be a way to tackle this, and a more concerted local media (radio, newspapers, etc.) approach to get out the 'overall' project view.

Online marketing, on the other hand, was highly successful although the site-responsive nature of the work (and problems with lack of proximity for most people encountering it online) meant that reach wasn't necessarily met by resulting participants.

Although feedback mechanisms were in place (both in person on collection days, and online via an email address visible on every page, or passively via analytics) it is difficult to gather quite how successful the walks themselves were. The event 'launch' days were very poorly attended (though likely this is as they were solely promoted via social media, which approached the proximity problem again), and could have formed a more useful point of contact for feedback. Much would have been sacrificed by making the 'launch events' seem more prominent than the fact you can experience the soundwalks on any day, but if the piece were to be repeated, a manner of promoting (perhaps making more celebratory) these events might be better found.

More time should also be allowed for feedback from other creative partners in the writing/production of the soundwalks; a turnaround of 4 days from transcription, writing, composing and editing/mixing is do-able, but didn't allow more than one test per soundwalk by the lead artists, or much feedback from partners and producers.

The soundwalks themselves, however, in my opinion, respond well to the subject matter, and explore usefully the times of day, ideas and spaces in the city of York

in an appropriate and active manner given the time available for their putting together. As previously mentioned under 'access' – more dedicated thought in a future iteration to impairment or disability would be useful. Likewise a greater reach in terms of collection or encounter points, a more embedded writing and testing process in the city itself (rather than remotely) would be desirable, and would enable the work to play with more variation of space and specificity of directions.

Feedback from those who completed the piece.

The response of the public was mostly very positive when encountering the artists and volunteers on the story collection days, and the umbrellas were pretty widely used. In total just over 100 stories were collected, with ¼ of these coming from the umbrellas (not including people who called but didn't leave useable messages – a further 10 or so).

The website had just under 800 visits over the period of the project, with just under 1500 pageviews and a 66% bounce rate (44% of visitors looked at more than one page). The project captured a great deal of social online interest (with numerous features in blog posts and tweets, garnering over 250 regular followers on Twitter, and 50 on Facebook.) The work was also covered in the local press and radio.

The resulting soundwalks at the time of writing (roughly a year after) have been downloaded 232 times, and people that spoke to the team were overwhelmingly positive about the experiences – how they matched up to the city, things that were happening around them, and how it changed the way they saw it and what they discovered in it. Email feedback has also been received, with one participant saying:

Amazing concept, words and music, beautifully performed and put together.

What a wonderful project... [...] York is all the richer for what you brought out of it. Thank you

And people on Twitter have said:

@thedharmablues: Daytime section of @umbrellaproject was pretty powerful stuff. I recommend visiting #York just for this alone. [...] Every city needs an Umbrella Project

@Alexanderkelly: really enjoyed discovering new parts of York & the headspace that doing @umbrellaproject's Commute soundwalk gave me today.

...I loved the way [Evening] summons up the ghosts of the living, and the blend of observation/fictionalisation. [...] like the other two, I found the headspace it put me in very affecting.

Although it's worth mentioning that those who have had a neutral or negative experience are less likely to contact the artistic team directly.

Other thoughts.

With greater flexibility it would have been interesting to develop ways of leaving the stories themselves around the city space, to more fully interrogate the interfaces used to collect and deliver (including headphones) the project, and to make the manner of discovering the project more adventurous – an artistic experience in itself.

With much further development (i.e. a future iteration of the project) it would be interesting to develop the work in a much more *embedded* manner – taking it out in association with libraries and community centres into residential areas of a city. The idea of umbrellas (*collection metaphor*) might be more usefully replaced with a project name such as *Walk With Me*, which refocuses the work on people, storytelling, and empathy. The artists would be more usefully in a place constantly, and the exchange more carefully balanced; workshops might be run, and work produced by residents as well as artists. Delivery mechanisms such as broadcasts, or plug and play points, alongside wearable electronics and apps, might well also be considered.

As previously mentioned access in terms of disability and impairment should also be more carefully considered, although a more embedded approach that worked directly with communities around a city would be more likely to enable those stories to be told, whether by the artist, or by the people themselves.

Appendix C: Umbrella Project scripts

The Soundwalk scripts:

Soundwalk 1: night-time/edges

The city shifts at night.

It is inhabited differently.

People move with different purposes.

Places that before seemed perfectly innocuous can become apparently dangerous.

Dogs bark.

Distant singing.

Music thuds.

The sky glows faintly orange, like cloudy ink.

Or gazes down, with stars like pinpricks on a piece of navy sugar paper.

A woman shrieks with laughter. Someone whistles. The scent on the air changes.

Bats swim by caught in the streetlights.

Always a faint surprise.

Who are you in this city?

How do other people see you?

Do you stand comfortably? Or hunched

Do you keep your head down?

When you walk, do you move across patches of light like oases in the nighttime streets?

Do you smile faintly at the couple nervously holding hands, sneaking glances at each other's faces?

Do you cross the road as a drunk man stumbles towards you?

Thank you for standing with me here tonight. I hope that you're not too cold, that you feel safe.

A while ago I stood on these streets and I asked people to talk to me. If you'll follow me, I'd like to take you to where that started.

We're going to move now. Simply and not too far. I want you to turn right now, walk forward, turn right onto Davygate towards parliament street, past Betty's, also on your right, the church behind you on your left, begin to move down the street.

Walk slowly. At the ambling pace usually reserved for holidays. Walk thinking about how each muscle and sinew in your body completes a small miracle with every step. (Small pause) Think about your walk. Until you get to the square, when you're there, find somewhere.

Find somewhere, find a place you feel comfortable; you can sit, or stand, lean against a wall, shop front, tree or building. Just find somewhere you feel ok.

Pause

I asked the people of York to talk to me, and lots of people have been telling me stories. But with you, today, I want to start with the silences. <no pause> The inarticulacies. The people who don't feel like their lives are worth putting into words. The people who asked 'why me'? The lack of light, the darkness on the edge of city nights, the silences.

And then there's the people that you don't notice. The people you don't see, the people woven so deeply or finely or regularly into the fabric of the city that they might as well not be there, they might as well be invisible.

Look around you as you move

How would you make yourself invisible here?

Do you see them? Do they see you?

Tonight I'm going to tell you the stories of 7 people. 7 people I found in the dark of York. 7 people whose stories were made mostly of silence, of a weight behind their eyes, of shared looks that you'll never see, of glimmering distant memories.

Take a deep breath.

Look around you. Look at the things you don't normally see, the tops of buildings, the sky, the ground beneath you.

Did you find somewhere that you feel comfortable? Now I want you to try and disappear. Find a shadow to step into, find a shadow somewhere in the square, and stand there.

Pause.

I'm going to introduce someone to you,

1. The girlfriend.

This is his girlfriend, you don't catch the name, and he never says the name first. 'This is my girlfriend'. Just once, she would like to be her name first, this time it wasn't even heard. SARAH she wants to shout MY NAME IS SARAH. Actually it isn't the name that matters. And maybe she doesn't want to shout. But she'd settle for being looked at. Not like, in a sexy way or anything, but like she might be able to say something. Like she would get the joke, like she might be able to join a conversation about sport or music or computers. They don't know what she does. They don't know what she knows about. And they don't ask. Because she's not there, not really, not on their radar, marked 'belongs to another'. And she loves him. She does. But in a funny way she-, well, it sounds like a weird thing to say but she misses school. She misses school, primary school, she misses when she used to run with the boys. She could play football and pick up worms and run as fast and as far as any of them. Those days when she was a secret member of the club. When they looked at her. When she did more than laugh at other people's jokes. She told some of them. She can't remember when it changed. When she got told to be quiet. When her brothers didn't. She's bored of being explained to, though. She's bored of being clocked as 'his' and not worth 'your' time. She's tired. Tired. So she stays quiet. She disappears into him. 'After all', she thinks, I do love him.

Can you see her? Is she here?

She closes her eyes briefly and in that moment, remembers running. Running through hot grass like straw under blue skies the colour of the stripes on her pinafore dress. No one notices the smile.

It's time to leave Sarah. Walk out of your shadow. But as you move away, slowly, I want you to look back, see her there, smiling, just for a second.

It's time to go.

The next place I want you to find is a bit harder, I'm going to ask you to move out of where you are now. When you do, keep to well-lit pedestrianised areas, and don't cross any proper roads, don't move further north than the Minster, or past the far end of Parliament Street, or cross the river. I want you to wander the streets in search of the smell of food. Try and find a bit of air that smells tasty. If you do find that place, blend into the background, breathe it in, if you don't, just keep on looking.

We're looking for him,

2. the kebab man. //hissing of fat//

If we find him, it'll, the same spot, the same spot he's been for 19 years. While people move around him. Like a rock in a river. Streaming past. And yet the river is always surprised to see them. Always asked 'so where do you really come from?'. Does nearly 20 years not qualify as 'here'? There are kids younger than that buying the damn burgers. He sets up about 8 o'clock. His brother used to help him, now it's his son. They work until 4am. Maybe 5 if there are a lot of stragglers. You learn to judge the crowds. The way people move. You can tell if a football match has been played, or if a lot of the students are out. The students are manageable drunks, for the most part. If they fight it's over girls. If they insult you they do it quietly. Stag nights are usually quite friendly, people drink too much to get leary. The women walk and wince just before every step and buy chips and cheese with a mix of hunger and regret and laughter. He sees this. He smiles at the beginning of the night, but when it gets busy he forgets. And certain types of groups. You can see it in their walks, the way they move across the

street, chests all puffed out and brittle strength, like bone china. You don't make eye contact. You serve them quickly. You ignore the things muttered over their breaths. You stay quiet. It's the best thing. Stay quiet. That's what he's learned after 19 years in this city.

If you're still walking, stop.

Be still now. Be as still as you can. Be still and let any other people fade past you. Imagine them streaming past like a camera on a long exposure setting. Be still and think about what it means to be from somewhere. What it means to be rooted in a place. Do you belong here? Do you belong to this city?

//give it more time //

Look up.

Look up at the sky. Take a deep breath. Let the night air fill you up. Can you hear singing?

Look down

Walk again. This time back the way you came from, walk fast, walk really fast, take sharp turns, move faster, move with purpose, with the strongest, most definite purpose you ever had, as though it's all you can do not to burst into a run. As if you're walking as fast as you can, after someone. You keep on catching glimpses of him, in a crowd, even if you reach where you came from, keep moving, keep following the sound of singing, there, there, on the edge of hearing. The sound of a voice, young, and the glimpse of golden brown hair, catching in the moving reflections on dark shop fronts. Can you hear them, singing?

Stop

Walk at a normal pace now. Just keep moving. Don't think about where you move, let your feet guide you. Can you hear them?

As you move, try and look into people's eyes

3. The bible kid.

Voices that talk mostly about finding god. But a little about fear. About talking to people who never want to listen. They heard that someone wanted stories, and they came over, a whole line of them. They don't want to preach, they want to share. That's what he says. The boy with the blonde-brown hair. He uses words like 'grace' and 'compelled', like 'blessed' and stresses that God wanted us to be gentle as doves and wise as serpents. He **wants** us to think, he says, God wants us to question things. The things he doesn't say are 'please, I'm not stupid, I just believe this', 'I'm sorry, but because I believe this I fear for you', and 'the world is simple to me, clear, how can all those greys be ok to you?' He says people in this city are not nice. He says that they are scary, and the flashes in his brown eyes when he is asked about what he means by that reflect thoughts he does not allow himself to say out loud. He talks about praising the Lord, about a relationship with God, not religion, and when pressed on what he means by 'scary' he mumbles something about the 'natural human fear of rejection'.

Pause.

Then others from his bible college hear about the person who wants stories, and they come over, they speak all day but are never heard. They sing all night but people don't listen. They look full of something that they can't quite hold in. Their smiles are big, but their eyes are watering.

Stop now.

Find a window to look at your reflection in.

Pause.

Look at your eyes. Into them. Do they want for certainty? Or for someone to listen? Or for a feeling of great heights, of falling from them.

Take a deep breath.

Are you tired?

Find somewhere to sit, now. Find somewhere to sit down. Just try and find somewhere to sit.

4. The man on the bench.

This is the man no one wants to see. Don't look though. Keep walking. Keep your gaze resolutely away from him. This is the man people look away from. This is the man who doesn't lift his head. This is the man who is always asked to move on, move on. This is the man you don't make eye contact with. This is the man who doesn't know how old he is. This is the man who wasn't always like this, wasn't always like this. This is the man that could be anyone. And this is why we walk by. This is why we ignore him, but if we stop seeing him, that's when we forget that we had a small hand in the society in which it could happen, in which he happened. Is happening. 'You see a lot more folk on the streets these days. More than you used to.' Someone said that to you the other day, and you thought about it; you probably do, you probably do.

If you haven't already, it's time to sit down. If you can't find anywhere to sit, lean somewhere, somewhere out of the way

Find somewhere to sit down, or lean, and when you do.

Watch people moving past.

Only a few more stories left.

As groups of people move through the streets, I want you see if you can spot this one man.

5. The mate who stands back.

This man is tall. He is dressed in jeans and a polo shirt. His shoulders are high, against the cold of the air. Very short hair. Short for the sake of it receding. When he goes home tonight it is to an empty house. He works in a factory. Shifts. He doesn't stand out so he gets on with people all right. Every day, every day, he stands in front of a pile of coloured plastic, by the end of each day they have been

affixed to transparent cassettes. Each cassette holds three colours of lipstick. He sometimes thinks about lipstick. About the hands that brush the things his hands construct. He imagines how they might look. That they're soft and they probably smell good. He also thinks about how many bacon sandwiches a week is probably too much.

And he goes on nights out. He doesn't earn much but he works long hours and doesn't have much else to spend it on. So he goes out quite a lot. He drinks and laughs with his mates telling stories from other night's drinking. He never gets a speaking part, but it feels good to him to know he's in there somewhere. Standing on the edges. Standing back. Once his mate slid down a bannister that had just had a knob put on the end, they didn't know about it, that were a right laugh. Once they all got in a fight with a stag night over from Hull. He hit a man in the face and remembers thinking in a strange, dislocated way 'this feels good, to hurt someone to protect someone else' it felt clean. Easy. Black and white. Once he saw one of his mates put a strange girl, unconscious outside of a club, into a taxi, and then follow her in. He didn't say anything. He sometimes thinks he should regret that. But he's too tired to think about it much. You probably missed him. His mates were swearing loudly, were taking up all of the space. But he likes it there, on the edges, on the bit where it frays, where no one looks, where he doesn't have to be anything.

Pause.

Did you miss him?

There are darkneses here. Woven in to the fabric of York. Like in any city. But the light, the light makes such a difference.

Close your eyes.

//pub interior//

It's warm. It's warm like good brandy, or full-bodied red wine, or a fiery whisky. Sound surrounds you, at once loud and muffled, full of orange light and laughter.

There's a group of friends in a corner. No different to any of the others. Except you haven't seen them, have you? Look closer.

6+7: The couple that aren't a couple yet.

The potential in a shared gaze; the electricity that no one else feels. The static when their arms accidentally brush. Huddled closer than they need to be in the warmth of the Yorkshire Terrier Pub. You wouldn't notice them. Why should you? The world is shifting for no one but them. Though perhaps a few friends who know them well are smiling. Today I want you to see them, I want you to look at them and know that in 2 year's time they will share a home. That in a year and a half she will have a bad day, and he will draw her a bath, pour her some wine, and kiss her gently on the forehead. That in 8 months time he will break his ankle slipping on some wet decking and she will drive all night from where she is to the hospital to see him. That her head fits perfectly in the space between his and his collarbone. That he has this way of running his fingers all the way down her back. All of this is to come. But tonight, wrapped in the warmth of the city, the orange night and narrow streets and close walls, they laugh, and when their eyes catch they see themselves, and they see the possibility of this. Look at them and see the things, see the things you have forgotten about yourself...

Open your eyes.

Someone told me a story about costumes. It was the launch of the final Harry Potter book and she was stood at midnight outside a bookshop with her little girl, dressed as a wizard. She saw people spilling out of the clubs in heels, make up, shiny boots and shirts with stood up collars, and for a second, she saw that they were all costumes really. The coats we shroud ourselves in and the walk which says 'don't approach me', the bouncer's jacket, and ID on his arm, or the heels and improbable skirt, despite the cold and pain. When we walk through the city at night we think about how people see us. But how often do we actually look back?

Think about the different places you've been tonight. Think about the 7 people we've met.

This is the last thing I'm going to ask you to do. And it's for them.

Stand up, and look around you.

Find somewhere, something nearby, that stands out, looks unusual. Anything, a post box, plant, sign, a light, a cobble, brick, flower, a doorway, anything. Walk over to it.

Pause.

When you get there, Look at it.

Every inch,

the texture, the colour, how the streetlight falls across it.

(More time to find somewhere)

Choose one of the people you've heard about today. Sarah, the kebab man, the bible kid, the man on the bench, the mate who stands back, or the couple that aren't a couple yet.

See them standing there. By the object that you picked. Weave them, their concentrate, into it. Keep them there, so the next time you walk past, you might see them, you might remember to listen, you might hear them whisper, you might hear them sing, you might see them smile, or shivering.

Pause.

Walk with them.

Pause.

Thank you,

Thank you for listening.

Soundwalk 2: daytime/stranger

Are you sitting comfortably?

I want to tell you a story.

This is the story of a city. A city made up of people, passing through. Of lines of communication, of distance, proximity, moments of paths crossed. Of crossed wires.

We are the lifeblood of the city.

We raise buildings and stream through its arteries

We build walls

We build walls

'I know what the Yorkshire word for a stranger is, which is 'offcomdum' stranger. I've lived here for 22 years and they call me an offcomdum, so I'm a stranger, so unless you're born in Yorkshire, you're a stranger [...]'

We're all strangers here.

Cities are places shaped by people.

But people are also shaped by the cities they move through.

This space is a corridor.

There are few places to sit, linger.

Benches that face outwards.

This is not a place where people are encouraged to stand and talk, or sit in each other's company.

We designed this space for optimum movement between shops,

Spaces like this have designed our movements like tunnels.

One place to another.

A journey with a beginning and an end.

Somewhere you have to be,

Something you have to buy,

Someone you have to get to,
Never mind the middle.

Look at how people move through this space.

Look at their speed, the body language, the patterns they make across the street.

The stories they communicate without speaking.

Who's washing by, who's left by the wayside?

Who walks in straight lines, who weaves from side-to-side, who shrinks away from contact, tries to make themselves smaller.

Can you see her? Head in her mobile phone, walking in one space with her mind somewhere else entirely.

Pause.

Look carefully for the people listening to something on headphones. Do you think you would be surprised by what they are listening to? Is the boy in a tracksuit a fan of the contemporary classical movement? Is the woman in the smart coat listening to a hardcore punk band?

Pause.

Him, there, do you see him? The one with the speckled grey hair, tall, he moves confidently, but slowly. If you were to look at him, look him in the eye, there would be a glint, half a smile. You imagine that he might be well travelled.

Pause.

Children change the speed at which you move, the amount of things you have to carry. Find the family, trying to make their way through the crowd. Look at their tired eyes and see behind them the cold, forgotten cups of tea, the jobs half finished, the thing niggling at the back of their mind that they needed to do today. What was it?

Pause.

One autumn I stood in this place and I asked people like these for their stories. Too many people told me, not because they wanted to get away, but because they truly seemed believed this: 'I don't have any'; 'I'm nobody'.

'I had a bit of an upset at work, and then I thought – because I was working with autism, adults with autism, challenging behaviour, and I suddenly thought, 'I'm nobody really' and then I thought 'no I'm not, I must be somebody, because I've done lots of stuff' I was in the army, I've delivered a baby, and you know, done, when I was there in the Falklands, not at the Falklands, but receiving the guys back, looked after all them, and when you actually think about it there are – you have achieved things, but you don't think you have, I mean even bringing up the kids on my own, that's something.'

The world is full of people who think they are nobody. People who think they have no story to tell, but stories are important. Listening to other people's – it is like saying 'you are important'. When we are little, stories shape and hone our own understanding of the world, stories are our guide for learning to be people.

But as we grow older, we grow tired. Tired. We just want to switch off, to put headphones on, to walk past, to drown out the conversations. Not hear the arguments, the potentially different opinions, the emptiness, the din of hundreds and thousands of people. We learn to stop listening.

But sometimes people surprise us, they step over the lines we have drawn.

Look for him.

'We were in town with my two sons, and it was towards Christmas and we went in to visit the Walt Disney store, and lot's of beautiful things for the boys to look at and unfortunately we couldn't get what they wanted, so a bit of a tantrum on the street, and there was this strange man coming towards us, a bit, erm, sort of, a

tramp-looking sort of man, and he approached us and he saw Samuel my son crying and wondering what's going on and he just offered us, you know, he offered us, ah, ten pounds, like this out of the blue, and ah, he looked so shabby himself so we are wondering, and he said 'no, no, don't worry,' I don't think he even explained, why he was giving it or-, he just said 'have it' and er, go in the store and buy him something. It was really, it was really surprising really, when just a stranger give you a – give you some money like that.'

The city sees him. Like a twinge in a muscle you had forgotten. A 'tramp looking' man that people usually look away from. She never knows why he gives them that 10 pound note. You could imagine that he once had a little boy. A little boy that he can no longer buy toys for. Or that he could never stand the sound of a child crying. That he had been given some money that he didn't need, or that he just liked being seen; looked at. For a moment.

Think about where you are sitting.

Think about the city from above, put a pin in the map of where you are.

Zoom in. Closer. Focus on exactly where you are sitting. See yourself, there, from every angle.

Now forget everything else.

Forget the places you have to go, the people you will see, all of the tangled thoughts and worries, put them out of your mind.

Be wholly here. Present. Now.

Think of all of the chance encounters that made this possible.

Look around you, now.

See the people moving past you, the swarming clouds of their own thoughts around their heads.

Stories are things we share.

Stories are important.

But we have done to them what we have done to our cities;

Corridors and compartments, presided over by others.

Hollywood tells our stories now.

But they only tell one type of story, for one type of person. Characters are only there if they serve a function.

They are selling our stories back to us. Like bottled water; sterilised.

So many people I speak to who don't think they have a tale to give.

As if they hadn't lived on this earth, had never experienced anything.

A lady with dark brown hair, an oval face, green eyes, a large coat, can you see her?

'I think that's – if people have their own standards or their own ideas and then don't want to let anyone else's in [...] and not judging books by their covers, for instance. A number of years ago I took her to a party and I took my sister and there was a girl with loads of tattoos and stuff, you know, facial things, and I says to her, ooh, and then at the end of the party she said 'you know I was talking to that girl and she was lovely, really clever and-' so you shouldn't just look at somebody and think they're nobody, should you, or they're rough or whatever. You need to get to talk to them, you know, another lady I talk to, in the street, she's a tramp lady, a bag lady, trolley lady, whatever you want to call her, she came over from Hong Kong, she lives on the streets but she's very clever, she's got a degree, she doesn't want to live in a house, so she's she sort of lives around, and she's quite nice, yeah, and you know I do talk to strangers, yes. It's my hobby.'

She stood and she told me about all the stories she had collected. The people she speaks to. The old woman whose 80th birthday it turned out to be, the chalk artist trying to raise money for the petrol to drive his wife to hospital for treatment for her diabetes. The autistic children she cared for. Her stepbrother killed in a building that collapsed. She talked fast. She listens to lots of people. To be asked to tell her story, though, there was a sadness. She told me mostly about the other people.

Look at your hands. Look at them. Do they look like how you remember them? Hold them.

Do they look old?

Do they move in the same way?

Do they feel soft, or cold?

Who was the last person you touched with them? What would you give for them to be held by a certain person?

We know the city like the back of our hands. Which, actually, we don't look at that often.

Don't phase out, keep on looking around, keep on seeing the people around you.

'Well it's a very grounding sort of thing, to be able to record interaction between people who aren't intending to interact because people are often in so much of a hurry aren't they? So they don't really notice what's going on, not that York is typical, it's rather different being so many visitors around, but in, in days that I've been travelling, it's amazing how if you're open to whatever happens, all sorts of amazing things do happen'

This woman and her family were invited to dinner by a strange woman. Their families have now been connected for 30 years. 30 years of friendship born out of a simple decision; 'I will invite this stranger into my home'.

It's easy to outsource our stories. But they're standardised, shaped, tasteless.

Like the difference between apples from a tree, and apples from a supermarket.

Sometimes they will be sour, or rotten.

But at least they're something.

Sometimes they're sweeter than you might be able to imagine.

I have been speaking to people.

Some stopped. Lots of people walked past, they had somewhere to go, or a brain so full they couldn't bear the interruption. Or a suspicion, 'so who's paying for this', 'what are you selling'?

I have been listening

And I have been talking to people about strangers.

And the most fascinating, the most lavish and amusing stories, all came from three types of person.

The young, the retired, and the travelling.

In these states we allow ourselves time to linger over people. Everything is fascinating, Our lives are like beautiful glasses waiting to be filled, or we shift into a different gear, one which is open, ready to hear new things.

Look around you.

I want you to try and see York like you were seeing it for the first time.

Really look at the people.

Look at how they move and fit into the spaces around them.

Look at the trees.

Look at the sky.

Look at the textures.

The street underneath you,

The tops of buildings

Breathe in the air.

Look at the people.

'You know I got here late at night and there was no one on the streets and then I was like 'oh, what did I do? You know, it's – there's not going to be any entertainment, and then I came the next day and it was like this, so I was just like, so I didn't know how to take it, so it's good, but we kind of live in a little fishbowl, if you will, so getting out is always refreshing and good, you know.'

I have a new question for you.

How public is this space?

There are lots of people here but
Who owns it?
Do you?
Who decides how you use it?
If you wanted to stand here and sing, how long before someone moved you
along?
What about if you brought a choir?
Brought together hundreds of people to dance and sing.
What if you wanted to have a picnic?
Paint a picture?
Who is watching you here? How many security cameras are there? What would
you have to do to be taken away?
Who gets to say where those lines are?

See your city.
Is it yours? Or are you a visitor here? A stranger to it?
How often do you explore it?
How many shortcuts do you know?
How many are you missing?
There is no beginning to this story,
No middle,
No end,
You make it.

He smiles, his movements are gentle, and he smiles at strangers.

'Yeah, I find that when you're travelling sometimes that, you know, it's the sort of kindness of strangers sort of when you're travelling and there's, you know, there's no – sometimes they'll do something to help you on your way, and you're not going to see them again, but there's like an unwritten rule that you help somebody else in kind, you know, so it's very organic, I always love that kind of travelling, you know, when you're not trying to depend on people but you just meet people on they way

that just help you on your way, and you do that for other people and it's just a nice [...] feeling yeah.'

This is the story of a city,
A story about people,
Like a river rushing past
You only see moments.
Nothing perfect, it can never be perfect, not like the movies.
Things will slip through your fingers,
There is no beginning and end,
Only present;
An on-going miracle:
Out of 7 billion people
That you are here, together, at all.
All the things that they could tell you.

'There's a man, who goes to the museum gardens, every day I think, I can't remember his name, and he's, he and my daughter have become friends because he always feeds the squirrels and the pigeons, and he has pigeons all over his coat, and he's really good at feeding the squirrels, [...] And he knows them by name, he has names for them [...] And, the pigeons are not pigeons, he said, they're actually feral doves, [...] They were brought over by the Romans when they came to York, the doves, for food and for decoration. And um, and a real pigeon has a white spot on its neck and they're bigger than the, the other pigeons, but all the ones here are a mix of dove and pigeon together'

A mix of pigeon and dove. Of course York has it's own slightly special breed of pigeon, of course it does.

Do you have a phone on you? You don't have to get it out of a bag or pocket, lay your hand on where you think it is. Who was the last person you spoke to? Was it in real life, or was it by text, email, tweet, Facebook, a phone call?

I have seen people clutch text messages to their chest the same way people have often folded letters in times past.

Pigeons, doves, letters, text messages.

We are storytelling animals. It's how we learn, how we pass on important information, how we discuss what it is to be a person. We are changing the world with faster and wider channels of communication.

But just like how our cities shape us, so too do the ways that we spread our stories.

A couple, an older couple who laugh a lot, who walk closely, who tell their stories in tandem. Can you see them?

'they've been working there for six week putting in the BT, erm, // new, fast broadband// and we had to run off in the end because our bus came, but he was saying yes, they've been working there for weeks and weeks and weeks putting this in, and I don't think anyone had spoken to him, and we just came along and said 'oh, are you still there!' you know, and had a long, friendly chat with him, and er, he told us all about it. But I wonder how many people bothered to find out what he was doing, you know [...] he was he was quite pleased// very pleased that somebody spoke to him, yes// I think they're nearly finished now though, so he's probably pleased about that as well [yes] it's probably going on all over York and nobody's noticed what they're doing, [...] and they're working in a hole, you see, a great big muddy hole, and they're in there day after day, and just one of them, so unless he phones someone on his [laughs] on the phones that he's mending [laughter] he doesn't have anyone to speak to// it's just him in a hole // it's just him in a hole, that's right.'

It's easy in the big picture, to walk past the little bits that make it up.

This is not the story of a man in a hole.

This is the story of two people, waiting for a bus, who took the time to talk to him.

Who took the time to see the unseen.

A moment of kindness.

Do something for me, today.

After you have listened to this.

Find a stranger.

And give them something.

It might be a smile.

You might start a conversation.

Or you could offer them a cup of tea.

Buy them a biscuit.

Sneak them a note.

Telling them something you think they might like to hear.

Give something for nothing.

When you have done that. Call someone. Or text or tweet or Facebook or just straight walk up to them. And tell them about it. About what happened. No matter how small you think it was.

Pass it on.

This is your story.

Part of the story of a city. A city made up of people, passing through. Of lines of communication, of distance, proximity, moments of paths crossed.

We are the lifeblood of the city.

We raise buildings and stream through its arteries

We build walls

But we build them see through.

Permeable.

We are the city.

We decide how it moves.
We have power in every moment,
To tell a better story of it.

Thank you.

Soundwalk 3: Commute/journey

You will need a piece of paper and a pencil

This is the story of a journey. Many journeys. Of the threads of experience that entwine the city. That bind us together. That thread between its walls. York has a history that shapes its boundaries. But so too do the people that move across its paths. This is the story of a journey. Many journeys.

The act of walking, of moving through a city at an ambling pace, is the simplest way to map our surroundings. We feel it through the soles of our feet, the beat of our hearts melding with the thud of our shoes against the pavement.

'You've just got more time to take in your surroundings when you're walking, haven't you, like, when you're walking through somewhere, you're not rushing, through it'

Time rushes past, as though sped up. People's footsteps patter down on the pavement like raindrops. I've been collecting stories with umbrellas. Each umbrella designed to pass through the hands of whoever needed the shelter. People were able to speak to me, able to call a number written on the umbrellas. While the rain fell down.

The air swirls in front of you. Face the main road. Watch people walking by in front of you. Busy moving towards their destinations. Imagine their lives left like slipstreams behind them. Imagine being able to step into their slipstream and hear their voices. Understand them. Try and know their destination.

Pause.

Walk with me now. Will you do that? But here's the thing. Not *to* anywhere in particular. We're not walking with a destination in mind. Or a route that you know, I want you to walk and sense the city differently, not where things are, but how they feel to you, take sharp turns and walk down unknown alleyways. If you meet dead ends, walk back and try again. Will you walk with me? Start walking now, it's up to you, which way do you turn? Be careful if you cross roads, and start walking now.

Choose a pace which is not normal to you. Look at people and buildings and light and trees in ways you are not used to.

This is the story of a journey. Many journeys.

We are briefly going to step into them.

You leave your house. You step out your door.

You leave for the last time. You prepare to return for the first in 40 years.

You move to university, you relish no longer being the 'baby of the family'.

You hold the walls like its all you can do to stop them falling in on you.

There's a buzzing you can't get away from. A buzzing. A buzzing.

You tread the steps of many as before you.

'I emigrated, we make uprising, you know, to kill the communism, it was a solidarity, you don't remember, it was in 1980s, and I left my family, I was like a political prisoner, not crime, political'

You stoop down to pick up a leaf. They fall from trees around you.

Autumn, summer, spring, winter.

The seasons shift, blur.

'I haven't been in York for over 40 years, and yep, parts of it haven't changed, and parts of it like everywhere, have.'

The River Ouse floods, then returns to its bounds.

You blink and suddenly look out on endless ocean. A journey around the world,
'A lot of people think I'm crazy I must be mad, but I like nothing better than being on my own in the middle of the ocean [...] it's just the ultimate in self sustainability, if anything goes wrong you have to fix it, if you can't fix it, you should drown like a gentleman, people don't understand that at all [...] people talk about going to sea and fighting the elements, people who fight the elements die, you know, you go with them, you can't fight anything that big.'

You blink again and the memory vanishes.

Can you see him? His old, blue eyes.

Rain falls outside.

A buzzing, like white noise.

Who can you see from where you are? How do they move? Can you see anyone older, older than you, 70 or more. Try and mimic that pace. Imagine the aches and pains and volume of the life they might have lived, bearing down on them.

'I've driven a tank, I've been in helicopters. I've had a wonderful life [...] I really have, I mean looking back, I've done all sorts of things. It's just my body doesn't work now properly.'

You're washed back to the place you were born

Wherever you are, change direction.

The rain falls

You laugh at hymns to which you don't know the words.

The rain falls, and time swims by, the water has no memory, but has touched every inch of this city.

You run with a bike on your shoulders, a time before mountain bikes were invented.

Fragments, fragments, slipstreams swirl.

'But it's easy; you just put one foot in front of the other and keep moving, that's it.'

One foot, one foot, in front of the other. One foot. The other.

The winds swim. The sky is purest blue. The air is fractured,

You see people running towards you, they look like moving statues.

'9/11 I was in central park, 2001, I was running to celebrate my birthday. And a blue sky, I will never forget, I lost my 2 friends. It was maybe 8 o'clock and I was going to the Penn station, you know, new york, 22nd street was Empire, to go to New Jersey, and I said, what happened, you know, people, nobody give me the answer. And I forget about Penn station, I went to the downtown, and there was like a, you know the Pompeii, Vesuvius, and the people they look like the dust [...] I said 'what is that, the science fiction, or' and that's what, because still my trauma in my head, every year, where ever I am, I run 9/11 race, and this year I run from York to Selby, and last year the same.'

As you walk, feel the ground under your feet, feel how they push you forward

You're running through early morning air.

You're running with loud music thudding in your ears.

You're walking and your hood is up.

You focus on the ground, try not to meet people's eyes.

'I'm the guy that you see in a hood and you hear lots of loud music and you think 'huh. god, don't go anywhere near him''

That moment you step out of your door in the morning. Whether to tread a path that you take everyday, to start a new route entirely, or to trace old paths, memories woven into the fabric of a place you've known all your life. That moment, that you move across the threshold, and all of what's in front of you and everything that might happen.

The air swirls as people move around you. Try and feel the air as you breathe it. Is it heavy with petrol, cold and sharp, warm and thick with water? Are the skies clear, clouded? When did it last rain here?

The rain falls and it touches us all. The water moves on an endless cycle touching the brows of people from hundreds, thousands of years ago. Many things have changed. Much is the same. People travel. They fall in love, some fall out again, others out of our grasp. Children are born, raised, begin their own journeys. The tide washes us on, on, some people are lost to it. They struggle to tread water. It washes into their mouths. They cannot shout. Then a little girl approaches and hands them a conker.

'You're always picking stuff up off the floor, aren't you? What are we picking up from the floor, conkers? // yeh yeah, [can't hear]// I know you pick up everything, don't you, you collect leaves, // yeah// for people'

Two paths briefly cross, and someone who felt like they were going under has something, in her hand. An anchor.

Keep moving, keep moving.

Times shift, people move, the water still falls.

See this city as if in the dark.

It's 6am.

That almost darker dark you get just before dawn.

Your shoulders are hunched, it's cold, your breath hangs in the air, your hands pushed deep into your pockets. You raise your hood, and stride forward as music thuds in your ears.

'I live in Lancaster, just outside of it, where it's all country-sidey, so I guess I walk a lot, when I'm home, but er, yeah I don't do much else, to be honest [and do you alwas walk to music] yeah, I'm a drummer, so I have to walk to music, I'm one of those annoying people who plays music really loud, so I'm the guy that you see in a hood and you hear lots of loud music and you think 'huh. god, don't go anywhere near him' [...] I'm nice really, I just don't let people know that at 6 in the morning,'

You need that barrier. You need to block yourself off from people, that level of tired where smiling is an effort, where sound you haven't specifically chosen grates.

Your shoulders fall, it drops away.

Take a deep breath as you walk, another.

Are there birds in the sky?

Look around at your surroundings, have you fallen into a recognizable route? A normal pace? Change them both. And while you walk for a moment now, imagine what you would pack if you could only take one suitcase

Pause.

You're in a different country now, not knowing that these streets will be yours to walk in 30 years time. You set out on a journey that takes you away from those that you love. You feel more tired than you ever could have imagined.

'I emigrated, we make uprising, you know, to kill the communism, it was a solidarity, you don't remember, it was in 1980s, and I left my family, I was like a political prisoner, not crime, political, because you know the communism. When my son was born in 1982, there was nothing on the shelves. Just the moustarde, you know the moustarde? And you know, you couldn't buy nothing, that was the system. And we make up, you know, like is now, Occupy Wall Street, Occupy St. Paul's Cathedral, occupy, occupy York. [...] and that's my story, you know, they kick me out, I emigrated to Austria, I left my family, my son, son of a gun, and my daughter, it's a long story.'

Walk faster now, faster. Get yourself out of breath. Walk faster.

You run. Because that's all you can do. And you live a lifetime away from

anything you ever knew as home. Home is running. Home is that feeling of one foot in front of the other. You promise your son you will do the New York Marathon, and when you get there, you do. You still carry the medal.

Return to a normal pace.

Think now, briefly, about the person, people, place, feeling, smell or place that to you, means home. Conjure it in your mind. Is it the smell of baking and the sound of *The Archers*? Is it rolling hills and volcanic rock? Is it the arms of a lover, or the smell of your child's blonde hair? Is it the friend who keeps you sane? Is it the family Christmas party? Is it the luxury of silence in each other's company?

Breathe in. Keep walking. Look towards the sun.

There will always be things that guide us home.

You're walking now through a city you haven't seen for several decades. It was your home, and now people you grew up with are wending their way here, from all over the world, for a reunion.

'My adventure here is that although I was born here, I've lived in Canada for 40 years, and I'm driving on the wrong side of the road again. [...] I haven't been in York for over 40 years, and yep, parts of it haven't changed, and parts of it like everywhere have, and I'm not always sure the change is – you know you see the same shops everywhere and so on, but Betty's is still Betty's and it was great, we found a nice little pub last night, for a drink, you know near the Minster and through the Shambles, and so on, it's still, still lovely there.'

It feels like a dream, almost, like those dreams you have of the house you grew up in. Uncanny, different things that you can't quite put your finger on, in the corner of your eye. Familiar, and not.

What has changed here? What is changing?

One foot in front of another.

Though you will not always know where they lead.

Sometimes the best thing is to be lost. Because all being lost is, is not knowing what you'll find.

I'm not a serious runner, but I like to run, [and what is it about it that you like] er, it's very therapeutic, it's a great way to uh, to kind of, uh, clear the slate in the morning, or to actually start to fill it up, uh, it's my only time to listen to music, [...] I mean I'm just travelling to York for a day, so this is a great opportunity to just, uh, to see the, uh, to see the, uh, to see the city [so you're seeing it running] it's perfect, in fact I just tweeted, I said that, uh, what did I say? I said that, um, I said 'running through the dark streets and corridors of York is like cave spelunking with gems at every terms, I'm lost, but no GPS urge', and that's true, it's just, I mean it's a great, a great way to exercise tourism in some respects'

Whatever you do keep moving, keep moving.

The day is clouding over now, the sun higher in the sky.

The water slows. To a standstill. The tide swells. The man on the ocean is also in the central library, reading a paper.

The girl whose voice was lost, holds her conker. She realizes that the buzzing, the white noise, it's the water, it's the rain, it's just the rain. Just the rain.

Walk slower now. Slower.

Watch your feet as they move, and imagine a green dirt path beneath them.

Water floods through the cracks and fissures, feeds the earth and pushes back, holds you up.

Alone, you're walking, the only certain thing the silence, the quiet. That if you keep on moving, you will find yourself somewhere different.

Look forward.

'I like walking, er, walked, well, I – walked and cycled across Scotland 2 years ago for the fun of it, and I'm walking across England, bit by bit, er, what do you call them? Wainwright, Wainwright's Way, ever heard of them? I'm doing that bit by bit [...] I don't know, I just enjoy it, it gets you away from everything, there's no noise, and you think that you're by yourself, but you're not, because every five ten minutes, there's somebody walking past, walking past you, you're walking towards them if you see what I mean, so there's always somebody there. So. But it's easy; you just put one foot in front of the other and keep moving, that's it.'

Stop, where you are now. Stop walking. Stop and look around you. Does this place mean anything to you?

Have you been here before? How does it make you feel? Is it welcoming? Do you feel safe? Would you know how to get here again? Are there people here? If there are, do they notice you?

The people you pass everyday don't often look at you, don't really look at you.

You are extraordinary. I know this. So are they.

Don't underestimate the people around you.

The elderly woman. She moves slowly. She walked this path you have trodden.

If you were to look her in the eye, there would be a glint there.

She would grasp your hand, and urge you to take risks and unusual routes and to be nothing short of remarkable.

When the rain falls, each drop is a memory.

'The object of the exercise is to do as much as you can, while you can, so at least you've got your memories. I mean nobody else gives a monkey's about your memories, nobody's interested in your [...] But, I've got my memories of the things

I've done, I've got my memories of working in the Danish old folk's home, and every evening – it was run by nuns – and every evening we had to sing hymns, you know [laughs] and I'm not religious, and I don't speak Danish. So I stood there with my hymn book going 'na na na na' you know, you know, and going out with the German fishing fleet as a cook on the boat, yes? I've got memories of being hungry, and cold, and wet, and lost, and nowhere to sleep except under a hedge, yes? I've driven a tank, I've been in helicopters. I've had a wonderful life [you're amazing!] I really have, I mean looking back, I've done all sorts of things. It's just my body doesn't work now properly. yeah, but I'm 70, so.'

We are all made up of a series of passing moments, shaped by hopes and fears. Eventually they all pass. All pass. The water washes over us. Tides of people move by.

Sometimes the fears overpower us. Too rarely are we asked to hope. To do anything but meter our expectations.

Look around you. Screw your feet into the ground. Look at the buildings, trees, people.

I've been collecting stories with umbrellas. Each umbrella designed to pass through the hands of who ever needed the shelter. People were able to speak to me, able to call a number written on the umbrellas. While the rain fell down, people told me their stories.

I have threaded them together, like a patchwork quilt, like the city contains us. Holds us in its bounds. The river rises every year. Spills over. The rain falls. And people move onward, their lives strung behind them like silk from a caterpillar.

The rain falls, and when it does it also falls on those you love, those you have lost, those who trod this same path before you, those who died, those in far off lands, and those who have yet to come.

We're going to leave them something.

I asked you to bring with you a piece of paper and a pen or pencil. Can you find that now?

Pause.

Find something to lean against so you can write on it.

Pause.

Now write on the piece of paper the following words: 'I was here'.

Once you've written that, I'd like you to write another sentence or two. Something simple. Something about how you feel, now. It could be as straightforward as 'cold' or 'tired', it could be something today has reminded you of, it could be something entirely unconnected. Maybe even a message for another person who might read it. Don't think too hard, and do it right now, or you'll stand thinking about it forever

Pause.

Have you done that? When you have put the pen or pencil away, and fold the paper up. As small as you want. You're going to leave this piece of paper here. So that someone might find it. You're leaving a little fragment, a residue of your walk today, here, behind you. Look around, and find somewhere to put it, the crack of a door, the edge of a bench, the crook of a tree branch. Find somewhere you want to leave this small part of yourself. Put it there. Do that, now.

Move forward, now, either towards where you started, or home, or the place you have to be next. This time, with a destination.

Hear the rain fall behind you.

The laughter and the shouts, see the man alone with his elements, the woman driving a tank, the man running his marathon, the boy with his hood up not to threaten, but protect, the little girl who picked up a conker to give to a stranger. The stranger who really needed it.

This was the story of a journey. Many journeys. Of the threads of experience that entwine the city. That bind us together. That thread between its walls. York has a history that shapes its boundaries. But so too do the people that move across its paths. This is the story of a journey. Your journey.

Thank you for sharing it with me.

Thank you.

Appendix D: Umbrella Project audio

See attached CD.

Appendix E: Correspondence with Rabbit

From: Rabbit <rabbit@irabbit.org>
To: Hannah Nicklin <h.k.nicklin@gmail.com>
Date: Saturday, 16 April 2011 08:18:24
Subject: Re: Questions

You are, I believe, a Rabbit?

I am not a rabbit, but Rabbit. Probably best not to dwell on this question.

What is the Agency of Coney?

The Agency of Coney is a collection of friends of mine. They make play professionally, I do it for the sheer love of it, because it is my nature.

Why do Coney like rabbits so?

Who wouldn't like a rabbit? And we share a name too in certain languages.

What is your role in the Agency of Coney?

I'm only Rabbit. No role in the Agency itself to speak of. But Coney also exists as a Secret Society, where there is a door is open to anyone who wants to enter. There are rumours that I am the agent that heads the Society but those are entirely unsubstantiated and should be ignored..

How does one become a member of the Agency of Coney?

One joins the Society by finding and knocking on that particular door. The HQ of the Agency may then later invite members of the Society to collaborate in making play.

How does Coney operate? (And why do you like to operate this way?)

It operates according to a set of principles (what you later call tenets) in making play. It aspires to be as it does.

Your website has discoveries and secret narratives that you can follow – what is that is important to you about people finding their own way through *all* of your world?

It's their world, as well as my world: our world in fact. That's the best reason. That people can find their own way is all about giving them the agency to take agency.

What kind of work, in your words, does Coney make?

Adventures and play. That perhaps imagine that ordinary people can sometimes do the most extraordinary things, and that the everyday world can sometimes be a magical place.

The Agency of Coney is founded on three main tenets – adventure, reciprocity,

and loveliness. Why are these three things important to you?

There are more of those principles, as they tend to be called rather than tenets. Curiosity, agency too. It's a living set, open to change. And not rules that are rigid. But they were discovered in actually making things happen and act as a fairly good guide perhaps for making good play. And possibly more.

I do believe that I have answered all that I can. I recommend that you send this rabbitted document, with my best wishes, to knock@youhavefoundconey.net and ask my friends there to help with those following.