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We are capable of so much more:

Experiments in Listening

Submitted for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Theatre Studies, LICA, Lancaster University in September 2017.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and
that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree
by this or any other University.

Signature..........

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Abstract

This PhD works through practice and theory to investigate the relationship between listening and the theatrical encounter in the context of Western theatre and performance. Rather than looking to the stage for a politics or ethics of performance, I ask what work needs to happen in order for the stage itself to appear, exploring some of the factors that might allow or prevent a group of individuals to gather together as 'audience'. The writing draws on a wide range of sources including the two practical components of the research and other contemporary performance practices, philosophies of listening and politics, communications theory, and theatre studies.

I begin by proposing that the theatrical encounter is a structure that prioritises the attentive over the declarative. Each of the five chapters that follows is an exploration of this proposition. The first two chapters propose readings for the terms 'listening' and 'audience', drawing primarily on Gemma Corradi Fiumara's writing about the philosophy of listening and Stanley Cavell's writing about being-in-audience. The third chapter reflects on the work of *Lying Fallow*, the first of two practice elements which were part of this research, asking whether and how this project aligns with the modes of listening that I have proposed thus far, and introducing Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's writing about the preposition 'beside' in relation to being-in-audience. In the fourth chapter, I examine the role of invitation in setting up the parameters for being-in-audience, in relation to Sara Ahmed's writing about arrival and encounter. And in the fifth and final chapter, I introduce the second practice element, *Experiments in Listening*, using this project to expand my thinking about where and how the work of being-in-audience takes place.

⇒ **Acknowledgments: those who have made this thing possible**

My favourite way to begin reading any book is to read the acknowledgments. I like to know something about the community from which a book was written, and the way the writer chooses to address the difficult question of ‘authority’ contained in the idea of ‘author’. I sometimes decide to read a book based entirely on this experience. So here goes...

I’m going all out on the thankyous. What follows is a map of desire and sustenance and nurture. Later in the PhD, I will go on to say that it is only in the act of gathering and listening that speaking comes to be possible, and I think this is already evident in the list that follows. It is a list of people who have made these thoughts and words possible. Some chose to gather around me, and some I have gathered through my reading, listening, and watching. Some gathered during the time I have written this PhD, and others have gathered over years. As is always the case, this list is not exhaustive, but a gesture towards the many networks that sustain a person at one moment, and a nod to the way that words can conjure magic. What follows is a list of friends, teachers, family, philosophers, and artists; of people I’ve met, and people I’ve known, and people I will never meet except through their words and images and sounds. On this page, they sit together for a moment. Magic.

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This PhD is dedicated to Omkar Prasad Sah (1925-2016),
who believed that listening was urgent work in this broken world.

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Introduction

This PhD comes to its conclusion at a particularly turbulent moment. Far-right movements are spreading across the world, not least in the UK. The political and social landscape feels as if it is changing more rapidly and with less predictability than I have experienced during my short lifetime. At the moment I began writing, four years ago, the question of instrumentalisation in the arts felt tangible and relevant, and I wanted to unpack the legacy of socially-engaged performance practices that had developed under Arts Council England's optimistic slogan "Great Art for Everyone".¹ Back then, I proposed the rather formal title, 'Examining the Radical in Socially Engaged Performance Practices' as my topic of study, asking:

What does it mean to be 'radical' within the context of performance work that is either made or presented within a community setting?²

In many ways, I am still asking this same question, and I hope that I will continue asking it, through practice and writing and daily life, in whatever new contexts I might find myself over the years. But first I have to acknowledge that the political, social, and artistic landscapes within which the question sits have changed drastically over the past four years, and continue to change at an alarming rate. And if the context has changed, then the shading of the question has changed. In trying to find out how I might answer this question, I soon realised that grasping at an answer was not going to be particularly useful, since the answer would shift depending on the context of my research and the approach I made.

¹ Arts Council England, *Great Art for Everyone: 2008-2011* (London: Arts Council England, 2008) <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/plan/sites/all/themes/plan/pdf/arts_council_plan.pdf>.

² This question was also at the heart of a symposium I co-organised in 2013 immediately prior to embarking on the PhD. See Rajni Shah, 'Beyond Glorious - the Radical in Engaged Practices' <<http://www.rajnishah.com/beyond-glorious>> [accessed 21 September 2017]

Perhaps this is where I need to begin.

Throughout this PhD, I will pay attention to the relationships between form, content, and process. I will consider the ways in which contexts create meaning, and I will celebrate the containers within which we listen to stories. Rather than looking to the stage for a politics or ethics of performance, I will ask what work needs to happen in order for a stage to appear, exploring the many factors that might allow or prevent a group of individuals to gather together and become 'audience' or 'performers'. And in some ways I will return to the question I originally posed, asking what happens when the word 'radical' is taken in its original meaning, 'going to the root'. I will propose that to understand the word 'radical' in a performance context, it is necessary to engage with the structures within which we gather, and which enable the performance as a whole to take place. And I will apply this approach to language too, often looking to etymology as a way of understanding more about how a word comes to hold meaning.

The main purpose of this introduction is to provide a landscape for your reading by sharing some of my own processes as I have conducted these experiments in listening. It is not so much a map of what is to come as a story about how it was made. I will begin, in the next section, by briefly outlining some of the theoretical texts and artistic practices that have inspired my writing and thinking over these past four years. In this section I will also give you some background on my own performance practice, which over fifteen years has led me to these questions. In the second section of this introduction, I will describe some of the contexts within which my own thinking has unfolded, identifying two of the key terms in this PhD: 'theatre' and 'listening'. I will explain what it is that I mean when I use these terms, which might otherwise point towards an unhelpfully wide range of possibilities. In the third section, I will briefly outline the trajectory of the PhD

as a whole, and I will describe the form I have used to structure each chapter, in case it helps your reading.

Then, I will hand over to you.

1. Influences

In the introduction to her most recent book, *Living a Feminist Life*, Sara Ahmed describes the first time she encountered writings by authors such as bell hooks, Audre Lorde, and Gloria Anzaldúa. She writes:

This work shook me up. Here was writing in which an embodied experience of power provides the basis of knowledge. Here was writing animated by the everyday: the detail of an encounter, an incident, a happening, flashing like insight. Reading black feminist and feminist of color scholarship was life changing; I began to appreciate that theory can do more the closer it gets to the skin.³

I do not refer directly to *Living a Feminist Life* in the body of this PhD, since it was not published until my final year of writing. But Ahmed developed this book through a series of blog posts which she posted regularly at feministkilljoys.com over the four years during which I was writing this PhD. Her blog posts were a constant source of inspiration as I navigated the new territory of theory, and attempted to understand how theory and practice (performance practice but also lived experience) might interact.

Ahmed cites hooks, Lorde, and Anzaldúa as some of the writers who gave her the courage to make her work personal – to write from her own embodied experiences as a woman of colour. For me, it was Ahmed's work that shook me up, and stood me firmly back in my own body. I have worked consistently throughout this PhD with the idea that theory can do more the closer it gets to the skin. Each of the writers that I describe below, including Ahmed, have helped me find a way to do this.

³ Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 10.

Writers and writings

It will become more and more apparent as you make your way through this PhD that certain texts and writers have been consistent companions during this time. I want to acknowledge three of them here.

Perhaps most obviously a core text for this PhD is Gemma Corradi Fiumara's 1990 book *The Other Side of Language: a philosophy of listening*, which was in many ways the starting point for my thinking about 'listening' in this project, and will be a consistent presence throughout the chapters that follow. Although this book was written some decades ago, Fiumara remains one of only a handful of thinkers I have found who take seriously the question of what it might mean to listen in a society that is dominated by notions of voice and visibility.⁴ The more time I spent with this book, the more I felt a kinship with her words, as if they were articulating the very possibilities that I myself had felt but had not been able to express. Fiumara's words also seemed to point towards what I consider to be the most important and undervalued aspects of making and 'presenting' theatrical performances: the careful work of constructing an environment for listening, and the ways in which this work has the potential to create value systems that prioritise the attentive. Throughout this PhD, I have used her words as guides towards a more holistic understanding of what it is that characterises the encounters that take place within the worlds of performance and theatre, as well as how those encounters might relate to the social and political settings against which they occur.

The second text, less obviously relevant but hugely influential, is queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's 2002 book, *Touching Feeling: affect, pedagogy, performativity*. I will write in some detail about my relationship with this book in chapter one, but it felt

⁴ See section 2. of this introduction for other examples of key writers I have encountered in the field of listening – though for me, Fiumara's book remains foundational.

important to acknowledge it here also. Sedgwick's writing has a striking ability to remain playful whilst engaging with demanding ideas, embracing thinking as an embodied and therefore often messy process, without losing either poetry or rigour along the way. Her writing has particularly influenced the choices I have made around structure and style, and reminded me of the important relationships between knowledge, embodiment, ethics, and form. Also, not mentioned explicitly but an inspiration in many of the same ways, was Sedgwick's *A Dialogue on Love*, a book written somewhere between poetry and prose, drawing on personal notes written by both Sedgwick and her therapist. An experiment in listening of another kind.

Finally in this section, I must acknowledge once more the influence of Sara Ahmed, a queer feminist whose life work and writing are rarely separable, whose words have encouraged me to be brave and personal and to find my own version of rigour. Ahmed works closely with the 'feminist killjoy', a figure who does not show up directly in this PhD, but whose presence I hope might be felt throughout, as one who is not afraid to challenge social convention in order to both acknowledge and question the ways in which some bodies are more at home in the world than others.⁵ Through both Sedgwick and Ahmed, I have found ways to write about the topic of listening as a fundamentally embodied practice, and to locate the work of listening in the moment that the body meets the world.

Ahmed's concern with the ways in which embodied experience interacts with and is informed by social structures explicitly includes the circulation and reception of theoretical works. For her most recent publication, she has adopted a 'blunt' citation

⁵ For more on the feminist killjoy, see Ahmed's blog (www.feministkilljoys.com) or 'Conclusion 2: A Killjoy Manifesto', in Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, pp. 251–68.

policy which involves not citing ‘white men’.⁶ This is strategic on her part. My citation policy is not so blunt, largely because I am not writing in the same context or with the same publishing history as Ahmed. But in the writing that follows it has been a goal of mine to explicitly avoid ‘propping up’ arguments with perceived figures of authority, often figures who present as white and male, as a form of validation or even emphasis. Instead, I have viewed the reading, writing, and making of this PhD as parallel activities with discrete collaborators and companions, sometimes writers and theorists, at other times artists or audience members. I have attempted to create a structure within which different modes of thinking, and different types of thinkers, can be valued alongside each other. To that end, this PhD includes quotes from people I have encountered in a range of different ways: those I might call peers, teachers, friends, or family, as well as theorists, academics, artists, strangers who have become companions, and passers-by who have become performers. All of these thinkers write or speak from their own experience. This is their expertise.⁷

In the next section I will briefly describe my own trajectory as an artist before acknowledging some of the artists whose work sits alongside my own. For ease, I have separated these acknowledgements of people who have influenced my practice into

⁶ ‘[...] I have adopted a very strict citation policy in *Living a Feminist Life*. I do not cite any white men. And by “white men” I am describing an institution, as well as the mechanisms for reproducing an institution. White men: a *citational relational*. This is I know a very blunt citation policy. [...] Sometimes we need to be blunt to change a habit. I am willing to be blunt.’ Sara Ahmed, ‘Feminist Shelters’, *feministkilljoys*, 30 December 2015 <<https://feministkilljoys.com/2015/12/30/feminist-shelters/>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

⁷ The term ‘experts of the everyday’ is used in similar ways by theatre company Rimini Protokoll to describe the people they work with when they make shows. See *Experts of the Everyday: The Theatre of Rimini Protokoll*, ed. by Miriam Dreysse and Florian Malzacher (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2008).

I am also put in mind of the following quote from sociologist Les Back, who writes, in relation to his own work: ‘The bus driver’s close-up reading of everyday life contains something worth listening to, but equally this view may be partial or distorted by prejudgements. The same is equally true of the professor. The trick is to make these insights speak to each other in the service of understanding.’ Les Back, *The Art of Listening* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), p. 12.

those who ‘make’ and those who ‘write’, but it feels important to acknowledge that these distinctions are happily problematic. The writers I respect the most write in an embodied way, and are deeply creative, whilst acknowledging that ‘writing’ and in particular ‘academic writing’ is one form of knowing among many. Equally, the makers I most respect make and think using a variety of formats, including writing. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, to take just one example, is perhaps best known as one of the originators of Queer Theory. But *Touching Feeling* – the book that provided vast inspiration for this PhD – was largely written during a period in her life when poetry, craft, and Buddhism were much greater influences than theoretical texts. Indeed, in a posthumously published list of artworks, teaching resources, and published writings from her lifetime, the list called ‘art’ is by far the longest.⁸

Performance-making

Over the past ten years, I have combined my directing and performing career in theatre with a series of projects in public spaces, using the principle of gift exchange as the foundation upon which to build open-ended conversations between strangers.⁹ This work eventually led me to create *Glorious*, a multi-stage project performed in five cities across the UK and Europe, in which a team of artists met local residents in public spaces and continued working with those people over several months. The project culminated in a one-off large-scale live performance in each city involving local residents performing

⁸ H.A. Sedgwick, ‘Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick - Archive’ <<http://evekosofskysedgwick.net/archive/>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

⁹ For an example of this work, see ‘small gifts’ in *Beautiful Trouble: A Toolbox for Revolution*, ed. by Andrew Boyd and Dave Oswald Mitchell (New York and London: O/R Books, 2012), pp. 360–61.

their own texts and musical compositions.¹⁰ *Glorious* was hugely rewarding, but it also left me with questions about the ways in which institutional priorities and paradigms (of theatres, festivals, and funding bodies) meet the embodied work of performance-making, and shape audience interactions. These questions were serious enough that I decided to stop making performances.

It was while touring *Glorious* that I met Gerry Harris, who would later become my supervisor. I mention this because it feels like an important part of the story. I began the thinking of this PhD at the moment I had decided to stop doing the thing I had done for the entire span of my professional life thus far. Perhaps this is why the figure of the feminist killjoy resonated so strongly for me. It was in the moment that I said ‘no’ that Gerry suggested I might welcome some support to think through the forces that had made this decision a necessity. This influenced the direction of the PhD significantly, not least because I began with a series of impossible questions, one of which was: how do I undertake a practice-based PhD when I have given up ‘performance-making’?

It was very much in response to this question that the practice elements of this PhD were conceived. Instead of focusing on ‘performance’, I wanted to examine those activities that held performance in place: listening, gathering, the act of invitation. I became fascinated by the work that is usually passed over or taken as ‘given’ when we, as artists, make and present theatre and performance, and the political and ethical impact of passing over that work. Both *Lying Fallow* and *Experiments in Listening*, the two practical elements of this PhD, were in their own ways attempts to create performance without providing the resolution of ‘a performance’, stripping back the

¹⁰ For more information about *Glorious*, see Mary Paterson and Elizabeth Lynch, *Dear Stranger, I love you: The Ethics of Community in Rajni Shah Projects’ Glorious* (Lancaster and London: Live Art Development Agency and Lancaster University, 2013).

layers of presentational work as an experiment in form, asking what would happen if the root structures of a performance were the only parts left.

Makers

I am, of course, not the only artist with these concerns. All of the artists I write about in the following chapters are working, in their own ways, with notions of listening, care, and gathering. But the performances I cite in the chapters that follow are not the only performances that I could have written about – they are simply the ones that left me with questions I felt I could broach through the writing of this PhD. Those works sit within a wider landscape of practice, which I want to outline briefly here. Although the practices of the artists listed below are for the most part not mentioned explicitly in the PhD, perhaps they will nevertheless accompany you as you read. They are all people I might describe as ‘quiet killjoys’, asking difficult questions, working with care, listening, and an attentiveness to the act of invitation. They are:

Pauline Oliveros, whose *Deep Listening* – a practice I am grateful to have experienced first-hand – is rooted in the idea that the complexity of sounds and music are already there, in the ways we might listen to the world, with attentiveness and inclusiveness.¹¹

Nic Green, who asks what it means to make performance practice ecological, acknowledging the human body as deeply and inevitably interconnected in its relationships with other bodies, with land, with politics, and with sound.¹²

¹¹ Deep Listening Institute, ‘The History of Deep Listening Institute’ <<http://deeplisting.org/site/content/about>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

¹² Artsadmin, ‘Nic Green’ <<http://www.artsadmin.co.uk/artists/nic-green>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

Sheila Ghelani, whose practice combines the politics of the body with a profound commitment to the work of invitation – whose current work includes writing a Care Checklist that asks how each of her new projects will affect the wellbeing of its participants, collaborators, audiences, and the wider political and social contexts in which it might take place.¹³

Rachel Gomme, who for the past twenty years has used silence and stillness in some way in almost all her works – notably her 2005 project, *audience*, which I had the pleasure of taking part in – a one-to-one performance in which she collects and records the silent presence of each audience member.¹⁴

Matt Davis, whose *Field* project began in 2003 as a series of events bringing experimental musicians and dance artists together, and went on to become a changing context for listening across time and space, for creating ‘performance’ without ‘event’, in ways that are purposely difficult to articulate yet continue to resonate in those of us who encountered it.¹⁵

Leo Burtin, whose show *The Midnight Soup* – a conversation starter, a memorial, a shared dinner, and a performance – always begins with an invitation and always ends with a celebration.¹⁶

Lois Weaver, whose most recent project, the Care Café, creates places for conversation and companionship in response to the question: *how can we maintain an attitude of care in such an uncaring world?*¹⁷

¹³ Sheila Ghelani, ‘Care Checklist’ (unpublished, 2017).

¹⁴ Rachel Gomme <<http://rachelgomme.webeden.co.uk>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

¹⁵ Matt Davis, *FIELD* <<http://f-i-e-l-d.co.uk/FIELD.html>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

¹⁶ Leo Burtin, *The Midnight Soup* (UK, self-published: 2016).

¹⁷ Split Britches, ‘Lois Weaver - Care Cafe’, 2016 <<http://www.split-britches.com/carecafe/>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

There are more influences than I can mention here. This list is probably already too long and only includes a handful of those who have influenced my thinking and practice over these four years. But the list would be incomplete without the late Adrian Howells, whose work I am happy to say has often been placed alongside my own by other writers, and whose loss marked a shock in the trajectory of this PhD. Adrian's work was characterised by care and generosity, and was always radical – both in the sense that the word is commonly understood, as work that is prepared to take risks and challenge boundaries; and in the sense that I have begun to understand it, as work that takes the fundamental act of being with another human in a state of deep attentiveness, and places it centre-stage.¹⁸ Adrian and I had hoped to work together one day.

Practice as research

Finally, in relation to performance-making, a note on the relationship between practice and writing.

There are two practical elements to this PhD: *Lying Fallow* and *Experiments in Listening*. Neither fits neatly into the idea of a 'performance' that PhD examiners could 'attend' and 'mark'. Instead, I consider the work of these two projects – along with my own writing and reading – to have been ongoing practices, happening alongside each other; and I consider all of those elements together to make up the thinking of this PhD.¹⁹

¹⁸ For a collection of writing about Howells, see *It's All Allowed: The Performances of Adrian Howells*, ed. by Deirdre Heddon and Dominic Johnson (Bristol: Intellect, 2016).

¹⁹ As part of the PhD viva the examiners acknowledged the productively difficult – perhaps irreconcilable – relationship that this PhD brings to light between the notion of (process-based) 'practice' and the notion of (external) 'examination'.

In my own version of things, this PhD would be classified as 100% practice and this written document would be included in that classification. However, for the purposes of examination I have agreed to classify *Lying Fallow* (a project that was in some senses 'inexaminable' because it included no element that the examiners could 'observe' as outsiders to the project) as 'practice-based research' and *Experiments in Listening* (a project that included a series of audiences, and

So the writing that follows is deeply informed by the thinking of the practice, but I have intentionally not attempted to replicate that thinking in writing. Instead, in each of the chapters that refers to the practice elements of the PhD (chapters three and five) I have explored the ways in which certain moments from the practice, or certain ideas that emerged through the practice, might inform my writing. And I have drawn from the experience of those projects to engage with the ideas of the PhD.

Of course, any attempt to use words to describe how knowledge functions in performance will inevitably feel both somewhat blunt and somewhat over-wrought in comparison with the practice itself. For those who were a part of the two projects I describe in this PhD, there is a distinct possibility that the experience of reading about them will feel alienated from the practice itself. But I have wanted above all to avoid writing *about* the projects as if to summarise the thinking that happened through them, when I am clear that the main body of ‘work’ resided, and continues to reside, in the bodies and minds of those who took part in them.

which the examiners were able to attend as part of the examination process) as ‘practice as research’.

2. Contexts and key terms

In 2013, when I began this PhD, art historian Claire Bishop had recently published a book called *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*.¹ In light of the fact that I was about to begin ‘academic’ work, and because of the kind of performance work I had been making, several people recommended this book to me. And when I first read Bishop’s writing, I was thrilled. I went on to read Grant Kester’s *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* and later his follow-up book, *The one and the many: contemporary collaborative art in a global context*.² In response to both of them – and particularly Kester with his focus on dialogue and collaboration – I felt a certain sense of recognition. Here I was, reading theory that engaged closely with questions that I had been grappling with for years: questions about the relationship between quality and equality, and about the social and political value of art that holds community engagement and conversation at its centre.

But somewhere along this journey of revelation, I also began to feel a sense of unease. Though I admired and often enjoyed them, there was something missing from both these texts, which seemed to be discussing questions I recognised, but were operating in a fundamentally different context to the one I knew as a practitioner.³ This unease was related to what I now recognise as two very obvious facts. Firstly, no matter how detailed their research was, theorists like Kester and Bishop could only ever write about works of art from the perspective of the critic, or the academic, and therefore the

¹ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (New York and London: Verso, 2012).

² Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California, 2004); Grant H. Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

³ Both Kester and Bishop do acknowledge the limitations of their contexts as critics rather than artists – and Kester in particular spends a little time exploring the ethical implications of this in his writing. See Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 6; Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, p. 188.

delicacy and complexity of these works – their potential, for example, to hold contradictory truths together – was at best over-simplified, and at worst completely missing, in these accounts.⁴ Secondly, while both theorists engaged deeply with dialogue-based and social practices that arose in the context of visual and gallery-centric arts, and while they were aware that theatre and performance were relevant to these practices, they never examined the work of the audience encounter that lies at the heart of the theatrical form, and seemed unaware of relevant practices that had evolved within theatre and performance lineages.⁵ This, I realised, was a big problem for me.

As it turns out, there are other theorists who acknowledge and explore the work of theatre in more depth than Kester or Bishop – notably Shannon Jackson in her 2011 publication, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*, which has some overlap with my project.⁶ And there has also been a lot more writing in recent years from the perspective of the practitioner – in particular, I enjoy the ideas that are opened up in Tom Finkelpearl’s 2013 collection of dialogues, *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation*.⁷ But as I surveyed the field of writing that already existed, I continued to feel that there was something missing.

⁴ This is beautifully explored in Kim Charnley, ‘Dissensus and the Politics of Collaborative Practice’, *Art & the Public Sphere*, 1.1 (2011), 37–53 <https://doi.org/10.1386/aps.1.1.37_1>.

⁵ In her introduction, for example, Bishop writes ‘Theatre and performance are crucial to many of these case studies, since participatory engagement tends to be expressed most forcefully in the live encounter between embodied actors in particular contexts’ (Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 3). But her writing fails to engage with or even recognise the work involved in creating a performance encounter in theatrical terms.

⁶ Jackson notes the lack of engagement with theatre and performance in theoretical texts about social practices – and goes on to explore in detail the ways in which the contexts within which artworks are created are an important part of the ‘work’ that they are (capable of) doing. Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011).

⁷ Tom Finkelpearl, *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

This is all a rather long-winded account of how I arrived at two of the key terms in this PhD: 'theatre' and 'listening'.⁸ Both of these words, and certainly their work in conjunction, seemed to me to be what was missing from accounts of artworks that considered context and encounter an integral part of the work they were doing. In many ways, this whole PhD is an exploration of what those two terms mean, and an attempt to describe the ways in which they might be intimately related. Nevertheless, in advance of those explorations, here follows a brief outline of what I mean when I use them, and some background on other landscapes that have framed my thinking about listening.

Theatre

Gallery curator and art critic Nicolas Bourriaud, in his problematic but endlessly cited work, *Relational Aesthetics*, makes the following declaration:

Art (practices stemming from painting and sculpture which come across in the form of an exhibition) [...] *tightens the space of relations*, unlike TV and literature which refer each individual person to his or her space of private consumption, and also unlike theatre and cinema which bring small groups together before specific unmistakable images. Actually, there is no live comment made about what is seen (the discussion time is put off until after the show). At an exhibition, on the other hand, even when inert forms are involved, there is the possibility of an immediate discussion [...] Art is the place that produces a specific sociability.⁹

Here, in a glimpsing mention – the only one in the whole book – Bourriaud lumps theatre in with cinema as an artform in which discussion is relegated to *after* the

⁸ I was introduced to Fiumara's work on listening through Kester's writing about her in *Conversation Pieces*. See Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, pp. 106–7.

⁹ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* [1998], trans. by Simon Pleasance (Dijon: Presses du réel, 2002), pp. 15–16. Original emphasis.

encounter. This is part of his argument for the ‘exhibition’ as an ideal format for what he calls ‘relational aesthetics’, art that acquires value through encounter rather than artefact. I am, of course, somewhat wary of this text, with its quick and simplistic dismissal of theatre. But Bourriaud’s description in this passage – though it portrays a rather singular and old-fashioned version of theatre, and makes the bizarre claim that theatre produces ‘specific unmistakable images’ – is accurate. Theatre is not a place where talking is the first concern. Rather, as I will go on to propose, theatre is a place where listening happens. And it is this, the capacity for listening to come before speaking, that – for me – defines the theatrical.

As will become apparent, the works that I examine in this PhD, including my own practice, are far from what one might conventionally label ‘theatre’. They are works that might be called ‘live art’ or ‘performance art’ or perhaps, combining these, ‘live performance’. These names point towards different practices and histories depending on who is using them. Sometimes, they are names that are used to separate artworks involving a live encounter from the practice that is traditionally called ‘theatre’ – erasing any relationship with notions of ‘character’, ‘plot’, and ‘acting’.¹⁰ By contrast, in the writing that follows, I rather insistently return to the label ‘theatre’, not because I want to evoke character, plot, or acting, but because the performance works that interest me most are works which create a particular kind of audience-performer relationship – a relationship in which attention circulates differently than it does outside the place designated as ‘theatre’. This ‘differently’ is the topic of the PhD.

¹⁰ Though it has been much ridiculed and contested, I enjoy Marina Abramović’s take on this. In an interview with Robert Ayers, she declared: ‘Theatre is fake: there is a black box, you pay for a ticket, and you sit in the dark and see somebody playing somebody else’s life. The knife is not real, the blood is not real, and the emotions are not real. Performance is just the opposite: the knife is real, the blood is real, and the emotions are real. It’s a very different concept.’ Robert Ayers and Marina Abramović, “‘The Knife Is Real, the Blood Is Real, and the Emotions Are Real.’”, *A Sky filled with Shooting Stars*, 10 March 2010 <<http://www.askyfilledwithshootingstars.com/wordpress/?p=1197>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

Throughout the chapters that follow, I will sometimes use the term 'theatre' and sometimes 'performance'. I do not use them to differentiate but to describe a range of practices that might be labelled differently depending on who describes them, and which have in common a particular kind of audience encounter.

Listening

The first thing I should make clear is that when I use the word 'listening' I am referring to the attentive state – by which I mean 'listening' as opposed to 'speaking', taking both these words in their broadest sense. In other words, I am not referring exclusively to aurality, nor am I opposing 'listening' to 'seeing'. Both of these areas have already received some attention in recent years within the field of performance studies. Lynne Kendrick and David Roesner's 2011 edited collection, *Theatre Noise: The Sound of Performance*, explores the theatre event as a sonic encounter – and Kendrick, Roesner, and an increasing number of others have published further writings about sound, aurality, and musicality in theatre and performance.¹¹ George Home-Cook's *Theatre and Aural Attention*, in some ways parallel to my own enquiry, focuses specifically on the listening (in this case as opposed to 'seeing') of audiences, though he expands the definition of 'listening' to include the idea of 'attending'.¹² And there are others who have written about listening within a broader survey of 'audience' – Susan Bennett's *Theatre Audiences*, Helen Freshwater's *Theatre & Audience*, and Caroline Heim's *Audience as Performer*, for example.¹³ There is only one text I have come across that focuses

¹¹ *Theatre Noise: The Sound of Performance*, ed. by Lynne Kendrick and David Roesner (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011).

¹² George Home-Cook, *Theatre and Aural Attention* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 1.

¹³ Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990); Helen Freshwater, *Theatre & Audience* (Basingstoke: Palgrave

specifically on theatre audiences and listening in the embodied way that I intend the word. This is Alice Rayner's excellent 1993 article, 'The Audience: Subjectivity, Community and the Ethics of Listening', to which I refer in chapter two.¹⁴

Widening my gaze from the world of theatre and performance studies, I have found other texts and methods that felt more relevant to my enquiry. These include therapeutic models, academic texts in the fields of sociology and political theory, and activist strategies. I list some of these below, including those I have not cited directly in the PhD, in order to describe another context for the thinking I am about to do.

While writing, I was lucky enough to meet media and communications scholar Tanja Dreher, who had recently brought together a range of Australian cultural and media scholars, practitioners, and activists under the title *The Listening Project*.¹⁵ During a symposium Dreher organised, called 'Listening as a Feminist Intervention', I was introduced to other theorists who were examining the social and political manifestations of listening.¹⁶ To take just three examples, it was through Dreher's work that I became acquainted with Susan Bickford's writing on listening as a democratic practice, Krista Ratcliffe's writing about listening and rhetoric, and Carol Gilligan's work on listening and psychology.¹⁷

Macmillan, 2009); Caroline Heim, *Audience as Performer: The Changing Role of Theatre Audiences in the Twenty-First Century* (New York and London: Routledge, 2016).

¹⁴ Alice Rayner, 'The Audience: Subjectivity, Community and the Ethics of Listening', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 7.2 (1993), 3–24.

¹⁵ There are not many traces of this project, but there was a special journal issue based on the initial findings of the project. See Nick Couldry, 'Rethinking the Politics of Voice', *Continuum*, 23.4 (2009), 579–82 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/10304310903026594>>.

¹⁶ Tanja Dreher, 'Listening as a Feminist Intervention', *Feminist Research Network, University of Wollongong*, 8 April 2016 <<http://www.uowblogs.com/frn/2016/04/08/workshops-on-listening-as-a-feminist-intervention/>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

¹⁷ Susan Bickford, *The Dissonance of Democracy: Listening, Conflict, and Citizenship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Krista Ratcliffe, *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006); Carol Gilligan and others, 'On the Listening Guide: A Voice-Centered Relational Model', in *Qualitative Research in Psychology*:

Other works that have provided the background to my thinking around ‘listening’ as a term include: Les Back’s enthusiastic account of listening within the context of sociology in *The Art of Listening*;¹⁸ Lisbeth Lipari’s *Listening, Thinking, Being* – a call for listening that moves away from an atomistic view of language towards more holistic concepts of listening and reading;¹⁹ and Jean-Luc Nancy’s lyrical reflections in *Listening (À l’écoute)*, a short book about listening in relation to music and the body.²⁰ There were also practices of listening in which I participated as part of my research. Most notably, I attended a two-day training workshop for a dialogue-based mental health treatment, called the *Open Dialogue* approach, which originated in Western Lapland, and in which listening and not-knowing are foundational qualities.²¹ And I attended an excellent session with Lancaster’s Dialogue, an open group who meet monthly to conduct dialogue based on a Bohmian model – a model which I shall describe further in chapter one.²²

Lastly in this section, a note on what is significantly missing from this PhD, and that is an examination of ‘theatre’ and ‘listening’ as terms in cultures other than the one I have known and worked in. This PhD is written with a clear focus on works of theatre and performance that happen within a broadly ‘Western’ model of thinking. While I desire

Expanding Perspectives in Methodology and Design, ed. by P. M. Camic, J. E. Rhodes, and L. Yardley (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2003), pp. 157–72.

¹⁸ Back, op. cit.

¹⁹ Lisbeth Lipari, *Listening, Thinking, Being: Toward an Ethics of Attunement* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2014).

²⁰ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening* [2002], trans. by Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007).

²¹ I learnt about the *Open Dialogue* approach through the theatre company Ridiculusmus whose show, *The Eradication of Schizophrenia in Western Lapland* (2014), is based on and about *Open Dialogue* and its uses as a treatment for schizophrenia. For more about the method, see Jaakko Seikkula and Tom Erik Arnkil, *Open Dialogues and Anticipations: Respecting Otherness in the Present Moment* (Tampere, Finland: National Institute for Health and Welfare, 2014).

²² Lancaster Dialogue <<https://lancasterdialogue.wordpress.com/>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

to learn more about how both of these terms operate in other cultures, it is as a listener myself that I must do this. Here, I can only recognise the vast knowledge that is held, particularly within Indigenous and First Nations cultures, relating to the practice I am describing as 'listening' but which is also known in other ways and under other names.

3. How to read this PhD

In a moment, the PhD itself will begin, and the introduction will be over. The trajectory of the chapters that follow goes something like this:

In the first chapter, I introduce the way that knowledge functions in this PhD. I begin mapping some of Fiumara's writing – which defines 'listening' in philosophical terms – on to my own embodied experiences of being an audience member at the theatre.

In chapter two I explore further what it means to listen as an audience member, and what it is that makes the listening of 'audience' different from the listening that happens outside the theatre or performance environment.

Chapter three introduces *Lying Fallow*, one of the practice elements in this PhD. In this chapter, I explore the idea that it is the act of gathering – a gathering of bodies and a gathering of attention – that characterises being-in-audience. I ask whether this gathering can happen when there is no show or performance to gather 'around'.

In chapter four I focus on the transitions between being-in-audience and being-in-the-world, asking what is involved in the work of invitation, and how this shapes the theatrical encounter between audience and performers.

The fifth and final chapter introduces the second practice element of the PhD, a series of dialogues and films entitled *Experiments in Listening*. In this chapter, I ask what the relationship is between listening and familiarity or strangeness, using this project to expand my thinking about where and how the work of being-in-audience takes place.

Each chapter in this PhD begins with a story, and I have chosen to call these stories 'preludes'. If I ask Google, 'What is a prelude to a book?' then I am told: 'Prelude is not the correct literary term; you are referring to a prologue.'

The word prologue is of course associated with words. The word prelude is associated with music. And yet, each of these chapters begins with a prelude, and not a prologue, and the choice is deliberate. The etymology of the word 'prelude' contains the idea of the ludic, of something playful. And so each prelude describes an embodied experience of knowledge, playfully (and seriously) following a line of enquiry from that experience. Each prelude sits separately from the rest of the chapter, introducing its thinking, though not always explicitly. The body of each chapter then elaborates on the ideas that have been introduced by the prelude, with a little less attention to poetry and form, and more attention to the process of working-through.

I recommend that if you are able and willing, you read this PhD slowly. This is not because it is difficult, but because it has been written with slowness and attentiveness in mind. I have included a few carefully placed words and one image to bridge the end of each chapter and introduce the prelude that leads into the next. These interstitial words and images are not illustrative. They are designed to be more like the interval during a night at the theatre. They are invitations to pause and to allow your eyes and mind a different relationship with the page.

A text, like any creature, should live and breathe and change. This is not something we are very good at embracing, as humans. We often like to think of things as fixed in the moment of encounter, of publishing, or of utterance. We like to think that what is said can be called solid ground, and what is written might be a foundation. But writing is words, in a particular order, on a particular day. This piece of writing, even with its peculiar status as 'PhD', is just the same. This is not to diminish its impact or worth.

Rather, the worth of this text will change as you read it, as the ideas move through your own mind and body. And there, in your reading and your listening, it will inevitably continue to change.

[end of introduction]

Chapter One: Listening

Prelude



There is a whole world yet to be discovered, not of unsolved issues but of relationships among things we know, of ways in which they might fit together.

- Gemma Corradi Fiumara ¹

¹ Gemma Corradi Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening* [1985], trans. by Charles Lambert (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 17.

I was reading *The Other Side of Language: a philosophy of listening* by Gemma Corradi Fiumara for the second time when it happened.

I had imagined I would make swift progress, this being my second time through.

Instead, I found a strange pattern emerging.

At every reading, rather than making progress as I had imagined, I read a little more slowly, often deliberately re-reading the same page many times. On the first of these sittings, I think I must have read the first fifteen pages of the book. On the second sitting, I started at the beginning again, and only got up to page seven. The next time, I began again, this time reaching only page three. The more engaged I felt with the act of reading, the slower it went. I was, in fact, reading so slowly that I was almost going backwards.

Following my instinct, I allowed this pattern of slow reading to continue over quite a few days. At each sitting, I realised, I felt more like I was encountering the writing for the first time. There was something both compelling and familiar about this. Compelling because each re-reading seemed to bring me closer to the kind of listening that Fiumara describes in the book, and familiar because its rhythm was very similar to that of another practice I value greatly: Vipassana meditation.

Vipassana – a Pali word commonly translated as ‘insight’ or ‘clear-seeing’ – is a meditation practice based on the repetition of very simple patterns of observation. A practice of Vipassana typically begins with Anapana meditation, which involves observing the physical sensation of the breath as it enters and exits the body through the nostrils. This then moves into the full Vipassana meditation practice, which involves the same kind of observation throughout the body, beginning at the top of the head and passing through each part of the body in turn, before returning to the top of the head to

begin again. This loop of observation is repeated until completion of the practice – in my experience usually an hour-long sitting.² The aim is to practice with equanimity: at each moment, to observe what is happening physically or emotionally – discomfort, pain, joy etc. – and to do so without engaging in a response based on past experience, either of craving (desire) or aversion.

Here's where my experiences of practising Vipassana and reading Fiumara overlap. Vipassana is an attempt to 'see clearly' one's own patterns of sensation and reaction, and by virtue of not privileging one's own emotional response or narrative, to experience the world more compassionately.³ In parallel with this, each time I (re-)read Fiumara's words, I found that I was able to do so with a little less of my own presumption getting in the way. Although unexpected and in some ways frustrating (in the sense that my intention to make progress with reading was frustrated), I would describe the process as a clarifying one: as my experience became less filtered through structures of knowledge and understanding that I already held, I felt it became more possible to encounter the words themselves as they were laid out on the page. Depending on how I viewed the situation, it was either an increasingly (and repeatedly) frustrated attempt at completion, or it was a whole new way of experiencing 'reading'.

² There are, of course, other aspects to the practice of Vipassana, including a Code of Discipline containing eight precepts that must be followed at all times. The description included here is my personal recollection of the physical process during a simple sitting meditation. For a description of the full Code of Practice, see <https://www.dhamma.org/en/about/code>.

³ It feels important to note that it is compassion rather than empathy that is cultivated through the practice of Vipassana. I will return to this later in the chapter and in later chapters. The key difference being that empathy, a precursor to compassion, involves an attempt or impulse to feel what another person is feeling, and therefore risks being clouded by desire; compassion, from the Latin *con + passio* (a calque from the Greek *sum + páthos*) meaning 'with, together, jointly, at the same time' + 'feeling, suffering', implies an act of feeling that is in understanding or sympathy *alongside*, without an impulse to directly experience what the other person is feeling. See *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*, ed. by Robert K. Barnhart (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1988), p. 196.

What changed with each reading was of course not the text but my own mode of attentiveness. The reason I went back to the beginning so many times was initially because – even on a second reading – *The Other Side of Language* was a difficult text for me to read; I had to repeat and go slowly in order to understand. But as I continued re-reading, making less and less progress each time, the parameters of the activity began to shift. My initial desire to understand dropped away and was replaced by another sensation. Eventually, I was no longer attached to gaining a certain kind of predetermined understanding of the text, and instead became interested in where the act of reading itself might take me. In Fiumara’s words (below), I found myself shifting from an activity that was initially about mastery or grasping at knowledge towards what she describes as a kind of ‘dwelling with’ (in my case) the words on the page. According to Fiumara, it is this fundamental shift in how thinking happens that is necessary in order for listening to be possible:

There is a demand here for a relationship with thinking anchored to humility and faithfulness, an approach which is unheard-of in our current thinking, revolving around grasping, mastering, using.

This ‘secondary’ and yet unrenunciabile philosophical perspective is characterized by the requirement that we dwell with, abide by, whatever we try to know; that we aim at coexistence-with, rather than knowledge-of.⁴

In this quote Fiumara describes the listening mode as ‘secondary’ within a particular hierarchy of philosophical thinking – and this notion of the secondary or lesser is crucial to an understanding of how listening is typically perceived in an overwhelmingly speech-oriented society. When I attempted to read Fiumara in the way I was used to, in what I might call my ‘primary’ or default mode, I found myself a little frustrated and

⁴ Fiumara, p. 15.

disappointed. But then a different relationship with knowing began to emerge – one that had remained unavailable and invisible to me previously because of my own perception of how knowledge operates. It was only when I was able to include my own mode of reading (rather than solely the facts conveyed by the words) as a form of knowledge in itself that the act of reading and re-reading began to shift.

*

In the concluding sentence to the introduction of her book *Touching Feeling*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick states:

In writing this book I've continually felt pressed against the limits of my stupidity, even as I've felt the promising closeness of transmissible gifts.⁵

Despite its appearance when taken out of context, describing herself as being 'pressed against the limits of [her] stupidity' is far from being a self-deprecating gesture. What follows in the book is a lengthy and complex exploration of the relationship between pedagogy and various systems of thought or knowledge that might all be defined, more or less problematically, as 'nondualistic'.⁶ Sedgwick's comment about being pressed against the limits of her stupidity, then, is a typically astute move towards the very thinking she is attempting to do in the book – gracefully acknowledging that the work of the book lies not only in its content but in the complex relationships between content, process, and form. Indeed, she is explicit in describing the arc of the book as being inevitably enmeshed with her personal journey while writing it, acknowledging what she

⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 24.

⁶ Though Sedgwick herself is quick to note that '[e]ven to invoke *nondualism*, as plenty of Buddhist sutras point out, is to tumble right into a dualistic trap.' Sedgwick, p. 2.

calls the 'slip-slidy' effects of her own encounters with mortality and Buddhism that loosened her hold on the confident voice of some of her earlier theoretical works.⁷

I feel myself pressed against the limits of my stupidity each time I read Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling*. This is not only because the thinking in *Touching Feeling* stretches the limits of my own knowledge – though it certainly does – but because in this book Sedgwick is writing *with* as well as *about* what I will for simplicity's sake continue to call nondualistic thought. In other words, she too is advocating a different kind of reading: one that does not rely on, and cannot be understood solely through a linear or cumulative idea of knowledge, but that requires an embrace of a more iterative or circular approach; one in which process and form are not separated from function, and in which stupidity and learning are often necessary bedfellows.⁸

Later in the book, she writes:

In Buddhist pedagogical thought [...] the apparent tautology of learning what you already know does not seem to constitute a paradox, nor an impasse, nor a scandal. It is not even a problem. If anything, it is a deliberate and defining practice.⁹

The process of reconciling oneself to this mode of thinking takes – to borrow Fiumara's words from earlier – humility and faithfulness. It takes time and patience, and a willingness to step outside of systems which might feel familiar and comfortable. Indeed, in the context of Buddhist pedagogy (which is the topic of her final chapter) Sedgwick

⁷ 'Such encounters as those with mortality and with Buddhism, which shape the last two chapters, have had some slip-slidy effects, for better or worse, on the strong consciousness of vocation that made a book like *Epistemology of the Closet* sound confident of its intervention on contemporaneous scenes of sexuality and critical theory.' Sedgwick, p. 2.

⁸ Indeed, in her introduction, Sedgwick describes *Touching Feeling* as a project that over ten years has 'with increasing stubbornness, refused to become linear in structure.' Sedgwick, p. 1.

⁹ Sedgwick, p. 166.

notes that this process of learning what one already knows is most evident in the concept of reincarnation, in which a whole lifetime might only constitute one iteration of learning.¹⁰

I have mentioned Sedgwick's writing about Buddhism and my own practice of Vipassana meditation, not because I want or even think it necessarily appropriate to place a special emphasis on practices that originate in Asia, but because they both provide a way to describe modes of knowing that challenge default structures of thought within 'Western' thinking – which is the dominant mode in the contexts I am writing about. At the same time, the feelings associated with encountering these different modes of knowing might sometimes feel disorienting – or as Sedgwick puts it, 'slip-slidy'. What I am trying to emphasise, then, is not that my experience of reading is like meditation, or that listening is particularly Buddhist, but that in order to begin thinking about listening, the very notion of how we construe knowledge might need to shift, and this might feel strange or even inappropriate at times.

Sedgwick and Fiumara have very different writing styles, and the two books from which I have quoted here, at least superficially, cover different topics that fall within different disciplinary lines. And yet, both are also grappling with the challenge of writing about thought structures that fall outside 'standard' or 'default' models; and both are attempting to challenge the structures within which the very thinking they are doing

¹⁰ In Sedgwick's own terms this kind of learning might be described as 'realisation' as Geraldine Harris notes in her review of the book: '[I]n the final chapter, Sedgwick discusses the familiar hermeneutic tautology, "of being able only to learn versions of what you already know or find out what you have already learned to look for" and goes on to talk about the pedagogical distinction between *recognizing*, or knowing something, and *realizing* it (p. 166). And I suddenly *realized* not only that this tautology is one of the concurrent narratives of *Touching Feeling* but also that it applied to the "pathway" through it that I had constructed for myself. So I had to go back to the beginning and start again.' Geraldine Harris, 'Book Review: *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*', *Feminist Theory*, 5.3 (2004), 361–62 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/146470010400500314>>.

would ordinarily be held. Indeed, both their writings reject a more standard academic prose style, often embracing poetry and a choreographic approach to form instead.

In writing this PhD and searching for its form, I have wrestled with the question of how to communicate clearly to a reader while remaining faithful to a practice of listening which is characterised by a certain commitment to not-knowing. I have settled on a slightly different approach in each chapter, each time considering the relationship between form and content. The story I tell in this prelude, about reading and re-reading Fiumara, has resonances throughout the PhD, in which I frequently perform the act of returning, looping back to the same ideas again and again as if to re-read them from a different angle.

In this first chapter, I open each section by describing an experience I have had as an audience member. These descriptions become the landscape within which I introduce some of Fiumara's writing about listening as a process of gathering and laying-before. I have attempted to provide enough information so as to create a path through the chapter, while leaving room for you as a reader to make your own way. I hope that what follows in each of the chapters is faithful to the rigorous processes that I and others have engaged with over these four years, and that at the same time it feels just secure enough to allow for some slip-slidy effects.

1. Root structures

There is a recurring phrase in James Leadbitter's show, *Mental*, and the phrase is:

"It's okay, you know how this ends."¹¹

The show, which is performed in an apartment (Leadbitter's own home on the occasion I saw it), involves an audience of up to fourteen people sitting on the floor around a bed with cups of tea, sharing an oversized duvet with the artist. During the performance, Leadbitter (who is in the bed wearing pyjamas) recounts his personal history as an activist and mental health patient, using an overhead projector to show the audience private medical records and private police records obtained under the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts. He talks candidly about his frequently traumatic experiences of navigating the UK mental healthcare system and, often simultaneously, being under close police surveillance as an activist, as well as the ways in which these two systems are troublingly interlinked and overlapping. The phrase "It's okay, you know how this ends" introduces a particularly intense section of material in which Leadbitter recounts several suicide attempts that he made during the period he is describing.

When he uses the phrase, Leadbitter is referring to the fact that the story he is recounting, while it is deeply traumatic and autobiographical, ends with him making this show. *It's okay*, he is saying, *because whatever I'm going to tell you, whatever you hear, it ends with me being in this room with you, alive*. The repeated phrase is acting as a kind of safety net for both audience and artist – and it is deeply reassuring. It is a reminder to him and to us that the events he is recounting belong in the past. It is a

¹¹ This phrase is recalled via notes I made following the performance. As I remember it, Leadbitter does not use exactly the same phrase each time, but repeats versions of it, reminding us each time that we are safe because we know how the story ends. *Mental* by the vacuum cleaner (aka James Leadbitter), 2 November 2013, Artsadmin, London.

reminder that he has transformed his painful experiences into this show – into the story we are hearing right now.

And yet, at the same time as the phrase reassures its audience, it also repeatedly interrupts the audience experience, unsettling the rhythm of Leadbitter's words. In the midst of a performance, in the middle of a story, Leadbitter reminds us of our own complicity in making this story; he reminds us that the end of the story exists because we are listening to it.

“It's okay, you know how this ends.”

The phrase is designed to hold us, to keep us at a safe distance from the traumatic incidents that are being described. But in doing so it brings us closer to another situation: the situation of sitting in a bedroom, around a bed, listening. And whilst the phrase itself might not seem remarkable, in the context of a performance I would describe it as radical: it goes to the roots; it brings to the fore the basic frame of theatre. Because we do know how this ends. Whenever we are caught up in the 'fictional' space of the theatre, we are also always aware that it will come to an end. This is part of what gives theatre its potential – it is always temporary. When we buy our ticket, when we step into reality-in-the-theatre, we understand that we will eventually be returned to reality-out-there. And because we know how it ends, we can engage in a heightened relationship with the unknown while it lasts. Each time the phrase is used, then, it punctures a line of 'progress' (the unfolding of a story) with a confrontation to that progress – and in doing so, it points towards the complexity of what 'progress' might mean in a theatrical context.

In the prelude to this chapter I described an experience of reading and re-reading as an activity that was not so much about repetition as about a shift in perception that was enabled through repetition. In that example, I described repeated confrontations with the limits of my own progress, which eventually opened up a different value system around the idea of 'reading' and its relationship to knowledge. If I take the same terms and apply them to this example, I might conclude that Leadbitter's phrase, by repeatedly reminding us of the limits of our own experience, has the potential to open up the parameters of 'listening' and its relationship to knowledge within the context of a performance.

During Leadbitter's show, as I experienced this batting back and forth between two worlds (that of the room I was in, and that of the story that was being told), the activity of being-in-audience itself became a part of how I understood the performance. I began to see my role as audience member as not only being about what I was listening *to* but also *how* I was listening. By repeatedly puncturing one timeline with the other, then, Leadbitter's words pointed me towards the fact that, in gathering to listen, my status as an audience member was as relevant as the story that was being told to me.

So the story of how we encounter each other within the performance becomes one in which it matters that it is this group of people sitting in a room, drinking tea, and listening, as much as it matters that Leadbitter is sharing his story with us.

If words make up one half of the story, listening provides the other half. And they only exist in relation to each other.

The other side of language

Drawing on Heidegger's *Early Greek Thinking*, Fiumara introduces her book on the philosophy of listening by highlighting a split that occurred early on in their semantic history between the Ancient Greek noun *logos* and its verbal form *legein*. *Logos*, she observes, has always been associated with speech or action. *Legein*, however, has among its meanings notions of sheltering, gathering, and receiving, which indicate a listening stance.¹² She observes that this secondary meaning was quickly sidelined, and the meaning 'to speak or convince' has dominated the semantic history of both *logos* and *legein*, greatly determining the structure of what is known as Western philosophy in its intimate relationship with the logical and the logocentric.

The meaning the Greeks assigned to the word *logos* has gradually gained worldwide acceptance, and whatever might have been passed down through the action word *legein* has been disregarded. This moulding, ordering sense of 'saying', in fact, has become drastically detached from the semantic richness of *legein*.¹³

Fiumara goes on to explore what this dominance of the notion of speech and argument, and the much weaker status of listening – the 'other side' of language that is often also perceived as the passive side – has meant for philosophy. She surveys in some depth what has come to count, falsely, as listening within Western thought, while proposing that a more holistic and ecological version of philosophy is possible – one that fully embraces both sides of 'logos' or 'thinking'.

If we were apprentices of listening rather than masters of discourse we might perhaps promote a different sort of coexistence among humans: not so much in the form of a utopian ideal but rather as an

¹² For this reference as well as more detailed etymological reference, see Fiumara, p. 1.

¹³ Fiumara, p. 2.

incipient philosophical solidarity capable of envisaging the common destiny of the species.¹⁴

For Fiumara, then, 'listening' as a term spans wide. It refers to a kind of affective register of holding attention, involving all of our senses: reading, watching, and listening are all included in this. Rather than being restricted to a purely auditory mode, what marks these modes out – as I began to explore in the prelude – is their association with activities that move away from prioritising the declarative, and towards a different kind of knowing, based on the attentive. Her writing draws on, critiques, and attempts to expand the framework of philosophy that she has inherited, asking how it is possible that such a major strand of thinking has evolved with such an intense bias towards knowledge that emerges through speech and the declarative mode, seeming to ignore completely its corollaries: listening and the attentive mode.

Through her work in this book, Fiumara presents a detailed argument about why this expanded definition of listening is not just necessary but essential to an understanding of human encounter, and she justifies her argument rigorously within philosophical terms. However, it feels important to note early on that there is an inevitable paradox at the heart of Fiumara's writing, just as there will be to some extent in mine. There is a certain poignancy in the fact that, in order to be heard within the field in which she writes, she needs to argue her case with clarity and force of voice – she has to be loud and clear. All the while, what she is arguing *for* is a system that does not determine value based purely on declaration and argument, and that does not reduce thinking to a linear or narrative structure.

¹⁴ Fiumara, p. 57.

What this means is that while Fiumara's thinking *proposes* a shift in the way philosophical knowledge is transmitted, it is somewhat limited in the extent to which it can enact that shift. In my opinion, Fiumara never quite addresses *how* the shift towards a listening culture might occur in real terms (in the way that I feel Sedgwick begins to adopt the very terms of nondualistic thinking through the form of her writing and the structure of *Touching Feeling* – or the way Sara Ahmed writes about questions of embodiment through her own embodied experiences), nor is she in a position to consider those structures outside philosophy that might already allow for it.

This, for me, is where theatre comes in.

In my opinion, the most exciting aspects of the theatrical experience lie in the mechanics or structures that enable the act of storytelling or representation to become possible. I believe that at the very root of something that we might call 'theatre' or 'performance', and more fundamental than the notion of 'a show' or 'a play', 'a performance' or 'an action', lies the creation of a possibility. I might describe it as the possibility of noticing within a space of not-yet-knowing, or as the possibility of listening without the imperative to act.¹⁵ Before anyone makes meaning, before anyone tells stories, before the performance itself begins, the act of gathering occurs.¹⁶ And when we gather to create, see, or make what we might call theatre or performance, what we are actually creating, fundamentally, is attention.¹⁷

¹⁵ I recall Leadbitter's repeated phrase here, which offers audience members the reassurance they might need in order to listen to his story without the (immediate) imperative to act.

¹⁶ It feels important to acknowledge that the word 'before' is problematic here. As I will go on to explore in chapter three, the process of theatrical gathering is not one that fits easily into a linear timeframe.

¹⁷ It might be worth mentioning that 'gathering' is part of the pattern that performance studies scholar Richard Schechner has identified – along with 'performing' and 'dispersing' – as being particular to the theatrical mode and part of the ritual of performance. However, as far as I know he does not elaborate very much on the gathering mode, nor relate it to listening in

Listening without the imperative to act

In my introduction I mentioned that I will be taking the word ‘radical’ as meaning ‘going to the root’. I’d like to return to this idea for a moment, as a way to begin thinking through the role of listening in the context of theatre.

‘Radical’ is commonly used as an adjective to describe a drastic action, an extreme or unorthodox measure, or something that brings about great change. In the context of theatre, it is usually applied to what happens onstage. But in its original meaning, unlinked from the notion of change which has come to define its later semantic history, it describes the root structures that underlie what is visible or manifest – those often hidden foundations and influences that nurture what is seen and heard. In the context of theatre, as I have already proposed, the notion of root structures might apply to the process of gathering together that underlies any theatrical encounter. To end this section of the chapter, I would like to explore the ways in which these two meanings of ‘radical’ intersect. In other words, I want to examine the relationship between the idea of the theatre as a place where we gather, and the idea of the theatre as a place of change and transformation.

The status of theatre in relation to change is complicated, and bumps up against some larger debates, to which I will return in more detail later.¹⁸ In short, though, theatre and the arts more generally are often assigned value in relation to their capacity for social, political, and personal change. This way of thinking is not one that is necessarily imposed from outside – I commonly think about my own practice in this way: as a

particular. See Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* [1988], rev. and expanded end (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 176, 189–90.

¹⁸ I discuss the listening of theatre in relation to its social and political contexts in chapters three and four.

catalyst for change in the world outside the theatre, or as a place in which participants, audience members, and artists might experience some kind of transformation. Indeed, it seems inevitable that in order to think about theatre's place in the world, one would consider its relationship to change.¹⁹ And yet it seems to me that in this model the notion of change too quickly and easily attaches itself to content, so that value is always attributed to what we see and hear at the theatre rather than the structures that enable us to see and hear. In this model, no matter how revolutionary the content might be, the value of theatre is inevitably measured without consideration of the structures within which that content takes place. There is something missing in this allocation of value.

There is, I believe, another way of thinking about theatre. Just as my repeated reading of Fiumara allowed me to begin encountering the words on the page differently, works of theatre and performance might enable a different kind of encounter between audience members. The page and the auditorium, or their equivalent, might then be thought of as places where writers and readers and actors and audience members meet, not in order to think the same thoughts or to see and hear the same things, nor in order for change to occur (though – importantly – it might, and often will), but in order to explore the possibility in the act of gathering itself.

I will interrogate what I mean by 'gathering' in greater detail in later chapters – it is a complex activity, and is often attached to a whole host of assumptions, particularly in relation to the idea of 'community' and to notions of happiness. For now, I simply want to suggest that an encounter that is not already determined by its relationship with

¹⁹ For example, theatre-maker Chris Goode has recently written a whole book that is driven by the urgent and complex question of how we might consider theatre as a world-changing activity. In his introduction, he writes, "The question towards which this book makes its way is the one that lies in wait for any theatre maker who dares to profess some concerted political ends for their practice [...] "Can theatre change the world?" Chris Goode, *The Forest and the Field: Changing Theatre in a Changing World* (London: Oberon, 2015), p. 16.

change or action, and which does not attach itself too quickly to notions of progress or outcome, might in fact be a radical proposition.

In order to explore this proposition, I will introduce two short philosophical texts whose ideas lay challenge to standard notions of 'progress' or 'change' as well as the related binary that is often perceived between 'active' and 'passive' states. The first of these is the slightly older and less obviously relevant text: physicist David Bohm's *On Dialogue*, written in the late 1980s, proposing a structure for human dialogue within which thought processes (and therefore knowledge creation) might be explicitly perceived and manifested as happening between people rather than emanating from within one person. The second is philosopher Jacques Rancière's 2009 essay, 'The Emancipated Spectator' – a text that has been highly influential within performance studies due to its proposed (re)definition of the audience-performer relationship as one that does not consist of knowledge transmission from one party to the other, but of a certain (shared but not equivalent) relationship with ignorance. Though coming from very different disciplines, and written at different times, both texts describe the human encounter within a constructed environment, and both question assumptions about the circulation of knowledge within those environments. Although this makes for a slightly lengthy diversion, it feels worth exploring both of these in a little more detail.

Bohm proposes a process (sometimes referred to as 'Bohmian dialogue' or 'Bohm dialogue')²⁰ within which each participant suspends judgement and opinions in order to allow dialogue to emerge from within a diverse group.

²⁰ There is some debate about what exactly counts as 'Bohmian dialogue' since Bohm outlined principles that were constantly evolving, and others have developed the method since. The concept was originally developed in conversation with Indian philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti, with whom Bohm was in dialogue over 25 years. See Donald Factor, 'On Facilitation & Purpose' <http://www.david-bohm.net/dialogue/facilitation_purpose.html> [accessed 21 September 2017]; Bill Angelos, Matthew Capowski, and Igor Topilsky, 'Bohm Consciousness Seminars', *The*

The object of a dialogue is not to analyze things, or to win an argument, or to exchange opinions. Rather, it is to suspend your opinions [...] If each of us in this room is suspending, then we are all doing the same thing. We are all looking at everything together.²¹

This text is helpful in its articulation of a shared activity that is not driven by a singular notion of speech or argument; Bohm proposes that by suspending our need to convince, or argue, and instead finding another way to be together, we might, without either rejecting or overcoming our differences, enter into dialogue. Through the shared act of suspending opinions, Bohm suggests that this version of dialogue allows for a different kind of speaking to emerge, one that is not driven by individual desires but that moves towards a common or collective consciousness.²²

In 'The Emancipated Spectator', Rancière identifies the performance itself as a 'third thing that is owned by no-one', allowing for a concept of the audience-performer relationship that is neither defined by the notion of overcoming distance (the need to bring the audience and performer 'closer' so that they share something) nor by the related notion of overcoming some kind of active-passive binary, in which audience members must be 'activated' in order to participate.

In the logic of emancipation, between the ignorant schoolmaster and the emancipated novice there is always a third thing – a book, or some other piece of writing – alien to both and to which they can refer to verify in common what the pupil has seen, what she says about it and what she thinks of it. The same applies to performance.

Bohm-Krishnamurti Project, 3 May 2012 <<http://bohmkrishnamurti.com/bohm-consciousness-seminars/>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

²¹ David Bohm, *On Dialogue* [1990], ed. by Lee Nichol, new edn (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 30.

²² 'If we can all suspend carrying out our impulses, suspend our assumptions, and look at them all, then we are all in the same state of consciousness. And therefore we have established the thing that many people say they want - a common consciousness.' Bohm, p. 38.

It is not the transmission of the artist's knowledge or inspiration to the spectator. It is the third thing that is owned by no one, whose meaning is owned by no one, but which subsists between them, excluding any uniform transmission, any identity of cause and effect.²³

Rancière describes a schoolmaster and a pupil who hold different relationships to knowledge, but who meet through a book or other piece of writing, and thereby embark on a process of learning within which knowledge is discovered mutually. His proposal that this also relates to performance challenges an assumption that, as audience members, we attend in order to 'learn' something that the performers or director already know. Instead, in his model, we are all attending in order to think together through the structure of a third thing: the performance itself.

I am particularly interested in the complementarity of Bohm's 'looking at everything together' and Rancière's 'third thing that is owned by no-one [...] but which subsists between them'. Both are exploring models of communication within which the relationship between language (including the non-verbal) and power might be altered through a different model of knowledge creation. Both are focused on the moment in which communication occurs, and the subsequent playing-out of the relationships between actors, spectators, or participants. In both cases, there is a third thing (the dialogue, the performance, or the writing) that allows for human beings to share in an action, without the inequalities or differences that might exist between them already defining the knowledge that might arise from their interaction.

²³ Jacques Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator' [2004], in *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. by Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2009), pp. 1-23 (pp. 14-15).

These models help me understand how one might describe the theatrical encounter as one that is defined by a certain kind of listening or holding of attention between people, characterised by withholding or not-already-knowing, rather than by the notion that an idea or set of ideas are transmitted from stage to auditorium. But these texts, of course, also have their own contexts and aims, neither of which quite tallies with mine. This means that both are ultimately bound by an existent relationship with change. For Bohm, the withholding of opinions enables a dialogue that models and produces an alternative social order – one in which there is the possibility of individual and collective transformation of consciousness.²⁴ For Rancière, the status of spectator and actor must be held equally in order that a certain model (or logic, in his terms) of emancipation might take place. Neither considers the gathering of attention an end in itself.

By contrast, I am interested in exploring what happens when the root structures of theatre – those structures that enable audience members and performers to gather together and hold attention in a particular way – are acknowledged as the place of the radical. Gathering is the work that underlies the theatrical encounter, and yet it is rarely examined in any detail. In the next section, and in the following chapters, I will begin to look at what is entailed in this act of gathering, and to consider what it might mean to forefront gathering as the location of the ‘work’ in theatrical ‘artworks’.

²⁴ See Bohm, p. 109.

2. Constructing listening

It is hard to pinpoint the moment at which a performance begins, whether this is the moment one first encounters the concept of the performance and begins to imagine it, the moment one takes a seat in a theatre, the moment when someone begins performing, or any other point in time.²⁵ Let's say, for argument's sake, that James Leadbitter's *Mental* begins at the moment I buy my ticket. At this point I find out that I am going to attend a show 'in East London' and that the exact address will be shared with all ticket holders sometime in advance of the performance. I am later sent the address and given specific instructions about when to arrive and how to get into the apartment block where the show will take place. I happen to know that this particular performance takes place in the artist's own home (he is public on social media with this fact), and the publicity for the show makes it clear that it is an intimate and political performance. I also know from hearsay that it takes place around a bed. These are some of the things I bring into the space with me as I arrive.

The apartment complex is on a council estate in the borough of Hackney. It's a high rise. The lift is a bit dirty and has no mirror. When I arrive at the apartment I ring the doorbell and Cat Harrison, James Leadbitter's producer at the time, answers the door. She is friendly. She asks if we found the place easily. She already knows me and my companion. Maybe she already knows most of the people who are attending; she addresses each of us by name, and her voice has a gentle, warm quality. She asks us to take off our shoes and leave them in the row that is forming in the hallway. She invites us to come into the living room and have a cup of tea and a cupcake with the other audience members who

²⁵ I return to this question of when the 'work' of performance begins in my writing about the invitation in chapter four.

are already there. She tells us all where the toilet is, and lets us know that we should leave any bags or coats in the hallway with the shoes. Some of us make small talk. I am a little nervous. More people arrive. She boils the kettle for more tea. Someone says that the cupcakes are delicious, and asks whether she made them. No, she says, Lily made them. I ask who Lily is, and she tells me that Lily is the artist's girlfriend. We are in the artist's home, eating cupcakes made by his girlfriend, drinking tea from his mugs. He is hosting us.

When everyone has arrived and been given mugs of tea, Cat goes into the bedroom to check whether James, the artist, is ready to begin. We are then guided into the bedroom with our tea, and invited to sit around the bed under an extra-large duvet.

We are ready to begin.

Hosting

Mental is framed by personal details: the awareness that we are audience members in someone's home, drinking his tea, listening to his story. These 'real' facts, the fact that it is his home and his tea and that they are cakes made by his girlfriend, might equally be considered fictional within the frame of theatre, but this seems irrelevant to their status here. Whether real or fictional, they are part of the invitation that is being carefully made as we enter the performance. They are signalling that the artist is aware of and concerned with the act of hosting.

In an essay exploring the relationship between care and the political potential of performance, writer and artist Harry Giles describes his experience of being in the audience at a performance of *Mental* as follows.

The artist is asking us to bear witness to trauma, and to be part of that trauma: it is not an easy thing to ask. But what I also remember about this piece is the context the work was given: as a small audience we were driven to a special location, we mingled in a foyer, and we were given cups of tea and biscuits before heading in. We were forewarned of the content of the piece, and given considerable opportunity to connect with other audience members. For the show itself, we were sat around the artist in his bed. The result of all of this was to create an audience which had responsibility and vulnerability to each other and to the artist: we were more present, more involved, and more able to look after ourselves. If someone needed to leave, they could: if the artist needed to leave, he could. I remember, almost more than the content of the show, feeling an extraordinary generosity of spirit between the artist and the audience, each supporting the other to continue.²⁶

In this essay, which draws on a number of audience experiences he has had in recent years, Giles suggests that the ways in which one cares for an audience are an important part of the work that the performance does. I agree with him. In my opinion, a show like *Mental* can only take great risk (in this case both emotional and political risk) because the contract between artist and audience is one that is clear and caring.

So when Leadbitter reminds us that we know how the story ends, he is also reminding us that he is hosting us; that the story he is telling, which is held by our listening, ends with him inviting us into his home. The indicators of familiarity that characterise this invitation – a personal welcome, a cup of tea, careful directions to the venue, remembering someone's name – are signs that can easily be misread as indicators of the

²⁶ Harry Giles, 'Shock and Care: An Essay About Art, Politics and Responsibility', 24 April 2016 <<https://harrygiles.org/2016/04/24/shock-and-care/>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

performance to come, whereas they are in fact markers of its boundaries. They sit at the edges of the performance, and indicate the parameters within which the performance will be held. Crucially, in this example, they indicate that the encounter that is about to take place is one that has been carefully constructed with an audience in mind.

But the fact that the invitation and welcome are made carefully and kindly is not an indication of whether the encounter that takes place within these boundaries will be conservative. As I hope is clear from my description of this performance, there is nothing safe or conservative about the content or form of this show – and any notion of safety lies not in the content but in the way we as audience and Leadbitter as artist are able to hold ourselves. By creating what Giles terms a generosity of spirit between artist and audience members, Leadbitter creates conditions in which audience members are more likely to trust him. Part of this trust is knowing that they are safe to leave if they need to. And it seems clear to me that in bringing a high level of care to the audience experience, Leadbitter not only encourages a more diverse range of audience members to be able to attend (Giles' essay comments in particular on the consideration of neurodiverse audience members), but he also gives us permission to enter into a relationship with the work on our own terms, with, as Giles notes, both responsibility and vulnerability.

Giles begins his essay by proposing that the history of art is often told as a history of shocks, one in which progress and innovation are born through rupture, and in which rupture is associated with antagonism. This way of telling history makes a link between the idea of newness and the idea of difficulty; and it is often assumed that audience members can only confront truly progressive ideas when they are taken out of their

supposed comfort zones.²⁷ But, he says, we might understand neoliberalism as a state of constant shock, and of constant stimulation, and we might understand the neoliberal project as one that has drastically eroded structures of care. Therefore, he argues, what is in fact most disruptive and necessary in our current political situation is art that takes care seriously.

The argument I'm trying to build through these examples is that experiences of deep and genuine care are themselves shocking, shocking through their incongruity with a wider uncaring world. They are also necessary, because so few of us have the option to be cared for. And they define your audiences, because to choose not to care – to not take account of – audiences made up of different people with very different needs, whether those are needs based on disability, class, mental health or otherwise – is to limit your audience, which is to limit the conversation your art is having and thus the possibilities of the art you can make.²⁸

Just as the term 'radical' gets attached to what is visible and audible and becomes associated with extreme or shocking acts, the term 'care' tends to be associated with qualities of softness and weakness, which are often perceived as occupying the 'secondary' place that listening shares. But those works that are caring towards their audiences are not less radical – and the relationship between care and progress is a complex one that shifts depending on details of both context and framing. In my experience it is those works of art that are least considerate of their audiences that have the least relational potential. And without careful consideration of hosting, as Giles notes above, the 'shock' that might impact some positively is the same shock that would

²⁷ This is one of the problems I have with Claire Bishop's work, which prioritises antagonism as a route to innovation. See Claire Bishop, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents', *Artforum*, 44.6 (2006), 178–83.

²⁸ Giles, op. cit.

completely exclude others, thereby paradoxically creating a far more conservative audience (and therefore) experience.²⁹

What lies before

So I am proposing that listening in the theatre might be understood as a constructed state that demands serious consideration of those aspects that are usually treated as peripheral to the main event – namely those aspects that might be categorised under the labels ‘hosting’ or ‘framing’, and are associated with care. I will end this section by returning briefly to Fiumara, asking how her writing about listening within the context of philosophy aligns with this interpretation of listening in the context of theatre.

As I have already noted, Fiumara observes that within its original meanings, *legein* – the verbal form of *logos* – contained ideas of gathering, sheltering, and receiving, all of which indicate a listening stance.³⁰ She goes on to cite Heidegger’s analysis of the terms, in which he proposes that to properly understand the meanings within *legein* one must turn to its German relation, *legen*.

²⁹ Throughout this PhD, I have chosen to write about hosting, care, and encounter by referring either to practitioners, such as Harry Giles, or to thinkers who write from embodied experience, such as (in chapters four and five) Sara Ahmed. Where others might have referenced writing by received figures of authority such as Derrida, Levinas, or Nancy, I have preferred to use sources that feel directly relevant to practice and lived experience. In addition, it feels pertinent in this footnote to note some of the deeply troubling implications of purely theoretical texts that are written in abstract form. Judith Butler notes the following:

‘It is interesting that Levinas insisted that we are bound to those we do not know, and even those we did not choose, could never have chosen, and that these obligations are, strictly speaking, precontractual. And yet, he was the one who claimed in an interview that the Palestinian had no face and that he only meant to extend ethical obligations to those who were bound together by his version of Judea-Christian and classical Greek origins.’ Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 107.

³⁰ Fiumara, p. 1.

No-one would want to deny that in the language of the Greeks from early on *legein* means to talk, say or tell. However, just as early and even more originally, *legein* means what is expressed in the similar German word *legen*: to lay down, to lay before. In *legen* a 'bringing together' prevails, the Latin *legere* understood as *lesen* [German: to read, select, gather, or harvest], in the sense of collecting and bringing together. *Legein* properly means the laying-down and laying-before which gathers itself and others.³¹

Here, Heidegger proposes that in its original meaning *legein* is always associated with a sense of collecting and bringing together which is akin to 'reading' – or what I might describe as a kind of curation of attention. Later, he also makes an analogy with the gathering that happens at harvest-time, proposing that the gathering of *legein* has at its heart the idea of collecting in order to bring under shelter.³² In other words, Heidegger is describing a gathering that is careful and considered, rather than a random or chance coming-together.

But it is the final sentence of the quote above that interests me the most in relation to theatrical listening. I am drawn to the notion of laying-before, which seems to me to align perfectly with the mechanisms that underpin the theatrical experience. When I consent to being an audience member, part of what I am consenting to – part of the contract – is that I accept, for a limited amount of time, whatever is laid or placed before me. The very notion of a stage, in fact, is of a designated area that has been constructed in order that whatever is placed upon it might be noticed differently. I might describe

³¹ Martin Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking* (San Francisco and London: Harper & Row, 1984), p. 60. Cited in Fiumara, p. 3.

³² 'The gleaning at harvest time gathers fruit from the soil. The gathering of the vintage involves picking grapes from the vine. Picking and gleaning are followed by the bringing together of the fruit. So long as we persist in the usual appearance we are inclined to take this bringing together as the gathering itself or even its termination. But gathering is more than mere amassing. To gathering belongs a collecting which brings under shelter.' Heidegger, p. 62.

this stage as a place where things gather attention around them, simply by being laid before an audience. Equally, I might describe it as a place where things are designated as 'onstage' through the attention that is bestowed upon them. In other words, the stage is created by the gathering of an audience, and at the same time it is what an audience gathers around.³³

In another section of the same text, Heidegger elaborates on the notion of laying-before:

Laying brings to lie, in that it lets things lie together before us. All too readily we take this 'letting' in the sense of omitting or letting go. To lay, to bring to lie, to let lie, would then mean to concern ourselves no longer with what is laid down and lies before us – to ignore it. However, *legein* [...] means just this, that whatever lies before us involves us and therefore concerns us.³⁴

Perhaps I am making a leap, reading Heidegger's words as if they were describing theatre. But it seems to me that there is a further link to be made between Heidegger's elaboration here on the meaning of *legein* and the role of the theatre in relation to the world outside. The phrase, 'whatever lies before us involves us and therefore concerns us' might well apply to the stage as a place dedicated to a certain kind of attentiveness. Exactly what kind of attentiveness is the topic of the next chapter. For now, I simply want to note that in the theatre we can concern ourselves with what is laid before us without moving into action, by watching and listening. And this seems to me to be what is special about the theatre – that it is a place where we are concerned and involved with what lies before us, not because we say that we are, but because we give it our attention.

³³ See chapter three for a more in-depth exploration of the act of gathering that happens in the theatre.

³⁴ Heidegger, p. 62. Cited in Fiumara, p. 5.

So how does this relate to care and carefulness? Those moments in which we concern ourselves with objects and people that are laid before us are constructed through the act of bringing-together and of laying-before. And their constructedness is defined by those seemingly peripheral details I mentioned earlier – the careful work of inviting, framing, and hosting that allows audience members to enter into a listening that is characterised by responsibility and vulnerability at once. What defines laying-before is not the object that is being placed, but the way that the act of laying itself is perceived. And where Heidegger, in his analogy with the harvest, locates this in the act of collecting, I locate it in the layers of invitation through which audiences come together.³⁵

³⁵ I explore the invitation in relation to theatrical listening in chapter four.

3. Difference and difficulty

There are some similarities between Rianna Tatana's *Monday's Child* and James Leadbitter's *Mental*. Both shows involve a small audience, and take place in a domestic setting. In both shows, audience members are offered a cup of tea and invited to listen to a personal narrative spoken in the first person. Both narratives concern the politics of the body – the way bodies are policed and surveyed in the public sphere. And both shows pay close attention to the idea of hosting, considering the audience member's journey from the moment they step into the 'theatre' to the moment they re-enter the outside world.

But Tatana's *Monday's Child* has an entirely different tone to Leadbitter's *Mental*. Though Tatana speaks in the first person, her words are often parodic, and they undercut any sense of ease we may have brought in with us as audience members. Though she speaks from personal experience, she also plays with the idea of 'fiction', riffing on clichéd expectations we might have brought in with us about what it means to watch an Aboriginal body perform.³⁶ In this final section of the chapter, then, I want to briefly introduce Tatana's work as a way of extending the definitions I have been proposing – as a reminder that taking care and taking risk in the theatre might manifest in a whole number of different ways. And eventually, as a way of introducing the term 'compassion' in relation to difference and difficulty.

³⁶ As I will go on to describe, Tatana uses her own body in the performance to highlight the politics of looking and listening in relation to the Aboriginal body – drawing on her own experiences as a fair-skinned Aboriginal woman living in Australia in the twenty-first century.

Monday's Child

Due to a confusion with my booking, I was not scheduled to see Rianna Tatana's *Monday's Child*, which is performed for only three audience members at a time. So it was at the last minute, when another audience member failed to turn up, that I was ushered into the narrow white-walled corridor where the performance begins, along with two other people I had never met.³⁷ Once inside, we found ourselves alone with a series of pictures on the wall, depicting a fair-skinned woman (which it soon became apparent was Tatana herself) painting her face black, alongside a series of framed pieces of text, which together read:

Shall I go on? Not yet convinced that there is a whole new fashion
in academia, the arts and professional activism to identify as
Aboriginal? Not yet convinced that for many of these fair
Aborigines, the choice to be Aboriginal can seem almost arbitrary
and intensely political, given how many of their ancestors are in fact
Caucasian? ³⁸

This was our welcome. This was the way the performance began – with confrontation, lack of direction, and uncertainty. We were not sure whether we were supposed to go anywhere or do anything in particular. We were waiting. After some time had passed, Tatana popped her head around the corner of a door at the far end of the corridor, and cheerily invited us into another room, this one decorated as a family kitchen, for 'a cuppa and a yarn'. Once we were inside and comfortably seated around a table, she said:

Before we begin, I'd just like to remind you all that even though I've
invited you here today, you're not actually welcome. Unless, of
course, you're a part of the traditional custodians of the land on

³⁷ *Monday's Child* by Rianna Tatana, 8 September 2015, Io Myers Studio One, UNSW Sydney.

³⁸ This is a quote from right-wing Australian columnist Andrew Bolt, though the credit is listed in the programme notes, not on the wall.

which we are gathered here today, the Bedegal people, or you've been previously welcomed by them. So, are we all comfortable? Excellent, let's choose our cups for our tea!³⁹

The short performance continued in a similar vein. Throughout, Tatana used dark humour to interrogate the audience's gaze in relation to essentialising tropes related to the Aboriginal body. She announced a 'yarning circle', a 'cultural dance', and a 'smoking ceremony' – all of which were subverted so that they became both ridiculous and painful to watch. I found myself wanting to avert my gaze but also laughing. Tatana was charming, funny, and ruthless.

Perhaps what I remember most about Tatana's show is the way I felt as I walked out. I was holding in my hand the 'token of appreciation' that Tatana had given each of us at the end of the show – a half-smoked cigarette wrapped in a damp paper napkin, which she had used during the 'smoking ceremony' to wipe off some of her blacked-up face – a gloomy joke drawing on clichéd expectations around the performance of Aboriginality as tourism. Giving each of us this 'token' to keep was a way of inviting us to literally take something of the performance away with us. But in spite of its abject nature, I felt that this token had been given to me as a gift – that there was a generosity in the gesture. In fact, what was remarkable about Tatana's performance as a whole is that while she used tropes familiar to antagonistic art – parody, cliché, reversing the gaze – to expose lines of privilege and histories of violence, what was constantly pulling against this and holding it in place was a genuine sense of care.

In an exegesis she has written about the show, Tatana asks:

³⁹ Rianna Tatana, "Monday's Child Is Fair of Face": Performing the Fluidity of Aboriginality in Contemporary Performance' (unpublished Honours thesis, UNSW Sydney, 2015), p. 46.

How can I create an encounter that balances the generosity of invitation with the difficulty of content in order to provoke the audience to question their own ideologies and assumptions? How do I create a meaningful and challenging space that critiques the oppressive societal constructions of Aboriginality? ⁴⁰

I have attended many performances that were intended to antagonise their audiences. I often enjoy these performances, even when they feel difficult, because I recognise that the antagonism is provoking me to see something that I might not otherwise have chosen to notice. However, I rarely come out of these performances feeling that I have been cared for, or that my presence as audience member was held with concern. The sense of generosity that Tatana mentions is noticeably missing from most of these performances.

Two listenings

I think back to Harry Giles' writing about Leadbitter's *Mental*, in which he remembers 'an extraordinary generosity of spirit between the artist and the audience'. He relates this feeling to the fact that Leadbitter set up the performance carefully, making sure audience members could find the venue easily, were welcomed, and given permission to leave if they wanted to. It is interesting to think back to the details I myself noted in Leadbitter's show – the welcome at the front door, the cup of tea. Each of those moments is parallel to a similar moment in Tatana's show, in which as audience we are reminded that we are not welcome. Tatana offers us all tea, and asks how much milk we take, before proceeding to measure out milk according to a predetermined measure of her

⁴⁰ Tatana, p. 7.

own choosing;⁴¹ she invites us into the kitchen with warmth, but immediately reminds us that we are not welcome. Nevertheless there was, in my opinion, an extraordinary generosity of spirit between the artist and the audience.

What was it then, that allowed this feeling of generosity? Perhaps a few of the following details. As audience members, we were told about the intimate nature of the performance, and understood what was involved, before we entered the performance. The first part of the performance in the corridor – though confronting and disorienting – was designed to allow us some time to sit with the politics of the performance before we entered the ‘show’.⁴² And when Tatana handed us each the ‘token’ at the end of the show, it was with care, compassion, and humour. Which brings me to my last point – the role of humour. I might think of the humour in Tatana’s show as a kind of ‘third thing’ that sat between us and her. We were not laughing at her or at ourselves, but at the whole situation – recognising for a moment how painfully absurd the political and social worlds we inhabit really are. During the performance, we were all implicated in the political landscape that Tatana was evoking. Our bodies became linked to histories beyond our timeframes. And yet, in that moment, using the lens of performance, we were all examining something uncomfortable *together*. We were all aware that we were inside a performance.

Perhaps what Tatana and Leadbitter’s shows share most of all, then, is that they both invite us as audience members to reflect back on our own presence. They both left me with the feeling that my role as audience member was an important one. Leadbitter does

⁴¹ There is of course a thinly veiled subtext in this tea ritual concerning the politics of skin colour.

⁴² Tatana writes about this choice in her exegesis, where she describes the waiting room as a liminal space. Tatana, pp. 19–20.

this in a way that is explicitly framed around care – he reminds us of our presence in the room as a way to let us know that in spite of the difficult subject-matter, things are okay. Tatana asks us to consider that things might not be okay, inviting us as audience members to reflect back on our own bodies and the histories in which they are implicated, as well as on our own gaze. They are both careful in evoking our gaze, and clear about the role that listening and watching play in their stories.

The point of this is not to make these two shows equivalent or even necessarily parallel. But I have picked these two shows to write about in this first chapter because each of them draws attention to the constructedness of theatre, and uses that constructedness to hold difficult emotions. And both artists recognise that in order to hold those difficult emotions in the room, a certain level of careful hosting is required.

Earlier, in describing my experience of *Mental*, I noted that theatre contains two listenings: the listening in the room, a listening that is defined by those root structures of gathering and invitation; and the listening of the story that is being told, a listening that might be described as the listening of laying-before. In their own ways, both shows draw attention to this double listening, and to the constructedness of the theatrical form.

Compassion

In the prelude to this chapter I noted that it is compassion, rather than empathy, that is said to increase during the practice of Vipassana meditation. In this interpretation, empathy involves accommodating the object or person with whom one is empathising – relating to the emotions of something or someone else by attempting to understand

them through one's own body, by displacing or temporarily replacing one's own feelings or needs. Compassion, by contrast, involves not accommodating but *being with* - a profound recognition and acceptance of *not* being that other person or thing. Compassion, then, is the word that I described as being relevant to a Fiumaran practice of listening. It is also a term I would like to explore as a way of describing the listening of theatre audiences. In this final section of the chapter, I will explore 'compassion' in a little more detail - as it is a term I will return to several times as the PhD unfolds.

The difference between empathy and compassion seems to me to hinge on their relationship with the notion of accommodation. To accommodate, literally meaning to make one thing fit to another, involves the changing of one thing to fit with another thing. Both accommodate and compassion contain the Latin prefix *com-* meaning *with*, but within *ac-com-modate*, the *com* is joined by the prefix *ad-* rendering it directional (just as *em-* renders *empathy* directional). The notion of accommodation is of course semantically related to the notion of hosting or housing - concepts that are often framed within a model of reciprocity and generosity. And yet, it is consistently certain types of objects or people who are required to do the changing in order that two things might fit. Those people or structures that are most dominant, or most socially accepted, require those people or structures that are less dominant to become either similar enough to be 'recognised' and then accommodated by the dominant structures (to 'pass'), or to stand completely outside them. The dominant structure or person most often does not recognise the impact of the interaction - their direction remains largely unchanged. It is almost always those perceived as weaker, or more marginal, who are expected to change in order to be 'accommodated' within the dominant ideology or structure.⁴³

⁴³ These are themes I will return to many times later, especially in relation to Sara Ahmed's work. For writing that is directly relevant to 'accommodation' see Sara Ahmed, 'Imposition',

In thinking about compassion, then, I find myself thinking about that which refuses to accommodate, or to be accommodated – that which refuses to enter into a system of exchange that is determined by the dominant force at play. Fiumara notes of listening in relation to a logocratic system:

The power of logos is such that in the attention that we give to its most glittering emissaries, we almost become dazzled tributaries, thus spending a life of thinking as though it were a coin that one surrendered to others. What we call ‘agreement’ and ‘consensus’ remain major philosophical problems.⁴⁴

What Fiumara is observing is that hierarchies and lineages are built through a kind of submission, or yielding, to what is considered ‘agreement’ or ‘consensus’ but is in fact nothing more than a hierarchy based on the power of speech. Conversely, within the notion of compassion, in its truest sense, there is a requirement of besideness, of not losing oneself. The *com* leads here, and it is not directional but spatial. It seems to me that this definition of compassion is crucially important to the act of listening that Fiumara is describing – an act in which I might allow whatever lies before me to concern me, and in which I take responsibility for what is proximate, not by accommodating it, but by being alongside it. Or, to put it another way, the dialogue that ensues from Fiumaran listening is not a transaction where one trades in power and visibility, but one in which the unseen and the unspoken can take their place lightly. It is a listening that allows for something or someone to be visible without needing them to become something other in order for this to be possible.

feministkilljoys, 14 April 2014 <<https://feministkilljoys.com/2014/04/14/imposition/>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

⁴⁴ Fiumara, p. 56.

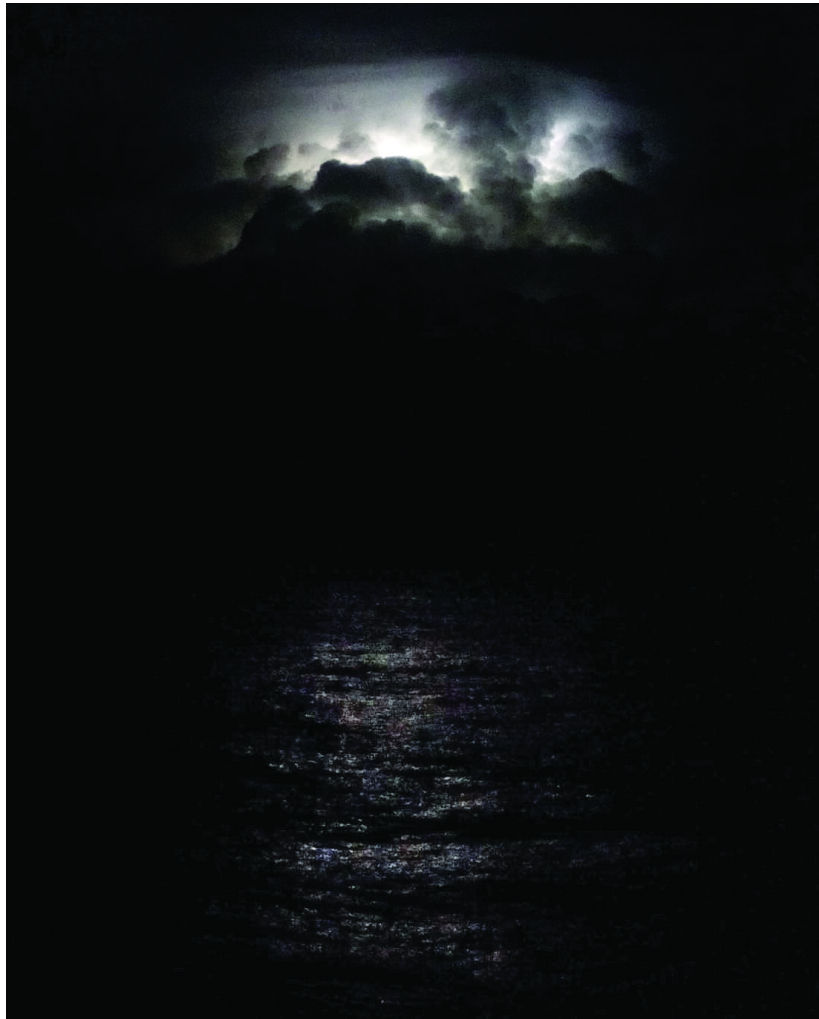
This listening, a kind of compassion, is one that feels like it describes the experience of being-in-audience that I had at both Leadbitter and Tatana's performances. In each of these, I felt able and invited to bring myself fully into the room – but it was also clear that while I was in that room, my role was to listen to a story told by someone else. In both shows – as signalled by the performers – my presence as listener was a considered part of the performance. And yet, at the same time, in both shows there was another listening, a listening through a third thing, an encounter that allowed us to confront difficult questions without immediately moving into action.

[end of chapter one]

As if
to turn towards
the possibility
that doing nothing
in silence
might sometimes
be
enough.

Chapter Two: Audience

Prelude



Our task is to make clear,
in unknown territory
that irreversible rupture has taken place.

- Karen Christopher ¹

¹ Karen Christopher, 'Waiting, Wondering, Wavering & Wanting: The Performance of Silence', *Frakcija*, 35 (A Companion to Goat Island's *When will the September roses bloom? Last night was only a comedy*, Part Two: Reflections on the Performance) (2005), n.p.

On October 4th 2014 I was in the audience at a panel discussion as part of a three-day symposium.² The discussion was structured in a fairly standard way, with short presentations from each of the panellists followed by a question and answer session in which the panel members were given an opportunity to respond to questions from the audience. As is often the way, the whole event was running behind schedule, so there was some time pressure on the session; nevertheless, a productive conversation was emerging, and there was a feeling of engagement between audience members and panellists. And then, in a moment, something happened that completely shifted this sense of productivity.

Here's how it happened.

Someone in the audience had asked a question, and I can no longer remember what this particular question was, but I remember noting down with interest the answer that each panellist gave as they justified or problematised their position in relation to it. Then it came to Lorena Rivero de Beer, an artist and psychotherapist who was on the panel. I am particularly interested in Rivero de Beer's work, and so I was eager to hear what she might have to say. But although it was her turn to respond, she did not say anything. We sat and waited, and she remained silent. Eventually, slightly awkwardly, and blushing, she said:

Silence as a response (for me, right now) is not a choice.³

Then she sat in silence again.

² Janna Graham, Lorena Rivero de Beer and Rebecca Beinart, 'Politics of Participation' (paper at InDialogue, Nottingham, 2014) <<https://indialogue2014.wordpress.com/2014-archive/2014-programme/>>.

³ This is how I wrote the phrase in my notebook at the time.

The room immediately felt different. This, I began to realise, was her answer to the question. Although she did attempt to say something more, to explain her words further, her voice stumbled and she soon returned to silence again. Silence, it seemed, really was the only response she could offer; she was bound to silence, not because she was choosing it, but because it was the only answer that she felt she could give. Her silence was neither clarifying nor confident, but it was profoundly affecting. I had been watching and listening with an expectation that she would respond to the question in words, with a statement of some kind, and yet her response made me acutely aware of the weight of that expectation.

I have since wondered how different this moment would have felt had she said, “My silence is a choice,” or had she chosen to sit silently and confidently, without any explanation. Either of these responses would have challenged the default of speech as the mode in which knowledge was circulating in the room, and would have provocatively disrupted the flow of the discussion; but in either case, she would have contributed a statement through her silence, thus aligning it to some extent with the statements that the other panellists had made. By articulating the fact that her silence was *not* a choice, something much more complicated began to happen. Instead of responding to the question in a way that reflected back the terms of that question, remaining within the constraints of the question-and-answer format, Rivero de Beer instead seemed to inhabit a kind of paradox: she made ‘visible’ the inability to speak; and in doing so, she threw into question the very terms within which we were all listening.⁴

⁴ I explore the status of the question in relation to listening further in chapter five of this PhD. This is also the topic of Fiumara’s fifth chapter, ‘A philosophy of listening within a tradition of questioning’. See Gemma Corradi Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening* [1985], trans. by Charles Lambert (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 28–51.

There are other facts that accompany this story – things that Rivero de Beer had disclosed earlier in the panel discussion: that she had recently become a mother for the first time, and the symposium was her first professional engagement since taking maternity leave; that she was training to become a psychotherapist, and found herself between worlds – not quite an artist, and not quite a therapist. In many ways, I don't feel that these facts belong here. They seem 'too personal'. But at the same time I can't ignore them; they were present in the way that I heard her silence and her words; they added a certain vulnerability and awkwardness to the moment that was palpable. They were part of who she was to me in that moment – a part of who she had declared herself to be. And this, in turn, affected my own emotional response. In the moment after she spoke, I felt disoriented and vulnerable; my heart was beating faster; I felt as if the room had been turned upside down.

Of course, in spite of the facts I describe above, I cannot know exactly what Rivero de Beer *meant* when she spoke those words and inhabited that silence. And in many ways, to try and pin down her exact meaning feels both reductive and somewhat contrary to the spirit in which I am interpreting the experience. What I do know, from later discussions with others who were in the audience that day, is that I was not the only one who felt that it had been both a significant and disorienting moment. By not only interrupting but throwing into question the usual format of a panel discussion, where a speaker defines and then clarifies or defends the parameters of their argument, Rivero de Beer significantly changed the relationship between those of us who were in the room. After she had spoken, we continued to sit in silence for what I can only guess was several minutes. But our silence was no longer one of waiting for someone to speak. Instead, it was one in which we acknowledged – however awkwardly or unsettlingly – that there were no clarifying words available.

*

What does it mean to reply with silence when speaking is expected?

In the second section of this chapter, I will recount several stories that involve more or less unexpected silences. Like Rivero de Beer's, they are all silences that take up a position that is usually occupied by speech or action; each is held by people who are occupying the role of 'speaker' or 'performer'. And in each example, the use of silence challenges expectations. But what I am really interested in is the way in which these silences reveal some of the defaults around how listening happens, and some of the complexity in the relationship between speaking and listening – particularly, in those later examples, within a theatrical context. Before I get there, I want to introduce a few texts that contest the over-simplified notion that silence and listening are inherently defined by lack.

In her 1996 book *The Dissonance of Democracy*, Susan Bickford writes:

Silence properly understood is not merely a lack of sound, nor is it an absence. It is connected to sound as part of meaning, as rests in music or pauses in speech. That is, it is given form by the occurrence of sound – silence only has presence as silence because it points to something beyond itself which throws the silence into relief.⁵

Here, Bickford (drawing on Don Ihde and Susan Sontag) uses silence to demonstrate that speech and listening are always connected; this is the main argument of her book, which makes the case for listening – in its relationship with speaking – as a complex and embodied practice of democratic citizenship. Her analysis is an important reminder that

⁵ Susan Bickford, *The Dissonance of Democracy: Listening, Conflict, and Citizenship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 154.

silence is always in relationship with something else – that sound and silence, like speaking and listening, are constructed activities that actively define each other. But in light of the silence I have described above, this account still feels inadequate. By declaring her silence ‘not a choice’ Rivero de Beer made something else happen in that moment: she both acknowledged and changed the way that attention was circulating in the room, challenging any assumption of a dualistic relationship between listening and speech.

In order to move towards a more nuanced understanding of the work that was happening in the silence following Rivero de Beer’s response, and the work of silence more generally, I will turn briefly to filmmaker, artist, and critical theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha’s 1990 essay, ‘Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference’. In this essay, Trinh approaches the question of silence specifically in relation to the feminine, addressing the overly simple binary that has often been used to describe the relationship between silence and speech, as if one were always passive and one always active, one always more feminine and the other always more masculine.

Within the context of women's speech silence has many faces. [...] On the one hand, we face the danger of inscribing femininity as absence, as lack and blank in rejecting the importance of the act of enunciation. On the other hand, we understand the necessity to place women on the side of negativity and to work in undertones, for example, in our attempts at undermining patriarchal systems of values. Silence is so commonly set in opposition with speech.

Silence as a will not to say or a will to unsay and as a language of its own has barely been explored.⁶

I am, perhaps unsurprisingly, most interested in Trinh's final sentence. Silence, although it is inevitably conceived in some kind of relationship with speech or noise, can occupy many positions, often simultaneously. I might, for example, describe Rivero de Beer's silence as occupying all of Trinh's suggested modes: as a will to unsay what we already expected her to say; as a will to not say anything unless she had something to say; and – perhaps most importantly – as a language of its own that was not already determined by speech. I might describe this kind of silence as one that avoids becoming bound up with the power games of binaries: silence-speech, passive-active, female-male.

Rivero de Beer's silence was not a silence of lack or absence in the way that those words are commonly understood. What made it both exciting and unusual was that in the work that it was doing, it seemed to take those terms and own them differently. Instead of reaching towards articulacy in response to a question, her silence held firm those qualities that are so often set in the negative: quietness, uncertainty, and lack of conviction. And through her choice of words, she also pointed towards the difficulty in performing this act within a structure that so strongly favours a certain concept of the declarative and a certain definition of articulacy. It is important to remember that in the moment I have described Rivero to Beer was in a position that meant she was already heard – she was the speaker, and therefore she was being listened *to*. But what she gave us as audience members was the opportunity to listen, without the usual directionality of 'to'. No longer held by the default of listening *to* her speak, I – as audience member –

⁶ Trinh T. Minh-ha, 'Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference', in *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras*, ed. by Gloria Anzaldúa (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Foundation Books, 1990), pp. 371–75 (p. 372).

was thrown back to reflect on my own position, and my own listening, as well as my relationship to the other voices and listenings in the room.

In the chapter that follows, I will return to these questions, working through two examples of performances that use silence in order to disrupt expectations around what it means to be in audience. But first, I will introduce what might initially seem like a surprising text: a lengthy and personal essay by philosopher Stanley Cavell, in which he considers what it means to be an audience member watching a Shakespearean tragedy unfold.

1. Doing nothing

In his essay, 'The Avoidance of Love', philosopher Stanley Cavell refers several times to a joke about someone who rushes on to the stage to try and save Desdemona from murder during a production of Shakespeare's *Othello*. Cavell asks exactly what it is that makes this behaviour seem funny or wrong, and goes on to interrogate how we know that we are not to take action when we are in the audience at the theatre – specifically, in his example, when we are watching a Shakespearean tragedy. His answer is that we do not choose inaction out of etiquette or aversion but because the very role of the audience member is tied up with a certain definition of 'doing nothing' as an ethical position.

Why do I do nothing, faced with tragic events? If I do nothing because I am distracted by the pleasures of witnessing this folly, or out of my knowledge of the proprieties of the place I am in, or because I think there will be some more appropriate time in which to act, or because I feel helpless to un-do events of such proportion, then I continue my sponsorship of evil in the world, its sway waiting upon these forms of inaction. I exit running. But if I do nothing because there is nothing to do, where that means I have given over time and space in which action is mine and consequently that I am in awe before the fact that I cannot do and suffer what it is another's to do and suffer, then I confirm the final fact of our separateness. And that is the unity of our condition.⁷

This statement requires a careful approach. If I read it too quickly, in spite of understanding that this is explicitly *not* what he is proposing, I find myself slipping into a reading in which Cavell proposes that theatre sanctifies inaction in the face of tragic

⁷ Stanley Cavell, 'The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*' [1967], in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, updated edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 267–353 (p. 339).

events. I note this potential slippage in reading because I find it revealing; it takes effort for me to understand the position that Cavell is describing here because I am unused to thinking in this way. I am used to a concept of not-doing that is associated with lack, where not-doing or silence are defined in opposition to doing or speaking, and where not-doing describes an inability, an inertia, or an unwillingness to engage. But what Cavell describes in this text is not a state of lack – it is an engaged state, and a revelatory one. The theatre, he suggests, is a place that might exist in order to allow audience members to acknowledge, and not to attempt to overcome, separateness. Far from being passive, this acknowledgment brings with it the possibility of both responsibility and compassion: if I am able to accept and acknowledge that I cannot suffer on your behalf, and that your suffering is not the same as mine, then I am able to take responsibility for what I *am* capable of doing, which is seeing and hearing you.

Ever since I was introduced to this essay some twenty years ago, I have felt that it expresses something important about what is happening when I take on the role of being-in-audience at a performance. But it was only on revisiting Cavell's essay after having read Fiumara's book, *The Other Side of Language*, that I began to understand the extent to which Cavell's words are, in my reading, describing something structural – something that defines not just the form of tragic drama, but the fundamental activity of holding attention that underlies any theatrical production.⁸ For me, what Cavell describes in this passage is a kind of listening. And while the listening he describes is not the same as the listening that Fiumara advocates, they are related in certain important ways. For example, Cavell's writing about 'doing nothing' as an audience member reads to me almost like a response to Fiumara when she claims:

⁸ Though it is important to underline here that for Cavell these arguments apply specifically to tragic theatre as a form, and relate to the notion of catharsis.

One of the most urgent philosophical problems that can be confronted [...] is why it should be so difficult to listen to something without transforming it into nothing or transferring it into our own language.⁹

This dilemma lies at the heart of Fiumara's enquiry into the philosophy of listening – and the difficulty she describes might also be described as the difficulty that being-in-audience gives us the possibility of confronting. If the act of listening makes demands on me, and chief amongst them is the demand that I fully acknowledge the presence of something or someone else without appropriating it, then my first and perhaps only responsibility as listener (or 'audience') is to resist the urge to immediately transform, transfer, or translate that presence into my own. In other words, at some level, to be in audience is to take on the responsibility of understanding and accepting that – whilst we might act in solidarity or compassion – none of us can live the life of another. For Cavell, this work happens through watching characters negotiate their fortunes within the world of tragic drama. For me, it is the work that happens when I am giving over my attention in the context of a theatre show or a performance; and it happens whether I am there as performer or as audience member.

Theatre and the fictional

I'd like to take a moment here to acknowledge two interrelated semantic knots. The first concerns a definition of 'theatre'. For Cavell, this means a proscenium arch theatre with lights and curtains and a stage; in this place, the audience members sit in the dark facing actors who are playing characters – specifically, in this essay, the characters in

⁹ Fiumara, p. 39.

Shakespeare's *King Lear*.¹⁰ By contrast, for me theatre means any number of situations in which I can identify a particular kind of audience-performer relationship; for me theatre is something that happens for a designated amount of time but can happen in many settings, with or without lights, curtains, or a proscenium arch. Indeed, much of what I refer to as 'theatre', as I mentioned in the introduction, might most legitimately be placed in the lineages of performance or live art. However, I am interested in what it is about Cavell's description of the theatrical that feels like it tallies or overlaps with mine. Most of all, I'm interested in what this overlap can tell me about the relationships that exist uniquely within this place we are both calling 'theatre', and how they are different from (whilst contingent with, and parallel to) the relationships that happen outside it.

This brings me to the second knot: the notion of the fictional. If Cavell and I mean different things when we use the word 'theatre' then what might we each mean if we use the word 'fictional', and how exactly might we go about designating what is fictional and what is not? This question is key to Cavell's argument, and in attempting to answer it I hope I might begin to articulate what it is that defines theatrical listening from the kind of listening that happens outside the theatre.

'The Avoidance of Love' is an essay in two thematic halves. In the first and much longer half, Cavell engages in a detailed character and plot analysis of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, focusing on the themes of recognition, acknowledgement, and avoidance in the play, interpreting them through the lens of philosophical scepticism. In the second half he

¹⁰ 'The Avoidance of Love' is an essay that is primarily about *King Lear*, though in the example of the joke with which I began the chapter, Cavell refers to *Othello*.

broadens his focus to puzzle on the role of the audience, asking: ‘What is the state of mind in which we find the events in a theater neither credible nor incredible?’¹¹

It is in answer to this question that he gives the example of someone rushing on to the stage in an attempt to ‘save’ Desdemona during a production of *Othello*. He then asks how one might describe the mistake they have made, or explain to them what exactly makes their behaviour inappropriate.

How do we imagine we might correct him? – that is, *what* mistake do we suppose him to have made? If we grant him the concept of play-acting, then we will tell him that this is an instance of it: “They are only acting; it isn’t real.” But we may not be perfectly happy to have had to say that.¹²

We ‘may not be perfectly happy to have had to say’ that what is happening is not real because play-acting is not the only thing that is happening. As I have already observed, our listening and watching as audience members at the theatre is held somewhere between one reality and the other – between the story and our listening. And in order for the performance to hold value we must at some level both believe its story and understand its fiction. Cavell goes on to complicate this further by noting that, though we might at the same time believe in the reality and understand the fiction of characters in a play, it is hard to describe what it is that distinguishes this activity from the activities of looking and listening outside the theatre.

Neither credible nor incredible: that ought to mean that the concept of credibility [in the theatre] is inappropriate altogether. The trouble is, it is inappropriate to real conduct as well, most of the time. That couple over there, drinking coffee, talking, laughing.

¹¹ Cavell, p. 327.

¹² Cavell, p. 328.

Do I believe they are just passing the time of day, or testing out the field for a flirtation, or something else? In usual cases, not one thing or another; I neither believe nor disbelieve.¹³

Cavell's point is that we are *always* dealing with the negotiation of a certain kind of fictionalisation in our lives. We interact with people in ways that treat them as if they were fictional characters every day, and – as Fiumara also observes – we are constantly faced with the challenge of encountering other people in our lives without either glossing over their presence or making them characters in our own narratives. In order to stop encountering other people in the world as characters, Cavell suggests, we must be prepared not only to see and hear them, but also to reveal ourselves, to let ourselves be recognised; but in order to do this, we must first acknowledge the impossibility of ever being fully recognised. And it is this double bind, he suggests, that theatre invites us to lay down.

The conditions of theater literalize the conditions we exact for existence outside – hiddenness, silence, isolation – hence make that existence plain. Theater does not expect us simply to stop theatricalizing; it knows that we can theatricalize its conditions as we can theatricalize any others. But in giving us a place within which our hiddenness and silence and separation are accounted for, it gives us a chance to stop.¹⁴

Cavell's title for the essay is 'The Avoidance of Love'. The title refers to the many characters in *King Lear* who avoid recognising or being recognised by those they love because of the fear and shame that cluster around the most profound acts of human encounter. But equally, if not more importantly, the title refers to the peculiar status of

¹³ Cavell, p. 329.

¹⁴ Cavell, p. 333.

audience members. Hidden and silent and still, when we are in the audience at the theatre, we are invited to lay down the burden of being recognised. And it is in this state that we might become capable of performing an act of encounter that neither avoids nor consumes love, but can be in its presence, because it demands nothing of us other than our attention.

In this reading, fictionalisation is a process that happens *outside* the theatre. What Cavell is suggesting is that the theatre is not a special place where a fictional scenario can untangle some of our real-life problems, but that it is, paradoxically, in the theatre that we can practice a type of recognition that is unburdened by the need to pretend. Or to put it the other way around, it is when we are in the audience at the theatre that we might give ourselves permission to lay down the *usual* work of recognising and being recognised, both of which are intimately bound with the declarative. And it is in this relationship, which is formed without the need for an equivalent return of attention, that we might finally allow ourselves to listen.

Giving over and lying before

In the quote I used at the beginning of this section, Cavell describes the experience of being an audience member as one that involves ‘giv[ing] over time and space in which action is mine.’ In other words, it involves accepting the time and space of another person or set of people (in his example, the time and space of characters in a play, but in my reading, the time and space of the performance more generally). This puts me in mind of the phrase ‘to lie before’, which you might remember from the previous chapter as one of the meanings of *legein* that Fiumara identified as relating to the attentive state. In that first chapter, I likened the idea of something being laid before someone with the

work that happens in a theatre: in the theatre, audience members are literally invited to accept, or encounter, what lies before them. What is special about the theatre, then, is a kind of choreography of attention: the act of being-in-audience at the theatre, whether before a proscenium arch in a darkened auditorium or in an entirely different setting, involves the circulation of attention in a way that is markedly different from the circulation of attention outside the theatre. Where a certain kind of exchange is required outside the theatre, inside we are given permission to observe, to *be with*, uncoupled from the need to respond.¹⁵

There is another way of describing this state, and it is to do with our capacity or incapacity to be articulate, where articulacy describes clarity of expression through words that furthers a declarative or logical progression. In the prelude to this chapter, I described a moment during a symposium in which I felt as if the room was turned upside down because someone had used words and silence in a way that altered the relationship between listening and speaking. And perhaps those moments when being-in-audience is an act of listening – an act that Cavell describes as the giving over of time and space, that Fiumara (via Heidegger) describes as a letting-lie-before, and that I have described as the holding of attention – might also be described as a kind of inarticulacy. Perhaps, as audience members, we give ourselves permission to be inarticulate in these moments because our job in these moments is not to articulate. We are silent, hidden, and still. Similarly, the actor or performer, whilst inhabiting a role that is about ‘performing’ (i.e. speaking and gesturing), is relieved of the duty of articulacy because they have permission to use words and gestures without needing to claim them as their own. So as well as being an act in which we are silent and hidden and still, as well as being an act

¹⁵ I would argue that this is true at a certain level even in more interactive performance settings – though the details of how it happens, of course, change.

in which we are relieved of the need to move into 'action', being-in-audience might also be described, in its ideal state, as an act in which we are relieved of the need to be perceived as articulate in order to be involved.

In later chapters I will explore the problematic relationship between this ideal of being-in-audience and the complicated, embodied reality of navigating towards this state; and I will acknowledge that the details of how one comes to be in audience vary depending on what kind of body one inhabits. For now, I simply want to notice this relationship between listening and the hidden, silent, and still mode of being-in-audience, asking what it is that holds this relationship in place, and what it takes to test its limits.

2. Performing silence

As part of our effort to approach the idea of repair, Goat Island's new piece is an attempt to perform incompleteness, to force a kind of fracture that does not automatically heal itself. To an unsuspecting audience whatever we do appears to be the whole show. Our task is to make clear, in unknown territory that irreversible rupture has taken place.¹⁶

And so I return to my earlier question: what does it mean to reply with silence when speaking is expected? The first time I asked it, I was describing a question and answer session at a symposium. This time, I will ask the question in relation to two performances that contained staged moments of silence and stillness. The silences had different durations: the first was a fifty-five-second silence, duration unannounced to the audience, as part of the first ten minutes of a two-hour performance; the second was a twenty-minute silence that was announced several times in advance, and was held at the centre of an hour-long show. In spite of the differences between them, they were both created as attempts to challenge notions of progress and wholeness; both were created to encourage or suggest the potential for performance to inhabit modes of hesitancy, slowness, and attentiveness. And there were distinct similarities in the ways in which audience members responded to these silences – most notably, in the ways that some audience members attempted to resist or refuse them.

The word 'reply' in my question is somewhat less appropriate for a performed silence than for a question and answer session. What, you might ask, is a performance replying *to*? But I have kept this phrasing because it points towards the complexity of the audience-performer relationship, which, like any relationship, is shaped by certain

¹⁶ Christopher, *op. cit.*

demands and expectations. I have suggested that being-in-audience might be an act in which we are all implicated – audience members and performers alike; that at some level, we all enter into the activity of ‘being-in-audience’ in spite of our overtly different roles. And I want to continue exploring this proposal. But perhaps these two examples will begin to uncover the type and extent of work involved in this act, as well as indicating when and how it stops being possible.

Fifty-five seconds

In the quote above, part of which also opens this chapter, Karen Christopher describes the role that silence played in Goat Island’s 2004 show *When will the September roses bloom? Last night was only a comedy*, a show she both co-created and performed in. The show, she tells us, was an attempt to approach ideas of loss and repair by creating something that was visibly and undeniably fractured. Holding silent and still for fifty-five seconds, indicating that a part of the show was missing, the performers attempted to make this fracturing tangible.

Shortly after our new performance begins, Bryan [Saner] enters to announce that we are missing the beginning. This announcement is followed by 55 seconds of silence in which those of us on stage wait motionless for the time to pass.¹⁷

Christopher goes on to describe the impossibility of actually embodying silence and stillness – the fact that, while we are alive, our bodies continue moving and making sound whether we want them to or not. She describes her own experience of performing silence and stillness during the show each night, noting that – in spite of, or alongside,

¹⁷ Christopher, op. cit.

her attempts to keep a soft gaze, to be listening rather than announcing something with her body, to be as close as she could to embodying stillness and silence – she was aware of her thoughts, the movement in her mind, and the tiny hairs on the skin of her face that wavered ecstatically of their own accord. She goes on to reflect on the way this silence might feel for an audience member:

As an audience, silence allows time to think about ourselves, our seat, the people opposite, or the fleeting thoughts and associations we are having in relation to the performance we are watching. Some people experience a kind of falling into the void of silence, others find a space opening up and filling with thoughts. For some it is terrifying to be left with our own devices, our own thoughts. Waiting for something to happen brings on existential crisis. That is why the doctor's waiting room has magazines.¹⁸

To an audience member, then, the silence of the performers – if it is not filled with other distractions of the mind – might feel unbearable. The audience have come to watch a performance, and perhaps this is not the kind of performance they had in mind. Sometimes, an audience member might be so unnerved by the experience of watching people holding still and silent for an extended period on stage that they might be moved to act. During one particular performance Christopher describes an audience member who called out after forty-eight seconds of silence: “Do you need help?”¹⁹

She goes on to ask what it might be that precipitates such a response to what is a fairly short period of silence and stillness (though the audience, of course, do not know how long it might last). She concludes that perhaps the audience member herself needed help – that her cry might have been a call for rescue from the existential crisis that had

¹⁸ Christopher, op. cit.

¹⁹ Christopher, op. cit.

been brought on by the suspension of activity on stage. Or she could have been genuinely asking whether the performers needed some kind of assistance from the audience in order to continue moving forward with the performance. Either way, it is clear that she felt some kind of intervention was needed.

What is fascinating to me about this story is what it reveals about the audience-performer contract, and how it throws into light the work that happens between audience and performer. The shout from the audience is not unlike the joke that Cavell recounts, of the person who gets up on stage to try and save Desdemona during a production of Shakespeare's *Othello*. Cavell's question, 'Why do I do nothing, faced with tragic events?' is reversed here. Why, I might ask, does this audience member feel that the silence is so unbearable that she can no longer remain still and silent herself? What is it that moves her to intervene? If I follow Cavell's logic, then she shouts out as a way of refusing the terms on which this performance is taking place: she refuses to be still and silent and hidden any longer; she demands to be seen, she demands action; waiting for something to happen has brought on existential crisis. In both examples, the act of offering help risks destroying the very thing that is taking place. This brings me back to a text I mentioned in the previous chapter, Rancière's 'The Emancipated Spectator', in which he identifies the performance as a third thing that sits between audience and performers, and which allows their encounter to take place. In the example of the woman who asked the performers if they needed help, just as in the example of the person who enters the stage to try and save Desdemona, their actions risk obliterating what lies between audience and performers – the performance itself, and the set of relationships that are gathered around it.

The shout from the audience member who asks whether the performers need help reveals how difficult the work of being-in-audience actually is. Without the distraction

of action or entertainment – in Christopher’s example, like the stack of magazines at the doctors – audience members and performers are doing nothing more than holding silence together. This is a risky business precisely because it veers so close to collapsing the two listenings of theatre. If we are all sitting in a room for a defined period of time holding attention together in a certain way, this might be called theatre. But if we are all sitting in a room, and we are unable to continue holding attention together, then we might just be sitting in a room. In my first chapter, I suggested that theatrical listening is always moving between the listening of being in the room and the listening of being in a story. When those two listenings are brought together for a moment, something exciting happens, and it feels like a rupture in the fabric of the performance. But if the story and the room become the same thing for too long, then these two listenings risk collapsing into one. At which point, there is no more theatre.

Twenty minutes

I was in the audience for the show *Elegy for Paul Dirac* by Kings of England at the SPILL Festival in London in 2011.²⁰ At the centre of the show was a silence of twenty minutes, held between audience and performers. This silence was inspired by an anecdote about quantum theorist Paul Dirac, who allegedly waited twenty minutes after being asked the question, ‘Where are you going on your holidays?’ before replying with the question, ‘Why do you want to know?’²¹ In a reflective article, director Simon Bowes describes the impulse behind staging the silence:

²⁰ Kings of England, *In Eldersfield, Chapter One: Elegy for Paul Dirac*, Pit Theatre, Barbican as part of SPILL Festival London, 22 April 2011.

²¹ Kings of England, *In Eldersfield’ Chapter One: Elegy for Paul Dirac* (London: Aldgate Press, 2011), pp. 24, 39–58.

The performance we made became a meditation on [Dirac's] shyness and quietude, not only as a response to trauma, but also as indicative of a set of values to which we (as theatre-makers and audiences) might subscribe: patience, a willingness to listen, and a carefulness in judgement and deliberation. Against the impulse toward biography and its desire to make life coherent, one anecdote in particular remains enigmatic, thereby obliging us to compose the *Elegy*.²²

This silence, then, was conceived as a way to work against the instinct towards narrative completeness that often characterises biography. Like the Goat Island silence, it was being held in order to create a kind of rupture in the narrative fabric of the show, and to challenge the desire for quick or easy coherence.

On the night I saw the show, I remember that the twenty-minute silence was announced several times in the sections before it happened, though of course as audience members we did not know how faithfully the company would attempt to enact it. At the beginning of the silence, the house lights were brought up, and they remained up throughout the twenty minutes; this meant that performers and audience members were all in view of each other. I remember becoming aware of the sounds of the space: the shuffling and breathing of other audience members, the small sounds of the performers sitting on stage, external and internal noises of the theatre building in which we were watching the show. After some time, I became aware of the frustration of certain audience members. Some stayed in the auditorium, voicing their discomfort, or giggling; others left the theatre. Bowes writes:

²² Simon Bowes, 'Quietude, Restlessness and Uproar: Towards an Ethics of Speech and Silence in "In Eldersfield, Chapter One: *Elegy for Paul Dirac*"', *Performing Ethos: International Journal of Ethics in Theatre & Performance*, 4.1 (2014), 41–52 (p. 42) <https://doi.org/10.1386/peet.4.1.41_1>.

During the silence, the slightest occurrence becomes a major event. For a short time, everyone seems attentive, and trained on ambient sounds and noises. Increasingly, these give way to louder human ones, predominantly voices, and then the creaking of chairs. [...] [T]he silence gives way to something else, as the event becomes a withholding of the kind of eventhood an audience tends to expect; a non-event standing-in-for an event; a non event during which, in any case, much drama ensued.²³

The drama that Bowes refers to in this quote was at its most heightened on the night that I was in the audience. During this particular performance, after some time had passed, one of the audience members let out a loud scream as they ran out of the theatre. A small cluster of others proceeded to exit the theatre following this person, and one of the performers, whom I later learnt was related to the audience member who had screamed, also temporarily left the space.

What was being asked of us was simply to sit together, holding something – a silence – open. It was positioned as a generous act. Raising the house lights was clearly part of this generous offer; I suspect that the company kept the house lights on because they wanted us to feel safe and welcome to move if we needed to. But what is most fascinating about this silence is that, in my experience of it – and I know that this is a sentiment shared by some of the company members as well as other audience members – it failed to move into a place where it felt equally held between us. We were, at the invitation of the company, attempting to hold open a silence, but in my experience we never moved beyond an awareness that we were *enacting* the holding open of silence. Though the performance raised questions – as Bowes had hoped – about patience and passivity, it was because those qualities felt like they were struggling to become present during the

²³ Bowes, pp. 45-46.

silence. With the house lights up, I was more acutely aware of myself in the presence of the other audience members and performers. By the end of the silence, I felt as if I could not have been further from being patient, passive, hidden, silent, or still.

I want to reflect briefly on something that is raised in a piece of writing about the Kings of England show, a co-authored piece by writers Mary Paterson and Theron Schmidt, who were resident during the SPILL Festival where the show was presented. In his section of the writing, Schmidt describes the twenty minute silence as follows.

It is an event in which the performers are most like the audience, as we all sit silently in the same room; and yet it is also an event that most exacerbates our differences, the unequal distributions of power, our surrender of control to those who are on stage.²⁴

Schmidt's writing questions the nature of the silence that is taking place during the Kings of England show. He reflects primarily on the question of whether the audience and performers are able to hold a silence together, quietly, hesitantly, introducing what Bowes refers to as an ethical encounter characterised by passivity²⁵ – a 'doing nothing' that might be parallel with Cavell's – or whether, in a theatre, that silence will only ever be a performance, an enactment of silence, in which we are all distinctly aware of our differing roles as audience members (who are exposed, both in our visibility, and by the fact that we do not know what is happening next) and performers (who are less vulnerable, their visibility masked by costumes and stage lighting, their not-knowing

²⁴ Mary Paterson and Theron Schmidt, 'Kings of England', *SPILL STINGS*, 2011 <<https://spillfestival.com/show/spill-stings-12-kings-of-england/>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

²⁵ Bowes states this several times in this and other writings about the show. For example: 'Performance affords a perpetual reinvestment in, and re-description of, the possibilities to be seen and heard; a time in which it seems imperative to take action, to advocate dissent and to register refusals; to not only be active, but to be seen to be active. Against this urgency, we take pause. There may yet be time to consider the virtues of patience, and to enquire whether passivity reveals to us an ethical or political value.' Bowes, p. 48.

masked by the fact that they understand the parameters of this silence and what comes next in the performance). The silence in this show is, after all, an enactment of another silence that happened at another time in another place. Maybe this is part of what make it so difficult to grasp.

Perhaps one of the answers to my question, ‘What does it mean to reply with silence when speaking is expected?’ might be that, in the theatre, it means that by default the silence in question becomes equivalent to speaking. In the example I recounted in the prelude, when Lorena Rivero de Beer held an unexpected silence in response to a question during a symposium, her silence and words replaced speaking with a challenge to the very hierarchies of speaking and listening that had been framing the session. But the setting is different in a theatre. This is partly because theatre always makes a double gesture: it is always held by silence, and stillness, and hiddenness; and it is always also in relationship with a third thing. In the two examples I have given, this third thing is the performance of a(nother) silence.

In order for theatre to happen, as I have noted in relation to the Goat Island silence, both elements of the double gesture need to remain intact. When they are collapsed over a long period of time, particularly if the house lights are on, the listening of the audience risks becoming one with the performance itself. Both Christopher and Bowes note that the audience’s relationship to waiting is challenged, maybe transformed, in the moment that the performers hold silent and still. In this moment, the waiting of the audience is thrown into a kind of turmoil or anxiety. They are no longer quite so silent and still and hidden. Instead, in this silence, all kinds of thoughts might occur. The possibility of ‘doing nothing’ is somehow harder to reach. And the audience might feel obligated to perform. Rather than withholding or standing in for an event, then, as Bowes suggests in his article, I would

suggest that in *Elegy for Paul Dirac* the twenty-minute silence held by the audience risked becoming too much like the event it needed to contain.

Giving audience

In her article, Christopher goes on to reflect further on what it is that might feel so difficult about holding silence together:

We are unaccustomed to sitting quietly in a silent theatre space. The uncertainty that creeps in is like the uncertainty of resting next to someone whose ways are unfamiliar. It is a moment of co-existence with that which is unfamiliar. The ability to be comfortable with this relationship is linked in my mind with the ability to tolerate difference.²⁶

This final quote from Christopher's reflections feels important. Sitting in silence and stillness with other audience members and performers risks revealing our vulnerability as listeners, exposing the fact that we are strangers to each other. This fact is exactly what gives performance its potential. It is a structure through which strangers might meet, in a way that does not necessarily assume common origins, only the common ground of the performance itself; and that ground, Rancière's third thing, allows each of us to approach it from our own vantage points, as separate beings performing a shared activity. But, as Christopher notes, the ability to tolerate difference is not one that comes easily. It takes work to be with others, and it is sometimes uncomfortable work that we are not always prepared to do.

²⁶ Christopher, op. cit.

It feels useful at this point to briefly consider the term 'audience' as a sign which is often used as if to denote a singular species and yet describes a group of people who bring different readings, histories, and frameworks of expectation to the activities of watching and listening. Alice Rayner, in her essay 'The Audience: Subjectivity, Community and the Ethics of Listening' has suggested that rather than using a singular noun, it might be more accurate and productive to think of 'audience' as a plural act:

Listening is not simply auditory; it is a framing of the speech. That framing may certainly be partially determined by desire and capacities as well as by the form of the petitioner's representation. [...] The auditor is in the position of both *being* an audience and *granting* an audience to. Audience, in this example, is something that is given, so that the "being" of the audience, what the audience is, is constituted by an act of giving: audience, in this perspective is not a thing or a person but an act.²⁷

In this reading, the act of giving audience is one which explicitly holds a certain agency or power. Simply put, while performers, writers, and directors may create the material that is to be seen and heard, they are reliant on there being other people who are prepared to give their attention to that material. The idea of 'audience' then moves from its frequent portrayal as being on the passive side of an active-passive exchange to being a state of responsibility for what is ultimately an active and conscious process on all sides.

The roles of audience and performer in this reading might be said to parallel those of host and guest. Yet what Rayner makes clear in her article is that being-in-audience cannot be broken down into a simple exchange in which one party is giving and one is

²⁷ Alice Rayner, 'The Audience: Subjectivity, Community and the Ethics of Listening', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 7.2 (1993), p. 20.

receiving; on the contrary, as she suggests later, the sign 'audience' might be said to be shifting between or even simultaneously occupying various positions. Drawing on the work of Bert O. States, Rayner compares these audience positions to the pronominal matrix, in which, depending on its position, audience might be operating as 'I', 'you', 'it', 'we', or 'they'.²⁸ This puts me in mind of Trinh T. Minh-Ha's quote from the prelude, where she suggests that silence might be explored not simply as lack, but as a will not to say, or as a will to unsay, and as a language of its own. The listening of an audience always holds many positions – it is literally and figuratively an act that is made up of different perspectives.

²⁸ 'Like the syntax of the pronoun, the "audience" is a shifter, changing both in what body it designates and in what position: variously operating as an "I," a "you," an "it," "we" or "they." From the vantage point of the performer, Bert States has described these "pronominal modes" as the "self-expressive" (I); the "collaborative" (you); and the "representational" (he/it that constitutes character) (160). The audience might also be said to operate in these modes.' Rayner, p. 7.

3. The choreography of attention

After I had drafted the prelude for this chapter, I sent what I had written to Lorena Rivero de Beer so that she could check it for factual accuracy, and to ask whether she was happy with me publishing some of the more personal facts in the description. In her reply, she said that – although she did not remember it exactly – she remembered something of the question that had been asked during that session, and why it prompted her to respond in the way that she did.

As I remember that moment silence was a response to the overwhelming feeling I had of speakers speaking over and covering up with logical thinking the uncomfortableness springing from the impossible position of having to talk about the function of silence for minorities.²⁹

Although in some ways it does not matter what the topic of the question was that she was responding to, Rivero de Beer's email reply gave me pause for thought. I was struck by the phrase 'the function of silence for minorities', which suddenly brought a whole new level of sense to her response on that day. What her email clarified for me is that it would be impossible to speak in a 'logical' way about the relationship between silence and oppression without somehow re-enacting and re-perpetrating the structural violences in that relationship. This was why she responded to the question in the way that she did: because it was the only response she could give in that moment without undermining her own message with her words; and because she felt an urgent need to make visible the very terms on which we were having the discussion.

²⁹ Personal correspondence with the author (12 April 2017), reproduced with permission.

Rivero de Beer's response also brought me a new understanding of the following paragraph from Fiumara's writing.

'Rigour' and, conversely, misunderstanding are deeply rooted in the exclusion of listening, in a trend which brooks no argument, where everyone obeys without too much fuss. These interwoven kinds of 'reasoning' lead us into a vicious circle, as powerful as it is elusive, a circle that can only be evaded with a force of silence that does not arise from astonished dumbfoundedness, but from serious, unyielding attention.³⁰

For a long time, I was puzzled by Fiumara's use of the word 'unyielding' in this paragraph. The problem that I encountered was one of perception. I had always perceived listening to be a yielding activity, one that was about relinquishing a fixed position or perspective in order to move towards a state where one could receive anything that was being offered by the speaker. Listening, to me, seemed to be about giving way, being responsive, maybe even about giving away. However, as I understand it now, this perception I had was one that both grew from and fed the assumption that listening is always subservient to speaking, and that it requires – at some level – a negation of the listener in favour of the speaker or the speech. In this equation, listening needs to be yielding *in order to accommodate speaking*, and listening is always defined by what is being declared.

But when I researched the meaning of the word 'unyielding', I found that it was originally associated with a notion of payment in return; rather than simply meaning 'inflexible' it means 'not to be given in return' i.e. not becoming a transaction.³¹ This turned things

³⁰ Fiumara, p. 11.

³¹ See 'yield v.' in *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*, ed. by Robert K. Barnhart (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1988), p. 1254.

around for me. I realised that perhaps the unyieldingness that Fiumara describes in this paragraph is one in which a cycle of logic that constantly reinforces itself can only be broken by a listening that refuses to be defined in relationship to that very logic. This is how listening avoids getting caught up in a vicious circle of logic, oppression, and linguistic violence. Of course, once I had made this link I realised that I already knew this meaning of the word ‘unyielding’, which describes something that does not bear fruit or produce goods. Something that is unproductive is something that fails to continue a cycle of production on the terms that have been dictated – it is a kind of resistance. Rivero de Beer’s silence was not remarkable because it occupied the most powerful position in the room, but because it redefined the terms on which power was operating, and because it turned our attention towards the often hidden hierarchies in those very structures.

In terms of the listening of being-in-audience, I can now reconceive Fiumara’s phrase, and this whole paragraph, as sitting in relation to what Cavell describes as the ‘doing nothing’ of audience. When I am engaged in the act of being-in-audience, I am attentive to something else; and I give over my attention to this something else while also remaining firmly within my own life. In this context, the phrase ‘serious, unyielding attention’ shifts from being an absolutist and utopian ideal to being something that applies to each moment in time as it occurs. A listening that does not yield, it turns out, is no less responsive or responsible; it is a listening that is embodied and attentive at once, recognising its own limits in order to allow something else – refusing the usual parameters on which encounter, recognition, and production of meaning happen outside the theatre.

Having spent some time with this particular paragraph, I felt that it was important to read it in the original Italian in which Fiumara wrote it.³² I was surprised to find that the phrase that has been translated as ‘serious, unyielding attention’ in English was originally written as:

un’apertura radicale ed irriducibile.³³

The word ‘attention’ has been used in English to translate the Italian *un’apertura* – an opening. This is the first thing I noticed: Fiumara describes the attention of listening as a kind of opening. Secondly, and perhaps most strikingly, the word that is translated as ‘serious’ is in fact *radicale* in Fiumara’s original Italian. The seriousness of which she writes is a seriousness that is described as being related to roots and the radical. And finally, she describes the silence of listening as *irriducibile* – irreducible, unyielding, but also uncompromising; literally ‘that which is not able to be led away’. So I might say that the ‘serious, unyielding attention’ that Fiumara describes is an opening in the root structures of how we think and communicate. The attention that she describes earlier in the quote as a force of silence is located in the very structures that allow us to listen. And part of its unyielding nature is that it does not give in to a logocratic culture in which speaking dominates, even while it always exists in relation to that which is declared or visible.

It is this unyielding listening that I equate closely with Cavell’s ‘not doing’ and that I will go on to describe in later chapters as a kind of resistance to the dominant modes of

³² Sadly, I have not been able to read the whole book in its original Italian within the timeframe of this PhD. Translation, of course, is a complex series of negotiations across languages. In taking a small phrase such as this for examination I want to be clear that I am not attempting to conduct a detailed textual analysis but rather asking what the original Italian reveals that might be helpful for understanding the listening that Fiumara is describing, and in turn how this might be helpful for thinking about the work of listening within the context of theatre.

³³ Gemma Corradi Fiumara, *Filosofia dell’ascolto* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1985), p. 22.

communication that we use in everyday exchanges, where a certain return is required, and where value is constructed based on what is said or shown. In the constructed environment of the theatre, there is an opportunity to reconfigure this exchange, so that, whilst declarations are made and actions are performed, all of these are underlined by the fundamental activity of being with what lies before.

[end of chapter two]

And you

you were quiet

and not lonely at all.

Chapter Three: Gathering

(on *Lying Fallow*)

Prelude



It was a large room. Full of people. All kinds.
And they had all arrived at the same building
at more or less the same time.
And they were all free. And they were all
asking themselves the same question:

What is behind that curtain?

- Laurie Anderson ¹

¹ Laurie Anderson, 'Born, Never Asked' on the album *Big Science* (Warner Bros, 1982)

From the ages of six to eighteen I lived with my parents in a small town near Oxford and occasionally my dad would take us all to the Oxford Playhouse to see a play. This, I believe, is one of the key places I learnt to love theatre. More specifically, this is where I learnt to love the occasion of going to the theatre. And one of the things that thrilled me most was the thing I understood least: before the show started, during the interval, and right at the end of the show when it was time to leave, a large, somewhat unattractive, mysterious object came noisily down from the top of the stage and hid the stage from the audience. I remember that this white industrial-looking screen had printed on it the quotes, “What, has this thing appeared again tonight?” and “For thine especial safety” and then in smaller type the name ‘Hamlet’ and some numbers. I never really understood the function of the safety curtain nor did I fully appreciate its Shakespearean references (‘Hamlet’, I remember thinking, was the name of a cigar that I had seen advertised at the cinema), but somehow its consistent appearance enthralled me. In particular, the quote, “What, has this thing appeared again tonight?” made a joke that I felt I understood; in the moment that the safety curtain made an appearance, it also commented on its own act of appearance!

Nowadays it is increasingly rare that I encounter the types of performance that take place in a proscenium arch theatre with a safety curtain. I’m more likely to attend performances that are site specific or that take place in studio theatres without curtains of any kind. However, I find it helpful to remember that whilst the content of those early shows at the Oxford Playhouse sometimes moved me greatly, it was the repeated appearance of the machinery of the theatre that enthralled me. It was the combination of all the elements – the words and sounds and visuals of the play, but also the curtains, the theatre lights, and the metering out of time – that appealed to me, and that made the world of the theatre stand apart from the rest of my world. On reflection, I wonder

whether I particularly loved the safety curtain because its presence during the intervals, before, and after the show indicated that in those moments when the narrative of the play was not visibly unfolding, when the play itself was definitely ‘not happening’, the theatrical experience continued to be held in place. Each play created a focused point in time and space around which a group of people might gather; but it is the repeated act of gathering, rather than the plays themselves, that has persisted in my memory.

It has always surprised me that of all the wonderful plays I saw during those years, the thing that has stuck in my mind was a part of the furniture. But perhaps my surprise is related to an expectation that it is the play, or the performance, that creates the theatrical experience, and that everything else in the theatre supports that act of creation. What I want to explore in some detail in this chapter is another version of this creation story – one in which the safety curtain, the stage, and all the other aspects of a theatrical production exist in relation to and as a product of another more fundamental economy: the economy of listening.

Before elaborating further on this, I want to introduce a quote from performance scholar Sara Jane Bailes’ book *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure*. In this section of the book she is writing about the playwright Samuel Beckett, whose work exemplified a certain obligation towards failure in the practice of being an artist. Here, Bailes identifies Beckett’s repeated and distinctive engagement with the conditions of boredom and waiting as being both characteristic of and foundational to his work.

Beckett understands boredom and the listlessness of waiting as an a priori condition and situation of the (expectant, empty) stage itself, a space and time to be filled, so perhaps we can think of it in this way: that in Beckett’s work, the stage is not a space in which waiting

is narrated, but rather that waiting is precisely what enables the stage to first of all “appear” and then to become animate.²

There is plenty that could be, and has been, said about Beckett’s plays in relation to waiting. For now, I’d like to focus on this particular aspect highlighted by Bailes, that Beckett’s theatre not only enacts but arises from – is made (visible and audible) by – waiting. The plays take place within this act of waiting; they are both *about* and *made of* the waiting of the audience, the characters, and (arguably) the actors.³ This strikes me as being deeply resonant with Fiumara’s proposal that:

[...] something can ‘speak’ if it is listened to, rather than there being something it might say, that one would subsequently attend to ‘by means of listening.’⁴

In Fiumara’s example, it is listening that creates the conditions in which speaking might occur; the act of declaration or manifestation is therefore defined not primarily by what is said or presented, but by the listening that allows it to become a relational event. Just as Beckett’s stage exists through and with the waiting of the audience and characters/actors, Fiumara’s proposal (and mine) is that any form of speech or action derives its agency and shape from the attention within which it is held. The illusion that it is always speaking that creates listening, then, is entirely one of habit and perception.

² Sara Jane Bailes, *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure: Forced Entertainment, Goat Island, Elevator Repair Service* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), p. 26.

³ As Bailes notes of her own experience: ‘Beckett dispensed with many of the tricks of the stage that can potentially fail the performer attempting to do her job – costume, accent, disguise, feigned emotion, the clutter and fakery of mimesis, and what to do with the body whilst standing still on stage. Instead, Beckett actors suffer the exposed conditions of the encounter itself: the meeting between performer and spectator as they collude in the expectation of the conditions of performance.’ Bailes, p. xv.

⁴ Gemma Corradi Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening* [1985], trans. by Charles Lambert (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 72. Note – in this quote Fiumara is specifically referring to a relationship between present-day listening and the ‘speech’ of past thought or tradition. However, she makes it clear that her point relates to listening more widely.

For each of us, there are people whom we have become conditioned to expect to hear, and there are people we don't realise we are not hearing. These behaviours relate more closely to the social structures that shape our attention than to the qualities of speech that seduce us.

In drawing a comparison with Beckett, I want to be careful not to collapse the activities of waiting and listening; though they sit in relationship to each other, each has its own particular relationship to time and space, especially within the context of the theatre. However, there is one more parallel that feels important. Listening and waiting, in contrast to their counterparts 'speaking' and 'doing', are almost always described (either explicitly or by implication) in relation to someone or something else: I am listening *to* or waiting *for* x. The not-doing of listening or waiting, then, almost always *seems* to exist in relation to the action or speech of another person, thing, or event that is temporally and/or spatially separate from the subject. But Beckett's theatre – perhaps in this respect a corollary to Fiumara's philosophy – reveals the construct in this waiting: we are not, in fact, waiting *for* anything in particular, but (as Karen Christopher also observed in the previous chapter) the human condition is one of waiting, full stop. In parallel with this, Fiumara insists that the human condition is one that already has the potential to embrace listening, if only we could bear to let go of the illusion that we are listening *to* something, and just listen.

The proposition to 'just listen' without already knowing what one is listening *to* or *for* might seem simple; it is certainly very attractive to those of us who carry the myth of having an 'open mind'. But the work that is needed in order for this possibility to manifest is immense. In order to let go of the illusion that I am listening *to* something, I first have to recognise that illusion; and in order to recognise it, I somehow need to

make it visible and audible. This paradox aligns perfectly with the theatrical model: the play, or the performance, is what allows us to listen – it has been created *in order* that we might pay attention to it; but its value, at least within the paradigm that I am exploring, lies not so much in its subject-matter – not so much in the thing that we are paying attention *to* – but in its status as having created the possibility for the act of gathering that enabled that attention.

*

In her book, Bailes goes on to draw a portrait of failure as a sharpening tool in what she calls ‘performance theatre’ in the United States and United Kingdom during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. She cites Forced Entertainment, Goat Island, and Elevator Repair Service as examples of companies whose work during this time embraced the inherent and inevitable failure(s) of the theatrical attempt as fertile ground for resistance to a specifically hard-right political set of ideologies. In different ways, each of the companies she writes about used ‘failure’ to expose and work into the conditions of the theatrical exchange. Their strategies included attempting the impossible, refusing the expectations of professionalism, embracing interruptions such as stumbling or stuttering, and refusing narrative completeness or coherence – as in the example of silence and stillness in Goat Island’s *When will the September roses bloom?* *Last night was only a comedy* in the previous chapter. Like Beckett, the artists in these companies were creating performances in order to make visible and push against the boundaries and regulations that hold the audience-performer relationship in place. And like Bailes, I am drawn to this kind of performance that points towards its own scaffolding. But rather than examining the work that happens on stage (and bearing in mind Bailes’ description of Beckett’s stage as becoming ‘animate’ only once it has ‘appeared’ through the act of waiting), in this chapter I want to interrogate the workings

of the scaffolding itself, asking what it is that needs to be in place in order that the (fertile) ground of theatre might first become 'visible' and then hold the possibility for resistance.

In chapter one I described my experiences as an audience member at two performances: James Leadbitter's *Mental* and Rianna Tatana's *Monday's Child*. In that chapter I began to explore the idea that the 'work' of performance might be located in the relationship between what is usually referred to as 'the performance' and the ways in which we gather around it – the details of how we arrive at a venue and come to be in audience together. In chapter two, I explored a little further what it is that characterises the listening that happens in the theatre, and how this listening differs from the listening that happens elsewhere. In this chapter, I want to bring those two explorations together, considering how it is in the details of the act of gathering that a certain kind of listening becomes possible, before asking whether this process of gathering-as-listening might be described as a form of resistance. In order to do this, I will shift my focus away from the audience-performer relationship and towards the very act of gathering itself.

The topic of this chapter is a project called *Lying Fallow*: a seven-month exploration of the idea of 'fallowness' or 'doing nothing', in which there was no 'performance' as such, but three gatherings which I will propose were fundamentally shaped and held by many of the same parameters as other performance projects. I co-organised and took part in *Lying Fallow*, and what follows is a process of thinking-through, based on a series of written reflections by other participants which I will use throughout the chapter to structure my own reflections.⁵ I will make three attempts to describe the project. In the

⁵ For longer extracts from participant reflections, see appendix 1.

first section, I will attempt to describe the project using the lens of theatre that I have been setting up in previous chapters, proposing certain parallels between the listening of being-in-audience and the listening of *Lying Fallow*. In the second section, I will ask whether it is possible to describe *Lying Fallow* as an act of resistance to the culture in which it was produced – and if so, on what terms. In the third section, I will turn to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s writing to help me describe the relationship between listening and value in *Lying Fallow*, questioning some of the frameworks I have set up earlier in the chapter.

1. Theatre without a show

This is an invitation from Mary Paterson, Rajni Shah, Susan Sheddan and Tiffany Charrington to join a group of thirty people for a series of conversations called *Lying Fallow*.

Lying Fallow will take place over seven months, and will involve a series of three gatherings in different London locations, which will each respond to the following questions:

- How might alert quietude, not knowing, and listening be seen as spaces of change, rigour, and possibility?
- Where and how might the idea of ‘lying fallow’ be actualised and given value within contemporary society?
- What becomes possible in those times when it may seem to the outside world as if we are doing or producing nothing?

At each gathering we will return to these same questions within a different frame. This means that while the location, the season, and the light in the room will change, our conversations will become acts of returning. As hosts, Mary, Rajni, Susan, and Tiffany will ensure that the events are carefully and generously held, but the conversations that emerge will be shaped by the people who attend and the ways in which each person wishes to participate.⁶

Lying Fallow was a project that refused almost all the usual markers of theatricality. There was no stage, no set, no costume, no allusion to the fictional, no play or performance as such, and no-one was identified as either ‘audience member’ or ‘performer’. But it was a project that attempted to move away from productivity, and to

⁶ Excerpt from ‘*Lying Fallow: An Invitation*’, *Rajni Shah Projects* <<http://www.rajnishah.com/lying-fallow>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

explore instead what it might mean to be with others ‘unproductively’, without any expectation of outcome. In this way, though not unproblematically, the project can be aligned with the definition of theatre that I have been exploring, in which ‘theatre’ is defined not by something that happens onstage but by a particular mode of holding attention between people – a mode in which ‘doing nothing’ is key. In addition, although it is a project that most would hesitate to call ‘theatre’, many of its elements are directly comparable to those that I would associate with performance-making. Each of the three *Lying Fallow* gatherings was a constructed, artificial environment, set aside from and explicitly alongside the ‘real world’ and all of our ‘real lives’. They took place in designated spaces at designated times. And although the project did not take place in theatres, its planning involved a detailed and careful consideration of things that one might think of as theatrical: the light(ing) and environment each time we met; the choreography, or metering out, of time and of space during each gathering; and perhaps most significantly, a certain relationship with anonymity in the establishment of a group dynamic.

Lying Fallow is a project that is hard to classify, and my intention in this chapter is to honour that complexity. I am choosing to use the lens of theatre to think through (and with) in this first section, but I also know that others might refer to *Lying Fallow* as a series of workshops, as relational art, or might move it away from the category of artistic practice altogether, preferring the lenses of community engagement or even therapy. Indeed, I suspect that most people who took part in the project would prefer not to categorise it at all – and in many ways, this is my preference too. Yet there is something that compels me to make this parallel with the theatrical, perhaps because there are certain aspects of this project that I recognise as standing in direct relation to my own

trajectory as a theatre-maker and my own understanding of the ways in which theatre permits human relations to take place.

There is not a particularly elegant way in which to make this comparison, and so I have chosen the one that seems most obvious, which is to propose certain characteristics of theatre as definitional in relation to the activity of being-in-audience, and then to examine *Lying Fallow* in relation to each of them. The three features that I am defining as characteristic based on what I have explored in previous chapters are: that theatre happens in an explicitly constructed environment, and it is the constructedness of this environment that marks its status as standing apart from everyday life; that theatre allows people to gather in such a way as to experience their relationship with each other on terms that are different from the terms on which we are usually in relation in our everyday lives; and finally, that theatre is an act of gathering that happens in a particular place, at a particular time, for a specific amount of time, usually around some kind of performance or play.⁷

Of course, I am not claiming these as the ultimate markers of the theatrical, nor as three stand-alone elements of theatre. I have acknowledged that *Lying Fallow* could not be limited to one mode of operation – that the work taking place was a complex interplay between several modes. Similarly, I have identified the three characteristics above in order to provide a structure for thinking about the theatrical frame, and I have attempted to retain some clarity between them in order to introduce them as terms; however, as this chapter unfolds, I hope it will become clear that they are functioning as stepping stones towards a more complex series of questions. They gesture towards a

⁷ There are, of course, many examples of theatrical experiences that test the limits of this last parameter in particular. For example, I believe that this statement might apply to theatrical experiences in which ‘gathering’ is not physical but virtual. It would be interesting to examine this in more detail, though this is beyond the scope of this particular project.

definition rather than claim it; but it is a definition that I hope provides enough clarity to both allow for a discussion of what makes the theatrical, as well as to challenge what is usually discussed when one writes or thinks about theatre.

One: an explicitly constructed environment

I used to sing all the time. I am happy to sing. But there are things that should be in place. Loud guitar should be there or it should be threatening to be there at any moment. A microphone should be there to hide behind. To hold onto. A stage should be there. To stand on. To be on. To say 'I'm singing now'.⁸

Broadly speaking, within a western tradition, the explicitly constructed environment of theatre might include a building, also called a 'theatre', containing some kind of stage, theatrical lighting, props, costumes, and an arrangement of furniture. All of these physical elements invite certain behaviours and processes around them, including a particular flow of attention in the room, so that some people can perform the task of being seen and heard while others (or as I have argued previously, all) can perform the tasks of watching and listening.⁹

In the quote above, *Lying Fallow* participant Emma Adams cites loud guitar, a microphone, and a stage as the props that she has always felt she needed in order to sing in front of other people. And yet, as she goes on to describe below, during *Lying Fallow* she was surprised to find herself singing to a roomful of strangers without any of these:

⁸ Emma Adams, reflections on *Lying Fallow* (extract), provided to the author with permission to reproduce. All other references to Adams from this source. See appendix 1 for collated reflections and further information on *Lying Fallow*.

⁹ Although it is worth noting that, as I explored in chapter two, in the model I am proposing the theatre is not really a place where anyone is 'seen and heard' straightforwardly, but rather a place where the anxieties around those conditions might to some extent be laid down.

I thought 'I'm going to sing' and the vast majority of my brain responded by saying 'do not be stupid! Of course you're not going to sing'. But the bit that had decided to sing, didn't even bother responding. It just opened my mouth and a song came out. That was a surprise [...] singing to a circle of unknown people, quietly, with nothing to hold onto. [...] I'm still surprised now.

What surprises Adams is not that she is singing in front of people – this is clearly something she has done before. She is surprised because she is singing without the usual furniture that indicates (to her and to others) that she is in the role of 'performer' and that others are in the role of 'audience'. In other words, she is singing in a place that has not been designated or set up as a theatre. Instead, she is in a room with a group of people who are mostly strangers, sitting in a circle. I remember the moment Adams is describing quite clearly. It was during the first *Lying Fallow* gathering, towards the end of the day. During this penultimate session, each person in turn was given two minutes which they were invited to use in any way they wished, including the option to remain silent and still. The session was framed as an invitation for each person to do whatever they needed in order to arrive or bring themselves into the room – but the parameters around this had been explicitly defined so as not to prioritise the declarative; there was no expectation of speech or performance as such.¹⁰

In this chapter I am particularly interested in asking what it was that held that listening in place – the furniture or props that might be thought of as equivalent to the stage and microphone and loud guitar that had allowed a context, a visibility, and an audibility to Adams' singing previously. In order to do this, I will quote at length from another *Lying Fallow* participant, Michelle Outram, who is writing here about the project as a whole:

¹⁰ The whole first gathering was conceived of as a time for 'arrival', so although this was the penultimate session of the day, the idea of 'introduction' felt relevant.

Room was made for those who may not always fare well in a selection process based on being known, confident, popular, pushy or bankable. And while some people saw *Lying Fallow* as a place of anti-production – as a place of fallowness in itself – for me it still had the elements of a being a thing, rather than an un-thing. We ‘performed’ *Lying Fallow* for each other by making the commitment to ‘hold the space’ for each other, which is a particular kind of audiencing or witnessing. There was a dramaturgy to each session, as well as an overall dramaturgy across the three sessions, which we accepted and allowed to unfold. It was a space for attention and transformation, similar to what one might conceive a performance experience to create. The architectures, light and sound created a rarefied environment for us to permit ourselves to go there.¹¹

In this quote Outram chooses to define *Lying Fallow* as a kind of performance, locating the project alongside more conventionally theatrical experiences through what she identifies as its dramaturgical elements. Significantly, she aligns ‘performing’ with ‘holding space’ or ‘audiencing’ – I will come back to this. But what particularly interests me about this quote in relation to the idea of an explicitly constructed environment is that Outram places side by side two temporally separate moments: the process of selection, in which people responded to a public invitation to take part in *Lying Fallow*; and the gatherings themselves, at which those who had been invited came together. She begins by describing a selection process for the project in which she felt that there was room for those who were not ‘known, confident, popular, pushy or bankable’, i.e. those who might not do well within a selection or application process which favours the declarative. She then goes on to describe the dramaturgy of *Lying Fallow* as one that created ‘a space for attention and transformation’ in part through ‘architectures, light

¹¹ Michelle Outram, reflections on *Lying Fallow* (extract), provided to the author with permission to reproduce. All other references to Outram from this source.

and sound'. The environment, then, and the attentiveness in the room, might be said to have been explicitly created by its furniture, by those aspects of the gatherings that were akin to the theatre: the way in which the light fell in each room, the architecture of the buildings in which we met, the arrangement of furniture, and the soundscapes of the three locations. And she is correct in observing that those elements had been carefully considered by those of us organising the project. But the first part of this quote points towards the whole process of invitation, drawing attention to the fact that the environments within the rooms themselves were also created by the behaviours of the people within them; and this behaviour (as well as the selection of people in the group) had already been shaped in part by the invitation to which those people had initially responded.¹²

On closer examination, then, the explicitly constructed environment does not begin in the theatre building or its equivalent, but in the many moments when someone responds to an invitation. It is an ongoing dialogue between the social and historical pressures of the wider environment, and the spatial arrangement of words and objects that invites a group of individuals to gather alongside those pressures. The explicitly constructed environment of any theatrical encounter, then, is not due to some intrinsic quality of the location nor the objects within it, but rather the care and attention with which they have been gathered together, as well as the act of invitation that enables a group of people to encounter them at a particular time and place.

¹² *Lying Fallow* involved a selection process, which was conducted by myself and my co-organisers. This impacted the process of gathering, of course, though I have not been able to go into the details of it here. It also feels worth mentioning that alongside the project that I co-organised, another project took place, in which participants met virtually to consider the three questions from our initial invitation. This secondary gathering was organised by two people who had applied but whom we had not been able to accommodate in our selection of thirty people.

In practical terms, in the context of *Lying Fallow*, this care and attention was manifest in details such as the wording and visuals of the invitation to participate, the selection of locations and timings for each of the gatherings, the welcome when each person arrived, and even the catering. These details all point towards a key relationship between care, listening, and invitation, which I have touched on previously and will return to several times in the following chapters. For now, it is worth noting that the constructed environment of theatre begins with the work of invitation. The listening that enabled Emma Adams to sing unexpectedly, then, might be said to be the product of a whole series of details that made up an environment in which it became possible to have a voice at that moment: the invitation for the project as a whole, the furniture, the light, the positioning of bodies in a room, the time structure for each day – all of which were part of an explicitly constructed act of gathering and listening which took place alongside our everyday lives.

Two: a particular kind of encounter

Within the constructed environment of the theatre a very particular kind of encounter is able to take place – one that I have argued previously (in response to Cavell) is characterised less by the fictional itself and more by the possibility of acknowledging the limits of recognition, or even of laying down the burden of recognition. Whilst *Lying Fallow* had no ‘performance’, ‘audience’, or explicit relationship with the ‘fictional’, it did allow a certain relationship with the non-declarative and with listening. And this listening seems to me akin to the type of listening that becomes possible in the context of theatre. Referring back to my opening thoughts on waiting and listening in the prelude to this chapter, I might even describe the work of *Lying Fallow* as a kind of being-

in-audience without there being anything to obviously be in audience *to*. I will come back to the paradoxical nature of this situation in the final section of this chapter. But first, I would like to explore the kinds of encounters that people experienced during *Lying Fallow*.

David Slater writes in his reflections on the experience:

It is as if *Lying Fallow* has created a space at the field's edge of my brain that is protected from the impulses and actions that incorporate negotiation, pragmatism and compromise; a cordon sanitaire that quietly holds off the expectations of immediate knowing and immediate articulation.¹³

Slater's description of his own experience captures something of the qualities that I felt were present during *Lying Fallow*, pointing as it does towards a prioritisation of the attentive, uncoupled from the need to articulate or to immediately determine meaning. And it was not only Slater who commented on this; almost everyone who wrote a reflection mentioned the ways in which not-knowing was held as a value during the three gatherings, often in relation to our decision to prioritise a certain relationship with anonymity during the gatherings. In contrast to Slater, Anna Minton writes about the ways in which the prioritisation of listening over speaking initially felt perplexing and even somewhat debilitating to her:

[O]ver the last ten years or so, I have been accustomed in meetings for us all to go around the room and give a quick synopsis of who we are and why we are present. It seems a useful way for each individual to outline what they can contribute, and to present themselves – and their achievements – in a way they feel

¹³David Slater, reflections on *Lying Fallow* (extract), provided to the author with permission to reproduce. All other references to Slater from this source.

comfortable with. [...] Normally that starts off any meeting with me feeling pretty good about myself, confident of my place in the room. ... But we didn't do this. We just sat in a circle and whoever wished to speak did so. To be honest, I didn't really understand what was going on and felt at quite a disadvantage.¹⁴

In practical terms, this privileging of the attentive over the declarative was present early on through the ways in which we, as organisers, chose to structure the initial *Lying Fallow* gathering. It is not that names or titles were withheld, but that there was an invitation to speak without needing to first announce or identify oneself to the group. Silence was not enforced, but was explicitly valued on the same terms as speaking, and was often prioritised as a state from which to begin a conversation or exchange. Alongside this, we consciously attempted to make the gatherings 'non-productive': there was no organised documentation of the gatherings, no evaluation was conducted, no website or network was created in order to prolong the life of the project when it came to an end.¹⁵ From the moment we began devising the project, we knew that – although each gathering would be held by a simple structure (an unheld space, as explored in the 1970s feminist text 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness',¹⁶ becomes very quickly filled with unspoken hierarchies) – they needed to be held in a way that would allow someone to participate in all three gatherings without any obligation to 'speak' or 'do' in order to be acknowledged.

¹⁴ Anna Minton, reflections on *Lying Fallow* (extract), provided to the author with permission to reproduce. All other references to Minton from this source.

¹⁵ The reflections from which I am quoting throughout this chapter were separate from the project, and given in response to an open invitation I made to all participants some months after the project had ended.

¹⁶ Jo Freeman, 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness' [1970] <<http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

Minton goes on to describe how her experience shifted over the course of the gatherings, and by the end of her reflections wonders whether *not* having been invited to present a public identity during the gatherings might in fact have ended up being the most significant aspect of *Lying Fallow* for her:

Looking back on *Lying Fallow* I wonder that the success of the project and the special quality of the space created depended in no small measure on us putting aside our public personas – the public profile we’ve all honed down to present on the professional stages we find ourselves on. Instead we created a space where we were free of this and could be more genuinely ourselves, enabling deeper, unconscious thoughts and feelings to emerge and for us to be seen in a different way, which was immeasurably rewarding.

It is interesting to note that Minton uses the analogy of a stage here: that *Lying Fallow* felt like a chance to ‘step off the stage’ as it were. The stage she describes is a stage that is defined by the declarative – a stage that is about speaking as a way of defining oneself in a professional setting – and it is of course a common analogy that a stage be described as a platform for speaking. And yet remember Bailes’ description of Beckett’s stage as one that was only able to appear through and with the act of waiting; in this description, a stage on which someone might speak only comes into being through a certain quality of attentiveness.

Minton goes on to recognise that in relinquishing the declarative mode of the professional stage which she had at first desired, she eventually found a possibility ‘to be seen in a different way’. A certain kind of visibility and audibility became possible for her through the constructed environment of the gathering that deliberately held off from an immediate demand for articulacy or declaration; her description of this ‘different’ audibility and visibility is one that I strongly associate with the state of

(in)visibility and (in)audibility that becomes possible through being-in-audience. It seems to me that it is also this relationship with visibility and audibility that, in the example I cited previously, allowed Emma Adams to sing in a way that was not so much about ‘performing’ as being held by listening.

Minton’s description brings me back to the notion of being-in-audience that I explored in some detail in the previous chapter – where I described the theatre as a place where one might temporarily lay down the burdens and anxieties that usually come with the assertion of identity and the process of recognition. Here, in acknowledging a certain kind of *invisibility* that became possible in part due to the relinquishing of the declarative, Minton is also acknowledging that the most important aspect of *Lying Fallow* was – for her (like Outram and Slater in their own ways) – the prioritisation of listening, rather than speaking, as definitional. She goes on to say:

There was much that was enjoyable about that [second] day, and about the third and final time we met, not least that it was a chance to take time out from the demands of our normal lives. I had imagined this would be [the] substance of what *Lying Fallow* was about, and it was certainly important. But what has stayed with me is the experience of being together in this group of people who didn’t parade their public identities, and yet managed to find something special in their collective togetherness.

Minton identifies that it is the combination of collectivity and anonymity that defines the project for her. Without the obligation to know each other’s public identities, within a structure that did not prioritise speaking before listening, it became possible to meet each other without needing to first take hold of a narrative, ‘fictional’ or otherwise. Speaking did happen, and declarations were made, but they did not necessarily define the way in which we, as participants, related to each other. Instead, to borrow Fiumara’s

term from earlier, I might say that there was a certain unyieldingness to our listening, which was not already defined by its relationship to speaking.

Three: clearly defined parameters of time and place

Theatre is something that happens at a particular time, for a limited amount of time, and in a particular place.¹⁷ On first glance, this appears rather obvious, but I would argue that the specificity and temporariness of place and duration is an important part of what allows the listening of theatre to function differently from the listening that happens outside of it – the specificity defines the act of gathering. And in most cases, as I have already mentioned, the gathering that I am identifying as the foundational act of theatre happens in response to a performance or a play. It is the prospect of some broadly narrative event that catches the attention of potential audience members, and draws them to the theatre. In the case of *Lying Fallow*, however, there was no performance. This is why it provides such an interesting, if difficult, example to work through. *Lying Fallow* was an invitation for thirty people to gather three times, in specific places, and for specific durations. We were not coming together to create, nor to consume, but to explore a conceptual space that attempted in certain ways to resist both of these.

In the paragraph I quoted in the prelude to this chapter, Bailes observed that Beckett's stage emerged through and was held by the act of waiting; it became 'visible' through what I have described as the illusion of 'waiting *for*'. Just so, I might propose that to think of the gathering that happens around a piece of theatre as gathering *for* a performance on a stage, if not an illusion, is at least a description that is standing in for something

¹⁷ See footnote 7. This does not necessarily preclude virtual gatherings or other modes of defining time and space.

else. In fact, the gathering and the performance are happening in relation to each other, but it is the gathering – a physical gathering, and a gathering of attentiveness – that makes the performance possible just as much as the performance enables the gathering.

In light of this, it is interesting to return once more to Fiumara's proposal that:

something can 'speak' if it is listened to, rather than there being something it might say, that one would subsequently attend to 'by means of' listening.¹⁸

In describing the way in which we might 'usually' think about the relationship between listening and speaking, Fiumara describes them within a (linear) temporal relationship: something is spoken, and so it exists in the world; and because it has been spoken, because it has been declared or brought into being, it can 'subsequently' be attended to and interpreted through listening. However, in framing the alternative, she uses the conditional – something can 'speak' *if* a listening frames that thing so that it can be heard. In this alternative example, the two entities are bound by the conditions of their meeting; rather than a model in which speaking and listening are in a subordinate relationship, she proposes a model that prioritises interdependence. In the more conventional model, I might describe gathering as what happens *in order that* visibility and audibility are possible; however, within the alternative model, I might rather describe gathering as an act *through* which a certain visibility and audibility become possible. It is a subtle difference, but an important one. In describing the relationship as one that is conditional rather than consequential, I am acknowledging that what is always holding visibility and audibility in place is the attentiveness – the invisibility and silence – of gathering.

¹⁸ Fiumara, p. 72.

If I had to identify something that occupied a role equivalent to a 'performance' within the structure of *Lying Fallow*, it would be the three questions that we, as organisers, included in the invitation to participate in the project:

- How might alert quietude, not knowing, and listening be seen as spaces of change, rigour, and possibility?
- Where and how might the idea of 'lying fallow' be actualised and given value within contemporary society?
- What becomes possible in those times when it may seem to the outside world as if we are doing or producing nothing?

These questions were something like the anchor of the invitation, and therefore I could describe them as a key part of the constructed environment that made up *Lying Fallow* at the stage of invitation. If I think of them as occupying the role of a 'performance' then I might understand them as the thing that drew participants to the project.

But as it turned out, although as organisers we made sure that the questions always had some kind of physical presence in the room during the three gatherings, they were rarely if ever alluded to. This was not something that we had anticipated, and we were a little taken aback when it happened. We even discussed whether we should foreground the questions during the gatherings in order to encourage more engagement with them. But within a paradigm where gathering is the foundational act, perhaps it makes perfect sense: having gathered a certain group of people together in a certain way, and therefore having been part of creating a certain kind of listening in the room, the questions no longer needed to perform a central role. Indeed, we had made it very clear in the invitation for *Lying Fallow* that the content of each gathering would not be predetermined – that it would come from the people who were in the room. The de-centring of the questions, then, was a surprise only because we (as organisers) were

holding on to their former centrality within the invitation, because we were holding on to a declarative structure. So while the questions might have been important in defining the way in which gathering happened, they did not define or provide the content.

This third parameter, then, begins to unravel my proposal that *Lying Fallow* functioned as a theatrical gathering would. The *Lying Fallow* gatherings did occur within clearly defined parameters of time and place, and the gatherings could be said to have taken place around an invitation, which was centred on the three questions. But when I look at what actually happened during the gatherings, it did not have any obvious relationship to a 'third thing' or 'performance' as such. Therefore I cannot neatly align the work of listening that happened during *Lying Fallow* with the listenings I have described in previous chapters. In order to begin working through what this might mean, in the next section I will place *Lying Fallow* alongside other types of gathering, moving away from the theatrical frame for a moment, and turning instead towards the political.

2. Resisting visibility

How, then, do we think about these transient and critical gatherings? One important argument that follows is that it matters that bodies assemble, and that the political meanings enacted by demonstrations are not only those that are enacted by discourse, whether written or vocalized. Embodied actions of various kinds signify in ways that are, strictly speaking, neither discursive nor prediscursive. In other words, forms of assembly already signify prior to, and apart from, any particular demands they make.¹⁹

In her book *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Judith Butler describes the performative nature of political assembly, and in particular those mass gatherings of protest in response to conditions of induced precarity that have characterised recent politics: public occupations in Tahrir Square (Cairo) in 2010, as part of the Occupy movement across many cities, and in Gezi Park (Turkey) in 2013, to name but a few. Butler makes a strong case for the validity of these assemblies as political statements that exist before any demands have been made, because the very act of gathering already enacts conditions that did not exist without it. In other words, she argues that these assemblies bring into being a different sociality, one which she later describes as both plural and embodied.²⁰

I am drawn to Butler's writing about assembly because she values the act of gathering separately from its status as demand; her point is that assembly is a political act, and that its work is embedded in that act before any specific demands have been made. This resonates with the arguments I have been making about the listening and gathering of

¹⁹ Butler, pp. 7–8.

²⁰ '[W]e have to rethink the speech act in order to understand what is made and what is done by certain kinds of bodily enactments: the bodies assembled "say" we are not disposable, even if they stand silently. This expressive possibility is part of plural and embodied performativity that we have to understand as marked by dependency and resistance.' Butler, p. 18.

theatre, and in particular with my description of *Lying Fallow* as a project in which the act of gathering held value in and of itself. A protest or occupation is an activity in which the gathering itself matters – in which the very act of gathering is the ‘work’, and in which the journeys that people have made in order to gather are valued as part of that work. A political gathering knows that to gather is to create attention so that certain things – issues, people, actions – are made visible and audible in ways they wouldn’t be otherwise. And yet, of course, the differences outweigh the similarities. Though her descriptions hinge around the same terms as mine, Butler is describing an explicitly political sphere, whereas I am describing a sphere that is defined by sitting in relation to, but in important ways also apart from, the political. The purpose of a gathering like *Lying Fallow* could never be to enact change without that purpose destroying its primary function, which was to gather non-productively, without having already defined an outcome.

Assemblies realise a right to appear, and in Butler’s writing they do so on terms that are nuanced and that challenge the dominant social order. But what assemblies do not and perhaps cannot do is to realise a right to *not* appear, and to do this together with other people. Protest, by definition, has a relationship with the declarative rather than the attentive. *Lying Fallow*, by contrast, asked what it would mean to create a place where it is possible to *not* appear, and to *not* speak – a place that has been created in order to sanction *not being recognised* in a way that does not mean sacrificing the right to be included. I want to ask whether this place, which is defined by attentiveness, can also be classified as a type of resistance.

Fallowness

Fallowness, in its most common agricultural meaning, refers to land that is cultivated but not tasked with growing. There is a sense of the un(re)productive – or, to borrow a term I have explored already, the unyielding – in this meaning. But it is important to note that in the context of fallowness this lack of production is always held within parameters that are based on a carefully constructed cycle of productivity: in agricultural terms, fields lie fallow for a certain period of time in order to regain fertility, and to be put to work again. In fact, in its original meaning, ‘fallow’ means ‘ploughed land’ and only later, ‘land ploughed but not planted’; in this original meaning, then, ‘fallow’ is not even defined by a lack of productivity but by a lack of *visible* productivity specifically within a cycle of cultivation.²¹

Fallowness, then, might also describe the unseen work that happens when human beings are not visibly productive. In her reflections on *Lying Fallow*, Genevieve Maxwell explores the term by describing the ways in which the notion of ‘doing nothing’ sits within a goal and profit-oriented society. She begins by considering those times when someone might appear ‘fallow’ or ‘unproductive’ due to ill-health, unemployment, or trauma:

[T]imes of involuntary ‘fallowness’ often come at times of great discomfort – be they related to health, wealth or happiness. And yet, in these times the ‘fallowness’ is largely perceived from the

²¹ **fallow**¹ *n.* land plowed and left unseeded. Probably before 1300 *falen*; later *falwe* (about 1300), and *falow* (1440, in *Promptorium Parvulorum*); developed from Old English *fealg*, *fealh* arable land, from Proto-Germanic **falzō*. The Old English forms are cognate with East Frisian *falge* fallow, *falgen* to plow, Middle High German *falgen* plow up (modern German *Felge* plowed-up fallow land), Russian *polosá* tract of land, plot, and probably Gallo-Latin *olca* arable land, from Indo-European **pelk-* / *polk-* to turn (Pok.807). —**adj.** uncultivated. 1377 *falwe*; from the noun.’ *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*, ed. by Robert K. Barnhart (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1988), p. 367.

outside – measured by linear time, ‘achieving’ or ‘not achieving’ and other socio-economic markers characteristic of competitive, capitalist society. These times are, conversely, often in reality a time of great struggle, and internal work, of not being able to find inner peace, ease or real rest.²²

Maxwell’s words point towards an important distinction between a state of non-productivity that is chosen and one that is imposed. When it is a choice, fallowness might be carefully curated *as part* of a cycle, whereas the situations Maxwell describes above define someone by their *failure to become part* of a cycle of production that is determined by others.²³ She goes on to write:

So, what is it then, to be fallow? [...] [I]s it an active and necessary part of a whole; a part that requires patience and proactive choice, without which our crops would not flourish in their cycle and growth cannot occur? A process carefully orchestrated and proactively planned, rather than a default option bourn out of mishap?

Maxwell wrote these notes from experience: she was recovering from illness during the second *Lying Fallow* gathering, and in this text she is reflecting on that experience. Indeed, many of the people who expressed an interest in the project had experienced some version of the ‘involuntary’ fallowness that Maxwell describes in her first paragraph: a fallowness that is imposed through circumstance, when for one reason or another one is rendered unable to contribute in a way that is perceived as productive within a social context. The alternative that she describes is a process that is ‘carefully

²² Genevieve Maxwell, reflections on *Lying Fallow* (extract), provided to the author with permission to reproduce. All other references to Maxwell from this source.

²³ I would be interested in exploring the notion of ‘fallow’ as a constructed and temporary state in relation to the notion of disability as a social construct. I regret that this is beyond the scope of this PhD.

orchestrated and proactively planned'; it is this description that I feel lends itself to the work of *Lying Fallow*, and that tallies with some of the thinking I have been doing around the role of listening in theatre. Importantly, this second definition might also be a way of reclaiming the first.

Rather than an imposed state in which one might be struggling to contribute or to become active but is rendered 'fallow' or 'useless' by a social frame, then, the fallowness that I am interested in here is one that is constructed and carefully held as a necessary part of a productive society. It is a fallowness that sits in a 'beside' relationship with its wider social context, one part of a cycle next to the other. It is interesting to consider this relationship in contrast to Butler's work on assembly, and to ask whether a state of non-productivity that sits beside the productive and visible aspects of a society can nevertheless be considered an act of resistance. In order to think through this relationship, I will return briefly to Sara Jane Bailes, who ends her chapter on Goat Island by discussing their work in relation to the political context in which it was being made:

However small or great the project, however richly or poorly funded, exposed or unseen, accessible or obscure, art is never *outside* of politics; it is always a product of the economic, social, and cultural conditions of its making, and imbued with the philosophical and political limits and intentions of its makers, even as it articulates autonomy.²⁴

This is a useful reminder that if *Lying Fallow* can be described as an act of resistance to a version of politics in which visibility and audibility are everything, then it must also be described as a product of that politics and therefore in some way a part of it. But if I replace the notion of 'outside' with 'beside' – considering *Lying Fallow* as a mode of

²⁴ Bailes, p. 146.

resistance that occupied a place *beside* the social and political world in which it was taking place – then this oppositional stance might become an additional one. In other words, the project might exist not in spite of or in opposition to, but alongside the world in which it was produced. I am taking *besideness* here in the mode that Sedgwick describes it:

Beside is an interesting preposition [...] because there's nothing very dualistic about it; a number of elements may lie alongside one another, though not an infinity of them. *Beside* permits a spacious agnosticism about several of the linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking: noncontradiction or the law of the excluded middle, cause versus effect, subject versus object. Its interest does not, however, depend on a fantasy of metonymically egalitarian or even pacific relations, as any child knows who's shared a bed with siblings.²⁵

I will return to Sedgwick's writing in the final section of this chapter. For now, it is worth noting that if I can translate what is perceived as lack, or uselessness, and reclaim it as a carefully orchestrated period of fallowness, then perhaps I can find myself temporarily alongside rather than outside society. Like Sedgwick, I do not mean to phrase this as some kind of utopian ideal, but to begin an attempt at articulating the ways in which the work of *Lying Fallow* lay in relationship to the world around it, without assuming the nature or texture of that relationship.

Indeed, although it was separate from our everyday lives, *Lying Fallow* was explicitly not framed as a 'retreat' from the outside world but as an activity that happened alongside it. Each gathering took place in central London, in a setting where other people, buildings, and activity were easily observable. And there were gaps of three months

²⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 8.

between each of the three gatherings, during which each participant's life continued. These details felt important. As Wajid Hussain, another participant, states in his reflections:

The thought of having to be secluded to be fallow were clearly not required after the first session of being together. I though[t] about fallowness during the dishes, while playing with my children and it all kind of started to mean being present. Not thinking more than within the moment.²⁶

The effects of considering besideneess rather than outsidersness as a defining trait resonate in the details of Hussain's daily life. If the work of *Lying Fallow* sat not in opposition to but beside the work of being-in-the-world, then its capacity to resist the commodifying or declarative value systems of that world lay not in one locatable act but in the many ways in which content, form, and process came together during the course of those gatherings. And the course of the gatherings might be said to span from the moment of invitation through to the present day, when its effects continue to echo through the lives of each of its participants. To quote Emma Adams:

I'm fairly certain that the rest of my life will in some way be a reflection / response to those 3 extraordinary meetings. [...] It's in me now. No going back :)

Making the work 'work'

The questions I have been exploring in this section are questions of resistance and value, which bring me to the task of locating and defining the 'work' of *Lying Fallow*. It seems

²⁶ Wajid Hussain, *Lying Fallow* reflections (extract), provided to the author with permission to reproduce.

pertinent at this point to define two different arenas that might hold the idea of ‘work’ in relation to the project. Firstly, there was the work of setting up the gatherings, which was undertaken by myself and my three co-organisers, and which involved conceptualising, inviting, and hosting.²⁷ This is what I would refer to as the work of creating an explicitly constructed environment. Secondly, there was the work of gathering that happened as a result of that invitational work – the work that I have been describing as a certain version of being-in-audience. As with almost everything related to this project, these two modes are somewhat enmeshed: the work of gathering is always tied up with and in relation to the invitation that instigated it – and the work of inviting, as I will go on to discuss in some detail in the next chapter, always exists in relation to both those who are being invited as well as to those who are inviting.

In the quote below, participant Alice Lagaay attempts to position the ‘work’ of *Lying Fallow* alongside the usual economies of academic and artistic work, in which something is produced and then shared with an audience. In the case of *Lying Fallow* she notes that there was no product as such, and no audience as such, and that the financial transactions surrounding the project challenged the parameters she had come to expect.

In academia one is increasingly accustomed to having to pay to present the fruits of one’s labour. Here we were invited to “come as we are”, no need to prepare or to bring anything particular to contribute to the event, our very presence, our very being (costs covered!) was sufficient to make the work work. How unusual is this? And what actually was the “work”? Rajni Shah [Projects] is a collective that – I presume – usually produces works to be seen by an audience. Here the presence of a collective body of chosen people *became* the (non-)art – to be seen by no-one but those

²⁷ *Lying Fallow* was co-conceived and co-produced by myself, Tiffany Charrington, Mary Paterson, and Susan Sheddan. See appendix 1 for full details.

present.

(Non-)Art for the (Non-)artists? & Not outward, but inward reaching.²⁸

In this section of her reflections, Lagaay proposes that the work that happens in this kind of economy of attention might be classified as inward rather than outward-reaching because of its relationship with (non-)productivity. And in some ways, this is an accurate description – the structure of the project invited a certain amount of self-reflection, and the gatherings took place in closed spaces, so that there were no additional audience members in the room observing us, nor were we obviously in audience *to* anything. And yet, if I come back for a moment to Michelle Outram’s description that I quoted earlier, she states:

We ‘performed’ *Lying Fallow* for each other by making the commitment to ‘hold the space’ for each other, which is a particular kind of audiencing or witnessing.

Where Lagaay describes the project as a kind of performance without an audience, Outram aligns performing with ‘audiencing’. What made the work ‘work’, then, as Lagaay puts it, was perhaps our collectivity, holding the positions traditionally labelled ‘audience’ and ‘performer’ as one, defined not by declaration or presentation, but by our embodied attentive presence.

Lagaay’s attempt to locate the ‘work’ of *Lying Fallow* brings me back to my earlier description of the project as one which modelled an alternative economy of attention – one which I proposed might sanction *not being recognised* without sacrificing the right to be included. Her description of the non-productive, private environment of the

²⁸ Alice Lagaay, reflections on *Lying Fallow* (extract), provided to the author with permission to reproduce.

project as ‘inward reaching’ points towards an emphasis on what is commonly perceived as internal or private, but might also be described as attentive. In order to explore this a little further, I will look to one more reflection, this time from participant Ben Webb.

The best thing about being invisible
is not having to think of anything to say.
I wanted to be less visible,
Which does not mean I wanted to disappear.
Together we held the space.²⁹

Webb’s writing about his experience of *Lying Fallow* took the form of poetry, so I am particularly wary of closing in on a specific reading in order to serve my own argument. But I have found myself returning to this particular quote again and again, turning over in my mind the phrase ‘I wanted to be less visible / Which does not mean I wanted to disappear.’ To me, Webb’s words describe a desire for acceptance without the need for declaration; a way of being-in-the-world that is quiet, that is more about listening than about speaking, but that is not read as a failure to interact or be present. They point towards what I consider an important distinction between *being undeclared but still acknowledged*, and disappearing. This divide is also the divide between an invisibility that is chosen and an invisibility that is unchosen – the difference, perhaps, of privilege.

At the beginning of this section I quoted Judith Butler describing the significance of assembly within a political sphere, where bodies both enact and demand a sociality that is otherwise impossible within the political climates of induced precarity in which they are occurring. And I might describe the difference between those gatherings and the gatherings of *Lying Fallow* as one of privilege. It is easy to think about artistic practice

²⁹ Ben Webb, reflections on *Lying Fallow* (extract), provided to the author with permission to reproduce.

in this way – as something that happens when one is privileged enough to afford it – as an activity that takes place when one is not struggling to survive. Yet this word elides the different spheres of work that took place in the project, and hides an important distinction. The work of invitation and hosting, in dialogue with the society in which it is occurring, defines the possibilities of accessing a project like *Lying Fallow* as well as the parameters within which the work becomes possible. But the work that took place within the project, the ‘privilege’ of being less visible without disappearing, is one that should and could be afforded to all.

3. Failing to declare oneself

There is a certain sense of paradox in any attempt to write about a project like *Lying Fallow*. The act of writing itself betrays the notion of non-productivity that was at the heart of the project. And as for locating the ‘work’ of *Lying Fallow*, though I have attempted it, I should acknowledge that this too is in some ways an impossible task, not least because it was different for each of us who took part. Some came to the project wishing to engage in a thinking process around fallowness or not-doing. Some wanted the experience of fallowness to emerge from the gatherings themselves. Some had experienced a great deal of fallowness in their lives already, and wanted to attend as a way of moving on from that place. If there is one thing I am sure of it is that each of us had our own notion of what ‘fallow’ meant and whether we were gathered to discuss it or to find some way to be it.

In the previous chapter, discussing the role of silence and stillness on stage, I proposed that without a ‘third thing’ between audience members and performers, there could be no performance. According to this definition, *Lying Fallow* fails to meet the conditions of performance. Not only did *Lying Fallow* fail to identify anyone as ‘performer’ or ‘audience member’, but it also failed to have an identifiable narrative, action, or show at its centre. And while the three questions from the invitation may have functioned in a way that was *akin* to a performance, in that they invited a certain kind of gathering and drew certain people together, they did not function as a common point of focus during the gatherings themselves. So to return to my analogy from the prelude, as I have already observed, without a performance at our centre, there was nothing to wait *for*, nothing to listen *to*. In other words, the ‘double listening’ that I have thus far described as essential to theatre was absent.

This reveals a gap in my thinking, and a confrontation between my own theory and practice. But rather than attempt to make *Lying Fallow* fit the terms I have already proposed, I am interested in how these problems of missingness and failure might expand the definition I have been proposing thus far by bringing its limits into focus. In this final section, then, I will attempt to work with this idea of the missing element in *Lying Fallow*, as one more way to think through the project. I will begin by comparing the work of the project to Peggy Phelan's writing about the 'unmarked' in performance, asking how her writing about absence in relation to live performance might be relevant to the work that *Lying Fallow* was doing. I will then turn back to the gatherings themselves, asking how compassion was a factor in the way we operated, and how compassion relates to besideness as a way of being that is not defined by a centre but by a shared set of relations. Finally, I will close the chapter by turning once more towards Sedgwick's writing, this time specifically in relation to notions of lack.

Invisible and unmarked

In 1993, with the publication of *Unmarked: the politics of performance*, feminist scholar Peggy Phelan famously proposed that within the context of the representational world of art there was an opportunity to shift focus from the marked (the visible and audible object or focus of the gaze) towards the unmarked (the unspoken, the invisible, the undocumented, and the indescribable). Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, Phelan described a realm of possibility within the encounter between self and other that seemed always to be glossed over, to exist in a blind spot. Reflecting on the project some years later, she wrote:

I was trying to move the field away from a constant preoccupation with the content of performance, a descriptive fixation on what performance enacted, and toward a consideration of performance as that which disappears. I thought this aspect of performance allowed us to answer some important philosophical and political questions about loss, history and death – questions that I thought performance art had done much to pose.³⁰

On the other side of the impotence of not-being-seen and not-being-heard that were driving a certain identity politics at the time (and arguably, as Butler’s work confirms, are re-amplified today), Phelan described the limitations of visual representation as a political goal, and the power in remaining unmarked.³¹ In order to consider the unmarked as a location for resistance, she recognised the need to consciously rethink the relationship between – in her terms – visibility and power:

More than calling for a shrewd analysis of the “terms and structures of representation” I am suggesting that we rethink the entire visibility-power game itself. The relations between visibility and power are never only representational; representation is not a simple abacus adding and subtracting power from visible beads.³²

In other words, merely inhabiting the same structures with increased visibility for those who are disenfranchised is inherently limited. It serves a purpose – to give voice, or give a platform, to those who have been denied one – but nevertheless it continues to support

³⁰ Peggy Phelan, ‘Performance, Live Culture and Things of the Heart’, *Journal of Visual Culture*, 2.3 (2003), 291–302 (p. 293) <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412903002003002>>.

³¹ ‘I am not suggesting that invisibility is the “proper” political agenda for the disenfranchised, but rather that the binary between the power of visibility and the impotence of invisibility is falsifying. There is real power in remaining unmarked; and there are serious limitations to visual representation as a political goal.’ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), p. 6.

³² Phelan, *Unmarked*, p. 140.

the shape and logic of those very structures that relentlessly privilege certain lines of visibility, and to reinforce binaries between the visible and the unseen.³³

Phelan's writing in *Unmarked* strikes a chord with some of the work that we were trying to do in *Lying Fallow*, and has felt invigorating to my own attempts to rethink the theatrical frame as a structure for listening rather than a platform for speaking. In the quote above, Phelan expresses a desire to move away from (political and social) narratives focused only on content, and to ask instead what it would mean to change the very structures that determine how meaning is made and circulated within Western societies. However, in attempting to write about the unmarked, Phelan turned towards the art object – the film, the sculpture, the photograph, the play – and looked for the invisible, the unspoken, and the unmarked within the presentation of those objects, in their relationships with audiences. It was in this context that she wrote the much-quoted (and frequently misinterpreted) phrase '[p]erformance's only life is in the present',³⁴ arguing that the encounter between audience and performer might provide a unique opportunity to escape the dominant forces of reproduction. However, in writing about the artwork, Phelan never turned her focus towards the act of gathering that was holding those relationships in place.

³³ It feels important to emphasise here that Phelan was not proposing that the work of 'increased visibility' was unnecessary, nor – as the quote in footnote 16 shows – was she advocating for invisibility as the political agenda for the disenfranchised. I have cited Phelan's work in the same chapter as Butler's not in order to pit their arguments against each other, but in order to approach the question of visibility from two different perspectives, both addressing the relationships between identity politics, representation, and performativity.

³⁴ Phelan, *Unmarked*, p. 146. This phrase has led to a lengthy debate in performance studies about the role of documentation in relation to live performance, which was not the primary focus of Phelan's original comments. For some of Phelan's own reflections on this, see Phelan, 'Performance, Live Culture and Things of the Heart'.

This brings me back to Bailes, writing almost twenty years after Phelan's *Unmarked*, and also asking questions about failure and resistance within the theatrical form. The failure Bailes writes about in her book often presents itself as a gap that reveals itself in relation to certain expectations. In her examples, something that an audience might have expected from a piece of theatre – a conventional sense of 'story', a certain presentation of 'skill' or 'professionalism' – is deliberately missing, and it is from this place that the performance unfolds. The 'missing' in the performance encounter, then, is the location of performance's most interesting work for both Bailes and, on different terms, for Phelan. And in some ways, *Lying Fallow* might be described as building on this 'missing'. Instead of presenting something missing on stage, or failing to return the audience's gaze, *Lying Fallow* missed out the stage itself – the ultimate failure in theatrical production. Described in these terms, perhaps *Lying Fallow* was not a critique of commodification, as Bailes' and Phelan's work was, but a failure to enter into the process of commodification at all.

Of course, I recognise that the previous sentence is utopic – that it cannot be true that *Lying Fallow* failed to enter into the process of commodification, if only because there is never only one process of commodification at play. At the same time, I am utterly convinced by its aspiration. Which puts me in mind of Bailes' earlier quote about the relationship between a work of art and the political and social conditions of its makers – the way artworks are always shaped by the contexts in which they are made, even when they sit in resistance to that context. And this, in turn, brings me back to my proposed response to Bailes: that *Lying Fallow* might be defined as sitting not outside but beside the world in which it took place.

Being beside

If I were to say that *Lying Fallow* invited a certain relationship with compassion, you might think that I was trying to tell you something about the emotional register of the project, or about the kindness of its participants. And to some extent, you would be right. But this interpretation of compassion would miss what is most interesting to me about the term, which is its linguistic and semantic relationship with besideness. In previous chapters, I have proposed that being-in-audience might be described as a certain kind of compassion, where compassion meant being-beside, and was ultimately related to a certain understanding of separateness. In *Lying Fallow* I have the opportunity to consider what this might mean in practice. In order to do this, I will once again quote Emma Adams, here describing something that happened during the first gathering. She writes,

I remember P crying and the feeling that this group of people who did not know each other all were coming together to care for him. I felt us all, silently gather him up and sit with him and it was OK for him to cry. And this is the simplest thing in the world but it is also the hardest. Usually, even though it is OK to cry, in practical ways it is *not OK* to cry. In the world, socially, at work. Crying usually isn't OK, even though we know it should be. But on this occasion it was OK. Genuinely OK. I could feel that in the room. All of these people, silently, carefully, carrying the space for P as he cried. And then he stopped and it was done and it was a thing that had happened, that mattered, that would not be forgotten but that was OK. Was more than OK.³⁵

³⁵ This quotation has been altered to preserve anonymity.

It is the final few sentences that feel important to me in relation to the notion of compassion. What Adams observes is that P was able to cry without it becoming *something else*. In her interpretation, the crying mattered, but not in a way that meant his emotions became transferred into another sentiment or action, or even into the next moment. In other words, what was extraordinary about this moment was not that P had shared something tender or special, or that he had made himself vulnerable, but rather that as a group we were able to hold this moment alongside other moments without leaving behind the fact that it mattered.

I remember this moment too. It felt profound. But the profundity of it lay in the fact that it didn't feel like it needed to become anything else. It didn't become a moment for concern or any other kind of narrative that took away from the event as it was happening. Instead, the moment was held by the group, and then it was done. The crying and the being done happened one after the other. Each had its moment, one beside the other. This reminds me of some of Phelan's descriptions of performance in relation to the present moment; and it also reminds me of Cavell's writing about being-in-audience as being defined by the capacity to confront the impossibility of living the life of another. In this moment of encounter, when we acknowledge the separateness of each human life, we are also able to be fully *with* another person in a certain way. This is a kind of compassion. And it is a kind of listening. In *Lying Fallow* it is the listening that allowed us to be together with a certain kind of anonymity. We did not need to know each other's names in order to be alongside each other. And we did not need to make a narrative in order to make sense of someone, whether they were singing or crying or speaking or not speaking. In fact, the making sense was what might have got in the way. If *Lying Fallow* was an act of resistance, then, it was perhaps an attempt at resistance to meaning-making.

There is something else to be said about 'beside' in relation to the notion of compassion, which is that 'beside' invites the possibility of difference – of different kinds of things sitting in relation to each other, without having to be in opposition or otherwise polarised. Sedgwick writes:

Beside comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations.³⁶

I am reminded here of Karen Christopher's comments from the previous chapter about sitting in silence with other audience members as a way of sitting with difference. In the theatre, we are sometimes literally side by side with others who might be different from us. We might witness strong emotions, and we might feel strong emotions. We might feel like responding. But we do not. We 'do nothing' because our job in that moment is to listen.

Narratives of lack

In the final section of her introduction to *Touching Feeling*, Sedgwick writes about the cover image for the book, a black and white photograph taken by Leon A. Borensztein of textile artist Judith Scott in an embrace with one of her large fibre sculptures. Sedgwick writes,

The photograph on the frontispiece of *Touching Feeling* was the catalyst that impelled me to assemble the book in its present form.³⁷

³⁶ Sedgwick, p. 8.

³⁷ Sedgwick, p. 22.

Sedgwick goes on to describe Scott's life as one that has frequently been portrayed by others in terms of lack: Scott has Down Syndrome, is profoundly deaf, and was classed 'ineducable' in childhood, before being institutionalised for thirty-five years. Later in life, she was heralded as an artist, but even then it was under the banner of 'outsider' art, with the implication that she did not possess the cognitive abilities to fully understand her own process or artworks.³⁸ Sedgwick writes about her own relationship to the photograph as follows.

I don't suppose it is necessarily innocuous when a fully fluent, well-rewarded language user, who has never lacked any educational opportunity, fastens with such a strong sense of identification on a photograph, an oeuvre, and a narrative like these of Judith Scott's. Yet oddly, I think my identification with Scott is less as the subject of some kind of privation than as the holder of an obscure treasure, or as a person receptively held by it.³⁹

When Sedgwick writes about Scott's image as the catalyst that impelled her to assemble the book in its present form, she is referring to the way in which the chapters relate to each other through besideneess rather than through some kind of driving argument. I take her statement above to indicate that Scott's work gave her the courage to work in this way, when she might otherwise have felt compelled to adhere to a more conventional academic narrative. One need only look as far as the title of Sedgwick's book to see the influence of Scott's work, and this image in particular, which is so tactile. By ending her introduction to the book by citing Scott as the catalyst for *Touching Feeling* in its present form, Sedgwick also asks us to read differently, to sit with a different kind of relationship to knowledge itself, one which I have previously described as iterative or circular rather than linear.

³⁸ Sedgwick, p. 23.

³⁹ Sedgwick, pp. 23–24.

I have described *Lying Fallow* as an act of resistance to meaning-making. In reference to this, it seems appropriate to come back for a brief moment to two more texts I cited in chapter one: Jacques Rancière's 'The Emancipated Spectator' in which he proposes the performance as a third thing; and David Bohm's 'On Dialogue' which sets out the parameters for a dialogue without pre-defined topic arising from a group. Both of these operate in a way that frames an explicitly constructed environment as one in which something is created *between* human beings, in which understanding or meaning-making occurs not in one body or another but in a location that is between bodies. What Sedgwick's writing does is to propose a different relationship with meaning-making, one that could perhaps be said to hold off on meaning-making as we commonly understand it altogether.

Lying Fallow was not looking for narrative. Or at least, the narrative that it was looking for was within one layer of 'work', which was the work of hosting and of invitation. This aspect of the project needed clear parameters and needed to communicate clearly. And this work translated to the gatherings themselves which, as I have discussed, were carefully held. But within each of the gatherings, narrative and meaning-making felt somewhat redundant – as illustrated in Anna Minton's earlier reflections on not learning each other's names. Instead, I might say that the *Lying Fallow* gatherings functioned as compassionate spaces, where each moment sat beside the next. And they too were framed by lack – lack of narrative, lack of resolution, lack of visible outcomes, lack of knowing each other's names – inviting participants into a different relationship with knowledge.

In order to end this chapter, I will return once more to the lack that I have identified as sitting at the centre of *Lying Fallow*: the lack of a 'third thing', a 'performance', that might have sat between us and allowed us to be in relationship with each other in a way that

was akin to the theatrical listening I have been defining in previous chapters. As I have already stated, I do not necessarily want to resolve or disappear this problem. Instead, what I want to propose as I close this chapter is something that seems at once perfectly obvious and worth stating explicitly – that perhaps the equivalent to the third thing during *Lying Fallow* was fallowness itself – that we were holding the possibility of a different value system alongside the one we were already inhabiting. I will return to David Slater’s reflections one more time to consider this:

It is as if *Lying Fallow* has created a space at the field’s edge of my brain that is protected from the impulses and actions that incorporate negotiation, pragmatism and compromise; a cordon sanitaire that quietly holds off the expectations of immediate knowing and immediate articulation.

Slater’s ‘space at the field’s edge’ sits alongside the worlds of pragmatism and immediate articulation, and it exists as a possibility, not in spite of those things but *alongside* those things. As he continues to live his daily life, the effects of *Lying Fallow* continue to hold a certain kind of internal space. This is a different kind of doubling than the double listening of being-in-audience I described in the previous chapter in relation to Goat Island’s *When will the September roses bloom? Last night was only a comedy* or in relation to Kings of England’s *Elegy for Paul Dirac*. Nevertheless, it is a kind of doubling in which one world sits alongside another. And to take Sedgwick’s definition of besideness, it is perhaps more than a doubling, in that it does not restrict itself to one thing in comparison with another, but a whole host of possible ways of being one beside the other beside the other.

[end of chapter three]

I
am
awake
all
night

resting

alongside
the possibility

that
something

needs
to be done.

Chapter Four: Invitation

Prelude



Anyway, thank you for listening to me.

In a minute I am going [to] stand up and walk out of that door.

In a minute we all are.

I'm going to walk towards change and optimism, towards complicated struggles and joyful celebrations, towards our houses and homes and our cities and our streets, towards families and friends and strangers and enemies.

I will walk towards all these things and more.

I am walking towards them now.

The performer stands.

I hope someone is with me.

They exit.

- Andy Smith ¹

¹ Andy Smith, *all that is solid melts into air*, in *The Preston Bill* (London: Oberon, 2015), p. 86.

At the end of the show I am sitting in the audience and the house lights are up, as they have been throughout the evening. Andy Smith has been performing his solo show *all that is solid melts into air*.² Just before he leaves, as he is beginning to make his way out of the theatre, he says these words:

I hope someone is with me.

Perhaps he is asking whether we, the audience, might share his commitment to optimism. But he is also hoping that we might walk out of the theatre, just as he is now; and in performing that action, the action of leaving our seats and leaving the theatre, an action that we would have performed even if he had not spoken those words, he is suggesting that we are already with him. We are with him simply by virtue of having been in the audience. It is a beautiful ending, one that suggests that the act of gathering together to be in audience is enough; one that suggests, or reminds us, that when we are gathered together in a theatre we are also, in some sense, already walking towards change and optimism and struggle and celebration and houses and homes and cities and streets and families and friends and strangers and enemies. It is an ending that suggests that to change the world is to take a moment to acknowledge that we are already part of a changing world, and to notice each other differently within it.³ The end of this show allies the experience of being in the theatre with the many other experiences of our lives, suggesting that to take part in theatre is at once a necessary, profound, political act, and that it is continuous with all the other parts of our complex everyday lives. It is an ending that acknowledges its audience. And it is optimistic.

And yet.

² *two from a smith*, 2 December 2014, The Nuffield Theatre, Lancaster.

³ The topic of how theatre might change the world is central to this play. At the very start of the evening, Andy says: "So this ... this is about how we change the world." Variations on this phrase are repeated throughout the evening. Smith, *all that is solid melts into air*, p. 67.

And yet, on the night that I was in the audience, I had a very particular experience of this ending. I was sitting in my seat and the house lights were up, as they had been throughout the show. Andy Smith had been performing *all that is solid melts into air*. Just before he left, as he was beginning to make his way out of the theatre, he said these words:

I hope someone is with me.

And what I saw was a man leaving the theatre, hoping that someone was with him, but walking alone. What I wanted to do more than anything in that moment was to get up from my seat and to walk with him. I wanted to share his optimism, and I wanted the fact of our gathering to have given me the strength that I needed to take this action. But instead of doing these things, I remained in my seat, and I applauded along with the rest of the audience, allowing the experience of being-in-audience to officially end before I walked out of the auditorium that night.

At some level, I felt that I had failed.

As I reflect back on this moment and read the playscript, I understand that Smith did not require us to physically join him as he left the theatre that night; the reading I now prefer is the one that I described first, the one in which Smith's hope functions as an acknowledgment of what he feels is already happening when we gather together to be in audience. Perhaps more significantly, I also understand that whether I had stayed in my seat and applauded, or leapt up to start the revolution, the same problem would have become manifest for me. And that problem was not in fact about whether I was capable of moving into action; rather, if anything, it was a crisis of identity. My crisis in that moment was located in the impossibility of imagining myself in the world outside the theatre while remaining within the listening of the theatre; or in other words, borrowing

from Jacqueline Jones Royster, it was the crisis of how to translate listening into language and action.

We speak within systems that we know significantly through our abilities to negotiate noise and to construct within that noise sense and sensibility. [...] My experiences tell me that we need to do more than just talk and talk back. I believe that in this model we miss a critical moment. We need to talk, yes, and to talk back, yes, but when do we listen? How do we listen? [...] How do we translate listening into language and action, into the creation of an appropriate response?⁴

Royster's writing has a specific context and purpose; this essay, originally a speech she gave at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in Washington DC in 1995, was intended to address institutional sexism and racism and to advance the parameters for cross-boundary discourse in an academic setting.⁵ It is also primarily an essay about speaking rather than listening. And yet, bearing in mind these differences in context and aim, I would like to spend a little time with Royster's thinking around the relationship between listening, language, and action – one that she goes on to describe as being unavoidably bound up in both speaker and listener's personal history and culture as well as their marked racial and gendered status. It is my belief that it will prove productive to consider her question, 'How do we translate listening into language and action, into the creation of an appropriate response?' as a way to draw out the relationship between the constructed, temporary resistance of theatrical listening, and the wider political and social contexts of that resistance. In other words, her question might help me begin to elucidate the complex relationship between theatre, listening, and social change.

⁴ Jacqueline Jones Royster, 'When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own', *College Composition and Communication*, 47.1 (1996), 29-40 (p. 38) <<https://doi.org/10.2307/358272>>.

⁵ Royster, p. 29.

Royster begins the paragraph above by referring to the systems within which we speak; systems which, in her words, ‘we know significantly’. These are the familiar systems of the declarative: systems which not only privilege certain modes of speaking but also certain bodies as more visible and audible than others. Ten years after Royster’s essay was published, Krista Ratcliffe took up the challenge of answering Royster’s question in her 2006 book, *Rhetorical Listening*, a scrutiny of her own practices of listening and speaking as a white female academic.⁶ Royster and Ratcliffe both confront the problem of how to ‘talk back’ in a way that also involves listening; this includes the problem of how one might be able to listen without *already* preparing to talk back, and without *already* imposing an agenda. In other words, they are taking on the problem of the transactional nature of speaking and listening, asking whether and how it might be possible to change the shape of those transactions in a way that prioritises listening.

In the quote above Royster proposes the inclusion of what she calls ‘a critical moment’ within spoken discourse. She goes on to describe this critical moment as a deliberate pause or hiatus in familiar institutional paradigms – where words are customarily exchanged rapidly and without reflection on subject position – in order to allow assumptions and biases about ‘voice’ to become evident, and for this evidence to influence the shape of the discourse that follows.⁷ Taking on Royster’s proposal, in her writing Ratcliffe outlines a model for rhetoric that includes a series of specific practical exercises to encourage the recognition and acknowledgement of personal biases in a teaching situation.⁸ Both are describing a need for change that is systemic.

⁶ Krista Ratcliffe, *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006).

⁷ Royster, pp. 29–30.

⁸ Ratcliffe, p. 16.

Royster's words are of course also a tribute to Audre Lorde's famous 1978 essay 'The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action'.⁹ This feels important to note. Both pieces concern the experience of attempting to speak and to be heard as a woman of colour in a society that struggles to hear, but repeatedly creates, both the categories 'woman' and 'colour'. In Lorde's essay, the transformation in question is one that feels exposing and dangerous but also essential to survival:

And of course I am afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger.¹⁰

I believe there is a relationship between what Lorde refers to here as self-revelation, what Royster (writing almost twenty years later) proposes as translation, and my failure (almost twenty years later again) to move into action at the end of *all that is solid melts into air*. Each of these situations might be described as an attempt to move from the attentive to the declarative, in order not only to listen, but also to be heard. In other words, each of them refers to a desire to both acknowledge and move beyond the boundaries of the individual body into the social sphere, while recognising that within the social sphere the body is inevitably constrained and shaped by the systems that surround it – a state that Susan Bickford has succinctly described in relation to Gloria Anzaldúa's work as 'embodiedness and embeddedness'.¹¹

⁹ Lorde's essay was originally a paper delivered at the Modern Language Association in 1977, and was first published in the journal *Sinister Wisdom* in 1978, though the version I quote from is the one she published in 1984 (revised and reprinted in 2007) as part of the collection *Sister Outsider*.

¹⁰ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* [1984], revised edn (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), p. 42.

¹¹ 'Speech and action [in Gloria Anzaldúa's work] are entwined with embodiedness and embeddedness, with one's physical and social self, not simply as constraint or a necessary condition, but as the material with which we create. Anzaldúa stresses the conscious making of identity, but such consciousness is not separate from the physical and social substance of our lives.' Susan Bickford, *The Dissonance of Democracy: Listening, Conflict, and Citizenship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 124–25.

*

You might remember that I chose to call my experience at the end of Smith's show a crisis of identity. If I now revisit my first analysis of that moment, I was proposing that through the act of leaving the theatre, and of having been together, we as audience might already be moving alongside Smith towards change. In this version of events – which is the version I believe Smith to be advocating – the potential for change is not located in the special category of theatre or elsewhere in our lives, but in our own bodies as they cross the threshold between one set of parameters and the next, from theatre to home to school to street. In Smith's own words:

[I]t is the people in the theatre – not the entity of the theatre itself – who hold the capacity for change.¹²

In many ways I agree with Smith here – it is important to not only ascribe the potential for change to an abstract entity, but to locate it within the embodied experience of being-in-audience. However, I also feel it is important to qualify his statement. Because if it is the people in the theatre who carry the capacity for change, then that change cannot help but be unevenly distributed between those bodies, moving as they are into a world where hearing and seeing happen according to what is already deemed visible and audible. In my case, I might say that in the moment that Smith's show was ending, I was caught between my identity as 'audience member' who has the permission to be still, silent, and in very particular ways to be invisible (see chapter two), and my identity as (amongst other things) 'woman of colour' who must speak, as articulated by Lorde, in order to claim her right to participate in society.¹³

¹² Andy Smith, 'What We Can Do with What We Have Got: A Dematerialised Theatre and Social and Political Change' (unpublished PhD, Lancaster University, 2014), p. 8 (footnote).

¹³ 'In the cause of silence, each of us draws the face of her own fear – fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgment, or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation. But most of all, I think, we fear the visibility without which we cannot truly live. [...] For to survive in the mouth

I believe that theatre's most important function might be to provide a 'critical moment' of listening akin to that which Royster describes as missing from most models of discourse. Yet if this is the case – if theatre can function as a listening intervention in a model of human interaction that would otherwise have us 'just talk and talk back' – then within the question of how one defines theatre is the question of both how we move into and out of this critical moment, as well as how this movement is shaped by the bodies we inhabit as we perform these transitions. This includes the act of invitation, a complex and plural act that determines which bodies are present and which bodies are missing, as well as how those bodies relate to each other. And at the other end, as I have begun to describe, it includes some kind of transition from the state of being-in-audience to not-being-in-audience, from the particular invisibility of attentiveness to the weight of embodiedness and embeddedness. This chapter looks at both of those transitional states, and asks how they relate to the listening of theatre.

of this dragon we call america, we have had to learn this first and most vital lesson - that we were never meant to survive. Not as human beings. And neither were most of you here today, Black or not. And that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength.' Lorde, p. 42.

1. How we arrive

Andy Smith describes his work as ‘dematerialised theatre’, a version of theatre that is made up of what he considers the simplest components possible: a room, an idea to be addressed or related, a person to do the addressing or relating, and an audience. He writes:

Many examples of work of this nature exist. They include the much quoted model offered by Peter Brook in *The Empty Space* of a man walking across an ‘empty space while someone else is watching him’ (Brook 2008: 11), what Tim Etchells refers to as ‘the irreducible fact of theatre – actors and an audience to whom they must speak’ (Etchells 1999: 94), and what I myself have written about as being a process of ‘taking away an excess, reducing down to some fact of theatre, of story, of us all together here’ (Smith 2011: 413) [...].¹⁴

Yet each of the above scenes – a man walking across an empty space, the irreducible fact of actors and audience, and ‘us all together here’ – contains a set-up. The man does not simply walk across an empty space, but is held in the gaze of someone who is watching him. The actors and the audience, what Etchells refers to as ‘the irreducible fact of theatre’, are in place because of a certain invitation, because of a series of events and a physical configuration of space that meant they were able to be in that place at that time, ready to take on the roles of audience and performer. In other words, in each of these scenes, the work of gathering has already happened and ‘an audience’ is in place.

If I reverse the situation I described in the prelude, then as a potential audience member I must find my way from a world in which I am required to speak in order to assert my existence, and in which I am marked by my physical appearance and my voice, to one in which I am able to temporarily take on the mantle of being-in-audience. This journey is

¹⁴ Smith, ‘What We Can Do With What We Have Got’, p. 39.

one that can become familiar to those of us who frequently engage with theatre and performance; in fact, it can become so familiar that it ceases to be acknowledged. In this chapter, however, I want to emphasise that the feeling of being invited is part of the construct that is theatre, and therefore the work of both making and accepting an invitation is an essential part of how theatre comes to be. Having begun by describing the end of a show, I will now return to the beginning: to the invitation that is happening before one even enters the theatre.

Artists and audiences

In the introduction to her book *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed writes:

It matters how we arrive at the places we do.¹⁵

It matters because each of us is already classified – as part of a ‘we’, as ‘stranger’, as ‘friend’ – based on how we arrived, and on how we arrived before that. The act of arrival is never limited to the moment of encounter; rather, the encounter is contextualised by the many arrivals and encounters that preceded it, and these come to determine a person’s default position – both perceived and felt – in a given situation.¹⁶ This is why, before someone even hears about a work of art, they more or less consciously carry with them the social conditioning that tells them whether or not they are invited, and it is into this place that the invitation to attend or participate lands.

¹⁵ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 2.

¹⁶ This is an argument that Ahmed makes throughout both *Queer Phenomenology* and *Strange Encounters*. Later in the paragraph I have already quoted, she goes on to observe the following. ‘So, we might fear an object that approaches us. The approach is not simply about the arrival of an object: it is also how we turn towards that object. The feeling of fear is directed toward that object, while it also apprehends the object in a certain way, as being fearsome. The timing of this apprehension matters. For an object to make this impression is dependent on past histories, which surface as impressions on the skin.’ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 2.

But the shape of that encounter is not only determined by the orientation of the recipient; it is also determined by the person or people doing the inviting. So it is not simply that it matters how a potential audience member arrives, but that it matters how the person or people making the invitation arrive: the very parameters of their personal history and their relationship with language will shape the way in which the invitation is made. This is equally true if the invitation is being made through or with an institution; it matters how that institution came to be constructed, in whose shape it was made, and how it came to be visible to the person or people doing the inviting, as well as to those being invited.¹⁷ In spite of frequent representations to the contrary, then, the work of invitation is neither simple nor necessarily feel-good. It is subtle, precarious work that is inextricably linked with the social and political systems that surround it. And although it is work that is often manipulated according to diversity or happiness agendas – and therefore frequently described within the language of these agendas – it is not always work that ‘results’ in diversity or happiness. Relatedly, just like any other work, the work of invitation can be handled well or poorly – it can be used for coercion just as easily as it can be used for welcome.

The complexity of this situation is belied by the increasing appropriation and commodification of what I might call ‘invitational work’ in the arts over the past few decades – work that considers its context and audience as a core part of its identity – evidenced by the proliferation of opportunities driven by marketing and public engagement agendas, and an accompanying wave of scholarly writings critiquing or

¹⁷ This is also territory that is well covered by Ahmed. In a recent blog post, for example, she writes: ‘One practitioner relayed to me how they named buildings in her institution. All dead white men she said. We don’t need the names to know how spaces come to be organised so they can receive certain bodies. We don’t need the naming to know how or who buildings can be *for*.’ Sara Ahmed, ‘White Men’, *feministkilljoys*, 4 November 2014 <<https://feministkilljoys.com/2014/11/04/white-men/>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

commenting on the trend.¹⁸ In these contexts, the notion of invitation is often translated from its conditional status into the specific exchange or change it might yield – from the work of inviting to a perceived ‘result’ that the inviting might lead towards. The work of invitation is then described in terms that prioritise a simplistic and demonstrative relationship between art and change: the obligation that art both *make visible change* and *make change visible*. In light of this, qualities like generosity and care become tools wielded in order to generate social or cultural capital, and the invitation is made specifically in order to produce a series of outcomes or narratives required by the parameters of the support structures within which the art is taking place.¹⁹

There are other ways of thinking through the work of invitation, without solely equating it with outcome, but they are harder to capture or sum up neatly. In contrast to the narratives that I have just described, I find that if I try to identify the actual moment when the work of inviting (and therefore the work of performance) begins, it continually eludes me. It is neither the moment when an artist first announces or tells me about their work, nor the moment when tickets go on sale, nor the moment when, literally or otherwise, the curtains open and the lights go down. Whilst the work of invitation is in some way embedded in all of these moments and more, what I am trying to notice here is that it does not resolve into any one of them, and that they do not operate in a linear progression. Rather, the work of invitation takes place in multiple moments of possibility between artists and the social and political conditions within which they or

¹⁸ Examples of these scholarly writings include: François Matarasso, *Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts* (Stroud: Comedia, 1997); Claire Bishop, ‘The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents’, *Artforum*, 44.6 (2006), 178–83; Tom Finkelpearl, *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

¹⁹ Again, many theorists have commented on this, notably Shannon Jackson on the importance of acknowledging support structures as part of a complex process whereby artworks come to exist, particularly in the context of theatre and performance. See Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011).

their 'work' come to meet potential audience members. It cannot be pinned down to one moment, it always exists in the conditional, and it exists between rather than within people.

This complexity is what renders the invitation near-invisible in most writing about performance – it is incredibly hard to put into words without disappearing the most interesting and significant aspects of its work. But it is also within this very difficulty that the most important aspects of invitational work become clear. To place focus on the contexts that accompany and shape any invitation is to acknowledge the full scope of this work as well as its risks.²⁰ It is clear to me that it is within these messy beginnings that any description of the relationship between 'artist' and 'audience' must begin.

Glorious

In 2011, as part of a larger project called *Glorious*, I and several other people working as Rajni Shah Projects (RSP) spent several weeks running a market stall on Whitecross Street Market in the City of London, meeting passers-by and inviting them to have a cup of tea or coffee and to engage in a letter-writing exchange with a stranger. The letter-writing activity was one of a series of works in public space that we had developed over a number of years, under the label 'public interventions'. In order to alert people to our presence, each day we attached small labels to several hundred individual daffodils, printed with the words, 'Write a letter to a stranger' and the times, dates, and location of our stall, and we offered these flowers to passers-by. Everyone who stopped to talk to

²⁰ See William Cheng, *Just Vibrations: The Purpose of Sounding Good* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016) for an interesting analysis of this phenomenon in the world of western classical music. Cheng argues that classical musicologists must consider the ethical stakes of contemporary musical life and not only its products, and that theorists in the field have a duty to acknowledge this. His arguments have, unsurprisingly, been met with some animosity and resistance from those who believe that musicology should focus purely on content.

us or took part in the letter-writing activity was also invited to continue working with us over the next few weeks, and eventually those who wished could attend workshops during which they wrote monologues that they performed as part of a large-scale experimental stage musical a month or so later.

In a short documentary video of the stage show, created for the SPILL Festival who had commissioned the work, one of the participants – a 77-year-old man called Brian Warby – speaks about how he became involved:

Couple of weeks ago I was walking down Whitecross Street, and I saw a lady with a daffodil in her hand, which intrigued me. Anyway, she captured me, and I got involved and met a very nice lady truthfully. [...] I've never been on stage before, I'm a pure novice, a guy off the street. A retired pensioner off the street. But she and her little team have made me what this show was about.²¹

Warby's description of the process is from an interview that took place immediately following the first London stage performance of *Glorious*. It is, of course, defined by its context; I do not know if he would have said the same things had he been interviewed at another moment in the process, or after it was over. Nevertheless, in his description he tracks a very specific process of invitation: first the visual signifier of a woman walking down the street with a daffodil, which intrigues him; then the conversation, which he describes as a 'capture' that results in his involvement; and eventually the stage performance.

There are many factors that provide the background to Warby being in a place to be able to engage with the invitation that RSP was making on that day. Firstly, and I would suggest most importantly, the fact that he lived very close to Whitecross Street and

²¹ Brian Warby in Lisa Cazzato Vieyra and Ana Godinho de Matos, *Glorious at SPILL Festival 2011* (London, 2011) <<https://vimeo.com/22741642>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

would walk around the market most weekdays talking to the stallholders, so that as (temporary) stallholders we were in his everyday path and in his familiar environment. Secondly, the fact that he was retired and lived alone, and so perhaps felt he could stop and talk to us without time pressure. And finally, the fact that the visual signifier of a daffodil held by a woman (both signs that might have put off others) was – for whatever reasons – intriguing to him, and allowed him the confidence to engage in a conversation with a stranger. Interestingly, Warby never wrote a letter – he did not respond to the initial invitation to ‘write a letter to a stranger’ that we were making with our stall. And from conversations I have had with him since, I think it would be fair to say that when we met him he would not have said he was interested in performing on stage in a musical. Rather, as he suggests in the video, he felt comfortable – for a whole number of reasons – in our company, and so the invitation that he took up was initially the invitation to spend some time with the people that made up RSP at that moment. But it was the context of this initial meeting – the background – that enabled us to become visible to him on that day; and having become visible, to become approachable.

I have used the term ‘background’ here explicitly to bring the language of this encounter back into the context of Ahmed’s writing about arrival and orientation. In *Queer Phenomenology* (from which I quoted above) Ahmed describes the process of bringing those objects that are usually perceived as existing in the background – that usually provide a place ‘from’ which to think – into the fore, as a way of queering or slanting the process of orientation itself and thus highlighting the work that is too often dismissed or overlooked precisely because of its status as ‘background’.²² It is interesting to think

²² ‘In this book, I bring the table to “the front” of the writing in part to show how “what” we think “from” is an orientation device. By bringing what is “behind” to the front, we might queer phenomenology by creating a new angle, in part by reading for the angle of the writing, in the “what” that appears. To queer phenomenology is to offer a different “slant” to the concept of orientation itself.’ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 4. I will come back to Ahmed’s writing about the table in the next section.

about RSP's public interventions using a similar language, in which the presence of an unusual activity in the market might highlight the everyday activities that someone takes for granted, by inviting a different kind of attention around a familiar place. The very fact that the market is a familiar place to Warby then becomes a part of the work of that particular encounter – the work that enables the invitation to take place in the way that it does. And the fact that the market is *not* a familiar place to the members of RSP, who are aware of their status as temporary market-stall holders, shapes the way in which that invitation is made. The background, then, the place *from* which the invitation happens, is a key part of the work of RSP's public interventions. Or, in different terms, the everyday lives of participants are co-opted by RSP, 'put to work' as potential sites for artistic social engagement.²³

A generous encounter

In another context, Ahmed writes about the encounter as implicated in the politics of arrival as follows.

A generous encounter may be one which would recognise how the encounter itself is implicated in broader relations and circuits of production and exchange (how did we get here? how did you arrive?), but in such a way that *the one who is already assimilated can still surprise*, can still move beyond the encounter which names her, and holds her in place.²⁴

²³ This second description ties the project back into larger debates around where value sits in relation to socially engaged artistic practice, which I referenced in my introduction. It is worth mentioning Shannon Jackson again here, as one of the key thinkers in this area who also writes specifically about bringing the background of social systems that are usually seen as 'support' into the foreground in order to consider those systems as part of the 'work' of 'socially engaged' artistic practice. See Jackson, p. 6.

²⁴ Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), p. 152.

Here, Ahmed describes a generous encounter as one that might allow room for movement and surprise. Rather than fix someone as ‘friend’, ‘stranger’ or (to use her term) ‘stranger stranger’²⁵ – all of which limit identity in their own ways – one might attempt to recognise and acknowledge the fact that we have all engaged in *different* processes of arrival, and from this place seek to allow the possibility of further movement. It is through acknowledging the differences in the process of arrival, she proposes, rather than trying to disappear them, that a generous encounter might become possible. The arrival, then, becomes acknowledged as being embedded in a whole series of arrivals, but is not limited to replaying those arrivals.

I want to think about how this relates to the work of the invitation within a theatrical context. Specifically, I want to ask whether the invitation to gather as part of the constructed environment of ‘theatre’ might be capable of acknowledging but not reifying the identities of those who are gathering. In order to do this, I will return once more to the example of Brian Warby and *Glorious*.

RSP’s public interventions at Whitecross Street Market in London and in other locations always took place somewhere with footfall, so that we were mostly encountering people who were following some kind of everyday trajectory. In London, this meant that we encountered people who were working at the market, people who lived locally like Warby, and also people who worked in the city and came to the market to buy lunch; in other cities, we did the same activity in shopping malls, near bus stations, and in libraries.²⁶ What this meant was that this particular process of invitation always took

²⁵ '[T]he figure of the stranger may be produced as that which can be taken in only by the simultaneous production of the figure of the stranger stranger, *who may yet be expelled by this very act of taking in.*' Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, p. 133. Original emphasis.

²⁶ Full list of locations for public interventions during *Glorious* included in Mary Paterson and Elizabeth Lynch, *Dear Stranger, I love you: The Ethics of Community in Rajni Shah Projects' Glorious* (Lancaster and London: Live Art Development Agency and Lancaster University, 2013).

place in a location where passers-by were in the context of their lives. Rather than inviting people into a theatre or asking people to respond to a call-out for participants, we were looking for chance encounters in places that were already being used as thoroughfares or gathering points.

This allowed for a slightly unusual shape to the initial process of invitation; although we were asking people to make a diversion from their everyday activity, we were doing so in a way that meant they could be curious and tentative while remaining in an environment that was familiar to them. Later, if they wished, this would translate into a situation in which they were taking part in something more unknown – but by this point they were already in a relationship they had chosen to have with company members and with other participants. This affected the power relations in the process of invitation. Though we were the ones making the invitation, it was in territory where we were more recently arrived than most of those we were inviting, and in which – rather than only being attached to the label ‘artist’ – we occupied the position of ‘guest’ or ‘visitor’.²⁷ In addition, because we were not ‘selecting’ participants but inviting everyone we met, the ‘casting’ of the final show was determined not by RSP but by the people we happened to meet, and who chose to take up our invitation.²⁸

Glorious was structured in this way partly in response to the fact that the invitation to take part in theatre, whether as ‘audience’ or ‘participant’, often lands within a sphere that is limited to those who are already familiar with the systems and modes of gathering that ‘theatre’ enacts. The public interventions were intended to specifically address this

²⁷ Indeed, in response to the fact that we were there as guests, Brian Warby offered to (and later did) conduct a tour of the local area for members of RSP, sharing some of his vast knowledge of the part of London that had been his home since 1972.

²⁸ For more on this process see Elizabeth Lynch, ‘Where will the message go?’ in Paterson and Lynch.

by taking the process of invitation into places that were not related to the theatre, and by making the work of invitation function separately to the show itself. Although some people, like Brian Warby, participated in the public interventions and then went on to perform in the show, many took part in the project in other ways, by writing a letter to a stranger and receiving one in return, or simply by taking a daffodil. So the *invitation* to participate was an explicit one, but the *way* in which a person might participate was not completely determined in advance. This acknowledgement of the invitation as a process in its own right allowed an openness to the project that might otherwise have been difficult to achieve.

It is of course worth recognising that although *Glorious* was in some ways a very open process, it was also clearly shaped by the aesthetics and ethics of RSP as a company, as well as by the people who were a part of the company at that time. While *Glorious* might have challenged some of the usual structures of touring theatre, it was inevitably also influenced by the support structures that enabled it. In addition to commissioning fees from venues and festivals, the project was funded by Arts Council England, four private trusts and foundations, and almost eighty individuals, who all required some kind of return for their investment. And while it is true that having a show at the end of each residency enabled a certain kind of gathering to take place (conceptually, but also logistically and financially), the show also came with baggage.²⁹ The video, for example, from which I have quoted Warby, was made by SPILL who were commissioning the work, in order to both document and promote their own festival. So whilst the invitation that RSP made during *Glorious* was designed to be open, it was also implicated in a

²⁹ This is an important if obvious point. It is almost impossible in the current funding climate to find support for artistic work that does not present some kind of outcome or product in return for investment. *Lying Fallow*, for example, had to be 'reported' to Arts Council England in the language of the funder: as 'audience numbers' and 'company development'.

creative process that was inevitably shaped by a whole number of outside forces – creative, market, and logistic.

My point is that within the explicitly constructed environment of theatre, there is an opportunity to think specifically about the invitation in relation to the encounter, and to do so in a way that takes into account the differences between people without those differences already determining how the encounter might play out. And in order to do this with any level of integrity the invitation must take place in a way that also recognises those structures and forces ‘outside’ the encounter that are inevitably a part of its internal logic. This brings me back to some of my writing from the previous chapter. In that chapter, I tried out the idea that the preposition ‘beside’ might best describe the relationship between *Lying Fallow* and the world in which it was taking place – and it is worth reiterating here that this relationship of besideness is brokered by the invitation. In the present chapter, then, ‘beside’ might help me to describe the invitation – not as singular – as one invitation that is specific to one way of being or one outcome – but as a process that leads to a number of possibilities that all exist alongside the familiar, or everyday, patterns of movement through a public space.

There is more to be said about the invitational process, and how its political and social embeddedness relates to what happens, and indeed what is possible, inside the theatre. In the next section, I will approach this question from the other side, describing a process of encounter that happens inside a theatre, in order to examine some of the complex relationships between ‘arrival’ and the role of continued invitation, or hosting, once one has entered the theatre.

2. The invitational frame

This is a performance of a dinner table conversation
Anyone seated at the table is a guest performer
Talk is the only course
No one will moderate
But a host may assist you
It is a democracy
To participate simply take an empty seat at the table
If the table is full you can request a seat
If you leave the table you can come back again and again
Feel free to write your comments on the tablecloth
There can be silence
There might be awkwardness
There could always be laughter
There is an end but no conclusion³⁰

The text above describes the ‘etiquette’ for the *Long Table*, a performance project created by artist Lois Weaver in 2003, originally inspired by Marleen Gorris’s 1995 film *Antonia’s Line*. In the film, the protagonist hosts a series of dinners at an ever-expanding table, which grows to accommodate all who come until it becomes so long that it must be moved outside. In response to this idea, the *Long Table* was conceived by Weaver as a structure that superimposed a domestic form (the dinner party) and a theatrical one (the stage performance). It was created as part of a series entitled *Systems of Address*, a collection of public engagement projects that Weaver has made available online for others to use and adapt.³¹ Each of these introduces an invitational structure within which

³⁰ ‘The Long Table Etiquette’ as reproduced in Deirdre Heddon, ‘Taking a Seat at the Table’, in *The Only Way Home is Through the Show: Performance Work of Lois Weaver*, ed. by Jen Harvie and Lois Weaver (Bristol: Intellect, 2015), pp. 200–3 (p. 201).

³¹ Lois Weaver, ‘Long Table’, *Public Address Systems*, 2013
<<http://publicaddresssystems.org/projects/long-table/>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

audience members can also be participants, opening up the idea of the 'stage' and proposing a fluidity around who has the right to be seen and heard, as well as what kinds of conversation might be staged in a public setting.

Weaver's *Systems of Address* have become a touchstone for many performance-makers, including myself. The format of the *Long Table* has been used to host conversations across the world – Weaver herself first used the form in Rio de Janeiro, and has since hosted Long Tables in Argentina, the UK, the USA, Croatia, Australia, Canada, and Slovenia.³² The fact that she has made the projects available for others to use is typical of her attitude to making performance – not only proposing new ways of gathering community through performance, but embedding community in the practice of making and sharing the work itself. The invitational frame proposed by the projects, then, extends to the ways in which those projects exist in the world, so that their work lies not only within the dialogues that take place each time one of them is used, but also in the ways that people other than Weaver use them to generate their own models for discourse.

Weaver writes of her aspirations for the *Long Table*:

The phrase 'come to the table' produced such beauty of embodiment. We could find a way to turn a hierarchy of experts into a table of conversationalists. We could discover a way for expertise to flow easily between statistics and story, between fact and fiction, between spectator and participant, and we would find that the ability to actually come and go from the table could be such a beautiful choreography of experience.³³

³² *The Only Way Home Is Through the Show: Performance Work of Lois Weaver*, ed. by Jen Harvie and Lois Weaver (Bristol: Intellect, 2015), pp. 302–3.

³³ Lois Weaver, 'Still Counting', in *The Only Way Home is Through the Show: Performance Work of Lois Weaver*, ed. by Jen Harvie and Lois Weaver (Bristol: Intellect, 2015), pp. 288–93.

The superimposition of the theatrical and the domestic is what makes the *Long Table* so appealing. The combination of the more formal theatrical structure with the more informal setting of a dinner table is designed to encourage those who would not ordinarily be invited to speak the possibility of being centre-stage and of being heard alongside those who might already think of themselves as ‘speakers’. In practice, however, my experience has been one of frustration at the seeming impossibility of this task – at the enormity of the work that is involved in ‘coming to the table’. While celebrating its existence, then, it is within this more challenging aspect of the *Long Table* that I want to begin.

Talking/Making/Taking Part

My most recent experience of the *Long Table* was during a festival called *Talking/Making/Taking Part* organised by writers Maddy Costa and Jake Orr (as ‘Dialogue’), which took place in London in 2014 and was focused on community engagement and diversity in the UK theatre scene.³⁴ One of the aims of the *Talking/Making/Taking Part* festival was to destigmatise and explore possibilities around the notion of ‘participation’ within the context of theatre – and the Long Table format was adapted for use as the introductory activity on each of the two mornings that the festival ran. However, as Costa notes in a set of strikingly transparent critical reflections on the festival, rather than opening up a dialogue to which everyone in the room had equal access, the Long Tables seemed to enforce some of the very hierarchies the festival had been seeking to avoid.

³⁴ *Talking/Making/Taking Part: a festival of theatre and discussion*, 22–23 November 2014, Ovalhouse, London.

The Long-Table discussions were a difficult but valuable learning experience for Dialogue. We've experimented with the format before, and keep hitting against a basic problem: the table feels like a stage, at which the "performers" have their backs to half of the audience. The festival raised a new problem: when the audience is a mixture of theatre professionals and people who rarely go to the theatre at all, coming to the table/stage can feel very uncomfortable – and that feeling intensifies if the conversation at the table hasn't found a[n] everyday language that doesn't leave anyone feeling lost. By not preparing for this, our Long Table felt no less hierarchical than the more traditional panel discussion.³⁵

Costa identifies a power differential between the table, which acts as a stage, and the rest of the room, which functions as an auditorium – in this case, literalised by the fact that the sessions took place in a theatre with the table onstage. Although there was a clear invitation to move between the two positions, Costa notes the difficulty in performing this action, which is more or less comfortable depending on how one relates to the language being used at the table.

This is something I have encountered before when taking part in Long Tables. The only way 'in' to the conversation is to embed oneself in a declarative position, by taking a seat at the table and then speaking from that position. Those who are in the audience, or those who have taken a seat at the table but are not speaking, hold little power to influence the direction of the (often fast-paced and heated) conversation; and even though one is invited to write on the paper tablecloth, it is my experience that this mode of communicating always feels secondary – it has little immediate impact unless attention is drawn to it by someone who is speaking. In the context of *Talking/Making/Taking Part*,

³⁵ Maddy Costa and Jake Orr, 'Dialogue Festival/ Long Table Discussion/ Learning and Feedback', *Welcome to Dialogue*, 2014 <<http://welcometodialogue.com/projects/dialogue-festival/dialogue-festival-documentation/dialogue-festival-long-table-discussion/dialogue-festival-long-table-discussion-learning-and-feedback>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

then, rather than opening up the terms for debate to all those who were present, the Long Table format seemed to highlight limitations and differences that were already in operation when we all walked into the room. Those who felt comfortable speaking, who felt a certain belonging or entitlement when they arrived at the theatre, seemed to be the first to take a seat at the table and to speak. Those who were less comfortable were then left with the choice of either remaining as silent audience members, or intervening (as speakers) to change the established flow of the conversation, making the potentially confronting transition that I explored in the prelude, of moving from the attentive to the declarative in order to demand that they be heard.

The difficulty that Costa describes was compounded by two elements in particular. Firstly, Dialogue had invited a US-based white male critic to 'host' the Long Tables, someone who had no previous experience with the Long Table format and whose marked status in relation to other people in the room was one of privilege and entitlement. Secondly, Dialogue had worked with a community and engagement specialist to offer a number of festival tickets to people from the local community who were not theatre professionals, and whom Costa and Orr felt might not otherwise attend the festival; these people had not only been encouraged to attend, but had been given some assurance that the festival would be open and accessible to them.³⁶ This introduced a particular politics to the festival, which played out in various ways on each of the days. Overall, I think it is fair to say that the festival was hugely successful in bringing together different groups of people working in or engaged with ideas of 'community' and 'theatre'; my sense is that it was a positive experience for the majority

³⁶ Maddy Costa and Jake Orr, 'Dialogue Festival Documentation', *Welcome to Dialogue*, 2014 <<http://welcometodialogue.com/projects/dialogue-festival/dialogue-festival-documentation/>> [accessed 21 September 2017]. The participants were from the Young Vic's Two Boroughs Project, which was run at that time by community and engagement specialist Lily Einhorn. See Young Vic, 'Two Boroughs' <<http://www.youngvic.org/taking-part/two-boroughs>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

of its attendees. However, my interest in this instance is less about the individual stories and more about how the structure of the *Long Table* shaped the dialogue that was able to take place, given the very different ‘arrivals’ of these two sets of people in particular.

In order to explore this further, I will return briefly to some of Ahmed’s writing, and the notion of orientation in relation to the encounter. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed writes extensively about tables as support structures that provide orientation to some more than others. She begins her introduction, in reference to the writing of philosopher Edmund Husserl, with the example of the writer’s table, describing the way in which it supports the function and naming of the ‘writer’ or ‘thinker’ specifically by being able to recede into the background – by already being close at hand for certain types of people.³⁷ Her point is that along with writing tables or desks come assumptions about the type of person who will be at them – a type of person who is already oriented towards the table, and for whom the (idea of a) writing table or desk is within easy reach. In other words, someone who has the privilege of being able to imagine themselves as a writer is already oriented towards and supported in the possibility of writing, in such a way as to render the table and the pen (or the laptop) as materials that are already imagined as belonging in that person’s environment.

Later in the book, Ahmed goes on to discuss the failure or success of orientation as being located not in the body of the person or thing, but in the process of orientation itself:

To orientate oneself can mean to adjust one’s position, such that we are “facing” the right direction: we know where we are through how we position ourselves in relation to others. [...] The failure of work is

³⁷ ‘If we start with Husserl’s first volume of *Ideas*, for instance, then we start with the writing table. The table appears, we could say, because the table is the object nearest the body of the philosopher.’ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 3.

not, then, “in” the thing or “in” the person but rather is about whether the person and the thing face each other *in the right way*.³⁸

It is interesting to take this analogy and consider the way that Costa describes the table/stage part of the room during Dialogue’s festival. Using Ahmed’s terms, the difficulty of the Long Tables during the festival could be said to reside in the notion of engagement itself, which is already determined by certain default orientations that people brought into the room with them, as well as the way in which both ‘table’ and ‘stage’ act as signifiers in that room. When they enter the room, certain people are ‘facing the right way’ in relation to the table/stage and what it stands for; others have a choice between adjusting their behaviour so that they can be ‘correctly’ oriented in order to engage with the Long Table (a process of accommodation), or they can disrupt the orientation of the room by taking a seat at the table in spite of not being already-oriented towards it. Either way, there is a marked difference between the choices available to those who are already oriented towards, or comfortable with, the declarative position – those who are used to being heard, and expect to be heard – and those who are not.³⁹

Weaver’s original structure was an attempt to challenge certain default orientations by explicitly bringing the domestic into the theatrical space and thus referencing the (informal) kitchen table within what is usually a formalised stage or panel environment. In the terms that Ahmed uses to think through the writer’s table, Weaver was working with the notion that certain bodies are associated and familiar with kitchen tables, and certain bodies with stages and other public platforms; her Long Tables attempted to create an invitation that might include those who were comfortable talking around a

³⁸ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 51. Original emphasis.

³⁹ In a short article on the *Long Table* Geraldine Harris notes this same thing, using the example of academics as those who are used to being heard, or used to leading a discussion, and therefore find it hard to listen. See Harris, ‘Entertaining Discussion’, p. 204.

kitchen table but not comfortable being heard on a stage. And yet, by inviting anyone to take part on the same terms, the structure fails to recognise those inequalities between us that mean some will find the transition to and from the table easier than others. It fails to recognise that we did not arrive on equal terms, and that we were not equally audible and visible when we arrived.

I will end this section by introducing a new term, ‘underheard’, borrowed from scholar Michelle Ballif’s research into listening and rhetoric. Ballif uses the term in relation to the notion of ‘categorical understanding’, noting that the inevitable pull towards categorical understanding means that certain differences between voices are frequently underheard or harder to notice.⁴⁰ This is another way of expressing the weight of default orientations. In the context of the *Long Table*, I might say that without an explicit invitation and structure for listening, the force of categorical understanding ensures that certain default orientations are likely to play out between the table/stage and the people attending, and that these orientations dull the ability for a more nuanced or complicated listening (and therefore speaking) to circulate in the room. In other words, quieter, more hesitant, or simply less familiar voices will *inevitably* be underheard unless the very structures within which we are listening – and not just speaking – can be seriously considered as part of the invitational frame.

⁴⁰ ‘[A]lthough Kris acknowledges that Diane and I have our differences, they get “underheard” by the force of the categorical understanding. [...] As I have argued before, one often “hears” not *what* the other is saying but *what resonates with what one has previously heard*.’ Ballif in Michelle Ballif, Davis D. Diane and Roxanne Mountford, ‘Toward an Ethics of Listening’, *JAC*, 20.4 (2000), 931–42. Original emphasis.

Structures of democracy

In the introduction to *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, from which I quoted in the previous chapter, Judith Butler describes the performative speech act “We, the people” as a political address that creates borders between the included and the excluded even when it intends to be fully inclusive. Her writing in this section of the book is concerned with defining a democratic politics that asks who counts at any one moment as ‘the people’ and how and where that demarcation is drawn up, with a view to contesting the normalised exclusion of some and inclusion of others. She writes:

The point of a democratic politics is not simply to extend recognition equally to all of the people, but, rather, to grasp that only by changing the relation between the recognizable and unrecognizable can (a) equality be understood and pursued and (b) “the people” become open to a further elaboration. Even when a form of recognition is extended to *all* the people, there remains an active premise that there is a vast region of those who remain unrecognizable, and that very power differential is reproduced every time that form of recognition is extended.⁴¹

I hardly need to point out the vast differences between the contexts of the *Talking/Making/Taking Part* festival and the scenes of mass global protest that Butler describes in her book. Nevertheless, it feels important to place them side by side here, not so much to compare the activities themselves as to take seriously the Long Table etiquette statement, ‘This is a democracy’.

Reflecting on the *Talking/Making/Taking Part* festival, artist Peter McMaster writes:

⁴¹ Butler, p. 5. Butler also later identifies Jacques Derrida, Bonnie Honig, Etienne Balibar, Ernesto Laclau, and Jacques Rancière as writers who have already broached the question of how the designation “the people” creates a boundary that sets up terms of both inclusivity and exclusivity. See Butler, p. 164.

I really questioned the validity of the assertion that the long table discussion was a democratic situation. As an engaging/participatory set up it appeared simple, but actually it was extremely exclusive and intimidating: a fast paced, non-rigorous, antagonistic intellectual discussion that by no means everyone in that space could participate in, [in which] there was never any silence to assimilate what was being said.⁴²

McMaster questions whether the *Long Table* was functioning as a democratic situation. However, I would suggest that it might have been *exactly* an enactment of the democratic ideal that every voice should count equally, but that in enacting this ideal it also pointed towards its limits.

The theatrical set up of the *Long Table* highlights the privileging of speech and visibility in the room: the table is on a stage or in a central position, and at the table are microphones so that everyone in the room can hear what has been said. In addition, during the Dialogue festival, the whole session was being livestreamed on the internet, something that Costa goes on to describe as compounding the problems of the session by ‘emphasis[ing] the element of performance, and creat[ing] a kind of pressure to say something clever.’⁴³ Whilst the *Long Table* is conceived as an inclusive format in which (in theory) anyone can participate, in reality every time someone sits at the table and speaks, whether they are speaking ‘inclusively’ or not, they are also publicly reaffirming certain power dynamics, recognising certain voices whilst excluding others. And in spite of Weaver’s etiquette, which seeks to include the possibility of silence and awkwardness, my experience of the *Long Table* is that there is always a tendency toward fast-moving debate. To come back to Royster, and echoing McMaster’s comments above, the *Long*

⁴² Peter McMaster in Costa and Orr, ‘Dialogue Festival/ Long Table Discussion/ Learning and Feedback’.

⁴³ Costa and Orr, ‘Dialogue Festival/ Long Table Discussion/ Learning and Feedback’.

Table too easily becomes a format for talking and talking back that does not include the possibility of a critical moment for listening.

The fact that *the Long Table* is so closely aligned with the world in which it operates is what makes it a fascinating model. It is a model that unites theatre and activism: at any one moment, anyone in the room could be audience member or performer, observer, witness, or participant. At one level, this means that everyone in the room has the potential to speak, and therefore to be heard. It is a form that invites action and responsibility. But if everyone is always a potential participant then no one is occupying the role of audience as I have defined it – the role of a listener who has permission to do nothing more than be attentive. So within the format of the *Long Table* the status of ‘audience’ as one who is still, hidden, and silent, is translated into the potential to become visible and audible, meaning that ‘to listen’ is too easily defined as to the potential to speak.

Listening and speaking

Alongside *the Long Table*, Weaver began to develop several other models for dialogue. Perhaps most notable is the project *Porch Sitting*, which theatre scholar Geraldine Harris describes as follows:

This format could be perceived as a performance of an *after* dinner conversation [...]. As with the *Long Table*, participants are usually free to swap from being ‘on stage’ to ‘off stage’ and silence, laughter, and raucous singing as well as conversation are all welcome.

However, in this instance guest performers sit in irregular lines facing the same way as if on a porch (or a balcony, or the space in front of any kind of shelter). This spatial relationship is key to its dynamic in that a side-by-side configuration is less highly charged

than the face-to-face, less likely to make people feel they have to fill a silence and, in reducing the visual ‘cues’ passing between participants, it places more emphasis on *listening*.⁴⁴

I have not taken part in *Porch Sitting* so I cannot comment on the way in which this format plays out. But I am drawn to the idea that the set up invites a conversation that is ‘*after* dinner’ and that takes place *outside* the location that is designated for action.

In her description of the activity, Weaver specifies that the set-up should take place across two locations: a ‘kitchen’ in which there is food and where people can mingle, and a ‘porch’ on which there may be silence or stillness.⁴⁵ This means that there are two levels of spatial ‘besideness’ happening: first there is the side-by-side configuration of the participants, who are no longer ‘around a table’ but facing out towards some kind of landscape, as if at a theatre without a performance as such; second is the fact that the activity of porch-sitting takes place alongside another location in which people are invited to talk and share food. In this instance, it is almost as if the Long Table format has been reversed. The focus here is on listening and watching together – and the kitchen table, or other kind of shelter, has become a place where one nourishes oneself, with conversation and food, in order to become ready for the porch. Here, the place for speaking and action becomes the background to a more open, contemplative setting. The after, or beside, takes centre-stage.

⁴⁴ Harris, ‘Entertaining Discussion’, p. 205.

⁴⁵ ‘The conversation space becomes a ‘household’ divided into two areas: the Kitchen and the Porch. In the Kitchen, you can get drinks, have a chat, have a bite to eat. There are no rules for behaviour. There is no need to leave the Kitchen, if that’s where you’re most comfortable. On the Porch, conversation is sustained by a few simple rules. It is a space to sit, think, dream or get involved in the ongoing conversation. It is ok if conversation goes quiet, or if it spills out into raucousness or song.’ Lois Weaver, ‘Porch Sitting’, *Public Address Systems*, 2013 <<http://publicaddresssystems.org/projects/porch-sitting/>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

Both *Porch Sitting* and the *Long Table* invite the activities of speaking and listening to sit at the same time within the parameters of the world and the parameters of theatre, straddling the two, which can be an uncomfortable proposition. Earlier in the chapter, I described the public interventions during *Glorious* as invitational work that happened in relation to but separately from the show – not necessarily leading towards a final performance, but happening relative to it, and shaped by it, nevertheless. And I might think of *Porch Sitting* on similar terms, with its invitation that includes two modes of participation. *Porch Sitting* separates the work of dialogue into a location that is governed by action and speaking, and a location that might be described as being governed by looking and listening. So the project still straddles two worlds, but includes listening more explicitly than the *Long Table*. And in this project, the ‘third thing’ that is shared by audience members might be described as a shared horizon, one that literally sits beyond the frame of the ‘theatre’.

3. An appropriate response

If invitation creates the artificial construct that is theatre, then theatre is also defined by the limits that this invitation creates. As much as it is a negotiation or exchange – and as much as it might be defined by potential – the act of invitation also sets up boundaries. Our positions in relation to those boundaries might shift, but the act of inviting – like the phrase “We, the people” – is necessarily one that draws lines between some people and others, that limits or extends the parameters of a potential audience. Invitation, then, at least within the context of theatre, presents an opportunity to intervene in the ‘default’ orientations that are already determined by our arrival, but it does so by drawing up new lines around which orientation will take place.

I began this chapter with a story about leaving the theatre at the end of a show – a story about a body that is moved to act, but that remains still, conflicted in its status somewhere between the sanctioned silence of being-in-audience and the clamouring demands of the world. I described messy beginnings – the relationships between audiences and artists, embedded in personal histories, and in the social and political contexts from which any act of invitation is made and received. I went on to explore how those messy beginnings translate into complex encounters, in which the visible and hidden stories of the body affect how and whether it is possible to respond to a seemingly open etiquette for conversation. And now I find myself here, back at the beginning again, asking how all of this translates into the moment when we leave the theatre – the moment when we re-enter a world that I have described as being defined by action and speech and change.

In this final section of the chapter, I return once more to that moment when I wanted, but failed, to walk out of the theatre with Andy Smith at the end of *all that is solid melts*

into air. And I return to Smith's proposal that it is the people in the theatre, rather than the entity of theatre itself, that hold the capacity for change⁴⁶ – and my difficulty in reconciling this statement with the fact that the politics of visibility and audibility operate differently inside and outside the theatre. With this in mind, I turn towards the following question, posed by theatre-maker Chris Goode in the opening to his book, *The Forest and the Field*.

If theatre is a special category of place, one in which a certain license pertains that can throw into question the normative construction and condition of our social relations, how then can what is discovered within the bounds of that license be exported into our everyday lives? How can it change us for good, when the very factors that open up that possibility of change belong to the distinctive speciality of theatre's own operating terms? ⁴⁷

Goode goes on to spend a little over 300 pages engaging with this question from the perspective of his own practice as a theatre-maker, which is a great reminder that if there is an answer to this question it might not be simple or easy. For now, I simply want to note that Goode uses the verb 'export' to describe the transition from theatre to world, presenting our bodies as vehicles that might carry Smith's capacity for change across a border between inside and outside the structure of theatre. And the word 'export' brings me right back to Royster, and her question, 'How do we translate listening into language and action?' I realise once again that the question of the relationship between theatre and world hinges on an act of translation – in this case, from the constructed invitation of theatre back into the world which it has temporarily been alongside.

⁴⁶ See footnote 12 in this chapter.

⁴⁷ Chris Goode, *The Forest and the Field: Changing Theatre in a Changing World* (London: Oberon, 2015), p. 46.

What made the end of Smith's show poignant was its expression of desire: 'I hope someone is with me.' In that moment, the very question of how change happens, and where change sits, came into view for me as an audience member. Andy Smith was walking towards change, towards his life and all its intersections with other lives and other moments. And he was hoping that someone was with him, whether literally by his side or sharing his intention. I read Smith's words in that moment as a call to action. And in the 'real world' the appropriate response to a call to action, if one felt it was ethically sound, would be to move into action. But in the world of theatre, the appropriate response might be to give Smith's words and actions my full attention. So it was impossible for me to inhabit that moment without in some sense destroying the contract of being-in-audience. It was impossible for me to walk alongside him without breaking the contract of stillness, silence, and hiddenness within which I was watching and listening – without performing. What I needed in that moment was a way to translate my silence, my listening, into language and action.

In the end, I think that Smith and I both position the most important work of theatre somewhere between the individual and social body, somewhere between constructed invitation and individual desire. I think that we both also might position the theatre as operating somewhere between the place where change is possible and the place where change is dreamt of. But here there is another complication. Smith writes from his experience of the world, but his body and his experience is different from mine. The theories that we propose, like the invitations we make, cannot help but be shaped by the bodies we inhabit. These are the bodies we write with and from. Consider my body, Smith's body, Royster's body, Ahmed's body. Each of our bodies would implicate us differently in that action of standing up and walking out of the theatre; and each of our bodies implicates us differently in the act of writing.

How we say goodbye

As a theatre-maker, I have always considered the most important moments in a performance to be the opening moments, when a show begins to set up the contract between audience and performers, and the closing moments, when, as a temporary community, we say goodbye. If the work of invitation defines the act of being-in-audience, then the work of how we say goodbye is implicated in this invitation too – it is, perhaps, a careful process of dispersal. And in that moment, whatever might be carried out of the theatre will be carried in bodies that are vastly different from each other. Perhaps, then, the work of performance, work that has been invited through a carefully constructed arrangement of words, space, and time, is indeed translated into the individual body as that body disentangles itself from the process of gathering and listening, preparing itself for the world.

I have discussed three different performances in this chapter, and perhaps the best way to think about this transition from theatre to world is simply to describe the endings associated with each of them.

First, there is Smith's show, where the ending is in some ways a conventional ending. The performer delivers their line and exits the stage, leaving the audience in the theatre with the house lights on. It feels important in describing this ending to remember that the house lights are on throughout Smith's show, so that this ending leaves an audience member somewhere between 'audience' and 'world', perhaps inhabiting that very place that Smith describes in his text: within a world where performance imagines itself sitting alongside all the other activities of life. In this ending, the act of gathering ends with an invitation to join the performer in walking towards change and towards life. The performer exits the theatre, and moves towards the outside world. We are invited to make the same transition.

The second example I introduced was from *Glorious*, a show that I directed and performed in, which was part of a bigger project involving public interventions, workshops, and a series of social gatherings. The show itself takes place in a theatre, again with the audience seated in an auditorium, this time watching a lit stage from darkened seats. Each act of this show is a repetition of the one before, presenting the same songs and monologues in a slightly different version each time. Throughout the show, the performers have held flowers, and in the final act they lay these flowers down as they leave the stage. In the final moments of the show, the same songs that have been performed in each of the acts begin to play again, this time recorded on an old fashioned reel-to-reel audio recorder. As the structure of the show begins to repeat again, the audience is handed flowers from the show and invited to exit by walking across the stage. They exit by walking through the performance space, which is filled with the debris of performance – costumes, cables, chairs, musical instruments. This ending is an invitation too; after three acts, this is an invitation to become part of the performance, to enter and exit the stage in a fourth act, carrying a living part of the performance out of the theatre and into the world.

The third example was Weaver's *Long Table*, which is not a show exactly, but nevertheless a theatrical gathering that invited an audience to be together for an amount of time. Weaver's etiquette is clear on the way that this performance ends: 'There is an end but no conclusion.' This, too, is an invitation to continue, an acknowledgment that the conversations that have begun during the Long Table are already a part of other conversations and other parts of lives. An acknowledgement that while something is over, something is always continuing.

Each of these endings considers itself as part of a series of beginnings. Perhaps, in those beginnings, the body remembers and carries out of the theatre its capacity to look and to listen differently.

[end of chapter four]

And there
in the way you heard me
was my future.

Chapter Five: Encounter

(on *Experiments in Listening*)

Prelude



Beginning from an ‘in-it-ness’, a politics of encountering gets closer in order to allow the differences between us, as differences that involve power and antagonism, to make a difference to the very encounter itself. The differences between us necessitate the dialogue, rather than disallow it – a dialogue must take place, precisely *because* we don’t speak the same language.

- Sara Ahmed ¹

¹ Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), p. 180.

Between 2004 and 2006 I made and toured a show called *Mr Quiver*. In its final version, it was a four-hour performance installation in which identities and maps were drawn and redrawn using costumes, salt, music, lights, and the bodies of three performers: myself, costume designer Lucille Acevedo-Jones, and lighting designer Cis O'Boyle.² Each of us manipulated the materials in the performance space as the four hours passed, repeatedly creating and dismantling images around and between audience members as they navigated the room. My material was my body, and for most of the performance I moved between two costumes – deliberately crass, quickly-sketched identities, based on British-Indian cultural clichés: a version of Queen Elizabeth I in regal costume, wig, and make-up; and a generic 'Indian bride' figure, nameless, eyes cast down, wearing red and gold clothing and jewellery.

One day a friend was in my home and happened to see a DVD I had recently made to promote *Mr Quiver*. On one side of the DVD case was a picture of me dressed as Queen Elizabeth I, and on the other side was a picture of me dressed as the Indian bride. My friend picked up the case exclaiming,

“Hey! Look! It’s a picture of you dressed as Elizabeth I!”

and then he turned it over and said,

“And look! It’s a picture of you dressed as ...”

He paused, looking at the photograph of me on stage wearing a jewel on my forehead, an elaborate gold nose ring, and a red and gold headscarf.

“... you.”

² Rajni Shah, 'Mr Quiver' <<http://www.rajnishah.com/mr-quiver>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

The pause was awkward, and telling. I suspect that my friend paused because he was trying to say something that was *not* culturally insensitive. And yet, in the moment that he elided my brown body with my clichéd ‘Indian bride’ performance persona, I felt a small chasm opening between us.

I can’t remember exactly how I responded. Perhaps I said nothing. Perhaps I laughed and explained that it was a picture of me *dressed as* an Indian bride. Perhaps my friend said something like, “Oh yes, of course” and we moved on. In truth, though, his words had made a huge impression on me. I realised that although I had been using *Mr Quiver* to examine the interplay between the public and private body, I had underestimated the extent to which others would desire to read my body first and foremost as an ‘ethnic’ body, and the amount of work that it would take to move away from this default. After this strange encounter with my friend I developed the Indian bride costume in a number of ways, including shaving my head and buying a wig of thick black hair pulled into a large bun. This, I felt, might create just enough distance between the visual signifiers of my body and the figure of the Indian bride to allow for the more nuanced and complex set of readings that I had hoped to evoke with the show.

In some ways, of course, my friend’s hesitation was completely understandable: the image of Elizabeth I, a well-known historical figure, was easy to recognise and name; the ‘Indian bride’ was not. But over the years, something about that moment between me and my friend has stayed with me, resonating like the memory of a wound or a small persistent unanswered question in the back of my mind.³ What interests me now is not

³ Ahmed writes extensively about the work of revisiting these moments that stick in the mind. ‘Memory work can be thought of in terms of returning to such “unsettling encounters” that one may have in “public life” (Goffman 1972); those moments when one is faced by others [...] in such a way that one is “moved from one’s place”. I think memory work in critical writing is crucial precisely as a way of *re-encountering those encounters*.’ Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, p. 189 (footnote to p. 128). Original emphasis.

so much the fact that my friend was at a loss for words, but the nature of the work that was happening during his pause and in my own response. Confronted with the difficulty in finding the right noun to describe the image he saw, but already committed to saying *something*, my friend found himself collapsing “Indian-looking woman” with “Rajni”. This was the easiest or quickest path for him; it was a shortcut to legibility. In response, though I do not remember my exact words or actions, I know that – rather than voice my unease or allow an awkward silence between us – I quickly moved the conversation on.

I could spend a lot of time dissecting this particular exchange, analysing the gendered and racialised behaviours we both fell into. In those extended moments during his pause and before my response, my friend and I were silently navigating the social and political histories enacted by and through our bodies, as well as the delicate and complicated encounter that was occurring between them. But I am not recounting this story because its content is unusual. I am telling it because it enacts something that is present in all conversations, and that silently or less silently occurs in the listening and speaking between one person and another person every day – even, perhaps, in the listening and speaking within one person. I am telling this particular story because in this story something becomes foregrounded for a moment that is usually in the background. And in this moment of foregrounding, an idea like ‘friendship’ that is held between two people is revealed to rest upon a network of power differentials and hierarchies just as much as it might be founded on a desire for stability and equality. It is another example of what I explored, via Ahmed, in the previous chapter: that it matters how we arrive.

*

In *Strange Encounters*, Ahmed writes about the complex work of ‘passing’ as relates to the figure of the stranger in so-called post-colonial narratives of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. She opens the book with a simple proposition: that the label

'stranger' creates an identity, and so the figure of the stranger, paradoxically, can only ever be perceived as strange when they are read within the confines of that label – when they 'pass' as 'strange' in some way – thus inevitably creating the identifier 'stranger' simultaneously with the identifier 'not-stranger' (or 'we').⁴ This means that strangeness, seemingly an indicator of what does not fit, is in fact a form of identification. And woven into this is a notion of narrative coherence. The stranger is a figure that is perceived to fit within certain narrative lines, and is drawn and redrawn according to those lines; but those narrative lines repeatedly smooth out the process whereby the construct of 'passing' – and therefore of narrative coherence itself – is created.⁵ This smoothing-out disappears a certain movement or instability – a hesitation – that Ahmed goes on to argue might otherwise productively define relationships between 'embodied others'.

Passing then cannot be simply theorised as a logic of the subject (= the transformation that takes place in the subject when she or he assumes an image). Rather, we can consider how passing takes place through strange encounters with embodied others in which there is a crisis of reading, a crisis that hesitates over the gap between an image that is already assumed and an image that is yet to be assumed. [...] Passing involves strange encounters: encounters where 'what is encountered' is under dispute. Such encounters represent precisely the impossibility of fixing the meaning of passing; it is the undecidable moment that repeats itself as others are addressed, as we address each other.⁶

Passing, then, is impossible to pin down because it exists within particular moments of encounter that are between, not within, people. Whether successful or unsuccessful,

⁴ Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, pp. 1–3.

⁵ Ahmed explores some of the key narratives around the stranger in *Strange Encounters*, through the lenses of multiculturalism, 'stranger danger' discourses, ethnography, post-colonialism, consumerism, and global feminism.

⁶ Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, p. 128.

passing is an act that brings to the surface the fictions that human beings place on each other all the time. And when passing fails, a certain set of expectations are not fulfilled, which means that a certain narrative fails to move forward.⁷

In the encounter between my friend and me, there was a hesitation, a not-knowing, before my friend put into words a version of me that did not fit well with the image I had created for myself. One account of what happened in that moment is that I ceased to pass as 'white' and therefore became unfamiliar to both my ('white') friend and to myself. In that small moment of crisis, we were not able to rely on the modes of recognition to which we had become accustomed, which would have allowed us to gloss over the differences between our embodied selves. However, I don't think that this memory has stayed with me simply because I was disappointed by this failure of recognition. On the contrary, I think that it has stayed with me because it held the possibility of moving in a different direction. In the moment before I said anything, there was potential for a process of reorientation between us based on difference rather than an assumption of sameness. But I was too quick to move us along into what felt like a more familiar mode, one in which we were able to recognise and claim our (former) relationship.

Every act of recognition is characterised by assumption and appropriation at some level, functioning as an assertion of or challenge to the social structures surrounding it. But it is important to remember that in the gap between 'already assumed' and 'yet to be assumed' – the gap which Ahmed identifies above as a crisis of reading – is also the work of listening and potentiality. It is in this gap, before the construction of meaning or narrative becomes stable, that anything might be possible. The work that was happening

⁷ See chapter two for a lengthy exploration of how this process (of fictionalising others) relates to being-in-audience at the theatre. In this chapter, I suggest, via Stanley Cavell's writing, that – paradoxically – the theatre might be a place that allows us to stop fictionalising.

during my friend's pause was, of course, the very same work that I hoped would take place during performances of *Mr Quiver* – I had created the show precisely in order to confront these easy collapses in the way a body is read. But in the context of the show there was no need, and indeed no invitation, to immediately declare a position in response to what was being presented. In the theatrical context, as I have suggested in earlier chapters, audience and performers alike are invited to replace the immediate obligation to be visible through speaking or declaring with a structural invitation to listen (the invitation, literally, to be *in audience*). And with this structural invitation to listen comes the potential to hold interpretation open, or to hold off on the collapse of meaning.

By this, I do not mean that theatre enables some kind of clean slate. It is easy to get caught up in the pursuit of an 'ideal listening' in which the listener brings no judgement, no traces of their past life, and somehow navigates the encounter without the influences of history and geography that shape the body and its thinking. This is the kind of listening that Fiumara sometimes seems to be advocating in her writing. Though she comments on the relationship between philosophy and the everyday world, and indeed argues against an over-simplification of the work of listening, nevertheless her own work remains steadfastly in the realm of the theoretical, and sometimes seems to lack engagement with the more embodied politics of encounter that is so clearly articulated by Ahmed.⁸ But if listening, as I am proposing it, is a gathering of bodies and of attention,

⁸ I have mentioned this tendency before, in chapter one. There is something both attractive and important about theory that operates in the realm of the ideal, because it allows for the emergence of new structures of thinking – and this is fundamental to Fiumara's philosophy of listening. But I feel it is important to recognise its status as an ideal. It might be worth remembering here that Fiumara refers to listening as 'the other side of language' in the title of her book. I think of her work as an act of theoretical rebalancing; in order to correct an imbalance between listening and speaking, she must strongly favour listening above speaking, whereas in fact she is arguing for the work they do together. This chapter and the previous chapter of my PhD attempt to address this.

then it seems at best inadequate and at worst dangerous for that gathering to happen without an acknowledgement of the histories and geographies that have shaped those bodies and their capacity for attentiveness. Perhaps, then, an ideal listening – and the listening that might be possible within the act of being-in-audience – is not one in which the self is negated in order to hold the possibility of otherness, but rather a negotiation of attention between others who are at once embodied and attentive, refusing to move too quickly into a narrative of passing.

In this chapter, I will describe some of the complexity of this proposal when put into practice. I will wrestle with the fact that embodiment rarely translates easily into words, and that there is no simple way to describe the minute shifts that we all make as we constantly adjust to one another within ever changing frames of reference. The main players in this chapter – Karen Christopher, Chris Goode, and Andy Smith – have all already appeared as writers in previous chapters, where, slightly uncomfortably but according to academic convention, I have referred to them by their last names. In this chapter, they come back on a first-name basis, as performers and friends. Somewhere in here, among the signs ‘friend’ and ‘writer’ and ‘artist’ and ‘audience’, are human beings with complex identities and emotions, meeting each other in many contexts, across time, and in different places. In this chapter, I ask what happens when we meet each other as complex beings in the context of performance.

1. Listening to form

In early 2014, I invited three people – all experienced performance-makers and also people I would call friends – to take part in a project called *Experiments in Listening*. The project, I explained, would consist of three separate dialogues, each a week long and in a different location. I would take part in each of the dialogues, along with one of the friends. We would conduct our dialogues – ‘performative dialogues’ I called them, to indicate that we should not restrict our communications to speaking – by simply paying attention to the relationship that we held between us, without any onus to make or present anything. We would also be accompanied by a filmmaker – someone chosen by the two of us who were to be in dialogue – and that filmmaker would go on to create a film based on their experiences of listening and watching with a camera during the week. At the end of each week, as a way of closing the dialogue, we would invite some kind of audience to join us.

The first dialogue took place in Nottingham at the end of September 2014, and was with Karen Christopher. Karen and I had worked together a few years previously on another project in Nottingham, along with Dance4 who were one of the organisational partners for *Experiments in Listening*; this meant that, although we were working away from home, we were also returning to a place in which we shared memories, and this sense of familiarity was an important part of the project. We were accompanied throughout the week by documentary filmmaker Lisa Cazzato-Vieyra, an artist I knew professionally but not personally, and whom Karen did not know at all before the project began. This first dialogue ended at 8.30pm on Friday 3rd October, when we brought the week to a close with an audience of delegates at a symposium called *In Dialogue 2014* within which our project had been programmed.¹

¹ See appendix 2 for further details about locations and partners for each of the *Experiments in Listening* dialogues.

The second dialogue took place in January 2015, with Chris Goode. Chris and I spent the week in London's Jerwood Studios, where we had last worked together sixteen years previously. The filmmaker we had hoped to work with, someone we both knew well, had pulled out of the project just a few weeks before we were due to begin due to ill-health. We frantically pulled together a list of possible options, feeling that it mattered very much who was to be in the room with us, wanting to create an atmosphere where we would feel safe enough to be intimate with each other. In the end, we approached Griffyn Gilligan, a young performer whom Chris and I had both met only a few months before, and invited him to work alongside us. While Griffyn had limited experience as a filmmaker, he seemed well attuned to the particularities and sensitivity of the project, and we both felt that we could trust his listening. This second dialogue came to a close at 5pm on Saturday 17th January 2015, with an audience of around 40 people who had responded to an invitation Chris and I sent out via email.

Finally, in early March 2015, I spent a week in dialogue with Andy Smith as part of Lancaster Arts' development programme on campus at Lancaster University. Andy and I were both living in Lancaster during the dialogue week, Andy at home with his family, and me in a rented room which I stayed in during the weeks when I was studying in Lancaster. Unlike the other two dialogues, Andy and I had never worked together before we embarked on this project, though we had known each other for several years; as Andy observes in the film of our week together, this dialogue took place in a declared space of friendship. Alongside us during this week was a filmmaker named Jonathan Kemp, who was employed as a video technician at the university at the time, and had been recommended by someone in the theatre department. Neither Andy nor I had worked with or even met Jonathan before, but we had seen some of his short films, and we had a sense that he would bring a good listening presence into the room. This final dialogue came to a close at 8pm on Friday 13th March 2015 with a public audience.

Disorientation

This is one way to understand *Experiments in Listening*, as a series of three dialogues documented by filmmakers, each of which ended in the company of a small audience. But it also feels a little contrived to describe it this way, as if these three blocks of factual information relating to the dialogue weeks might give you a hold on the project. This is partly because one of the difficulties in describing a project like *Experiments in Listening* is knowing where to place its centre. The most obvious way to describe the project is as I have done above – by placing the dialogues themselves at the centre, and describing the work of the filmmakers, the presence of the audiences at the end of each week, and also the ongoing screenings of the three films that were created during those weeks, as secondary activities. But this feels at odds with the premise of this PhD, and in some ways also the project itself, both of which are focused on listening and being-in-audience.

As I continue writing, I will instead attempt to navigate a different relationship with narrative – one that does not automatically interpret the three dialogues as ‘the performance’ or the three films as ‘the documentation’, but that focuses on the many ways listening manifests across the whole landscape of the project, from dialogues to sharings to films. In this reading, I can include the fact that the friendships underlying the dialogues allowed us to feel comfortable with each other, but also that they allowed us to take shortcuts and to make assumptions. And I can include the fact that the filmmakers and audiences, including the audiences who gather each time I host a screening of the films, do not, for the most part, know our histories – and that this not-knowing is as much a part of the work of the project as anything that the two of us who were in dialogue might have brought. So while I might still describe the dialogues as being at the centre of several acts of gathering, that centre does not necessarily determine the hierarchy of interpretation.

In keeping with this idea, I will structure the chapter by working my way loosely from the 'outside' in, reaching the dialogue weeks themselves via a consideration of the listenings that surround them. In this opening section of the chapter, I will introduce Sara Ahmed's writing about 'wonder' in relation to some of the comments audience members have made during screenings of the films, as a way to begin thinking about how one might frame the work of the project as a whole. In the second section, I will consider the films, the filmmakers, and the end-of-week audiences through the lens of Tanja Dreher's writing about the term 'eavesdropping with permission', focusing in particular on the relationship between listening and being heard. And in the third and final section, I will focus on the intersection between the modes of friendship and being-in-audience in the dialogue weeks themselves, drawing briefly on two different theoretical texts that consider the place of love on stage.

In each of these sections, I will attempt to locate listening using the lens of disorientation. That is to say that I will not focus primarily on the moments in the project when communication felt easy and flowing – though there have been many – but on the moments when things did not feel as if they were quite lining up – the moments when communication stumbled or stalled or fell out of line with expectations. It is through these moments that I hope to describe listening as a state that often sits uncomfortably or surprisingly within the wider frameworks of communication to which we are accustomed. In chapter three, I proposed that the work of *Lying Fallow* might be described as an act of resistance that was also an act of besideneess. And in some ways, the writing in this chapter continues that work. In this chapter, however, I will consider 'resistance' as something that stops us from listening. I will look at the ways in which resistance shows up when familiarity is disrupted, and when expectations are not met. And I will look to the theatrical encounter as a structure that might be able to hold these disruptions differently.

During my introduction to screenings of the three *Experiments in Listening* films, I always say that the screening is a part of the experiment – that the experiments in listening continue during the screenings, which are as much a part of the project as the dialogues, the sharings at the end of each week, or the films. I feel similarly about the process of writing this chapter. I took part in all three dialogues; I watched first cuts of the films and sometimes entered into discussion with the filmmakers while they were editing; I continue to organise and host screenings of the films. In other words, I could not be further from being an outsider to the project. So in the writing that follows, I have done my best to remain embodied and attentive at once, not slipping into analysis that ignores my complicity nor obscuring facts that are clouded by my memory. But as I embark on this task, I also want to acknowledge that this writing also can only ever reflect my own attempts at listening, as part of an ongoing and non-linear process.²

Wonder

One of my favourite comments about *Experiments in Listening* came from someone who attended one of the film screenings. They said that as the evening unfolded they found themselves listening differently – specifically, they found themselves listening to *form* rather than only to *content*. The comment was particularly striking because partway through the evening, this person had intended to call it a night and go home. They had approached me during one of the breaks between films, and asked whether it was okay if they left early – they had a sense of the project from what they had seen already, and

² Along the way, I have had many conversations that have helped shape this thinking. These include invaluable exchanges following the dialogues with Karen, Chris, Andy, as well as filmmakers Lisa, Griffyn, and Jonathan. I must also thank Barbara Campbell, Carrie Hamilton, Davina Silver, Debra Ferreday, Jane Trowell, Judy Annear, Maddy Costa, Morganne Conti, Sarah Rodigari, and Sonja Todd for conversations and written exchanges about the *Experiments in Listening* sharings and screenings, which have helped me think through the work of the project and informed the chapter.

had promised their partner that they would be home early. They were clearly expecting me to say that leaving would be fine. Instead, I replied that while they were of course free to leave if they needed, it was my preference that they stay and experience the evening as a whole; I explained that it was conceived as an event that one would attend in its entirety, and pointed out that it had been advertised as such. To their credit, not only did they stay, but they went on to comment that only once they had experienced the evening as a whole did they understand that what mattered was not some piece of information or knowledge about the dialogues that they might glean from watching the films, but the whole arc of the evening with its invitation to listen differently.³ In other words, the evening was not only about watching films, but about the whole process of gathering.

This might be a useful way to begin thinking about *Experiments in Listening* – as a project that invites a shift from listening to content towards listening to form. To me, that shift implies a broadening of focus, and places attention on the whole process of gathering to listen (a gathering of attention as well as a gathering of bodies) that I explored in chapter three. In every aspect of the project, but particularly in the context of screenings, this gathering process includes an awareness of other gatherings at other times. Audiences at screenings are not just watching for the content of the dialogues, but are aware of the listening of the filmmakers, the audiences who are captured on film at each end-of-week sharing, as well as their own listening, which connects the three films months or years after the dialogues happened. Their listening is placed within a series of listenings, all partial and subjective, but which together make up a more complex version of what being-in-audience might mean.

³ With thanks to Malcolm Whittaker who made the comment.

The idea of listening to form across contexts also opens up the project to some of the questions I engaged with in the previous chapter, about the ways in which lines of privilege and social constructs intersect with the listening of being-in-audience. In order to explore this a little further, I will turn briefly to a section of Ahmed's writing in her 2004 book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. In this section of the book, Ahmed writes about the feeling of 'wonder' in relation to feminism – describing her relationship with feminism as one that is not only characterised by emotions such as pain, anger, and rage in response to the way the world is constructed, but also by emotions that are creative and that hold the possibility of different orientations with the world.⁴ Responding to Descartes' description of wonder as the first and primary emotion, she writes:

So wonder, as an affective relation to the world, is about seeing the world that one faces and is faced with “as if” for the first time. What is the status of the “as if”? [...] It could be assumed that the “as if” functions as a radical form of subjectivism, in which the subject forgets all that has taken place before a given moment of contemplation. But I would suggest that wonder allows us to see the surfaces of the world *as made*, and as such wonder opens up rather than suspends historicity.⁵

Here, rather than a 'first emotion' that negates history, wonder might be about bringing histories into a different relationship with the body, and about making visible lines of difference as made rather than assumed. I might also locate the work of theatre in this 'as if' – interpreting the theatre as a place where the constructedness of identity is brought to the surface. Theatre is, after all, a place where the surfaces of the world are seen as made. It is also a place that is often described in the way Ahmed first describes 'wonder', as a location that is somehow outside time. But I want to consider it here in

⁴ For the full section, see 'Feminism and Wonder' in chapter 8 of Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, new edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pp. 178–83.

⁵ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, p. 179. Original emphasis.

relation to her second description – as a place that holds the potential to open up, rather than suspend, historicity – as a place where the surfaces of what lies before us are acknowledged as constructed – somewhere between ‘already assumed’ and ‘yet to be assumed’.

Ahmed’s writing about ‘wonder’, then, helps me elaborate on the idea of a shift from listening to content towards listening to form. In the next section, I will begin to think about how this shift happens – by describing a strategy that initially came from one of the dialogues and later became a defining feature of the *Experiments in Listening* screenings: no questions.

No questions

On our fourth day of working together, aware that we had fallen into a pattern in which at the beginning of each day he would ask me questions about my intentions for the project and I would attempt to provide answers, Andy proposed a series of parameters within which he and I might work. These included the parameter ‘no questions’: an invitation to us both to refrain from asking questions when we spoke. It was a simple idea, and we both agreed to try it without thinking too much about what it would entail. When we tried it, we found that it significantly changed our dialogue and the relationship between us.

The first thing I noticed was that our previous exchanges had been filled with questions. Not just the obvious ones, but also the colloquialisms that peppered many of our sentences – phrases like, “... don’t you think?” or “... you know?” Without questions, I found that I began to speak more slowly, with longer pauses, allowing myself time to consider what I wanted to say next, careful to rephrase any potential question as a

statement. Without the directionality of Andy's questions, I also found that I had to pay closer attention to what he was saying, and to consider whether I had a response or not. I noticed that those smaller colloquial questions had been directing our conversations far more than I had imagined they were. They were ways of seeking reassurance, but they were also ways of ensuring that the conversation moved in an already-determined direction, limited by what the speaker had already said.

This puts me in mind of some of Fiumara's writing on the relationship between listening and the question, where she warns:

[T]he answer collaborates with the question and produces everything that is demanded of it, and *nothing else*.⁶

I have always thought of questions as being indicative of engagement and interest in the other, and have often found myself asking questions in order to listen better to someone else – as a way of finding out about them. But taking away this default behaviour revealed to me how much assumption is contained in the act of questioning. It is clear to me now that while the act of asking a question *enacts* listening, it is itself also a performative gesture, and therefore risks distracting from or even obliterating the activity of listening with its own performativity. Without the performance of listening, Andy and I were confronted with what it might mean to *actually* listen. We were so intrigued by the profound effect of this parameter that 'no questions' became a rule we stuck with throughout the rest of our time together, and even began to use outside the parameters of the project.

Later, when I was thinking about how to host the first screening of the films, I decided to borrow the 'no questions' rule and to use it as a parameter for a post-screening

⁶ Gemma Corradi Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening* [1985], trans. by Charles Lambert (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 35. Original emphasis.

discussion with the audience. I combined it with two other parameters, which were also adapted from my dialogue week with Andy.

1. Speaking and silence are equally valid
2. No questions
3. Any response is valid

I now use these parameters every time I host a screening of *Experiments in Listening*. I mention them first during my introduction to the evening, so that audience members know in advance that following the screening of the three films we will enter into a discussion. When it is time for the discussion to begin, I remind everyone of the three parameters, and invite people to move their chairs if they wish. This creates a small shift in the way the room is set up between watching the films and talking. Once everyone is ready, we enter into the discussion, using the parameters to guide us.

After one of the screenings a friend of mine, Judy Annear, who had been in the audience, sent me an email in which she reflected on the experience. She wrote:

[I]magining an environment without questions is quite an ask - on reflection it seems to me that questions are a way of measuring oneself against others/what is going on. One has to go further inside and be more vulnerable in order to recognise or observe where any such queries might come from and why such a journey is valuable.⁷

Annear notices that ‘no questions’ – as an intervention in the way that language usually circulates – demands work. She observes that the parameter invites more vulnerability and self-reflection than a default set-up. One might imagine a more standard discussion in which audience members were invited to ask me and other artists from the project

⁷ Judy Annear, personal correspondence with the author following *Experiments in Listening* screening, Sydney; reproduced with permission.

questions about what had happened during the dialogue weeks. In moving away from this default mode, we move away from two default hierarchies: a hierarchy of voice and articulacy, in which it is assumed that the most significant activity in a discussion is the act of speaking (and the people who speak most are usually those who are already heard – in this case, myself and, if present, the other artists – usually followed closely by the person in the room who is already most comfortable speaking in public); and a hierarchy of attention, in which the dialogues are by default the ‘centre’ of attention, and everything else has a lesser status. Instead, the three parameters, along with the films themselves, invite listening to happen before speaking – a balance between listening to self and listening to others.

Of course these parameters cannot guarantee the quality of the listening that happens in the discussions. It would be easy to imagine an environment in which ‘no questions’ and ‘any response is valid’ gave permission for someone to continue speaking uninterrupted, dominating the discussion, and leaving no room for anyone else to speak. It is certainly not the case that the parameters completely erase the differences between those who were already comfortable speaking when they came into the room and those who were not. But, in my experience, they invite some of the qualities of watching and listening that have been in the room during the films to continue into the discussion part of the evening. And they combine with the three films, as well as all the other elements of invitation that make up the screenings – the layout of the room, my welcome address, the catering, the other people in the room, and the many factors that have enabled each of the audience members to be there – to create a certain attentiveness to the act of gathering. Perhaps, then, ‘no questions’ introduces at least the possibility that we, as audience, might face each other differently – with a little less assumption – while inviting us to speak from where we are.

2. Eavesdropping with permission

In a paper entitled 'Eavesdropping with permission: the politics of listening for safer speaking spaces', media and communications scholar Tanja Dreher explores and builds on Krista Ratcliffe's proposal that the word 'eavesdropping' might be recontextualised and reimagined as a rhetorical term. Dreher writes:

Drawing on recent work on the politics of speaking and listening, I suggest that a particular form of 'political listening' (Bickford 1996) or 'eavesdropping' (Ratcliffe 2005) may enable people, like myself, who are discursively privileged, to contribute to antiracism without dominating the space of conversation.⁸

Ratcliffe's theory is that by consciously listening differently to historical and social narratives, one might shift which narratives are visible and which invisible; and by then choosing how one positions oneself in relation to those historical and social factors that otherwise invisibly draw up lines of privilege between people, it might become possible to reorient the relationships between oneself and others in present-day situations.⁹ Dreher then takes this reading of eavesdropping and asks how it might influence her own practices of listening in environments where she would otherwise be discursively privileged, crucially adding the qualifier 'with permission' to Ratcliffe's term.¹⁰ Dreher elaborates on the term as follows.

⁸ Tanja Dreher, 'Eavesdropping with Permission: The Politics of Listening for Safer Speaking Spaces', *borderlands ejournal*, 8.1 (2009), 1–21 (pp. 1–2).

⁹ For Ratcliffe's use of the term, see Krista Ratcliffe, *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006), p. 101.

¹⁰ Dreher summarises the article as follows. 'Here I reflect on my experiences as a co-convenor of the [...] "Gender, Violence, Protection" workshop series in an attempt to analyse some of the possibilities for a white, middle-class woman like myself, influenced by feminisms, antiracism and critical race and whiteness studies, to contribute to developing safer spaces for speaking and listening across differences in the context of Indigenous sovereignty, and despite the persistence of colonial feminism and the privileges of whiteness.' Dreher, 'Eavesdropping with Permission', p. 1.

In contrast to ‘dialogue’ aimed at empathy or understanding, ‘eavesdropping with permission’ involves the possibility of shifting risk and redistributing discomfort in order to unsettle the privileges of a centralized speaking position. This eavesdropping entails a shift to the margins and an ongoing negotiation of discomfort and permission.¹¹

Eavesdropping is of course usually characterised by a lack of permission – by the fact that someone purposely overhears what they are not meant to hear. Dreher’s ‘with permission’ changes this, proposing that it might be possible to create a situation in which both parties have agreed to the act of ‘listening in’. And in this act of permission lies a relationship with construct; this listening will be a constructed one, in which a contract has been carefully set up between listener and speaker – a contract that, as Dreher notes, might involve ongoing negotiations.

‘Eavesdropping with permission’ resonates for obvious reasons with the state of being-in-audience that I have been exploring, in which audience members inhabit a listening role that is embodied and attentive at once. Dreher’s description of the term as an alternative to a certain kind of dialogue aimed at ‘empathy’ and ‘understanding’ also resonates with my own descriptions of being-in-audience as a state more closely aligned with compassion than empathy. In this section, then, I want to borrow Dreher’s term as another way to consider the listenings that made up *Experiments in Listening*. But I also want to acknowledge that this is an act of translation – that I am carrying the term between contexts, and that this will change its resonances significantly. Most obviously, my writing here is about being-in-audience in a broadly theatrical context, where I am proposing that listening happens before speaking. Dreher’s work, on the other hand, describes her own role in contexts where speaking – not listening – dominates.

¹¹ Dreher, ‘Eavesdropping with Permission’, p. 1.

In spite of some reservations about differences in context, then, I think it is worth exploring ‘eavesdropping with permission’ specifically in relation to the role of the filmmakers and end-of-week audiences at *Experiments in Listening*. Though ‘eavesdropping’ may seem like the key term here, I would like to begin this exploration by thinking carefully about the act of giving permission and what it enables. In Dreher’s writing about the term, the permission she seeks grants her the right, as eavesdropper, to listen without any onus – or entitlement, depending on how one frames it – to respond. But, significantly, the same contract also grants the speaker(s) the permission to speak and be heard by someone outside the conversation, without the onus of making themselves heard in a particular way.¹² In the context of *Experiments in Listening*, then, I might first use Dreher’s term to describe the ways in which the framework of the project gave the filmmakers permission to eavesdrop on the dialogues. But, crucially, I would add that it also gave us permission to listen to *ourselves* differently. And this is in part because we knew that we were heard by someone outside the conversation, without needing to make ourselves heard in any particular way in order to earn their attention. The listening of the filmmakers was therefore not only present with the objective of creating something (the film) but was in and of itself already a creative act.

In the first chapter I wrote about Heidegger’s phrase ‘laying-before’, which Fiumara cites in her writing about the philosophy of listening. And it seems worth returning to this for a moment here. In light of Dreher’s writing about eavesdropping with permission, I realise that the idea of letting something or someone ‘lie before’ concerns not only the

¹² This is one of the moments when the translation between contexts is complicated, particularly given the context of Dreher’s original article, in which she is a white woman eavesdropping on conversations between women of colour. I do not mean to suggest that Dreher’s listening in these contexts is what gave value to their speaking. But I *am* observing that, once permission has been granted, the eavesdropper’s listening is inevitably a part of the speaking that happens, and the ways in which it is heard. The politics of how this plays out depend in large part, in my opinion, on the details of the act of permission-granting, which are not described in Dreher’s article.

audience member, or the listener, as Heidegger and Fiumara explore it, but also the speaker, or performer. In order to let something or someone lie before me, without my gaze or listening becoming an act of objectification, I need to be listening with permission. And this permission creates the contract between audience and performer, in which both are active participants in the encounter.

In the next two sections, I will briefly reflect on the listening of the filmmakers as well as the presence of the end-of-week audiences, using the lens of eavesdropping to begin teasing open their roles in the project.

Filmmakers as eavesdroppers

Lisa came in and out of the room, filming for select periods of time each day, making a first edit as she went, attuned to the way sunlight fell in the room at different times of day, and adjusting her schedule accordingly. Because the gallery we were in was noisier during the day than we had anticipated, and because there was very limited lighting after dark, we often began very early, adjusting our hours so that we could work when there was most light and least disturbance. Lisa was discreet, and always responsive to our dialogue, but she was also not afraid to make requests of us. At the close of each day, she invited Karen and me to spend time with her individually, encouraging us to treat the camera as a reflective presence. Her film shows fragments of conversations, close-ups of our bodies and details of the room, and layers of sound and image, often drawing attention to what is out of shot. It feels tightly edited but also poetic in its composition, inviting a viewer to find their own narrative through the images and sounds of the week.

The second dialogue took place in a white-walled rehearsal room in London's Jerwood Studios, which received little light. At the beginning of the week, **Griffyn** described his

desire to be like a ghost in the room with me and Chris. He wanted to interfere as little as possible, and he also wanted to be present as much as possible. This did not mean that he was static, but that he moved around the rehearsal room with grace and subtlety, curling his body silently into corners in order to find the best camera angle without interfering with our rhythm. At the end of each day, at Chris' suggestion, all three of us talked about how we were, and Griffyn recorded these conversations via audio. The film he made focuses on transitional and sometimes difficult moments, capturing the edges of long conversations, as well as moments of doubt, hesitation, and misunderstanding. Reflecting this, the picture is sometimes grainy, sometimes dark, and sometimes the audio is difficult to hear.

Jonathan moved around less than Griffyn, often remaining at some distance. The room was different too – wooden, and round, with a balcony all around but no natural light. Jonathan proposed that Andy and I wear radio mics during the week, so that he could easily capture the quieter moments of our dialogue and the sounds of our breath. Like Griffyn, he stayed in the room with us almost continuously. When Andy and I decided to move our dialogue outside for some of the sessions, he came with us. Jonathan's film includes footage of us walking on campus, and drinking tea in town on a rainy day. It has a slower pace than the others, and follows the chronology of the week quite closely. In an email he wrote to me during the editing process, he said that he wanted most of all to capture the way things changed slowly between the two of us over the week, as we became less physically active and more contemplative.

The filmmakers for *Experiments in Listening* were all people who did not have a significant history with the two of us who were in dialogue.¹³ What this meant was that, for the most part, they were not in a position to read our actions and conversations by making assumptions, or by relying on past knowledge. Instead, they were forced into the position of the eavesdropper, picking up clues, receiving what was placed before them without explanation. Although the three films have very different styles, they all share an awareness of surface details: small patterns in our behaviour, the way words fell or did not fall between us, the timbre of our voices, the physical space between our two bodies, the differences in our movement and manners. As with any act of eavesdropping, the filmmakers inevitably filtered this information through their own experiences, habits, and preferences. Theirs, like ours, was an embodied experience of listening, influenced by their own personal histories as well as by the fact of being in the room.

What I want to continue exploring in this section is that by inviting our words and actions to be overheard during the dialogues, the filmmakers also gave us permission to hear ourselves differently – through their presence in the room, and later through their films. I want to try out the idea that the listening of the filmmakers – while it did not and could not eradicate assumption – might have made us a little more aware of some of the behaviours between us that otherwise might have gone unnoticed. Perhaps, to return to a term I introduced in chapter three, the fact of being overheard lessened the amount that was ‘underheard’, meaning that our words and actions had a little more chance of landing in the room between us.¹⁴ At the very least, both during and after the

¹³ This would have been slightly different with the filmmaker Chris and I had originally planned to work with – though I suspect that the framework of the project meant that whatever their personal history, the filmmaker was always listening from the position of eavesdropper, as someone outside the conversations that were taking place.

¹⁴ This is a term used by scholar Michelle Ballif, which I introduced briefly in chapter three. ‘[A]lthough Kris acknowledges that Diane and I have our differences, they get “underheard” by the force of the categorical understanding. [...] As I have argued before, one often “hears” not *what* the other is saying but *what resonates with what one has previously heard.*” Ballif in

dialogues, the listening of the filmmakers made us aware of some of the limits and complexities in our listening.

There was, for example, a moment during my dialogue week with Andy when we were holding silence together for a certain period of time. During this time, I remember looking across the room, and instead of my friend Andy, I suddenly saw a large white man. Andy and I spoke about this experience later, and he said that he had experienced something similar in the way he saw me. It was a fleeting moment, but it re-shaped my perception of what it meant for us to be in the room together. After that moment, I think it is fair to say that we were both much more acutely aware of the distance between how we are perceived in the world, and how we might see each other as 'friends'. We drew on this in the ways that we worked together, each writing words for the other person to read aloud, as a way of both manifesting and playing with the distance between representation and perception. And while I cannot clearly attribute the clarity of this moment to the fact that Jonathan was in the room with us, I am sure that it played a part. I am sure that the way we listened to each other was shaped by the fact that we were always not two but three.¹⁵

In conversations with Andy, Chris, and Karen prior to the dialogues, I often described the filmmakers and end-of-week audiences as 'lenses' – referring to the fact that their presences would mean we were always at some level alert to another gaze, or another listening, which would give us a different awareness of our own words and actions. The filmmakers functioned (literally) as a lens during the weeks, holding our conversations

Michelle Ballif, Davis D. Diane and Roxanne Mountford, 'Toward an Ethics of Listening', *JAC*, 20.4 (2000), 931-42. Original emphasis.

¹⁵ In fact, I would say that we were more than three. Throughout the week, we also carried with us an awareness of the sharings that would happen at the end of the week. In some ways, those audiences were also with us throughout the dialogues.

within a framework of listening and watching with a camera – holding another perspective in the room. And similarly, the sharings provided a lens through which we might exit the week – closing each dialogue by opening it up to a wider range of listenings. I hoped that both of these structural components might pull productively against our familiarity with each other, though when I conceived of the project I did not know how this would play out. In the next section, I will write a little more about this lens of the end-of-week sharings, as a version of the transition from ‘theatre’ to ‘world’.

Exiting the dialogues

The end-of-week sharings provided a different kind of eavesdropping. Each one was very much shaped by the ways in which its specific audience had been brought together, and the context of the room in which we were working. In the moment that the audience entered, the listenings in the room were suddenly multiplied. These felt like very different experiments in listening – experiments in which there was a risk that, in trying to accommodate audiences, we might instead simply end up ‘performing’ our listening from the week. In this section, I will briefly describe the set-up for each sharing, before focusing in some detail on the challenge of retaining a commitment to listening when confronted with a set of audiences.

The first one was carefully planned. **Karen** and I knew that our dialogue was taking place as part of a symposium, and so our preparations for the end-of-week sharing were very much informed by that context. We knew that whatever we did had to be contained within a tight window of time, and that it would happen in front of an audience of delegates who had already spent the day watching presentations, and would watch

several more after ours.¹⁶ There was some room for improvisation, but it happened within a careful framework. The precision with which we planned this sharing feels to me like a reflection of the week we had spent together, which had been carefully timed around the restrictions of our working space. Inviting a new audience into the room felt like a shift in perspective and energy, but it did not feel like a shock. Our week had already involved several lenses through which we invited other perspectives into the dialogue: as part of the week, Karen and I had written letters to each other outside of our working sessions; we had hosted a tea break every afternoon, which was open to the public; and as I have mentioned, we had spent time with Lisa at the close of every day, using the camera as a different kind of lens to reflect back on the dialogue.

The second sharing had an entirely different set-up. **Chris** and I were working in a rehearsal studio, and so there was not a ready-made audience. Instead, we agreed to email a few people we knew, and to invite them into the studio to share the end of our dialogue week. As it turned out, a lot of people replied to our invitation, and we had to turn a significant number away. In the end, there were around forty people in the room during our sharing. This felt confronting, largely because Chris and I attempted to continue listening to each other without modifying our behaviour for an audience. This was our experiment. We wanted to see if we could find our way towards the end as if there were no extra people in the room – and we had therefore purposely not planned anything in advance. But when forty people entered the room (en masse, in spite of our best efforts to have them come in as they arrived) this – unsurprisingly – proved challenging, as I will explore below.

¹⁶ Incidentally, this was the same symposium in which I later attended the panel involving Lorena Rivero de Beer, which I describe in the prelude to chapter two.

The third sharing was open to a public audience. It had been advertised through Lancaster Arts, and so the room contained people we knew as well as people who had decided to come along because they were curious. **Andy** and I had a loose structure, which we had devised during one of our ‘no questions’ sessions, and within which we were each free to make our own decisions during the sharing. We had provided ourselves and each other with certain prompts we might use, including a piece of text we planned to read at some point in the evening. My own decisions relating to this sharing were very much informed by my experience of the previous one. I had decided in advance that when I entered the room, I would not speak until I felt like I was listening – until I felt like I was present with the people in the room, including Andy. As soon as we entered the room, I was aware of the silence of the audience as they waited for something to happen, and I had to work hard to stop myself from speaking immediately. In the end, the long silence that we both held as we entered meant that others in the room felt free to speak during the sharing. We were not anticipating this, but it was a welcome surprise.

I have had very positive feedback from people I know who came to the second sharing with Chris. Nevertheless, my experience of it was that it felt overwhelming, difficult, and very different from the rest of our week together, in a way that the other two sharings did not. In a talk he gave later in the year, which I happened to attend, Chris describes it as follows.

With all best will, the sudden influx of people into the room is jarring, and the sharing is fine, it’s completely fine, but it never really feels good exactly. It’s good to share, but not everything can be distributed in that way.¹⁷

¹⁷ Chris Goode, ‘The Birds’, keynote address at Finalists Festival, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2015; unpublished manuscript provided to the author, p. 8.

Interestingly, Chris and I had not acknowledged that we both found this moment difficult until he gave this talk. Afterwards, with some relief, we promised to speak about it some more. And perhaps we still will. But for now, drawing largely on my own experience, and bolstered by the fact that we both encountered some difficulty in opening our dialogue out to others, I will tentatively explore why this might have been.

I find that if I try to remember this sharing, I can barely remember a thing about it. I know that Chris and I were surrounded by people, in one long row of chairs that went all the way around three sides of the room. Most of these people were people that at least one of us knew, and many were also theatre-makers or performers. I know that we had felt ambivalent about the sharing – and that the large number of people we already knew were coming meant that there was a heightened sense of anticipation around it. And I know that, when they came in, this audience presence changed the way Chris acted towards me. I suspect it also changed how I was with him.

In retrospect, it seems obvious to me that in trying to hold on to the listening we had inhabited during the week, we were inevitably going to feel alienated from the audience members who joined us at that moment. The word ‘sharing’ seems pertinent here, and Chris also picks up on this in his description. Our desire to continue ‘as we were’ meant that we had not considered the transition into a much more public arena, nor the ways in which it might affect our behaviours. We had not considered what it might mean to share the listening in the room. At a certain point, it began to feel as if we were no longer listening but pretending, or enacting, our listening. This is something I will return to in the final section of the chapter, where I will examine in a little more detail the status of our friendships within the strange context of performance. For now, it is enough to notice that the listening of those audience members affected what happened in the room – and though the sharing

involved many of the same activities as the rest of our dialogue week, we inhabited them differently because we were being overheard in a much more public way.

If I think about this audience in terms of Dreher's 'eavesdropping with permission', what I notice most is that, while Chris and I had in theory given this audience permission to eavesdrop on us, we had not considered the way their presence might affect our own listening. We had not set up the contract carefully. In other words, perhaps we had not in fact given our full permission. Based on my own experience during this sharing, in which I found I was unable to bring myself fully into the room, I might conclude that in order to listen in a way that is embodied and attentive at once, I need to find a way to bring my body into the space. I need to be invited as listener.

In the terms I set up earlier, I might say that Chris and I did not allow the listening of those audience members to act as a lens, providing an exit from our dialogue. Instead, we tried to remain firmly inside our listening from the week together. It is interesting to consider this in light of Griffyn's film, which as I have mentioned often focuses on the moments in this dialogue that involved misunderstandings or negotiations. He picks up on small details in our conversations that are sometimes confronting to watch but which I do not recall as being difficult at the time. Again, this draws attention to the role of the eavesdropper as bringing a new perspective to the dialogue. And perhaps the presence of the audience at the end of the week made those differences between us all the more apparent – maybe those audience members and their many (very generous) listenings risked bringing to the surface lines of difference that Chris and I were not yet ready to confront.

3. Becoming strange

The thing about listening is that you kind of have to be ready.
And there are many different ways to be ready.
And one of them is to be ...
not itchy, not unfinished with other things,
not too busy in the mind.
And you have to, you have to be able to,
I think you have to be able to
open, open, open up.¹⁸

As I have already suggested, the details of my friendships with Karen, Andy, and Chris both mattered immensely and were not relevant at all to an understanding of *Experiments in Listening*. I think it is necessary to hold both these as true in order to understand the work of the project. I might say that our personal histories functioned as landscapes in which the project was conceived, allowing us to begin with a certain amount of trust – to begin in a place where we were prepared to attempt the opening up of listening that Karen describes in the quote above. And in some ways, those friendships also became the subject matter of the project, inflecting our dialogues with a certain quality of listening, and influencing the topics we addressed, as well as the ways in which we worked. But at the same time, what Karen, Chris, and Andy brought with them specifically was an understanding of what it might mean to work within the frame of performance – what it might mean to listen while also being heard.¹⁹

In this final section, I want to explore that intersection in a little more detail, asking what – if anything – is special about this project in the way it combines the modes of friendship and performance. Before I begin, I want to reintroduce Ahmed's

¹⁸ Karen Christopher, *Experiments in Listening* film by Lisa Cazzato-Vieyra.

¹⁹ Here, I mean 'being heard' in the sense of being public.

interpretation of the term ‘wonder’ as an emotion that brings the background into focus differently – this time thinking specifically about the ways in which ‘wonder’ might be a way to (re)claim ‘disorientation’. Below are the final words of the introduction to Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology*.

Queer objects might take us to the very limits of social gathering, even when they still gather us around, even then they still lead us to gather at a table. Indeed, to live out the politics of disorientation might be to sustain wonder about the very forms of social gathering.²⁰

These sentences set up the work of *Queer Phenomenology*, which is about the ways in which queerness, through the lenses of sexuality and race, disrupts and reorganises space itself, by not following accepted or normalised pathways. Crucially, Ahmed describes wonder here not as something that occurs in one moment – as a flash, as something out of the ordinary that then disappears – but as something sustained, as the ongoing work of living out a politics that exists at the ‘very limits of social gathering’. It takes work to hold open disorienting experiences in a way that allows for a wider focus – in a way that allows one to sustain wonder about the very forms of social gathering. I might think of Dreher’s ‘eavesdropping with permission’ as a strategy that attempts – in certain ways – to do this work. And I might include the listening of being-in-audience as also holding the potential to manifest this work.²¹

²⁰ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 24.

²¹ I am not the only one to read Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology* in relation to theatre. Chris has written about it in similar terms (and has even described my own practice in relation to it). In *The Forest and the Field* he describes *Queer Phenomenology* as ‘a book which could easily be read as being secretly about theatre all the way through’. Chris Goode, *The Forest and the Field: Changing Theatre in a Changing World* (London: Oberon, 2015), p. 112.

In this final section, I will consider friendship as a mode of social gathering that might also be interpreted as the background to our dialogues. And I will consider that, through the lens of performance, *Experiments in Listening* might bring that background of friendship into a different relationship with the body – by bringing our personal histories into the foreground, as it were. But it feels important to note that this act of foregrounding is not a straightforward one in which our friendships simply become the subject matter of the project. By foregrounding what was background through the lens of performance, something much more complicated happens. With this in mind, I will head into an exploration of the dialogues themselves, exploring them first through the lens of ‘love’ and then ‘passing’, proposing that the dialogues allowed our friendships to be held differently in relation to both wonder and disorientation.

Love

In a paper she gave a few years ago, artist and academic Wendy Hubbard notes a growing trend in the UK ‘for works of theatre and performance to explicitly foreground [...] the relationships between their performers.’²² She cites Quarantine’s 2007 show *Susan and Darren* (which features a mother and son) and Bryony Kimmings’ 2013 show *Credible Likeable Superstar Role Model* (in which Kimmings performs with her niece) among a number of performances that have been staged in the UK over the last ten years that place friendships, family relationships, or more broadly ‘love’, as she later describes it, on stage.

As well as drawing attention to what I think is a notable trend, this paper starts to work through two questions. One: Might such

²² Wendy Hubbard, ‘Sharing Performance: Quarantine/ With / Jean-Luc Nancy’, paper at London Theatre Seminar, 21 November 2013; unpublished manuscript provided to the author, p. 1.

performances offer a vantage point to reflect on fault-lines in the dominant political and philosophical paradigms around property and subject-hood? Two: What is love doing on the contemporary stage? Or, more properly: What *work* is love doing on the contemporary stage?²³

The proliferation of these kinds of shows, Hubbard proposes, not only indicates a growing trend, but draws attention to the ways in which the seemingly private or personal relationships between performers in these shows both exceed and underpin the relational work that becomes possible between performers and audience members when those friendships or other relationships are placed onstage.

The performances [...] explicitly direct an audience's attention to attachments amongst its performers, which precede, outlast and underlie the performances they appear in together and which I argue seem to 'found' those performances. By 'found' here I mean a kind of underwriting, a sense that the relations seem to provide the performance with a grounding sense of meaning, as well as an associated effect of emotional depth and even what tends to feel like a kind of moral seriousness.²⁴

Hubbard's paper goes on consider themes of interdependency and exposure in Quarantine's *Susan and Darren* as well as in their 2011 show *Entitled*, considering their work primarily in relation to philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's writings about self-hood and togetherness. My explorations will, for the most part, take another route. But I have included these reflections from Hubbard because her thinking feels relevant to *Experiments in Listening* – as a project which might arguably, if problematically, be included in Hubbard's list of performances, and which at the very least was conceived within the performance landscape that she is describing.

²³ Hubbard, p. 2.

²⁴ Hubbard, p. 2.

Aligning my language with Hubbard for a moment, then, I might say that the three dialogues in *Experiments in Listening* were founded on love – that they were experiments that involved placing the relationship between two friends within the frame of (an extended and unusual) performance to see what might emerge. But where Hubbard asks, ‘What is love doing on stage?’ I want to ask instead, ‘What does the stage do to love?’ i.e. how does the listening of audience members change the status of that which is placed ‘onstage’? Where Hubbard suggests that the performances she discusses are founded on the ongoing relationships between their performers, and that this in turn affects our listening as audience members, I want to approach the same idea with reverse emphasis. I would suggest that it is through the specific listening of being-in-audience – including that of the performers – that the relationships on stage take on a different status – and that the work underlying that status is not the work of love but of listening.

Perhaps I should take a moment here to define ‘onstage’ specifically in relation to *Experiments in Listening*. This is a slightly complicated task. The project involved three dialogues, each a week long, with no set parameters around what happened, and an explicit invitation that we would begin with nothing more than the relationships between us. Overtly, then, the project was an attempt to move away from a certain idea of stage-ness, towards a more attentive, intimate state. But if I think back for a moment to the parameters I used to define ‘theatre’ in chapter three in relation to *Lying Fallow* – something that happens in an explicitly constructed environment, that allows people to gather in such a way as to experience their relationship with each other on terms that are different from the terms on which we are in relation in our everyday lives, and that happens in a particular place, at a particular time, for a specific amount of time – then I find that they might all apply to *Experiments in Listening*. In other words, if ‘onstage’ is defined by a certain kind of listening, then it is clear to me that the dialogues took place onstage.

More complicated is the question of where to locate the listening that holds that stage in place. Here, again, I might refer back to some of the thinking from chapter three, where I defined the gathering-as-listening of the audience as existing in a conditional rather than causal relationship with the thing it was gathering around. In the context of *Experiments in Listening*, the work of gathering happens in different timescales, some of it even at different times, and in different places. According to a causal logic, the audiences at the screenings watch dialogues that have already happened – and because the films themselves do not change when they are watched by audiences at screenings, one might conclude that it is the films that gather a series of audiences around them. Yet, as I explored in the first section of this chapter, the gathering that happens each time the films are screened is still creating the ‘work’ of the dialogues, even if the films themselves are not changing and the dialogues have already happened.²⁵ Within a conditional relationship, the work of the project only happens if audiences gather to listen, and the listening of those audiences affects the ways in which the whole project is read, just as much as the films and dialogues enable the listening of those audiences. At the other end of the scale, I take this act of being-in-audience to include the listening that was held between the two of us each time we were in dialogue – which was constantly shifting according to a whole number of factors impacting it at any one time. Perhaps, then, it is not the relationships between the performers in Hubbard’s examples that are special, but the ways in which their familiarity meets the demands of strangeness (or ‘not already knowing’) that are held in the act of listening that lies at the heart of being-in-audience. As I have already begun to explore, this suggests that in the

²⁵ This is why it is my preference that the films are not viewed outside the context of hosted screenings, as detailed in Appendix 2.

encounter that theatre allows, and within the listening of theatre, friends might stand a chance of noticing *each other* differently.

Misfired signals

There is no doubt in my mind as to the location of the most 'difficult' moment from the first dialogue. I suspect that Karen would say the same. It occurred early on, during the second day, and it is a moment Lisa spends some time exploring in her film. Lisa, Karen, and I had travelled to Nottingham from London for the project. We were staying in guest rooms, and working in a gallery setting that was noisier and busier than we had anticipated. For this reason, we had decided to begin our dialogue as early in the morning as possible. Karen and I left our shared accommodation at 6.30am, and immediately got lost. We both knew the city differently, and our ways of navigating clashed. We disagreed, walked around in a big circle, and eventually arrived at the gallery much later than we had hoped, finding Lisa waiting patiently for us. This was the beginning of the second day. Later, after lunch, I wanted to create a structure in which we might work together in silence. I wrote a number of unfinished sentences on the black wall of the studio in chalk, using a phrase Karen had offered me during an earlier exercise, "I see...", as a starting point. I left a note for her, inviting her to be with me in silence, and waited for her to return from lunch. When Karen returned, Lisa had already joined me, and we were both in the room. Karen came in and sat down. And in this moment, sitting together in silence, something began to feel terribly wrong.

When Karen and I began our dialogue, I suspect that both of us were expecting to talk about the fact that we share a desire to find the possibility of friendship in strangers.²⁶ I suspect we both also expected we might *talk* about the reverse possibility – that friendship contains blind spots, or short cuts, that can diminish our listening potential. And we did talk about both of these things in some detail. What neither of us expected, however, was a deep embodied insight into the potential for strangeness, or maybe more appropriately estrangedness, in our own friendship. But during our dialogue, at the moment I describe above, we suddenly became completely unable to communicate with each other. The reasons why we failed to communicate are – as these things often tend to be – fairly banal: a series of minor misunderstandings that obliterated the possibility of listening between us temporarily. As Karen says in the film,

You know it's hard to say what could be so frightening about two people planning to have a kind of conversation. ... Something happened – it did use words but it was all about signs and ways and back-story, history. Triggers, there were little triggers that turned our minds to a really dark place. Which is pretty incredible, I have to say.²⁷

The estrangedness between us at this moment reveals what is perhaps already evident: that the category 'friend' contains the distinct possibility of not-listening. Our inability to communicate in that moment was not aided by our assumption of friendship; in fact, the desire to see each other as friends, or as someone familiar, was what felt most challenging and constraining. It is a moment I recall as deeply disorienting, one in which the landmarks that usually defined our friendship were not visible to either of us. But I want to examine a little further the terms of this disorientation. In order to do this, I will

²⁶ Karen and I have often talked about the politics of friendship within our artistic practices, and we also worked together on *Glorious* – a project that was founded on the belief that strangers might be friends.

²⁷ Karen Christopher, in the film of *Experiments in Listening* by Lisa Cazzato-Vieyra.

return to something I proposed in the prelude, where – perhaps optimistically – I described being-in-audience as something that happens in the gap between ‘already assumed’ and ‘yet to be assumed’.

Reflecting on this moment with Karen, I am aware of my desire to place it neatly in position between ‘already assumed’ and ‘yet to be assumed’. But it is more complicated than that. In practice, the listening that lies between ‘already assumed’ and ‘yet to be assumed’ is not a constant state but one that at every moment risks tipping either way. Perhaps what I can say with some certainty is that in this moment Karen and I failed to ‘pass’ as friends. We were unable to recognise each other as friends. I might even describe it as a moment in which we moved temporarily from a place of listening, of being-in-audience with each other, to a place where we made certain assumptions about each other based on previous experiences that were not relevant to the moment. In other words, in that moment we failed to negotiate attention successfully. We were not able to communicate. This, of course, is also what makes listening so difficult: to find oneself capable of listening takes the work of many trajectories that are constantly having to adjust to each other. It is for this reason, as I explored at the very beginning of this PhD, that listening involves a repetitious or iterative process – a willingness to learn again.

During our dialogue, Karen and I also exchanged a series of letters, which we wrote, for the most part, outside the studio. The night after we had experienced this rupture in our dialogue, Karen wrote the following in her letter:

It isn't great that we experienced this miscommunication – or misfired signals – but because it happened, some of the apparatus has been laid bare or made clear. [...] Failures in communication light up the pathways. Let's focus on the radiance.²⁸

²⁸ Karen Christopher, private letter (30 September 2014), written as part of *Experiments in Listening*. Reproduced with permission.

Perhaps I am being whimsical, but I cannot help thinking about the work of sustaining wonder when I re-read Karen's words now. That moment, in which communication failed, was held within the parameters of a week-long dialogue, and within layers of other constructed acts of listening. This meant that our miscommunication was perhaps amplified, or intensified. But it also meant that we were able to locate our own listening within a broader system. In that moment that listening failed, and in the moments that followed, our miscommunication took centre-stage. But because of it, we were able to listen from a place in which our disorientation was part of a wider system of communication – one that was now brought into focus differently.

The theatrical frame

I will end by returning once more to the idea of love on stage, this time, perhaps surprisingly, via Stanley Cavell's essay *The Avoidance of Love*, which I wrote about in some detail in chapter two. In the section of the essay from which I am about to quote, Cavell is describing the famous abdication scene from *King Lear*, in which Lear demands that Cordelia and her sisters declare their love for him publicly in order to secure a share of his kingdom. Whereas her sisters have no problem declaring their love, Cordelia cannot seem to reconcile herself to the task of converting her love into a public announcement. Cavell makes the following astounding observation.

But to pretend publicly to love, where you do not love, is easy; to pretend to love, where you really do love, is not obviously possible.²⁹

²⁹ Stanley Cavell, 'The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*' [1967], in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, updated edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 267–353, p. 290.

It might seem strange to introduce writing concerning the motivations of a fictional character at the end of a chapter about *Experiments in Listening*. But what fascinates me about this quote, and indeed about Cavell's essay as a whole, is that it points precisely towards the wider complexity of what it means to be 'onstage'. In this context, it seems directly relevant to Hubbard's writing about what it means to place 'love' onstage, and my own questions about the status of friendship within the listening of audience.

All Cordelia needs to do in this scene is to declare her love for her father. Her problem, according to Cavell, is that she cannot see a way to put into words the real emotion of her love, without immediately reducing it to a pretence. Famously, she chooses to stay mostly silent, and the story of the play unfolds from this moment. But Cavell's writing brings me back to the story I told in the prelude, about a moment of failed 'passing' between friends. Cavell writes about the impossibility of pretending to love where one really does love, but I am curious to know what happens if I rephrase this in the language of passing. In this language, I might say that Cordelia refuses to 'pass' as a loving daughter because she wants her love to be visible without needing to be declared – because the act of passing would make it seem less genuine. But her refusal to pass shifts the hierarchies of speaking and listening in the room, bringing what was in the background – her private relationship with her father – into the foreground, and exposing the lines of privilege and pretence that surround the act of abdication.

I have introduced this story because it tells me something about putting things onstage. In inviting Karen, Andy, and Chris into dialogue, I was, at some level, asking us to put our friendships onstage, as part of a project that attempts to define the stage through listening. In putting our friendships onstage, we also had to relinquish – for those moments – our right to claim those friendships as private or hidden. But placing them onstage also meant that they might become visible *differently* through the eyes and ears

of others – and therefore that we might approach them differently. What had previously passed between us might now become visible and audible. This is the theatrical frame at play. It is the theatrical frame that draws attention to passing, and that allows us the opportunity to lay down or approach differently the acts of fictionalisation which characterise our daily lives.

I began this chapter thinking about listening to form, and here I will end thinking about the work that it takes to listen to form. In chapter three, I described *Lying Fallow* as a project that resisted meaning-making by stopping short of creating a narrative. If I were to think about *Experiments in Listening* on similar terms, I might say that it, too, resisted meaning-making, by acknowledging the gaps between its components. In other words, it is perhaps in the way it doesn't add up that one makes sense of *Experiments in Listening*. The films and the end-of-week sharings fail to represent the dialogues. The dialogues fail to represent our friendships. The work of *Experiments in Listening* might lie in the gaps between each of its listenings, and in the way it brought awareness to those gaps as integral to the act of listening. To end where I began, the screenings were not only about the films or about the dialogues, but about our own listenings that rub against each other, inviting different viewpoints to come into focus.

[end of chapter five]

Conclusion

This
might be a moment for us to look each other
in the eye, knowing that the work
of listening
sits between us,
clouded by memory and desire.

I think that conclusions have a bad reputation. Their work, evident in the name, is perceived as that of shutting down and closing up. They are often seen as nothing more than a structural obligation. But – just as the closing moments of a show are the final moments of its invitation, opening the parameters of its thinking to the world outside, inviting a process of translation from theatre to world through the body – so this conclusion is an opportunity to think about how the words on these pages meet the wider world in which they have been written, and to ask what that world might hold.

In the introduction to this PhD I did not attempt to lay out a detailed trajectory of the chapters that would follow, preferring instead to describe the landscapes in which it was made, the way its thinking evolved, and my personal reasons for writing it. Similarly, in this conclusion I will not attempt to sum up the work that has happened over the last five chapters, or to draw it together. Instead, I want to acknowledge that these words meet the world through our embodied experiences of them – meaning that the work of this PhD sits somewhere between my writing and your interpretations.

“Disseminating good practices” is a catchword today. However, there is very little attention to the actual transfer of good practices in the prevailing idea of dissemination – and even less on the sustainability of good practices. [...] Good practices do not even travel in the strict sense of the word. They have to be *created* in the new context. An interest towards ideas can develop in minds, but to generate a practice and make it flourish, one has to form and foster all the relationships relevant to the practice – and these are unique in each context.¹

In this quote, Jaakko Seikkula and Tom Arnkil challenge standard models of thinking around disseminating good practice. Their words are written in relation to two therapeutic models of treatment that centre on the dialogic: *Open Dialogues*, and *Anticipation/Future dialogues*.² They describe the ways in which practices need to be created through specific relationships in specific places, emphasising the connections between models of good practice and real lives. This is where I would like to end, focused on listening as an embodied and embedded practice, one that exists in the encounter between body and world. Although the listening of theatre might be created by invitation, it comes alive in individual bodies, and is coloured by the histories that those bodies carry, as much as by the invitation that an artist or artwork might make. As I end, then, I am thinking about the audience as part of the work. And I am thinking about ‘good practice’ as something that lives not in a model or a method, but in the way invitations meet the people who encounter them. Which means that the ‘good’ of ‘good practice’ is defined by the fine and shifting details of specific embodied encounters.

¹ Jaakko Seikkula and Tom Erik Arnkil, *Open Dialogues and Anticipations: Respecting Otherness in the Present Moment* (Tampere, Finland: National Institute for Health and Welfare, 2014), pp. 160–61. Original emphasis.

² As I mentioned in the introduction, I attended an Open Dialogues training session as part of the research for this PhD. Though I have not been able to write about the work directly, the method has greatly informed my process.

In the same piece of writing, Seikkula and Arnkil point out that the most important part of ‘dissemination’ – literally ‘to spread abroad by sowing seed’ – is the act of planting, the way a seed is nurtured and tended to, and the ground on which it lands.³ Their words remind me that I began this PhD by writing about the radical, relating that term to the work that underlies the performance encounter, its root structures, nurtured and made possible by a careful act of invitation, taking into account the ways in which we enter and exit that encounter. In my first chapter, I also promised that I would return to the question of change in relation to listening – and to some extent, I feel that I have. But the relationship between change, action, and listening remains knotty and complex, and though I have worked through some of its details, it feels important to return to it once more, as part of the work of opening these ideas to the world.

In the face of climate crisis, in a world of deeply-felt inequity, it is hard to challenge the call to move into action, and to champion instead the seemingly less urgent call to listen. And it is undoubtedly true that to inhabit a place where one has the resources to think from a wider perspective is a privilege. I am, after all, not writing these words from the frontline; I am not yet fighting for survival. But it also feels important to remember that listening is not a solution or an alternative – it is a way of thinking about what is already happening, and of meeting what already lies before us, with the possibility of encountering it differently. As I find my way out of this writing, then, I will turn to two final quotes, one from Sedgwick and one from Fiumara. In different ways, I feel that they open up the idea that listening might yet provide the tools we need as we move into an uncertain future.

³ Seikkula and Arnkil, p. 161.

This first quote is from Sedgwick's writing about reparative and paranoid modes of reading.

To recognize in paranoia a distinctively rigid relation to temporality, at once anticipatory and retroactive, averse above all to surprise, is also to glimpse the lineaments of other possibilities. [...] [T]o read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to a reader *as new*; to a reparatively positioned reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise.⁴

In many ways, Sedgwick's writing about the reparative mode feels deeply relevant to the mode of listening that I have been exploring over the past five chapters. Yet, maybe fittingly, though it influenced my own processes of writing and reading, I could never grasp hold of it in a way that would allow me to take it with me into the body of the PhD. This is partly because Sedgwick introduces these terms in one of the final chapters of *Touching Feeling*, and they feel firmly rooted in detailed analyses of other texts and thought systems that have gone before. But it is also because the reparative is a mode that by its very nature refuses to be summed up or pinned down – because it is a mode that is plural by nature. This, then, might be one way to think about listening as part of a changing world, as a stance that invites the possibility of difference and therefore change, without already knowing what that change will be, open to surprise.

The second quote is one you have already encountered. It seems appropriate to end by returning to the very beginning. This quote, from Fiumara, is the one I cited at the start of the first prelude:

⁴ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 146. Original emphasis.

There is a whole world yet to be discovered, not of unsolved issues but of relationships among things we know, of ways in which they might fit together.⁵

I am not sure that I need to add much interpretation here. Except, perhaps, to say that Fiumara's words might well be describing a reparative mode of being in the world – a mode in which whatever happens next might be met with a listening stance that encounters it as if new. Inviting you to re-read this quote at the end of the PhD might be the closest I can get to commenting on the reparative mode.

As promised, my final gesture will be towards the world outside this PhD. As I write these last words, then, instead of looking for the ways in which I already understand listening to be possible, I will widen my gaze to include the perspectives of others: artists who are inviting me to listen differently; artists who are inviting us to gather in ways that do not simply follow what has gone before. What follows is a glimpse of a landscape. It is a landscape of performances and performance-makers that I know of, whose practices might be contingent with and also extend the thinking in these words. It includes performances I have attended, and performances I have heard about. They have happened alongside this writing, and they are continuing. As I close this PhD, I am placing this writing alongside:

Luis Carlos Sotelo Castro, who is setting up a listening performance lab, focused on the ways in which participatory theatre might facilitate listening, working with refugees and at-risk youth in post-conflict contexts across the Americas.⁶

⁵ Gemma Corradi Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening* [1985], trans. by Charles Lambert (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 17.

⁶ Concordia University, 'Concordia Receives \$1.24 Million for Research Infrastructure', 15 August 2017 <<http://www.concordia.ca/cunews/main/stories/2017/08/15/canada-foundation-for-innovation-supports-research-infrastructure.html>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

Selina Thompson, whose evolving installation and archive, *Race Cards*, invites audience members to consider their own embodied relationship with the construct of race, through an encounter with a series of 1,000 questions drawn from her own experiences.⁷

Torika Bolatagici, who has created *The Community Reading Room*, a pop-up space where individuals who identify as First Nations and People of Colour are invited to encounter texts that acknowledge and place their lived experience at the centre, rather than the margin.⁸

Sheila Ghelani and Sue Palmer, whose tabletop performance, *Common Salt*, asks audiences of 30 people at a time to consider their own embodied relationships to borders, taxes, trade, and the lines of history, through the habitat, border, and boundary of the hedge.⁹

Alex Tálamo, who walks for twelve hours, dawn till dusk, in solidarity with the Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, remembering 30,000 people who disappeared during the military dictatorship, in an act of resistance to disappearance.¹⁰

Nic Green, the first recipient of the Adrian Howells Award for Intimate Performance, who is developing a form to facilitate the transformation of words donated by an individual into birdsong, and who is asking how this form might be in service to people approaching death.¹¹

⁷ Selina Thompson, 'Race Cards' <<http://selinathompson.co.uk/work/race-cards/>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

⁸ Torika Bolatagici, *The Community Reading Room* <<http://www.communityreadingroom.com/>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

⁹ Sheila Ghelani, 'Common Salt', 2017 <<http://www.sheilaghelani.co.uk/commonsalt/>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

¹⁰ Alex Tálamo, '30,000 Steps in a Circle around a Pile of Rubble Carrying a Rock with My Family Name Engraved on It to Re-Enact the Protests against Disappearance by the Madres de Plaza de Mayo', <<http://alextalamo.com/portfolio/30000-steps-in-a-circle-around-a-pile-of-rubble-carrying-a-rock-with-my-family-name-engraved-on-it-to-re-enact-the-protests-against-disappearance-by-the-madres-de-plaza-de-mayo/>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

¹¹ 'Adrian Howells Award for Intimate Performance' <<https://takemesomewhere.co.uk/nicgreen>> [accessed 21 September 2017].

And here, in fine company, it ends.

[end of conclusion]

Appendix 1: *Lying Fallow*

There are several sections to this appendix, which aims to give comprehensive factual information as well as an insight into the experience of attending *Lying Fallow*. It includes: an acknowledgement of the people who co-created the project; field notes from each of the gatherings, written by myself; and a series of edited responses written by participants.

Acknowledgement of co-creation

Lying Fallow was conceived and organised by myself and co-creators Mary Paterson, Susan Sheddan, and Tiffany Charrington, with advice and guidance from Mark Trezona. I confirm that each of them has given permission for me to write about the project as part of my PhD.

Field Notes

The following are extracts from field notes I wrote after each of the gatherings.

Field Notes on *Lying Fallow* #1 (written 28/11/2014)

Date and time: 12-5pm, Saturday 15th November 2014

Location: Hackney City Farm (HCF), Straw Bale Room

The location for this first gathering was a small room (6 metres by 7 metres), mostly wooden, with three blackboards along one side – on which were written the three core questions – and glass doors looking out onto a private part of the farm on two other sides. In certain parts of the room, the straw bale structure was visible – including one small window through which one could see the straw inside the wall. Chairs were arranged in a circle for both main sessions of the day, which meant that all activities

took place within a group. This circle of chairs took up most of the space in the room. In the centre of the circle (and variously moved/used during the day by participants) was a large cushion, several smaller cushions, and a blanket for alternative seating options.

As one entered, there were two long tables dressed with simple tablecloths along the wall directly to the left, with homemade cakes (and handwritten lists of ingredients) that tended to everyone's dietary requirements, an urn of hot water and an urn of coffee, herbal tea bags and black caffeinated tea bags, two bottles of tap water, cups for hot and cold drinks, a marker for people to write their names on their cups, and serviettes; further along, there was a large bouquet of Autumnal flowers in a simple vase, and three stacks of A3 double-sided printed sheets which had anonymised answers (from the original applications) by each person to the question: 'What ideally would you like Lying Fallow to be?' On the wall next to these were three A3 posters with each person's photo and name. On the opposite side of the room was a corner with two half-circle tables where people could leave their coats and bags.

Structure of Day:

11.45am-12.30am – We allowed this time for people to find the place. Tiffany stood outside at the entrance to the farm, to greet people and direct them (we had mentioned in an email that one of us would be doing this). She also had her phone and everyone had her number in case of any delays. We had put signs up guiding people through the Farm café to the Straw Bale Room in case people missed Tiffany on the way in. The rest of us were waiting in the room, to welcome each person, let them know they had some time to arrive, and invite them to help themselves to cake and a drink, and to leave their coats and bags in the corner if they wished.

12.30-12.45: Everyone sat in chairs in a circle (already laid out when they arrived). Susan, Mary, Tiffany, and Rajni gave brief introductions, welcoming people, explaining the structure of the day, and giving a short account of why they each had chosen to be there.

12.45-1.45pm: First session, introduced by Rajni, in which the invitation was to begin in silence and practise listening as a group, and to allow whatever thoughts that might emerge to be expressed. An explicit invitation for the speaking to be a 'thinking-through' rather than formalised or already-completed phrases, and for the whole process to feel as messy or as silent as it needed to.

1.45-2pm: Everyone was invited to go outside and take a walk around the farm, while lunch was set up by Frizzante caterers, with help from Rajni and Tiffany.

2-3pm: Lunch catered by Frizzante, the HCF restaurant. Catering to suit all diets, served as a buffet in the centre of the room.

Menu:

Leek, potato and cauliflower soup

Dairy free rice croquettes

Salad bowl

Sandwich Platters: humus and grilled veg; vegan tomato pesto and salad (w/ regular bread, wheat free bread, and gluten free bread)

1 x roast butternut squash with side salad - special diet

3-4.30pm: Second session, introduced by Tiffany, during which each person in the circle had two minutes (timed, with a gentle sound after each two minutes, though the person could go on longer if they wished) to say something by way of introduction or hold the silence.

4.30-5pm: closing session, for anyone to share reflections, questions, or thoughts about the next session in February. Introduced by Mary and Susan, and the space was held by Mary, Rajni, Susan, and Tiffany.

Field Notes on Lying Fallow #2 (written 16/02/15 and 25/02/15)

Date and time: 9am-9pm, Sunday 15th February 2015

Location: Keynes Library, Birkbeck

The Keynes Library is an old parlour room, with an arch halfway across, and feels domestic, as well as being within the warren of classrooms that is 32 Gordon Square, Birkbeck. It was particularly relevant that we were in an institution on a day on which it was shut and so most spaces were empty. Long corridors, doors, and a building full of history.

Structure of Day:

9-10am: Arrivals. The space was almost ready when people arrived, with a circle of chairs in one half, and a place for people to leave bags and coats in the other half. Along one end were tables with breakfast supplies: croissants, orange juice, gluten free muffins, bananas, oranges, apples, nuts and raisins, rice cakes with dark chocolate. On a table near the windows was a kettle, five large bottles of drinking water, recycled tea cups and a pen to write names on cups, six different teas, Fairtrade instant coffee, semi-skimmed milk, coconut milk, and soya milk.

10-11am: Everyone was invited to sit in a circle as in the previous gathering, and to speak or not speak as they felt moved.

11-11.30am: Time for people to help themselves to cakes (vegan, locally made), biscuits (vegan and gluten free macaroons and chocolate macaroons), or more breakfast, and to make tea or coffee.

11.30am-1pm: An open session, in which some materials were left on the table as resources, and everyone was invited to explore the concept of 'lying fallow' in the way that most made sense to them. On the table were: A5 booklets with the core questions and statements and blank pages, A3 construction paper, graph paper, plain paper, coloured pens, pencils, maps of the local area, books that people wanted to share. There was an invitation to use the table to share any materials with other participants.

1-3pm: Lunch – we walked together to a buffet at Chutneys Indian restaurant, in a room downstairs at small tables. Bottled water provided.

3-4.30pm: A repeat of the morning session, where participants were free to do an activity of their choosing. This time we were encouraged to do something different from the first time – perhaps challenging our ‘usual’ way of exploring or being.

4.30-5.30pm: Repeat of ‘clean space’ from the first event. Each person was given two minutes, timed, to use as they wished, to speak or be silent or anything else.

5.30-6.30pm: Mary gave an introduction to the different phases of dusk, and we were all invited to either stay in the room with the lights off or walk out into Gordon Square to experience the dusk together.

7-8.30pm: Dinner, at Antalya Turkish restaurant. Participants were invited to remain here as long as they wished, and to head home from here.

8.30-9pm: Rajni, Susan, Mary, Tiffany, and Mark returned to Keynes Library and cleared up.

Field Notes on *Lying Fallow* #3 (written 26-27/05/15 & 14/06/15)

Date and time: 5-10pm, Friday 15th May 2015

Location: Steve Whitsun Studio, Artsadmin, London

We spent a long time choosing the location for this final gathering and cycled through quite a few options before deciding. When we finally settled for the Steve Whitsun Studio, in spite of having had some reservations about it being arts-related (and therefore affecting the different relationships people might have, levels of comfort, feelings of being inside or outside), we were sure it was the right space. This was primarily because of the light: the studio has a very large glass window covering the whole of one wall. It felt important to be somewhere we could experience dusk falling, and where light could be present in an equally significant but different way to the other sessions.

The studio has two doors, one on each side of a long mirror wall (over which we drew a curtain), and has two much smaller windows in the wall opposite the mirror wall. On entering, the big glass windows are to the left, and to the right there are no windows, but there is a piano.

We invited people to take off their shoes as they came in, and to leave them along the left wall. We invited people to leave bags and coats along the right wall, in the corner nearest the door. Along the far wall, facing people as they came in, were long tables with tablecloths and some basic food that we had bought: fruit juice, sparkling water, organic and Fairtrade teas, fresh mint, nuts and raisins, some fresh fruit, rice cakes with dark chocolate, biodegradable cups, plates, and forks. Everyone had been invited to bring something for a potluck dinner, and so people added their contributions on arrival.

On the left wall, just beyond where people were leaving shoes, was a table with some art supplies – papers, paints, pens, copies of the three questions written by hand on

large pieces of paper, and some copies of the booklets with everyone's 'desires for Lying Fallow' which had been left over from last time. I had also put together a small booklet (one copy only) with each person's photo stuck in and their name written in handwriting below. This was in order to acknowledge everyone who had been part of the group of 31. Chairs were set up in a circle in the middle of the studio, and there were also some extra chairs along the left side of the room.

Structure of Day:

3pm: Mary, Rajni, Susan, and Tiffany arrive, check in, and lay out the room.

5 - 5.30: Arrivals. I was on the street, directing people inside, and Tiffany was in the bar area, telling people how to get upstairs. Once they were upstairs, Mary and Susan told people about the room set-up, and brought kettles of hot water up from the kitchen so people could have tea. This went on longer than we had anticipated due to late arrivals.

5.30 - 6.30: Each person experienced two minutes of being listened to. I had realised after the second gathering that we had done this activity at roughly the same time of day in each gathering – at the close of the first gathering, before watching the sunset at the second gathering, and now at the start. It was a familiar format to everyone at this point. Introduced by Mary.

6.30 - 8.15: This time had been configured as free time in which people could share food and share the space in any way they wanted. This was a similar space to the hours we had at Birkbeck, but this time taking place within a tighter time-frame, and within the room (at Birkbeck people had been invited to go outside or into other parts of the empty building if they wished). There was an idea that rather than having a designated time for food, this invitation would mean that food was being shared throughout, just as the space was being shared throughout. Introduced by Susan.

8.15 - 8.30: Short break.

8.30 - 9.30: Another return to a previously used format. We sat in a circle and anyone could speak when/if moved. Introduced by Rajni.

9.30 - 10.00 Time for saying goodbye. This was introduced by Tiffany, who had proposed that just as we always left time for people to arrive, we should also leave time for people to leave, knowing that this was the final gathering, and that saying goodbye might feel important. We knew we had to leave the studio by 10pm (though we failed – I think the last people left around 10.45pm).

Edited responses

The words on the following pages are edited together from personal reflections on *Lying Fallow* written by the following participants: Alice Lagaay, Anna Minton, Ben Webb, David Slater, Emma Adams, Genevieve Maxwell, Michelle Outram, Stella Duffy, and Wajid Hussain. They are designed to give an insight into the shared experience of the gatherings, and a glimpse of the diversity of experiences taken away from them. I have quoted from some of the responses in the body of the PhD, where I have credited them individually. I confirm that all the authors of these texts have given their permission for me to reproduce their words.

*

So, what is it then, to be fallow?

The most important lesson I learnt from *Lying Fallow* is how valuable it can be **not** to tell people you don't know who you are and what you do.

Looking back, I don't know whether a decision was made by the organisers that participants **would not** introduce themselves. Whether by accident or design, when the group of 30 or so people met, who I believe mostly didn't know each other, no formal introductions were made in the usual way. When I say 'usual way', what I mean is that over the last ten years or so, I have been accustomed in meetings for us all to go around the room and give a quick synopsis of who we are and why we are present. It seems a useful way for each individual to outline what they can contribute, and to present themselves – and their achievements – in a way they feel comfortable with. Normally

that starts off any meeting with me feeling pretty good about myself, confident of my place in the room.

But we didn't do this. We just sat in a circle and whoever wished to speak did so. To be honest, I didn't really understand what was going on and felt at quite a disadvantage. I wasn't being acknowledged in the public that had been created, and I didn't enjoy that feeling. But then, no one else was being acknowledged either. The first session, which in my memory was the shortest, ended and I went home feeling perplexed and slightly unsettled.

*

We did not come quietly,
Bringing our lives,
Bringing the world with us into the room.
What we wanted remaining unknown, even to ourselves.

*

We are invited to hold a 'difficult' space of *not knowing and inarticularity*.

Some people perform- finding allusions to social hierarchies and statuses unavoidable. Some people perform silence. Some perform relaxation in the hope the genuine experience will follow. I sense some fear, some excitement; some manage to shift in to 'being'.

But we are not yet fallow.

I have scribbled in my notebook:

How can 'lying fallow' be less introverted, and have more AGENCY?

I don't yet know.

Apart, perhaps from 'being' it, from time to time.

*

After the first session on my train journey home my mind was trying as we are taught to label the experience and put it in a box. I thought about it for a while and then I realised my approach was a little Western in its tao.

I then tried to keep fallow until the next session which was actually quite difficult at first. I have a young family and a hectic schedule so understanding fallowness or even practicing fallowness became something to think about. After giving it some thought I observed (I suppose) my thoughts and feelings during activities. The thought of having to be secluded to be fallow were clearly not required after the first session of being together. I thought about fallowness during the dishes, while playing with my children, and it all kind of started to mean being present. Not thinking more than within the moment.

*

The best thing about being invisible
is not having to think of anything to say.

I wanted to be less visible,

Which does not mean I wanted to disappear.

*

I remember singing to the room. I was taken aback. I thought 'I'm going to sing' and the vast majority of my brain responded by saying 'do not be stupid! Of course you're not going to sing'. But the bit that had decided to sing, didn't even bother responding. It just opened my mouth and a song came out. That was a surprise.

I remember P crying and the feeling that this group of people who did not know each other all were coming together to care for him. I felt us all, silently gather him up and sit with him and it was OK for him to cry. And this is the simplest thing in the world but it is also the hardest. Usually, even though it is OK to cry, in practical ways it is not OK to cry. In the world, socially, at work. Crying usually isn't OK, even though we know it should be. But on this occasion it was OK. Genuinely OK. I could feel that in the room.

*

Three months passed and we met again. This time from the moment we met it was different.

And for some reason it no longer mattered to me that my public profile was not recognised. I had been recognised in a different way – simply I was remembered from the last time which meant I belonged to the group. We all did.

Participating in Lying Fallow was a paradoxical experience that afforded the opportunity of being able to openly sit at the edge of your knowing in the company of people who it seemed that you knew both intimately and hardly at all.

Anonymity in a collective context.

*

Shifting light, the repeated rituals of shared eating, breathing, the dissolving of choice over speech or silence, soften.

It is *'like being invited to sit in a growing meadow...'* (Anon)

'An enabled unravelling' (Anon)

'Like we just walked down a corridor and here we all are again!' (Anon)

I still do not know all the names, I know even less of the occupations. This is a fine thing.

*

And what actually was the “work”? Rajni Shah [Projects] is a collective that – I presume – usually produces works to be seen by an audience. Here the presence of a collective body of chosen people *became* the (non-)art – to be seen by no-one but those present.

And while some people saw Lying Fallow as a place of anti-production – as a place of fallowness in itself – for me it still had the elements of a being a thing, rather than an un-thing. It was a space for attention and transformation, similar to what one might conceive a performance experience to create. We 'performed' Lying Fallow for each other by making the commitment to 'hold the space' for each other, which is a particular kind of audiencing or witnessing.

And as we went along, I felt the anger and the rage and the guilt and the irritation that we were not 'doing', ebbing away and being replaced with recognition and a sense of rhythm and expectation. Recognising the voices in the room and the concerns. The ideas about the universe, god, weather moving. The ebbs and flow of us.

*

There is space, between the meetings. Space from each other. Space travelling through the season, through different textures of light. There are some dark times, and some good. And somehow, without trying to, this initial experience with fallowness, this 'gap' through which to peep; this permissive metaspace returns to me in glimpses periodically, slowly giving itself permission to manifest and organically creep without conscious intervention.

*

I enter a top floor room bathed in evening sunlight with a smile on my face and a sense of ultimate peace. It is our third fallowing.

I still want to do and do and do. But I sense more and more that this desire to 'do' is in fact a reaction to feeling anxious about not being a useful 'agent' in the world. And I'm growing some thinking about how in fact, agency comes from noticing and witnessing the world just as much as it does from making ones self busy with the things of the world.

The light fades, and I realize we are once again at reflection point. It looks as though we are gathered in a circle around a great, dark pool, gazing inwards. Half of the circle are reflected in that pool.

*

It is as if Lying Fallow has created a space at the field's edge of my brain that is protected from the impulses and actions that incorporate negotiation, pragmatism and compromise; a cordon sanitaire that quietly holds off the expectations of immediate knowing and immediate articulation.

Somewhere we are watching the sun set still.

We are not finished yet.

*

And it's been gentle and beautiful but it's also been hard. It's been demanding. It's been much more rigorous and required me to be much more honest with myself than I ever expected.

If I died this is what you'd find:

Me on my way, full of anxiety and anticipation.

Me arrived, taking my place, waiting for a sign.

Me sitting in a circle of strangers and I have never felt so held.

Me taking off my shoes before the feast.

Me learning my own name in a new language.

Me listening for my cue to breathe again.

Me meeting an old friend as if for the first time.

Me smiling at a stranger, willing them to *be okay*.

Me filled with the knowledge that we are always alone and *that is okay*.

*

Several months have passed since the Lying Fallow meetings in London took place. And yet I continue to feel regular afterwaves, as if the project were not yet over, its potency still unfolding, evolving, reverberating.

I ask myself, why is this? Why do I continue to be visited by the question that the invitation to participate in such a series of events first raised? Why do I still sense the gentle but persistent nudge that it presented?

Linear time has done its trick of leaping forwards towards a point called an end.

But in cyclical time, we are just beginning.

And besides I'm fairly certain that the rest of my life will in some way be a reflection / response to those 3 extraordinary meetings.

*

Lying Fallow continues to accompany my every day, everywhere. In quite palpable ways even, as occasionally a direct consequence of having signed up to the project occurs (someone will write something to the group, a friendship that was forged in London will continue to create a wave....) and every time this happens I find myself imagining what other connections that were not made, might have been made, and what consequences and reverberations these might have caused... So lying fallow, it would seem, is not just attending to the potential to be (i.e. of what is yet to come), but also exercising one's ability to pay tribute to the unborn, the impossible.

Appendix 2: *Experiments in Listening*

This appendix contains: an acknowledgment of authorship for the three *Experiments in Listening* films that are included in this PhD; credits for each of the three dialogues; and links to the three films, in case the examiners feel it necessary to watch them prior to the screening I will host on the eve of the viva.

Acknowledgement of authorship

The three films that are included as one half of the practice element of this PhD (presented during a screening prior to the viva) are filmed and edited by filmmakers Lisa Cazzato-Vieyra, Griffyn Gilligan, and Jonathan Kemp. I confirm that each of these filmmakers, as well as my dialogue partners Karen Christopher, Chris Goode, and Andy Smith, have given permission for me to write about the project and to include the films as part of my PhD.

Credits

Monday 29 September - Friday 3 October 2014

Karen Christopher and Rajni Shah

Backlit, Nottingham (as part of the 'In Dialogue symposium' 2014)

Filmmaker: Lisa Cazzato-Vieyra

Monday 12 - Saturday 17 January 2015

Chris Goode and Rajni Shah

Jerwood Space, London

Filmmaker: Griffyn Gilligan

Monday 9 - Friday 13 March 2015

Andy Smith and Rajni Shah

Jack Hylton Room, Lancaster University, Lancaster

Filmmaker: Jonathan Kemp

Experiments in Listening was supported by: Arts and Humanities Research Council, Arts Council England, Backlit, Dance4, InDialogue 2014, Jerwood Space, and Lancaster Arts

Films

I will be hosting a screening of the three *Experiments in Listening* films prior to the viva for this PhD, and it is my strong preference that the films are experienced in this way, side by side, as part of an evening that includes framing and discussion. I write about my reasons for this in chapter five of the PhD. However, for the purposes of examination, in case the examiners feel it is necessary, I am including the following links to the three films, which can be watched online:

Karen Christopher and Rajni Shah: <https://vimeo.com/229959605>

Chris Goode and Rajni Shah: <https://vimeo.com/230710941>

Andy Smith and Rajni Shah: <https://vimeo.com/231992380>

Password: PhD

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