

**Exercises in Constraint:
The Poetics of the OuLiPo in Performance**

Oliver Pierre Bray

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Abstract

The OuLiPo (the *Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle*, which roughly translates as the Workshop for Potential Literature) is a French writing group that has been generating literature under self-imposed constraints since 1960. In this thesis I investigate how the poetics of the Oulipo can be used to service the creation of contemporary performance work. In turn, this investigation seeks to use the lens of contemporary performance practice to illuminate the philosophies and characteristics of the Oulipo.

The poetics of the Oulipo comprise highly practical methodology of both conceptual consideration of potential and the application of generative constraint in literature. To best approach the back-and-forth reflection of performance practice and the Oulipo through the consideration of the group's poetics, this investigation is necessarily practice-led. I have undertaken three performance projects, each profiled in a professional context, to investigate the possibilities of oulipian poetics in contemporary performance practice. A combination of scholarly, comparative and practice-led research has been used to demonstrate how the poetics of the Oulipo might inform performance making strategies. In the first project, oulipian poetics produce a set of working constraints to be used in the devising practices of performance making. The second project demonstrates that constraints can be deployed in the formal treatment of an existing playtext towards the creation of a total theatrical work. The third project presents an improvisational training model that enables the performer to operate under constraint in the live moment of material generation and performance.

Throughout this thesis the practice-led enquiry presents opportunities to reflect upon the Oulipo's rich artistic history, their paradoxically serious and playful poetics and finally how their one exception to the law of constraint, the clinamen, may unexpectedly be positioned as the group's most significant constraint of all.

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Introduction

The literary group OuLiPo, the *Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle*, which roughly translates as the Workshop for Potential Literature, uses imposed structural constraints to generate writing. This thesis investigates how the poetics and philosophy of this writing might service the creation of performance work. This thesis also considers how performance work created under such conditions might illuminate the poetics and philosophy of the OuLiPo.

The OuLiPo

Founded in Paris in 1960 by 'inutilious researchers' of the *Collège de 'Pataphysique* (Hugill 2012: 1), the Oulipo comprised conceptual artists (Marcel Duchamp), mathematicians (Claude Berge) and chemical engineers (François Le Lionnais), as well as novelists, poets and literature professors. The group can be situated within a national lineage of French game playing that started with the Dadas and Surrealists, latterly spawning the 'Pataphysicists and culminating in the creation of the Oulipo. The group's use of restrictive constraints, elaborative structures, and often scientific approaches are the result of the oulipian philosophy that operating under such conditions is liberating and dispenses with the need for inherent artistic talent:

That which certain writers have introduced with talent (even with genius) in their work [...] the Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle (Oulipo) intends to do systematically and scientifically.
(Le Lionnais, 2007: 27)

These works, all of them governed in some way by strict technical constraints or elaborate architectural designs, are attempts to prove the hypothesis that the most arbitrary structural mandates can be the most creatively liberating.
(Levin Becker, 2012: 6)

The imposition of constraint and removal of recourse to talent is a democratising ethos, one that flattens considerably the authorly hierarchy of writing as well as changing the relationship between the writer and their work. The act of generation becomes procedural for the writer, and the constraints, technically at least, become their muse. For the reader, there is value in both the encounter with these quirky

texts and in the observation of the constraints at play within them.

Constraints used by the Oulipo may be singular or multiple, invisible or highly visible in any given work. The visibility of constraints for the reader, or in the case of performance for the audience, is latterly discussed in this thesis in terms of Oulipian¹ Marcel Bénabou's insight into the different notions of 'constraint revelation' (Clarke, 2016). Similarly, the procedural aspect of the group's processes as distinct from those of aleatory art, together with the Oulipo's disinclination towards chance (James, 2009: 109) and indeed the processes of the surrealist lineage (Consenstein, 2002), form a large part of the critical analysis of this thesis. Founder member of the group, Raymond Queneau, 'fell in with the Surrealists [...] and eventually fell out with the Surrealists [...] both personally and politically' (Levin Becker, 2012: 117) and by doing so set the conditions for the formation of the Oulipo. While there is no doubt that the Surrealist movement inspired the Oulipo and arguably shares generative methodology, the issues of inspiration and chance are a site of distinction between the two institutions.

Oulipian lineage is further investigated during this thesis, in particular the *Collège de 'Pataphysique*², conceived by Alfred Jarry, whose members included a number of the founders of the Oulipo (Schott, 2009). British Pataphysician Andrew Hugill describes the conditions for the formation of the Collège in 1948 as being the result of a 'practical commitment to the world that – somewhat paradoxically, given the futility of existence – provides some kind of meaning' (2012: 115). Hugill describes that in a post World War II context the Dada's 'seemed dangerously trivial' (2012: 115) and the surrealists were '[at] risk of self-indulgence and irrelevancy' (2012: 115). According to Hugill, Breton's surrealists were still holding a political position towards the far left, and with many new far right groups popping up, Paris was ripe for 'a nonpartisan home of quiet scholarship and reflection nuanced with

¹ Oulipian Daniel Levin Becker in his book *Many subtle Channels*, in keeping with French standards of demonymy, uses a capitalised Oulipian throughout the volume only when referring to a person. He uses the example that 'Georges Perec was an Oulipian, but his output was (for the most part) oulipian' (2012: ix). I have used the same formatting rule for the remainder of this thesis.

² 'Pataphysics should orthographically be preceded by an apostrophe, 'so as to avoid a simple pun' (Shattuck & Watson: 131). However, in this thesis, to avoid strain on the eyes and my keyboard, and legitimised through the ambiguity around the use of the apostrophe in the various permutations of the word: *pataphysics*, *pataphysical*, *pataphysicist* – I will remove the apostrophe completely from this point forward.

pataphysical humour' (2012: 116). The principles of scholarship and humour form fundamental aspects of oulipian poetics. Oulipians are lovers of playing highly structured and rational games, a quite different endeavour from the relative illogicality of the group's artistic parentage. Scott Esposito points out that 'over the years, the strength of the work produced by its members moved the group inexorably into the literary canon' (Elkin and Esposito, 2013: 5). Indeed, the Oulipo are the longest running literary movement in French history.

The formation of the Oulipo in 1960 occurred within a context of rich cultural, artistic and literary innovation both in Paris and beyond. The Conceptual Art movement was emerging, spearheaded by Oulipian Marcel Duchamp; the interdisciplinary Fluxus movement was making waves across Europe and America with personalities like John Cage, discussed later, and Joseph Beuys, changing perceptions of art, writing, music and performance. Similarly, the early 1960s saw a proliferation of post-structuralist and philosophical writing output from writers and thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jacques Lacan. Works by these authors around the year of the founding of the Oulipo, respectively addressed; notions of existentialism; structuralism and perceptions of madness; the phenomenology of expression; and the ethics of psychoanalysis.³

The Oulipo differentiate themselves from their contemporaries by their avoidance of political positioning and their scepticism of post-structuralism and the unconscious mind, discussed in more detail later. The group departs from their pataphysical roots by way of their complete allegiance to constraining devices, which leave nothing to chance, and their generative practices of permutation and exhaustion. The group's fascination with the discovery of new constraints through the trialling of the existing ones is characteristically playful, with new configurations affecting potential future tools of the group's repertoire. The ludic impulse and playful self-consciousness of the group forms an important critical lens on their methodology

³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960)
Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la Folie* (1961)
Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signes (Signs)* (1960)
Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, Vol. VII* (1959-60)

and is investigated within this thesis.

The group's unique approach to writing practice offers a clear model for generative writing practice and potentially other creative outputs. Although rare, there are occasions where oulipian work has moved into the live space of performance practice. Examples of this are noted later in this introduction. A direct application of the group's poetics to theatre and performance does not currently exist. It is the consideration of oulipian methodology, which includes the strong basis of the group's poetics in literature, in relation to contemporary performance practice that underpins a major part of this study's claimed contribution. Furthermore, the investigation of oulipian poetics through the practice of performance making is equally illuminating and as this study indicates, much is revealed about the Oulipo by considering the group in this way.

The oulipian principles of analysis and synthesis are articulated in *Lipo: First Manifesto*, by founder member of the Oulipo François Le Lionnais, who describes the underlying mechanisms of oulipian investigation (2007: 26-28). Respectively geared toward the recognising of the potential in existing literary models and then inculcating that knowledge into new literary possibilities, anoulipism and synthoulipism (Le Lionnais, 2007: 28) also assume a foundational role in the development of theatrical equivalence in this study. Consequently, the tools of analysis and synthesis are tightly woven into the methodology underpinning this research.

The constraints used by the Oulipo result in a dual outcome; the first is the generation of literature and second is the generation of constraint discourse. That is, constraint imposition is not only a tool for generating writing but is additionally pervasive as critical content, in turn dominating the content of the generated material and the discourse around the group, illustrating a slippage between mechanics and scholarship.

Potentielle, or potential, forms a seminal part of the group's ethos as well as their name and presents the notion that the 'Oulipo was founded not to actually produce

literature, but to produce tools for its construction' (Brotchie in Perec, 2013: 7). Potential literature for the group is best clarified by an example of the group's practice. A good departure point is Oulipian Raymond Queneau's *Cent mille milliards de poemes (A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems)* (1961), a book consisting of ten sonnets each in fourteen lines, printed on card pages with each line on a separate strip. The strips potentially make 100,000,000,000,000 possible combinations of lines, meaning the book would take 200,000,000 years to read in all permutations – a very clear definition of potential literature, in its entirety the book is unreadable. The notion of potential is further represented in the group's monthly meeting agenda items of *Creation, Ruminaton* and *Erudition* (Schott, 2009). Placing equal emphasis on the consideration of realised and unrealised procedures, the Oulipo is always searching for new constraints on which to ruminate and create in practice. The potential for literary generation is positioned as central to the poetics of the group. This contemplative emphasis creates a tension when considered in the context of the group's later principle of exhaustion. This tension between the unrealised and the exhaustible will be explored throughout this thesis. Potential is a backbone of the group's activity and accounts, to a degree, for the cross-disciplinary makeup of the members. The varied systems of mathematics and computation for example, provide vast possibilities for literary generation, such as Le Lionnais's application of Boolean logic to the haiku poetry form (Motte 2006: 196). The potential for constraint grows in correlation with the breadth of the members' expertise. Every time a member discovers a new constraint it becomes part of the group's repertoire, producing families of related constraints that may be played with in any combination. Indeed, the plethora and diversity of the group's outputs is a testament to both its concerns of potential and its ever-growing list of possibilities.

Research Questions & Methodology

The rich and varied poetics of the Oulipo has serviced and sustained the group's generation of literature for over 50 years. The group's working methods have been introduced to other art forms including tragicomedy, as discussed later in this introduction, however there is much to learn from the direct relationship of the group to literature. I propose that the group's relationship to literature is so critical to its poetics that the simple substitution of an alternate form into the methodology of the

group in the context of this study would serve only as a narrow appropriation of its methods. This study then, is concerned with the implications of the poetics of the Oulipo for the field of contemporary performance, rather than for example, an investigation of potential performance. Therefore, the central research questions for this study are:

**What are the performance applications of the poetics of the Oulipo (Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle) and how might they service the creation of new performance work?
In turn, how might these performance applications illuminate the Oulipo?**

The discovery and investigation of the performance applications and the development of performance practice have taken place over three distinct but interrelated projects, addressed during this thesis in chronological order. Each project was investigated through the practice of performance making and documentation of this practice will be introduced at appropriate moments throughout the thesis. Each practical investigation has been critically reflected upon throughout this document. A practice-led investigation was necessary in order to fully investigate the theatrical implications of this study. Similarly, the written components of the study are necessary for discursive contextualisation of the practical investigations for purposes of dissemination of the inquiry. The written and practical parts of this study are symbiotic and equally valued within this document, each should therefore be valued in terms of articulacy, criticality, and realisation. I will now give a brief overview of the approach of Practice as Research and how it fits within my methodology.

Robin Nelson informs us that there are three kinds of research:

- *personal research* – involves finding out, and sifting, what is known;
 - *professional research* – involves networking, finding sources and collating information;
 - *academic research* – involves conducting research inquiry to establish new knowledge.
- (2013: 25)

The Practice-led, or Practice-as, research of this study necessarily assumes the definition attributed to *academic research* above. While a great deal of the other two kinds of research might happen in the development of performance practice, the establishing of new knowledge is foregrounded as part of this methodology. The emergence of Practice as Research (PaR) as an academic methodological enquiry within the creative arts sector, has inspired a dense interdisciplinary discourse over the last decade or so that has attempted to capture the tensions and nuances of this form of research. Robin Nelson's now seminal article 'Practice as Research and the Problem with Knowledge' (2006) has provided both a rigorous discussion on why PaR is important, and a practical approach through the presentation of his Dynamic Model. This model demonstrates the triangulation of practice with know-how and know-that knowledges and critical reflection (Nelson, 2006: 114).

In the introduction to their edited volume *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance* (2012), Kershaw and Nicholson consider the breadth of academic disciplines and methods approached in practice-led research in theatre and performance (2011: 2). Commenting on the range of subject matter in their own book, Kershaw and Nicholson draw attention to 'a remarkable variety of methodologies, drawing on many theoretical domains beyond theatre and performance as subjects per se' (2011: 2). The Oulipo are a literary group and much of the content of this inquiry synthesises critical resource that sits within the academic discipline of literature. That said, the multi-disciplinary nature of performance studies and the cross-disciplinary constitution of the Oulipo, introduces a broader scope of resource than a more straightforward comparative study might otherwise. Additionally, the practice-led nature of this study requires an unpacking of my own skill-based theatrical tendencies as a performance maker. The bespoke and highly flexible nature of any practical research project in theatre and performance, leads Kershaw and Nicholson to close their introduction by quoting the poet Louis Arragon, who claimed: 'Your imagination, dear reader, is worth more than you imagine' (2011: 13)

Practice-led research presents itself in this study rather simply. The research questions of the study must be addressed through performance practice and the

availability of the knowledge generated is addressed in a number of ways. Firstly, documentation of the performances is included for review and where necessary particular moments of the practice are referenced for direct viewing. Secondly, the performance work was profiled in a public context, the experience of the work, both for an audience and my collaborators, although not formally recorded, is reflected upon within the evaluation of each project. Thirdly, the issue of the availability of tacit knowledge is addressed through a question central to oulipian poetics. Tacit knowledge in relation to mastery, consciousness and the oulipian aversion to inspiration and that which is not classifiable, is discussed in detail within the thesis. Indeed, this critical discussion of oulipian consciousness of skill, indirectly tackles the relationship between 'know-that' and 'know-how' knowledge that Nelson highlights (2006: 114), and so approaches a fundamental area of PaR discourse.

Brad Haseman approaches the paradigm of PaR by defining creative arts research as 'performative research' (2012: 150). Haseman references JL Austin's performative speech acts, defined as 'utterance[s] that accomplish, by their very enunciation, an action that generates effects' (Haseman, 2012: 150), and goes on to define PaR in those terms:

In the double articulation involved in creative arts research, practice brings into being what, for want of a better word, it names. [...] it not only expresses the research, but in that expression becomes the research itself.
(Haseman, 2012: 150)

It is crucial to note that a great portion of the research of this study has been and is the practice itself, experienced through live observation, documentation or critical reflection.

In order to investigate the central research question of the study, each project had a specific research question to address.

Project 1 research question:

How might the constraints and methods of the Oulipo be used to inform

a new lexicon of terms that can generate performance content?

An understanding of oulipian constraints and processes was used to inform a generative methodology for performance work. This was a way of addressing in practice the existing methods of the Oulipo in a theatrical context. The project involved the development of a lexicon of working constraints, similar to those of the Oulipo, which captured and categorised the tools for creation. However, just as important as this developed language was the transposition of both actual method and philosophical ethos into a process geared towards the generation of performance work. The commentary around this project introduces a detailed definition of constraint and potential in the context of this study, and additionally introduces Marcel Bénabou's term 'constraint revelation' (Clarke, 2016) as a critical lens for considering how the reader or audience may engage with constraint. Project 1 also tackles the pataphysical starting points of the Oulipo with a particular focus on anoulipism and synthoulipism, which may be considered as mathema and poesis respectively, and the implications of the relationship between generation and scholarship.

Project 2 research question:

How might the methods of constraint of the Oulipo be used to design and shape the composition, construction and form of new performance work?

Developing from the findings of Project 1, this project considered how methods of oulipian constraint could inform a more holistic theatrical event. The project involved constraints working in parallel and in layers rather than in series, considering families and causal chains in constraints. The project also investigated a number of challenging binaries presented by the group, including the relationship between imposed constraints and more established rules, or theatrical tendencies, in the construction of theatre. This project identifies and explores the group's disinclination towards chance-based activity and notions of inspiration. Similarly, reflection on this project considers Alison James' observation of the tension in oulipian poetics between the rhetorical regimes and scholastic ideologies of the

group (2009: 121).

Project 3 research question:

How might the methods of constraint of the Oulipo be used to guide and direct the live moment of performance?

Project 3 involved the use of live-working constraints and focussed on the discovery of how constraints can be used to direct the improvisation of material for a live audience. During this final project, constraint was positioned as the primary director of the practical work created. Reflection on this project addresses in detail the binary between playful and ludic impulses of the group and their relationship to seriousness and earnestness. While reflecting on the project I consider the relationships between expression and order (James, 2009); myth and mythology (Huizinga, 2016); and emergence and deciphering (Lévy, 2004), in relation to the specific practices of the project. I also analyse and critically consider the Oulipo's *clinamen* (Motte, 1986), or anticipated swerve, in terms of oulipian poetics and deploy it as a synonymous phenomenon to the live performer, fundamental to understanding performance practice based on oulipian poetics.

The Oulipo in Performance

The Oulipo have an existing relationship to performance, albeit a quite limited one. The group's monthly *Jeudi* (Thursday) meetings include the public readings of both established and new variants of oulipian works and techniques to an audience of listeners. These texts have been nicknamed by members of the group as 'Oulipo light' works, rather than the weightier tomes of some Oulipians' output, which are conversely, and equally wryly, labeled 'Oulipo 'ard' (Levin Becker 2012: 62-63). The playful performances of Oulipo light have been labeled quite negatively by some members of the group, particularly when compared to the perhaps more earnest Oulipo 'ard outputs. This tension is discussed in detail later in this thesis.

There are also oulipian works, although few in number, that can even more explicitly and definitively be described as performance works. In 2009 as part of the *Paris en toutes lettres* festival, Oulipian Jacques Jouet sat in a tent for eight hours a-day for

the duration of the festival writing a novel titled *Agatha de Paris* (Levin Becker, 2012: 67). His writing was projected onto a screen so that an audience could track his progress. The constraint at play in this instance was time-based and had perhaps more in common with a durational live-art work than a usual oulipian writing exercise. This gives further strength to the suggestion that the poetics of the group have application beyond literature. Furthermore, at the same festival there were two actors performing excerpts from Oulipian Raymond Queneau's text *Exercises in Style* (1947).

Another example of an oulipian text for performance is Oulipian Olivier Salon's three-hander performance (in which he performs) *Pièces détachée*, which has been hugely successful touring across France since 2006 (Levin Becker, 2012: 47). This work is an adaptation of existing Oulipo texts and though easily described as performance, it is more a presentation of oulipian literature rather than a work that directly tackles the issue of constraint in performance.

To wit, hovering somewhere in the wings is a conviction that literature is not *meant* to be performed.
(Levin Becker, 2012: 63)

Oulipian Daniel Levin Becker's observation above gives a further justification for this research project. Although there exists a constellation of performance practices that have an affinity with oulipian ethos, discussed shortly, there is no performance practice that tackles the central issue of constraint in performance or performance and oulipian poetics directly. Existing performance work that resonates with the group rarely moves beyond the presentation of oulipian literature and so remains within the problematic scope of Levin Becker's conviction that 'literature is not *meant* to be performed' (2012:63).

A live poetry collective comprising Tim Clare, Ross Sutherland and Joe Dunthorne, have performed a show titled *Found in Translation* (2009) that outlines the philosophy of the Oulipo in combination with some examples of their own texts written under constraint. This work, which uses their attempt to join the Oulipo as a starting point, first performed at their own writing event *Homework* in London, uses

the Oulipo as material for performance. The playful quirks, devices and characteristics of the Oulipo are cited as material for a performance lecture. Although interesting, this work is not an example of exploring constraint or oulipian poetics in performance, rather it is a sketch about the Oulipo, textured with the spoken delivery of writing generated using some of the group's more familiar constraints (Schott, 2009). *Found in Translation* is a comedic documentary with some references to oulipian strategies, it does not provide new insight or perspective to performance practice. The crucial differentiation between this kind of work and my own practice is that I seek not to demonstrate the results of oulipian writing techniques, but to locate and develop theatrical language and insight through a methodology born out of a deep understanding and mediated application of the group's poetics and practices. This theatrical language will additionally serve to further illuminate the poetics of the group.

In 1968 Oulipian Georges Perec wrote a radio play with the working title *La Machine* that provides valuable insights into playing within oulipian constraint in a live performance context. The only complete version of the play for some time was Eugen Helmlé's German translation, *Die Maschine*. This version was translated into English 31 years later by Ulrich Schönherr for a special Georges Perec issue of *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* (2009). Following this publication, UK-based contemporary theatre company Third Angel staged the play and I was a co-director and performer with the company working with Schönherr's translation. This led to the premiere performance in English at the Crucible Studio, Sheffield, in 2012. While the use of rule-based structures is quite common within contemporary theatre, the specifically analytical and granular level of constraining devices within *The Machine* represent a rare example of the oulipian effect on the live performer. The text of *The Machine* reads as a 'how to' of oulipian constraint, consisting of a thorough observation, segmentation, dissection, rewriting and rereading of Goethe's poem *Wandrer's Nachtlied II* (1780) (Rambler's Lullaby II). *The Machine*, written by an Oulipian and meant for performance, in this case radio, is the closest one can get to a theatrical oulipian text. Yet, while Perec was conscious of the multiple live voices that would read his play, the text remains a demonstration of oulipian literary

constraint, rather than addressing, as this study proposes, the impact of oulipian poetics on live performance.

The notion of constraint and potential in creative outputs other than literature do exist. There are a number of oulipian sub-groups, essentially oulipian philosophy manifested in various forms that include music, OuMuPo (*Ouvroir de Musiques Potentielles*) and cooking, OuCuiPo (*Ouvroir de Cuisine Potentielle*). The somewhat theatrical OuTraPo (*Ouvroir de Tragicomédie Potentielle*) also exists (Levin Becker, 2012: 270). This group, founded by Pataphysician Stanley Chapman in 1990, does address the potential of theatrical constraint to some extent, but emphasises constraints originating from a tragicomedy tradition of dramatic literature, rather than the broader or more contemporary investigation of the live moment that is the focus of this study. The distinction between the purposes of this investigation and the explorations of the Outrapo is simple. This study was not limited to investigating constraints of the literary traditions of tragicomedy in the theatre. Rather, it involved the practical investigation of oulipian method and poetics in live performance practice. The broader possibilities of the hypothetical OuThe(atre)Po or OuPerf(ormance)Po is further strengthened by the argument that this investigation uncovered a research gap to be inhabited. I have found only two references to an OuThePo (*Ouvroir des Théâtralités Potentielles*, or The Workshop of Potential Theatricality). The first reference alludes to a one-off workshop for eight participants delivered in March 2010 in Paris by Pierre Prévost, combining theatrical games with words and street performance (Cours de Miracles, 2010). The second reference is to Judith Benard who is a director, actor and academic in literature and linguistics. In 1998 Bernard performed with the Dairy Bandits at the Croix Rousse Theatre, Lyon, in a show titled *Outhepo, teatraal voorstel van de Oulipo* (Outhepo, theatrical proposal of the Oulipo) (Mortier, 2016). Neither an OuThePo or OuPerfPo meaningfully exist, so this study responds to a significant gap to be mined concerning the relationship between oulipian poetics and live performance.

Constraint in Contemporary Performance Practice

As previously stated, no meaningful examples exist of oulipian poetics explored through performance practice. Nevertheless, there does exist a rich lineage of contemporary performance that has used processes of generative rules and instructional operations as part of a creative process. I will now briefly describe relevant parts of this lineage. I will also pull out particular examples of performance practice that connect my professional practice and training to the field of contemporary performance to foreground the impetus for my working with oulipian poetics and constraint in this study.

The first example is the Theatre of Mistakes, founded in the early 1970s ‘under the direction of Anthony Howell’ (Creese, 1979: 67). The group used improvisational exercises, strictly controlled by formal structure, to develop performances (Creese, 1979: 67). In particular, the group focussed on the use of repetition in the generation of material. Robb Creese wrote about the Theatre of Mistakes in an article published in a special issue of the *The Drama Review* (1979) which specifically focussed on structuralist performance. The issue also contains commentary on the work of Michael Kirby, who is discussed in more detail later in this thesis and specifically helps to bridge the gap between formal structures in performance and those used by the Oulipo to generate literature. The Theatre of Mistakes utilised a ‘conceptual approach’ (Creese, 1979: 68) in their methods of creating theatre. This took an alternative form of generating material for performance quite unlike more traditional directing,

for example, a performance might be constructed from actors copying each other’s walks, speaking very quickly, using a round performance space – “rules” determined before work began.
(Creese, 1979: 68)

This constitutes a part of my own creative lineage and current desires to work within the area of structure and rules in my performance practice. The Theatre of Mistakes held values and concerns that have become part of contemporary theatre lineage. For example, the group ‘does not feel any compulsion to act’ (Creese, 1979: 70) and within their work ‘[t]he structure is more important than communication of themes to

the audience (1979: 71).

Anthony Howell and Fiona Templeton published a booklet titled *Elements of Performance Art* (1976), which Creese describes as,

a reduction of improvisation rules to their simplest form. The rules of the exercises are extremely varied [...] before any workshop or performance there are many options open to the group.
(1979: 68)

The pre-setting of rules, perhaps constraints, echoes the ethos of the Oulipo but rather than vehemently uphold their rules, the members of the Theatre of Mistakes were allowed a much greater level of freedom – seeing rules as options rather than unbreakable laws. The positioning of rules as means to an end, rather than the site of potential, is explained later in the thesis and marks fundamental departure from the work of rule-based contemporary theatre making and the content of this study. The flexibility of rules is not necessarily complimentary to the rigidity of constraints. Creese comments that the Theatre of Mistakes believed there ‘was no restriction whatsoever on what actions actors could initiate’ (1979: 73). This is quite different from the oulipian poetics of constraint adherence.

There is no doubt that the rule-based processes of the Theatre of Mistakes inspired groups founded later, like the Chicago-based performance group Goat Island. Indeed, my own training and creative practice has been heavily influenced by Goat Island. In her article “‘Dear Participant’ – training, rehearsal and response in the work of Goat Island performance group and Francis Alÿs’ (2013), Sara Jane Bailes writes about the relationship between Goat Island and training. Bailes considers how the creative processes of Goat Island, specifically their Summer Schools, are resistant to traditional training doctrines that comprise ‘a specific approach to both the production of material (situation, character, plot, etc.) and [...] an upheld set of conventions, principles and instructive tools’ (2013: 5). Like the Theatre of Mistakes, this approach is not governed by approaches to acting or the communication of precise themes.

Bailes positions the idea of 'response' (2013: 8) front and centre to Goat Island's working methods, giving examples of how material is transferred to and from participants during a Summer School. I participated in a Goat Island Summer School in 2007 at Lancaster University and remember well these responding processes. I recall generating a 60 second piece of performance material, then rearranging its order, performing it backwards and then teaching it to another participant. The second participant then claimed the composition and transformed it further. I recall being encouraged to think about the material in terms of duration and action only, to break it down into component parts – essentially I was asked to consider it structurally rather than thematically. This ethos, in addition to my own developing professional practice and my university education in contemporary theatre making, further developed in me a concern for the structural and a fascination for the imposition of constraint on a creative process.

A participant in a Goat Island Summer School might be asked to bring in a 'creative response' to a previously given instruction or a fieldwork exercise and perform it for the other participants. [...] Another participant responds the following day [...] another two, three or four individuals might then be given the responsibility of responding to the (second) response so that duets and quartets develop, the work itself proliferates and so on.
(Bailes, 2013: 8)

Summer School activities were instructional. Bailes' observation above is extremely similar to my own experience of a Goat Island Summer School. This similarity indicates that the generative methods of the group were well-practised, sitting within a repertoire of activity synonymous with the group. The group's processes may be described as a set of rules – a set of activities – known to elicit worthwhile responses. Rules in this instance form a methodological hypothesis that assumes appropriate material will be generated from them. This is distinct from the potential held by constraints, the imposition of which results in the unknown outcomes that underpin this study and the poetics of the Oulipo. Indeed, as Bailes points out, Goat Island's methodology 'facilitates rather than constrains' (2013: 8).

Bailes adds that '[t]hese instructions and preparatory methods resist taxonomy

(2013: 9). Again, there is a disjunction between this outlook and oulipian poetics. Bailes notes that Goat Island's instructional endeavours may not easily be classifiable, whereby the oulipo are intent on the classification and categorising of processes.

What 'counts' as performance – one's idea of what a performance might be – is frequently challenged by such methods while what remains (rather than being edited out) does so often by virtue of chance rather than through evaluative judgement.

(Bailes, 2013: 11)

While the word chance is used by Bailes above, it might easily be substituted for indeterminacy. However there exists a distance between the perhaps democratic ethos of chance in Goat Island, and the fiercely anti-chance poetics of the author-driven Oulipo. The notion of the Oulipo being anti-chance is discussed in detail later in this thesis.

[Goat Island] challenge the very idea that a coherent, singular, original 'author' is possible or necessary for art production, and the logic this affirms: that there is a right or wrong way to do something.

(Bailes, 2013: 12)

The Oulipo are ultimately pro-author and may well contest the idea that there might not be 'a right or wrong way to do something'. This creates a tension with my own, more democratically inclined making tendencies, influenced so heavily by Goat Island and their predecessors. This tension is discussed in more detail later in the thesis.

The instructional approach to generating performance material can also be located in the British experimental performance company Station House Opera. Making work since 1980, the company have created performances where content has been generated live through the imposition of formal structures. Andrew Quick in his article 'Time and the Event' (1998), reflects on two performance works by the company, *Black Works* (1991) and *The Oracle* (1992), both of which use some means of live instruction to progress the works. In *Black Works*, 'recorded

instructions are relayed to the performers via headphones suspended at various points around the playing space' (Quick, 1998: 226). In the site-specific performance *The Oracle*, 'the instructions for actions are communicated via a network of stainless steel and plastic pipes' (Quick, 1998: 230). Quick rationalises his choice of works on which to reflect:

I focus on these works because they appear to be structured through the dynamics of displacement, where the operations of time and space appear to work synergetically: producing an effect greater than their attempted synthesis.
(1998: 224)

His observation on displacement and the operations of time and space, characterise the lineage of contemporary performance practice, and the formal concerns of my practice. Indeed, Quick's observation on synthesis echoes the oulipian methods of 'anoulipism and synthoulipism' (Le Lionnais, 2007: 28) discussed later. Similarly, the result of synthesis for Station House Opera, for Quick, is 'an effect greater than their attempted synthesis'. The notion that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts connects with Sydney Lévy's concept of emergence (2004) discussed in detail later. Quick connects Station House Opera to Forced Entertainment, arguably the most successful British contemporary theatre company of the last century. Quick paraphrases Forced Entertainment director Tim Etchells as stating that:

[M]eaning is not there to be 'unearthed'. It is not a known quantity discernible to the theatre practitioner and mysterious to, but discoverable by, an audience. The production or creation of meaning is described in terms evocative of movement, of an encounter and a struggle, as 'falling' and 'tumbling'. This motion does not subscribe to some predetermined direction, it does not operate indexically or teleologically.
(Quick, 1998: 226)

Connecting with the Theatre of Mistakes and Goat Island, the idea of meaning as an encounter that does not come from a predetermined direction is a pervasive notion in contemporary theatre. Of further note here is the idea that the 'motion' of meaning creation does not operate indexically or telologically. The Oulipo may well dispute this, particularly in terms of their striving for original language (Motte, 2002:

24) and their mastery of all signs.

Finally, the work of composer, poet and multimedia artist John Cage warrants brief mention here as playing a part in a performance lineage that resonates with the notion of rule or instructional-based performance. Cage is of particular interest to me because of his writing experiments that liken his processes to the undertakings of the Oulipo. Cage's mesostic pieces for example, were composed

by 'writing through' pre-existing texts (his 'ready-mades') following a 'meso-string,' spelling something central to the piece, and a strict set of lettristic rules to locate sequences of words and phrases.
(Retallack, 2015: 379)

Cage's mesostic experiments are an example of a particular playfulness in text generation. These works were written under certain rules, are score-like in their presentation and were written for performance (Retallack, 2015: 378-380). Cage's work has crossed disciplinary boundaries and influenced ways of notation and vocal delivery that have again fed into a formal tendency of contemporary theatre practice. Indeed, the Fluxus community, in which Cage was very active, resonates with the interdisciplinary make-up of the Oulipo. Additionally, Cage shared interests in 'ready-mades' with his friend Marcel Duchamp, an Oulipian, to whom he dedicated his first mesostic poem (Anderson, 2005: 276).

In addition to the lineage of structural and rule-based generative processes in contemporary theatre, the impetus for this study was also formed through my observations of the pervasiveness of imposed structures in my own artistic undertakings. I have found myself for many years hunting for the maths in many of my performance projects. I remember making a performance based on the Fibonacci sequence, a set of 20 solo performances, each borrowing from the previous, creating a cumulative performance event built around a beautiful, naturally occurring formulae. Additionally, the quick application of mathematical formula has informed my pedagogy for a long time, knowing semi-instinctively for instance that the optimum group size for teaching is 16, which leaves plenty of options for feedback loops and permutations of group size.

Similarly, my touring performance *Villa* (2009), built around a text so intentionally overwritten that it was largely impenetrable to the listener, was systematically jolted out of itself by what I called at the time *interventions*, precisely laced throughout the work according to the word count of the script. The content of these interventions was determined in the rehearsal room through improvisations based on the content of the room. The ubiquity of my attempts at grasping constraint were, if nothing else, teaching me the value of reliance on the arbitrary, or the pataphysically valuable. Realising that decisions made according to time, mathematics, or what happened to be around me were no less valuable than some solipsistic choice, and they additionally provided me with a problem to solve, a labyrinth from which to escape (Queneau in Motte, 2007:22). Even then, these undertakings were quite distinct from the task or rule-based activities of contemporary performance that have been additionally valuable to my artistic development. Task or rule-based activity, for me, presents the opportunity to discover beautiful moments in performance or to facilitate the audience in watching the performer going through something genuine. These extremely valuable strategies are not synonymous with the imposition of constraint, which seeks to access the potential through arbitrary restriction. Constraints are vehemently upheld, they are not starting points but are laws to generate by, positioned in a hierarchy of generative practice at the top, all encompassing, unavoidable and therefore inescapable. Constraints are not tools to help get the artist from A to B, but to keep the artist contemplating A until every possible B is considered.

Georges Perec's *Life A User's Manual* (1978) sat on my bookshelf for years before I started this study or understood any of its relationship to the Oulipo, as did Christian Bök's *Eunoia* (2001). These examples of constrained writing rested among countless, less overtly constrained tomes while I remained largely ignorant of the true nature of their restrictions. These books, no less constrained because of my obliviousness to them, repeatedly drew me back, they spoke to me from beyond their literature, offering something else, something ungraspable that my hundreds of other volumes could not. My bookcases provide a metaphor for oulipian poetics. The group's assurance that all literature is constrained, whether we see it or not, is

now obvious. However, oulipian volumes shout the loudest about their constraints, proclaiming them stridently so that one might be allowed to consider the omnipresence of constraint.

Literary Examples

This thesis will be interspersed with examples of oulipian texts written under constraint. However, I begin my contextualising of the group by introducing some examples of oulipian work. The literary outputs of the Oulipo can be loosely categorised into two main forms. The first of these is the short form, often poetry-based outputs, the second comprises the more substantial texts that take a novelistic form. As previously mentioned, these forms have been referred to by the group as ‘Oulipo light’ and ‘Oulipo ‘ard’, respectively (Levin Becker 2012: 62-63). We will start with Oulipo light.

The ‘Snowball’ text for example, is defined by the group as a ‘form in which each segment of a text is one letter longer than the segment preceding it (Motte, 2007: 213). An example of the snowball form follows:

I
am
the
text
which
begins
sparely,
assuming
magnitude
constantly,
perceptibly
proportional,
incorporating
unquestionable,
incrementations

(Mathews & Brotchie, 2005: 228)

As will become an important feature of this study, the constraint in the example above does not only determine the form of the poetry but also becomes the subject matter of the content, 'a text written according to a constraint describes the constraint' (2005: 42).

Perhaps the most well-known, shorter form constraint is the S+n constraint. This constraint involves taking an existing text and replacing each noun/substantive(S) with the noun that appears 'n' (usually 7) places later in a dictionary (Motte, 2007: 213). The dictionary used for the exercise has a large impact on the text created. The *Oulipo Compendium* (2005) gives the following examples of the constraint applied to the beginning of the book of Genesis in the Bible. The first example uses a large dictionary, *Websters New Twentieth Century Dictionary*, and leaves the replacement nouns somewhat synonymous with, and homophonically alike, the originals. The second example uses a small dictionary, the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, and leaves a greater distance between the original and the substitute nouns, as well as the replacements being simpler words:

1) In the beguinage God created the hebdomad and the earthfall. And the earthfall was without formalization, and void; and darnex was upon the facette of the deerhair. And the spiritlessness of God moved upon the facette of the watercolorist. And God said, Let there be lightface: and there was lightface.

2) In the bend God created the hen and the education. And the education was without founder, and void; and death was upon the falsehood of the demand. And the sport of God moved upon the falsehood of the wealth. And God said, Let there be limit: and there was limit.

(Mathews & Brotchie, 2005: 202)

I will now consider some examples of Oulipo 'ard texts. Oulipian Georges Perec (1936-1982) perhaps the group's most famous son, is renowned for his contribution to the oulipian novelistic form in addition to his huge contribution to the short form. In 1969 Perec wrote *La Disparition* (The Disappearance), translated as *A Void* (Adair, 1994). The entire novel was written without using the letter e. This makes the novel a lipogram in e and even though e is the most used letter in both French

and English languages, the letter is even more pervasive in French, making Perec's task contextually even more difficult than an anglophone might initially think. The restriction of the lipogram not only shapes the novel's restricted vocabulary, but also, as described in the snowball example above, 'describes the constraint' (Mathews & Brotchie, 2005: 42). The book's content, in Perec's original version at least, involves the narrative revolving around the notion of the lost letter.

The *Winter Journeys (Voyages d'hiver)* (2013) corpus started as a fictional short story, *Le Voyage d'hiver*, written by Georges Perec in 1979. The story describes the discovery of an old text written in 1864 that appeared strikingly similar to much of the famous literature of the twentieth century. The premise of the narrative is that the found text, written by Hugo Vernier, must have been used by Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Kahn and numerous others to construct their own works – essentially they all plagiarised Vernier. The *Winter Journeys* collection comprises this story retold, extended and transformed by multiple Oulipian authors. The narratives range from Reine Haugure's *Le Voyage du vers* (Verses Journey), which takes the form of a paper supposedly delivered at a conference on Vernierian studies, to François Caradec's *Le Voyage du ver* (The Worm's Journey), a narrative written from the perspective of a book worm devouring its way through a bookshelf of key literature, including a copy of the original *Le Voyage d'hiver*. Providing a fascinating insight into the writing voices of Oulipians, these short stories combine to create a serial novel that demonstrates the oulipian penchant for both playfulness and rigor, serving as a kind of microcosm of their poetics.

The differences between light and 'ard texts are discussed in a later chapter of this thesis, as are the differences in space, labour and other issues congruent with the journeys between Projects 1 and 2 of this study.

Currency

Over recent years the writings of the Oulipo, a predominantly French movement, have been increasingly translated into English, consequently the phenomenon of writing under constraint has gathered momentum in the English speaking world. Specifically, Penguin and Vintage, as well as smaller publishing houses such as the

Dalkey Archive Press and Atlas Press, have made a wide range of Oulipo texts internationally available. The Oulipo are also widely referenced within a gamut of academic research, much of which is synthesised within this study. These wide references include discourse directly related to the contemplation of the group itself and others that less directly recall the approaches of the group. Founder member of the Oulipo, Raymond Queneau, in 1947 published the seminal text *Exercises in Style*, comprising a simple narrative retold 99 different ways. The text was republished in 2013 with an additional 38 permutations, including recently translated versions originally written by Queneau and homages written by other authors. As noted earlier, Georges Perec's radio play *The Machine* (*La Machine*, 1968) was only recently published in English translation by Ulrich Schönherr (2009), eventually leading to my co-directing and performing of the play with Third Angel (2011-2013). My reflections on the performance and my observations on the clinamen performer developed within this thesis have been published in *Performance Research Journal* (2016). I have also co-directed and performed in another translation of a Perec radio play, *The Raise* (2005) (*L'Augmentation*, 1968), a work in progress of which was performed in 2016 and is currently in further development. These developments of Perec's work sit alongside a surge of interest in Perec and the Oulipo more generally. In November 2013, a conference organised by the University of London titled *Generative Constraint* took place, which specifically focussed on creativity from restriction. In November 2013 an 'Oulipo Laboratory' titled *Subtle Channels* took place in San Francisco, described as:

yet another step beyond the borders of France for this constraint-employing coterie of writers and mathematicians, and demands a recognition and examination of the current state of potential literature. (Drayton, 2014: 296)

The recent surge of interest in the Oulipo situates this study in a contemporary context of considerable discursive appetite for the group. This sets the scene for a necessary study into the poetics of the Oulipo, the potential of constraints and how these might synthesise with contemporary performance practice.

Création & Ruminaton: Project 1

The cultural and critical context of the Oulipo is not only rooted in literary culture, but also in a particular post-World War II shift in 20th century French thinking.

Specifically, the Oulipo can be tied directly to the Collège de Pataphysique, which will be discussed in detail during this chapter. As the longest running literary group in French history, the Oulipo's link to literature is inseparable from their working methods. Consequently, this investigation does not only consider an equivalence in theatre that is based on literary constraints converted into theatrical constraints. Moreover, this study proposes to investigate how this literature-based movement can offer insight into contemporary performance practice and considers how contemporary performance practice can illuminate the Oulipo.

The Oulipo places emphasis on various implicit constraining devices present in literature during their activities of generation. In addition to the structural devices inherent in various literature forms, there are of course many practices in the broader realms of art generation that have made efforts to capture the implicit constraints of generation. These include, but are far from limited to, Quintilian's *Institutes of Oratory* (95 CE) in ancient Rome (1856), and Groupe μ 's 20th Century expositions of semiotics and painting composition (1982). Additionally, there have been efforts employed to capture the structures of theatrical form, including Eugene Scribe and Victorien Sardou's *well-made plays* of the 19th Century (1995: 1191-1192), which built upon Aristotelian principles. Scribe's structure of the *well-made play* will inform some of the specific constraints of Project 3, where constraint is tackled as a live-working phenomena, and rather self-referentially ironises some traditional approaches to theatrical performance.

Project 1 culminated in a public performance lasting one hour. The performance involved the presentation of performance material generated under constraint, while signposting the particular constraints used via projected surtitles and a glossary that was included in the programme note. Project 1 responded to the following research question:

How might the constraints and methods of the Oulipo be used to inform a new lexicon of terms that can generate performance content?

An understating of oulipian constraints and process were used to inform a generative methodology for performance work, that is, a way of addressing in practice the existing methods of the Oulipo in a theatrical context. The project involved the development of a lexicon of working constraints, similar to that of the Oulipo, that captures and categorises the tools for creation. However, just as important as this developed language is the transposition of both actual method and philosophical ethos into a process geared towards the generation of performance work.

Defining Constraint & Potential

Every literary work begins with an inspiration (at least that's what the author suggests) which must accommodate itself as well as possible to a series of constraints and procedures that fit inside each other like Chinese boxes.

(Le Lionnais, 2007: 26)

Oulipian François Le Lionnais wrote the above in 1962 in *Lipo: First Manifesto* (2007: 26-28). He suggests that all literary work is constrained and this starting point is a fundamental observation of this study. The categorisation of constraint usage is summarised well by Warren Motte in *Oulipo: a Primer of Potential Literature*:

One might postulate three levels [of constraint]: first, a minimal level, constraints of the language in which text is written; second, an intermediate level, including constraints of genre and certain literary norms; third, a maximal level, that of *consciously* preelaborated and *voluntarily* imposed systems of artifice.

(2007: 11)

Clearly, oulipian constraint operates at the maximal level described above. The words 'consciously', as opposed to un/sub-consciously, and 'voluntarily', are the focus of oulipian activity. Similarly, the focus of Project 1 was on constraints that are imposed on the creative act. However, minimal and intermediate constraints were additionally at play in this project and the following two, changing and directing

the way in which maximal constraints were applied and responded to. Minimal and intermediate constraints may additionally be described as rules, a discussion elaborated on in the following chapter. Marjorie Perloff defines constraint in the following way:

[T]he Oulipo constraint is a *generative* device: it creates a formal structure whose rules of composition are internalized so that the constraint in question is not only a rule but a thematic property of the poem.

(Perloff, 2004: 25)

Perloff's definition of oulipian constraint details further the internalising properties of the constraint, alluding to a pervasiveness that thematically impacts on the work created. The constraint in this context becomes bigger than a device for generation, emerging as content to the work. This links significantly to Marcel Bénabou's (2016) observations of *internal revelation* (of constraint) discussed later, and his commandment of '*Un texte écrit selon une contrainte parle de cette contrainte*' (Clarke, 2016: 880), whereby a text written according to the constraint speaks of that constraint. Oulipian Harry Mathews makes his definition simply:

What I say is, [constraint is] a form that makes you write something that you wouldn't normally say, or in a way that you would never have said it. The form is so demanding that you can't get around it.

(Mathews in Drayton, 2014: 300)

Similar to Motte's suggestion of self-imposition, Mathews adds the additional condition of constraint as it being imposing, so demanding that one cannot ignore it. It is with these definitions in mind that I approach the notion of constraint in this study.

In terms of the Oulipo, potential ordinarily refers to a constraint that may result in literary output. In this sense the literature (whether existing or not) is positioned as less important than the constraint itself, or its potential. The potential of literature is best demonstrated by the wholly unreadable example of *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* (1961), described in the introduction to this thesis. It is the unique combination of the concerns of potential and exhaustion that provide the fertile

literary ground that the Oulipo occupy:

The workshop's most enticing offering was a way to *exhaust* potential – an outlet for restless creative energy, a lexicon of techniques and rules that could not only inspire writing projects but also make them cleverer, richer, weirder – in short, liberate them.
(Levin Becker, 2012: 33)

Levin Becker identifies the group's relentless curiosity. The amalgamation of the desire to investigate potential (limitless) through exhaustion (finite), creates a paradox. The potential for exhaustion is as unachievable as potential itself, but the journey is quantifiable. Even though the group recognises the endless, countless constraints in writing practice, this does not discourage them from making every effort to capture them, however small a fraction they may be capable of exhausting. Experimental poet Christian Bök paraphrases Oulipian Jacques Roubaud in suggesting a solution to this paradox by virtue of a pataphysical *as if*.

The constraint must comprehensively evoke the entire domain of its own *as if*, producing not an exemplary singularity to be repeated but an imaginary multiparity to be explored.
(Bök, 2002: 71)

Bök is proposing the exposure of potential as an opportunity to explore the possible permutations of language. This is in opposition to reproducible rules, discussed in more detail in the next chapter, the outcome of which is predictable.

Analysis & Synthesis

The recognition of the pervasiveness of constraints in literary generation is why the group have positioned their principal undertakings in the following ways, outlined in the *Lipo: First Manifesto*:

In the research which the Oulipo proposes to undertake, one may distinguish two principal tendencies, oriented respectively toward Analysis and Synthesis.
(Le Lionnais, 2007: 27)

Analysis, in the oulipian sense, is about the mining and recognising of the potential in existing literary models. Le Lionnais in the *Lipo* goes on to suggest the placing of

an existing poetry form within scientific, and (most importantly) non-poetry form,⁴ and talks of reinvigoration – the revitalising or making better of existing works. The analysis of existing literary models is, for the Oulipo, coupled with the recognition of forms and constraints that are from non-literary traditions. This perspective of analysis presents a cross-disciplinary practice. In understanding the notion of constraint as inherent to creative generation, the group have embarked on a system of analysis that involves auditing-through-practice, or ‘try[ing] to prove motion by walking’ (Queneau in Bök, 2002: 66).

Constraints may be singular or multiple, invisible or highly visible in any given work and some constraints are less obvious than others. *La Disparition* (1969), the lipogram in e discussed in the introduction to this thesis, was famously reviewed by critic René-Marill Albérès who failed to notice the lipogram at all (Levin Becker, 2012: 82). The question of constraint visibility and revelation will be covered in more detail later in this chapter.

For this study, not only did I need to understand the practice of analysis in oulipian context, but also understand how analysis can simultaneously take place in my own research in designing theatrical constraints. Indeed, the fact that the Oulipo have already analysed and transformed existing literary constraints, means that the work they have undertaken presents as an already densely manipulated set of structures for my practice to compound. *The Oulipo: a Primer of Potential Literature* (2007) lists a glossary of oulipian constraint, signposted as ‘names of Oulipian and pre-Oulipian poetic structures’ (209). The glossary provides a definition for each of the constraints, for example:

PERVERB

A perverb juxtaposes the first part of one proverb to the second part of another.⁵

(Motte: 2007, 213)

⁴ The Cento and Markov’s chain theory respectively (2007: 27).

⁵ My own attempt at a perverb: *two wrongs don’t do as the Romans do*.

The perverb constraint presents the potential to alter existing structures, in this case the source proverbs. Additionally, the perverb presents an opportunity for me to alter a constraint designed for literature, to one designed for performance. Project 1 involved me taking a large number of oulipian constraints, the whole of the glossary, and translating them into a theatrical equivalent set of constraints. As previously mentioned, some of the existing oulipian constraints were themselves hybrids/transformations of various literary and scientific forms, making my starting point a particular place on the pre-existing journey of analysis (and synthesis) that the Oulipo had already undertaken. This is distinct from an attempt to replicate the Oulipo within a theatrical context. Instead I attempted to address the analytical practices of the *literary* group Oulipo directly, rather than imitate them in a different discipline. As mentioned previously, this was to ensure that the implicit relationship between literature and the Oulipo was prioritised. Recognition of this starting point is part of how this study enables reflection on and consequent illumination of the Oulipo

The capturing and recording of existing ideas and models – the analysis that the Oulipo undertakes – is so that those past models may be ready to be inculcated into the group’s second tendency, a system of synthesis:

The synthetic tendency is [...] ambitious; it constitutes the essential vocation of the Oulipo. It’s a question of developing new possibilities unknown to our predecessors.
(Le Lionnais, 2007: 27)

In the above, Le Lionnais crucially highlights an essential focus of the group – the generation of new material – without which the group may not have enjoyed quite such a long and consistent success. Synthesis was the lynchpin of Project I, which involved the analysis of existing oulipian constraints and ethos, in order to design theatrical versions that could be tested/synthesised in a practical workshop space. The oulipian philosophies of analysis and synthesis are usefully summarised by Dave Drayton in his notations on ‘Subtle Channels’, an Oulipo Laboratory, held in San Francisco in 2013:

Anoulipism: The discovery of older forms of constrained writing and the recuperation and exploration of these pre-existing constraints through analysis of such forms. It examines the potential for the future use or ultimate exhaustion of these constraints.

Synthoulipism: The invention of new constraints and forms – the invention of potential. Synthoulipism is the synthesis of ideas to form a theory or system of new Oulipian operation.
(Drayton, 2014: 304)

Le Lionnais, in *The Lipo*, describes the relationship between the two approaches as being blurred, 'from one to the other there exists many subtle channels' (2007: 28). Despite, or perhaps because of this, analysis and synthesis provide a valuable frame with which to pin down the activities of Project 1.

Generating Constraints

Project 1 set out to apply the unique structural constraints of oulipian writing directly to a theatrical environment. In my designing of constraints, I interpreted each specific oulipian constraint from the glossary in up to four different ways, each relating to the four dimensions, as I observe them, of performance – Body, Voice, Time and Space. The outcome of this exercise was to create new constraints that could generate performance material. I define material in this context as short moments of performance. Project 1 placed no serious emphasis on the broader concerns of theatrical presentation. Considerations of dramaturgy, thematic consistency and scenography were not addressed in the initial design and application of these new constraints. Each was a simple instruction for the performer to make sense of and practically deal with in the moment of the workshop.

43 existing oulipian constraints were transformed into 155 new constraints to be tested in workshops. The number of constraints is not 172 (4 (dimensions of performance) x 43) because similar existing constraints were grouped; similar new constraints were grouped; and I found it impossible to design four equivalents for every constraint. These constraints were then trialled in workshops. Each trialled constraint, together with its original sibling can be found in Appendix A. An example of an original oulipian constraint and its theatrical sisters is below:

Oulipo Constraint	Performance Equivalent Physical	Performance Equivalent Verbal	Performance Equivalent Temporal	Performance Equivalent Environmental
PANGRAM A text containing all the letters of the alphabet.	Physical gesture must contain <u>all</u> possible variants of that gesture.	Spoken text must include <u>all</u> synonyms for at least one word.	Ingredients of time happen simultaneously – past/present/future	Action that uses all of the three-dimensional space available. (See also – SQUARE POEM)

Table 1 Original and Trialled Constraints Example 1

The workshops consisted of myself and a collaborator systematically attempting to perform under each constraint. In the example above, under the physical variation of Pangram, a performer waving may end up delivering an emphatic wave to say ‘hello’, followed by a slight and circular royal wave and then an attempted individual Mexican wave. Similarly, under the verbal variation, the performer may say the following, ‘you are an ape, a chimp, a monkey, a primate, you are simian!’ Constraints that yielded no content and were not applicable to the context of the workshop, were unapologetically dropped. The lack of adherence to these constraints was not a lack of rigour – which would not be in keeping with oulipian discipline – instead, the moment of dropping a constraint should be seen as part of the process of constraint design. This is the equivalent of an Oulipian ceasing a particular endeavour because they realise that a certain word has no perfect anagram, or that two homophones can’t be portmanteaued. The process of writing four sister constraints to each existing oulipian constraint, was the first part of the design process, the second was their initial practical application. In literature, the equivalent second part of the design may take place in the Oulipian’s mind or within their personal notebook scribbles. Because of the nature of live performance, these ‘workings-out’ happened in the workshop space, the same space in which the material was latterly generated.

The workshops involved improvising around each constraint. To give the performers some initial content to improvise around, a passage from Will Self’s novel *Great Apes* (1997), was chosen as a stimulus material for trialling constraints (see the programme note for the performance in Appendix B). The text was used only as stimulus for responding to the constraints and was not intended to lean towards specific subject matter or meaning. The *Great Apes* text was used during the trialling of some constraints more than others, and inevitably much of the

content generated relates directly to the content of the *Great Apes* passage. The constraints were not defined thematically and were not interconnectedly trialled in groups or layers, something addressed more significantly in Projects 2 and 3. The *Great Apes* passage was chosen because I thought it had *potential*. The text addresses anthropomorphism, self-doubt, fear and humour, amongst other things, and served as a good starting point that opened up a multiplicity of improvisational directions. That said, rather like Richard Schechner's *The Marilyn Project*, discussed in the next chapter, 'it could have been any script; the script did not matter' (Schechner in Kirby, 1987: 132). The workshops needed some existing material to initiate the improvisation; it didn't need to be the specific text I chose to do this job, it just so happened that it was. Nevertheless, the *Great Apes* passage leaves its trace within the work created, as you will observe when you watch the performance work. Just as Marcel Bénabou's *perverses* (a verse version of the perverb described earlier) are based on the famous French poetry form the Alexandrine and led him to use Charles Baudelaire, my penchant for the overwritten and grotesque led me to use Will Self. These decisions speak of our own lineages and are connected at some level to the networks of literary history. This is a particular kind of intertextuality, a recognition of influence that is inextricably linked to the poetics of anoulipism.

Constraints were trialled, recorded and where necessary advanced. A final list of 26 unique theatrical constraints was completed and recorded in a constraint glossary which is included in the programme note (see Appendix B). The content that resulted from the constraint impositions is what constitutes the content of the final performance.

Practice Documentation, Project 1

You are now invited to watch the performance work of Project 1,

The Animal Was Upon Him

Documented show performed 7th March 2014 at Yorkshire Dance, Leeds

Audience approx. 80, seated end-on

<https://vimeo.com/98730765>

password – **constraint**

You may choose to have the programme note (Appendix B), which includes a glossary of the constraints used, with you while you watch.

A Note on Michael Kirby

Michael Kirby's *Formalist Theatre* (1987) has provided an inroad to thinking about constraint in performance and a theatrical Oulipo. Although not a member of the Oulipo, nor strictly working under constraint, Kirby as a critical and analytical performance maker provides valuable insight into the potential of structure and constraint in performance practice. Kirby's structural observations of theatre and performance provide a useful bridge between the literature dominated Oulipo and an already established structural emphasis in contemporary theatre. Kirby's observations on analysis and formalism are similar to the Oulipo's position of inherent constraints in writing practice. However, rather than providing tools for generation, Kirby postulates a language for reading performance at a time that is historically in line with similar activities undertaken by the Oulipo:

If one is interested in innovation, more new ideas may come from the suggestions and indications of an analytical system (in which no creative stimulus was intended) than from theatrical theory (in which it was). When theory is 'borrowed,' the result is usually predictable.
(Kirby, 1987: xviii)

Analytical systems provide a useful model for performance generation because they are broadly applicable. When a model can be extensively applied, it can expose rhythms and gaps over a generous spectrum of practice that can be mined for creative purposes. This inherently structural approach echoes the poetics of the Oulipo. As outlined in the first manifesto, the Oulipo desire to first investigate, and secondly borrow and re-apply, existing rule structures to the task of writing. The Oulipo and Kirby focus on analysis in order to effectively categorise, pin down and understand inherent existing structures, and both informed the analytical auditing and redesigning of constraints in Project 1. The Oulipo believe that all literature is structure. Kirby believed that all theatre/performance can be placed somewhere on a set of continua. Similarly the Oulipo seeks the potential in categorisation, seeing the marking of something as leading to the blending, re-working, developing and often exhausting possibilities for the future. I will come to discuss the differences between rules and constraints in the next chapter, but the acknowledgement of the pervasiveness of rules in writing practice forms a fundamental part of anoulipism.

In *A Formalist Theatre*, Kirby alludes to multiple methods of measurement from a range of models outside of the realms of theatre, both scientific and artistic. Kirby was happy to apply the analytical tools used for two-dimensional art like painting, to the multi-dimensional space of theatre (1987: 22). The cross-disciplinary borrowing of analytical tools, again echoes the constitution of the Oulipo.

Time, the major dimension of performance, can be seen as a sequence of present moments, each of which moves away to become part of the past.
(Kirby, 1987: 22)

This fundamental observation about time is crucial. Time is one of the most significant differences between performance and literature. The way performance material unfolds through time can be manipulated. This is a principal difference between the reader⁶ and the live audience, and the work of the Oulipo and my own practice – a recognition of the fourth dimension. In Project 1, time, as a crucial factor in the difference between literature and performance, takes its place alongside Voice, Body and Space in my exercise of developing theatrical constraints.

In Project 1, very specific structures were designed in order to carry out and document the process, a further echoing of structural categorisation from Kirby and the Oulipo. I undertook 15 workshops during which I trialled constraints, each workshop lasted exactly 60 minutes and was immediately followed by my collaborator and I individually recording exactly 60 seconds of verbal reflection. Kirby's persistence in recording, categorising and placing performance moments on spectrums was a useful influence on my own method, enabling me to clearly track developments and simply revisit work completed. Kirby postulates that a theory that tends to completeness may be creatively less interesting, as its conclusiveness makes it applicable only retrospectively to completed works. Instead he proposes an amalgamation of analysis and theory, and analysis as theory, proposing 'an open and deductive system [...]'. As theory, the analytical system is intended to be

⁶ I use the word reader in Kirby's terms as distinct from watcher or audience. I understand that terminologically this word may have contested definitions and varying usage.

provocative and stimulating rather than prescriptive' (1987: xix). There is a great similarity between Kirby's approach to conflating analysis and theory in an effort to yield creativity and the Oulipo's blurring of analysis and synthesis. Both approaches are captured in Bök's description of the conflation of *mathema* and *poiesis* (2004: 70-71), discussed later, which considers the joining together of *study* and *making*.

Green Eggs & Ham

Anoulipism is devoted to discovery, Synthoulipism to invention. From one to the other there exist many subtle channels.
(Le Lionnais, 2007: 28)

The subversion and portmanteauing of the words analysis and synthesis to Anoulipism and Synthoulipism, speaks to the poetics of the Oulipo. The oulipisation of existing words and terms to describe hybrid or interstitial ideas highlights the philosophy of a group that is not reluctant to create terminology in order to establish positions and new territories. This philosophy was echoed in Project 1, during which I defined my own glossary of working terms (Appendix B), a further resonance of Bök's idea of the need for new methods to 'colonize unfamiliar lexicons' (2007). My interest in Bök's idea is in both the appropriation of language in defining constraint and the occupation of existing categorical systems.

The constraints of Project 1 were named through a process of back-formation, which is defined as, '[t]he formation of what looks like a root-word from an already existing word which might be (but is not) a derivative of the former' (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Back-formation resonates with the oulipian term 'anticipatory' plagiarism, which is defined as:

[A] 'paradoxical and provocative' expression which the Oulipo uses to identify its predecessors: authors who have previously used methods now seen as 'Oulipian'.
(Mathews & Brotchie, 2005: 211)

Suspending literary lineage and unabashedly claiming work are ironic positions that the Oulipo enjoy playing within. Anticipatory plagiarism is redolent of the somewhat arrogant pataphysical claim that 'all things are pataphysical; yet few men practice

pataphysics consciously' (Shattuck, 1960: 27-30). The notion of anticipatory plagiarism sets up the group as a temporally unbound nexus of constraint, playfully claiming any constraint as their own, regardless of whether or not it was conceived and used before the conception of the group. This calls into question the group's apparent adherence to structural and modern concerns, appearing to occupy a rather more postmodern position of fragmentation and impermanence of ownership. I take this as further evidence of the group speaking to the cultural time of their conception, their various postmodern contemporaries leading the group to examine ideas of structural categorisation while at the same time disrupting the hierarchical conventions that grow out of that categorisation.

Scott Esposito draws attention to Georges Perec's *La Vie mode d'emploi* (translated as *Life A User's Manual*), written in 1978, stating that it 'did both analysis and synthesis' and it 'devoured pre-existing forms [and] also pioneered new forms' (Elkin and Esposito, 2013: 22). There is a necessary bleed from analysis to synthesis in books like *Life*, which occurs because of the necessity to exemplify the definitions of both kinds of activity. In order to evidence analytical activity one may need to synthesise. It is difficult to imagine analysis without synthesis, or more crudely, the past without the present and future. Esposito points out (by way of a comparison to Walter Benjamin and photography) the linear nature of creative development, the necessity to push forth new ideas that are brought about by the moment history turns into the present (Elkin and Esposito, 2013: 22).

There is further precedent for the kind of experimentation approached in Project 1. Catrinel Haught-Tromp's, 'The *Green Eggs and Ham* Hypothesis: How Constraints Facilitate Creativity' (2017), is one such example. Haught-Tromp provides a strong rationale as to why creativity may be elicited from constraint. The hypothesis proposes that 'working with constraints can yield more creative outputs' (2017: 11). Theodore Geisel, also known as Dr. Seuss, a children's author, wrote a story titled *Green Eggs and Ham* (1960) using a limited vocabulary of only 50 words after being challenged by his publisher (Haught-Tromp, 2017: 11). Citing Freedman's 'Streetlight Effect' (Haught-Tromp, 2017: 11) and Kaplan's 'Drunkards Search' (Haught-Tromp, 2017: 11), Haught-Tromp proposes that the tendency of people

undertaking a creative act is to firstly go to the simplest solution possible, the solution that is most available to the creator (2017: 11). The term *tendency*, specifically my own theatrical tendencies, how they relate to established rules and how they differ from constraint, will be discussed in the following chapter in relation to Project 2. The recognition of my own implicit theatrical tendencies is an important observation of my creative process. Haught-Tromp signposts that tendency becomes instrumental because it posits an easy solution to creative problems. The strength of applying any given constraint in this context then, is to remove, to whatever extent this is possible, recourse to an obvious (easy) solution, rather like Mathews' remarks described earlier, 'write something that you wouldn't normally say' (Mathews in Drayton, 2014: 300). In essence, this means artists putting themselves in a position that catches them off guard. Haught-Tromp references Bristol and Viskontas as recognising that the easiest solution 'often yields disappointing solutions [as] the familiar [...] will likely yield only clichés' (Haught-Tromp, 2017:11).

Haught-Tromp undertook a set of experiments whereby participants were asked to write short, creative texts for the inside of greetings cards. Some of the participants undertook the tasks with no constraints applied, others were asked to apply constraints, including the incorporation of a given word or words into their messages. The results were judged according to their relative creativity by a panel of judges, who rated the texts 'on a 10-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all creative*) to 10 (*extremely creative*)' (2017: 12-13). Ignoring for the moment the problem of rating creativity, the results of Haught-Tromp's experiment were resoundingly positive in attesting to the hypothesis that constraint imposition elicits creativity. Haught-Tromp concludes that 'the challenging task of working with a constraint [...] led participants to make more connections between items that are not obviously or naturally associated [and] may have encouraged them to explore new associative paths' (2017: 14). Although the practices of this study are not seeking to quantify creativity according to a data gathering experiment, Haught-Tromp's examples give credence to the study's direction. One underlying assumption of this study is, in line with oulipian philosophy, that the result of the application of constraint is creative generation. Indeed, the following of 'new associative paths' (2017:14), a term Haught-Tromp borrows from Sarnoff Mednick (1962), sits well as an explanation of

synthoulipism, specifically as Drayton summarises, ‘Synthoulipism is the synthesis of ideas to form a theory or system of new Oulipian operation’ (2014: 304). In the case of Project 1, this takes the form of translating existing oulipian constraints into an initial set of theatrical versions. These theatrical versions, through practical exploration, created a new system of operation, ready to synthesise the potential for new performance material. The application of constraint for Haught-Tromp, ‘anchors the search’ (2017: 14), allowing for a procedural methodology to emerge. In this sense, the oulipian constraints used in Project 1 provided the necessary initial anchoring required to avoid the creatively crippling ‘paradox of choice’ (Haught-Tromp, 2017: 11).

While considering the ‘breaking of associative paths’ (2017: 14) Haught-Tromp also introduces the work of Daniel Kahneman, who proposes that problem solving/decision making takes place through either *System 1* or *System 2* thinking. Kahneman defines *System 1* and *System 2* thinking in the following way:

System 1 operates automatically and quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control.

System 2 allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it.

(Kahneman, 2011: 20-21)

Applying constraints makes mental activities effortful and demands *System 2* thinking. The attempted enforcing of *System 2* in Haught-Tromp’s experiment is reminiscent of the oulipian desire to move away from inspired, intuitive thought, a digression from the alleged surrealist philosophy so abhorred by Raymond Queneau (and unpacked in more detail in the next chapter). Additionally and importantly, *System 2* thinking, understood by Kahneman as logic-based, also aligns with both anoulipiam and synthoulipism as a structured and rational way of recognising past constraints and the contemplation of them as synthetic tools. The systematic and procedural tendencies of *System 2* thinking, as mapped against the stages of work undertaken for Project 1, privilege rational and considered thought as a genuine conduit to creativity. Haught-Tromp’s experiment, if problematic in its attempt to

quantify creativity, nonetheless suggests that the targeted limiting of options, when applied to a creative act, can helpfully assist creative generation.

Interestingly, Haught-Tromp draws attention to a danger of overloading the creative process with too many constraints:

[I]f too many constraints are specified, then the task risks turning into a deterministic endeavor, where at each step along the way the input can yield only one possible output. This is no longer a creative task. (Haught-Tromp, 2017: 15)

This echoes my own caution with working under constraint for the first time. The trialling of constraints in Project 1 occurred in series, one constraint was trialled at a time, rather than working with multiple constraints in parallel. This design enabled me to be reflective (reflexive) during the process of trialling, to avoid situations whereby one constraint might cloud my judgment of another, to avoid the 'paradox of choice' (Haught-Tromp, 2017:11). This was a process specific to Project 1, undertaken with the knowledge that Projects 2 and 3 would involve the grouping and parallel processing of constraints. This primary endeavour, built as it was upon the recognition of my own theatrical tendencies, enabled me to understand in practice the impact of constraint imposition. That said, the layering and simultaneous use of constraints in this study (and for the Oulipo) has provided a rich environment for creativity in the second and third projects. The danger of determinism was avoided in Project 3 through the deployment of the clinamen performer, which will be discussed in detail later in this thesis. Indeed, Craig Dworkin sees the application of the clinamen as the site of explanation for the longevity of the Oulipo, preventing the group 'from becoming a too-perfect parody of itself' (2015: 13).

An Oulipian Agenda

The research practices of designing and trialling constraints for Project 1 were developed out of the Oulipo's methods of analysis and synthesis but were also an attempt to work within the spirit of the group, who themselves use a version of practice-led methodology at their monthly meetings. Their three agenda items are outlined by Oulipian Harry Mathews as:

- Creation:** Consideration of new procedures/constraints, with examples.
- Rumination:** Consideration of unrealised procedures/constraints, i.e. possibilities/potential.
- Erudition:** Consideration of work by non-members.

(Mathews in Schott, 2009)

The group continues to refine and build new structures in their work, a strategy geared towards exhaustion by playing through each possibility in a perpetual game of generation. Adherence to the rules is crucial, but the rules inevitably grow and the game evolves. The tools of analysis and synthesis are further represented in the group's monthly meeting agenda items listed above, of *Creation*, *Rumination* and *Erudition*. Placing equal emphasis on the consideration of realised and unrealised procedures, the Oulipo is always searching for new constraints on which to ruminate and create in practice.

The activity of *Rumination* closely ties to the term *potentielle*. The verb rumination reflects the act of thinking slowly or deeply, a derivative of chewing or masticating, rather like Kahneman's *System 2* thinking referred to previously. The group often eat during their meetings (Fournel in Schott, 2009), and the metaphorical extension of rumination, to slowly digest and cogitate on practices, rather than having to actually action them, places once again the oulipian consideration of constraints within the territory of potential.

This agenda of *Creation*, *Rumination* and *Erudition*, which can be outlined as sharing the results of new constraints; discussing the (conceptual) viability of new constraints; and looking outward for education on working with constraints, is echoed in the methodology of Project 1. As mentioned previously, the two-part process of designing constraints, or my analysis into synthesis, comprised firstly the translation of existing constraints into four theatrical equivalences, and secondly the discarding or editing of these variations. This constitutes a *Rumination* on the possibilities of potential in performance. As articulated earlier, these practices

occurred both before and during the workshop trials, leading to the observation that *Rumination* can constitute a collaborative practice in addition to an individual's solo contemplation. In other words, my own methodology sees a conflation of *Rumination* and *Creation*. The oulipian agenda item of *Erudition*, as defined by Mathews, can also describe all activity of this study, undertaken as it was by a non-member, me.

Inherent within the constraints employed by the Oulipo are signifiers to the poetics of the group. The articulation of the group's philosophy in *Lipo: First Manifesto*, captures the playful character of the Oulipo. Fond as the group are of borrowing scientific method and mathematical algorithms, through that appropriated formal language one can detect the ludic characteristics of the group. Le Lionnais ends the first manifesto with the following:

A word at the end for the benefit of those particularly grave people who condemn without consideration and without appeal all work wherein is manifested any propensity for pleasantry. When they are the work of poets, entertainments, pranks, and hoaxes still form within the domain of poetry. Potential literature remains thus the most serious thing in the world. Q.E.D.
(Le Lionnais, 2007: 28)

The ludic and playful impulses of the group will be discussed in a later chapter of this thesis, but the deliberate challenge to earnest critics is reminiscent of the pataphysical roots of the group.

Le Collège de Pataphysique

The Oulipo was founded in Paris by two members of the *Collège de Pataphysique*, François Le Lionnais and Raymond Queneau (Hugill, 2012: 106). For the purposes of this study, it is useful to trace the relationship of the Collège to the Oulipo in the context of several shared philosophies that echo through both institutions.

Pataphysics is notoriously difficult to define and Hugill notes that any attempt at definition should be approached with caution (2012: 3). American writer Roger Shattuck, has offered a relatively clear set of definitions in his 'Subliminal Note'

(1960), an essay written in English that brought pataphysics to a broader anglo-community. Shattuck offers seven definitions of pataphysics:

1. Pataphysics is the science of the realm beyond metaphysics.
2. Pataphysics is the science of the particular, of laws governing exceptions.
3. Pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions.
4. For pataphysics all things are equal.
5. Pataphysics is, in aspect, imperturbable.
6. All things are pataphysical; yet few men practice pataphysics consciously.
7. Beyond pataphysics lies nothing; pataphysics is the ultimate defence.

(1960: 27-30)

In his essay Shattuck explicates all of these definitions and the crossovers between them are multiple. The third definition listed above – *Pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions* – is the most recognised of these definitions and I see it as the nexus of pataphysical philosophy, around which the other definitions circle (much like the gidouille, the symbol of pataphysics [Ubu's spiral] (Hugill, 2012:6)).

Pataphysics as the science of imaginary solutions is defined by Shattuck in the following way:

In the realm of the particular, every event arises from an infinite number of causes. All solutions, therefore, to particular problems, all attributions of cause and effect, are based on arbitrary choice, another term for scientific imagination. [...] Pataphysics welcomes all scientific theories (they are getting better and better) and treats each one not as a generality but as an attempt, sometimes heroic and sometimes pathetic, to pin down one point of view as 'real.' Students of philosophy may remember the German Hans Vaihinger with his Philosophy of *als ob*. Ponderously yet persistently he declared that we construct our own system of thought and value, and then live 'as if' reality conformed to it. The idea of 'truth' is the most imaginary of all solutions.

(1960: 28)

Connecting to both the pataphysical concern of 'all things are equal', the notion that any solution based on cause and effect is arbitrary, points the way forward to oulipian poetics built around arbitrary constraint. The oulipian cross-disciplinary philosophy of exchange between mathematics and literature can be justified by the arbitrary causes of creation more broadly applicable to the pataphysicians.

Pataphysics is a pseudoscience built around multiple and equally valuable theories.

Simply, as definition six in Shattuck's list highlights, all things are equal and therefore 'truth' is problematized. Similarly, the revisiting of Vaihinger's *as if* philosophy, raised previously, pushes pataphysical discourse to the imaginary and by extension connects it to the oulipian philosophy of potential. Both the pataphysicists and the Oulipo share a common privileging of speculation and process over summative truth or unimagined (because proved) solutions.

The Oulipo was inspired by the *Collège de Pataphysique*, mostly by working within it. Christian Bök describes the *Collège* as a 'speculative institution' (2002: 64), and notes that the Oulipo:

study three unique species of exceptional eventuality: the excess of order emerging out of chaos, the chiasm existing between order and chaos, and the swerve of chaos breaking from order.
(2002: 64).

The 'excess of order' is the result of valuing all speculative theories equally, with emphasis on the value of *as if*, however absurd that might be. This leads inevitably to a saturation, or excess of order(s), that can be likened to the potentiality of oulipian concern. Bök references Samuel Butler's novel *Erewhon* (1872) in his justification of the *Collège*'s use of multiple *as ifs*, stating that the *Collège*:

subscribes implicitly to an Erewhonian hypothesis: the idea that, if unreason cannot exist without its opposite, then surely an increase in the former must result in an increase in the latter (hence the need to advocate what is specious in order to expedite what is rational).
(2002: 66).

The absurdity of this sentiment again illustrates the dual position of the Oulipo, whose ludic impulse perhaps paradoxically leads them to the earnest rigor of procedural work. During the process of translating existing oulipian constraints to theatrical constraints during Project 1, I was conscious of an *as if* philosophy, turning 43 constraints into 155 new possibilities through an acknowledgement of the multiple dimensions of performance – to capture the excess, to record the potential. This procedure was inevitably imperfect, influenced as it was by my own formal tendencies and the inescapably inadequate pursuit of exhaustion, or to put it

another way – the pursuit of capturing as many *as ifs* as possible. Bök recognises this imperfection in the Oulipo, commenting on the group in relation to pataphysics:

Such a nomadic science privileges the amateurism of tinkering engineers, who proceed by trial and error, case by case, following rather than directing a course of action: not refinement, but engagement.
(2002: 66)

Directing as mentioned above becomes a valuable homonym here, applicable to this study by capturing precisely the undertakings of Project 1. When translating oulipian constraints into theatrical versions and then trialling these constraints in a workshop context, I was not concerned with directing in either a conventional or theatrical sense. Indeed, the undertakings of a director are deliberately, for the most part, not speculative but refined. Conversely, the trailing of constraints in Project 1 was unrefined, an immediate, practical attempt. Of equal significance in Bök's commentary is the word *engagement*. Bök quotes Queneau as describing oulipian process as 'forge[ing] ahead without undue refinement [to] try to prove motion by walking' (2002: 66). The philosophy of a lack of refinement affords the potential to progress without needing to be summatively convincing, an ethos of praxis, reflecting through a process, a privileging of doing. Indeed, the translation of oulipian constraints into theatrical constraints was an example of the absence of undue refinement. While translating swiftly and efficiently each existing constraint into four new constraints, I was not concerned with initially refining the new versions. Similarly, when responding/improvising with the constraints during the workshop trials, the dealing with these constraints was not a perfect exercise in considering how each constraint might work in the pursuit of a whole performance work. Rather, each constraint was *tinkered* with at an individual level, including the rejection or acceptance of each constraint. Operating under constraints involved a complex triangulation of constraint adherence, artistic tendency, and allegiance to oulipian poetics. This triangulation narrowed the scope for digression from the procedural, but as I discuss later in this thesis, still acknowledged the most chaotic constraint of all – the live performer (clinamen). In the context of Project 1 this is a quite different process from a game of chance or aleatory art generation; as we will discover in the

next chapter, the Oulipo are highly sceptical of chance. Oulipian Claude Berge protests, '*Nous sommes essentiellement anti-hasard*' (we are essentially anti-chance) (James, 2009: 109).

The activities of anoulipism and synoulipism in oulipian methodology can be considered in similar terms to Bök's articulation of *poiesis* and *mathema*:

The distinction between *poiesis* and *mathema* is a constraint that has outlived its potential, and thus the pataphysician must disrupt this constraint by adopting, as a new constraint, *mathema* itself. (2002: 70).

Poiesis and *mathema*, which one might define as *generation* and *study* respectively, become conflated in the pursuits of the Oulipo due to the 'many subtle channels' between anoulipism and synthoulipism (Le Lionnaise, 2007: 28). A context where observance of the discourse of generation becomes as important as the generation itself, speaks to both Kirby's assertion that innovation is reached by analysis (1987: xviii) and the Oulipo's own anoulipism.

This is an important observation when considering my own study, which involves the application of constraints to the discipline of theatre practice. Rather than a substitution of theatre to replace literature in my methodology, this study is a development towards theatre from the substitute *mathema*, the discourse of literature. That is to say, this study constitutes a particular swerve from an already existing conflation of *poiesis* and *mathema*, an exercise comprising a departure from that which has *already* departed. So when, for example, I change the following oulipian constraint into four new constraints, I am creating subsets of constraints that already exist in the context of an introspective literary practice:

Oulipo Constraint	Performance Equivalent Physical	Performance Equivalent Verbal	Performance Equivalent Temporal	Performance Equivalent Environmental
EPENTHESIS Insertion of a letter, phoneme or syllable into the middle of a word e.g. visitating for visiting.	Insertion of dramatic physical gesture into the centre of moments.	Insertion of a phoneme or syllable into the middle of a word e.g. visitating for visiting.	Changes of pace/time (sloooow/fst) within words, sentences or moments.	Properties inserted in unexpected moments.

Table 2 Original and Trialled Constraints Example 2

The Oulipo have acted as a kind of machine that has already undertaken a significant, self-referential task, ready for me to develop in a unique direction. To revisit Queneau's words, the development of one existing constraint into four others for a different context, was undertaken in Project 1 without 'undue refinement' (Bök, 2002: 66). I attempted to prove that a theatre of constraint can exist by the study of constraint *and* the practice of making constrained theatre, 'to prove motion by walking' (2002: 66).

The practice of anoulipism, or the understanding of existing literary constraints, for the performance practice of this study necessarily requires an acknowledgement of my existing theatrical tendencies. However, my embodied knowledge of theatre making is a particularly slippery set of existing skills that are difficult to categorise. Donald Schön's work on *reflection-in-action* (1983) can go some way to start accounting for these tendencies.

Reflection in Action

Donald Schön, in *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (1983/1999), posits a model of reflection-in-action that has provided a starting point for the instinctual artistic undertakings that took place during the workshops of Project I. Schön problematises *Technical Rationality*, describing it as a Positivist ideal, being applicable only when problems and 'ends' are clear (1999: 41). Schön states that those who adhere to technical rationality must exclude 'phenomena they have learned to see as central to their practice. And artistic ways of coping with these phenomena do not qualify, for them, as rigorous professional knowledge.' (1999: 42). He goes on to propose that:

Every competent practitioner can recognize phenomena [...] in his [sic] day-to-day practice he makes innumerable judgments of quality for which he cannot state adequate criteria, and he displays skills for which he cannot state the rules and procedures. Even when he makes conscious use of research-based theories and techniques, he is dependent on tacit recognitions, judgments, and skilful performances. (1999: 49-50)

These tacit recognitions, which can also be described as theatrical tendencies, can be used to rationalise how my collaborator and I operated within the workshop space. My collaborator and I made our decisions in the practical space while generating material under constraint through our pre-existing theatrical tendencies. Schön articulates how the practitioner can successfully balance, through reflection-in-action, uncertainty and overarching theories or systems:

He [sic] must be willing to enter into new confusions and uncertainties. Hence, he must adopt a kind of double vision. [...] if the inquirer maintains his double vision, even while deepening his commitment to a chosen frame, he increases his chances of arriving at a deeper and broader coherence of artefact and idea. His ability to do this depends on certain relatively constant elements that he may bring to a situation otherwise in flux: an overarching theory, an appreciative system, and a stance of reflection-in-action which can become, in some practitioners, an ethic for inquiry.
(1999: 164)

On reflection, I can recognise this ‘double vision’ as a method used within the workshop activity of Project 1. The reliance on existing skills, namely the ability to improvise and the ability to play, were contextualised by the overarching needs of the project – the need to generate material from adherence to a constraint. Some examples of my theatrical tendencies can be observed by watching the edited documentation of the workshops. In the *Project 1: Constraint Workshop Samples* documentation,⁷ you can observe examples of my existing knowledge of performance informing how I deal with the constraints:

TIME CODE	THEATRICAL TENDENCIES
1:10 – 1:43	Locating an alternative perspective on content.
2:00 – 2:25	Finding patterns and repetition in vocal delivery and using a kind of <i>double entendre</i> .
5:20 – 5:53	Performing of emotional connection/earnestness to content in vocal delivery.
7:55 – 9:01	Being deliberately ambiguous in the recalling of narrative.
11:55 – 12:40	Performers responding to the proposals of one another.
14:40 – 15:50	The performance of heightened cultural tropes/stereotypes.
16:25 – 17:11	Using vocal dexterity and range.

Table 3 Theatrical Tendencies Video References

⁷ Access at <https://vimeo.com/70507350> (password – **constraint**)

Schön's reflection-in-action is useful in as much as it highlights the need to acknowledge the existing, tacit skills of the performer in this study. Schön provides an acknowledgement that these skills are reflected upon during the creative act. However, the positioning of these skills as so tacit that they may be unconsciously reflected upon is a challenge to the oulipian opposition to the notion of the unconscious. This opposition suggests that at best the unconscious is an excuse to not unravel the detail of the artist's decisions, at worst it is a celebration of the mystic, like the surrealists' exchanging of God for the unconscious mind, a position simply not tolerated by the Oulipo (Consenstein, 2002:128). Queneau stated, 'no rule can ever be undermined by pretending that the rule doesn't exist' (Bök, 2002: 67). Schön draws our attention to a problem, regrettably he does not solve it.

While reflection-in-action explains my artistic tendencies to a degree, Schön falls short at describing the nuances of artistic intuition and indeed the problems this creates in a study of this kind, one built around the tangibility of rigorous constraints. Schön's glossing over of embodied knowledge, together with the Oulipo's objection to surrealist privileging of the unconscious, is problematized further in the next chapter. However, in terms of Project 1, Oulipian Marcel Bénabou draws our attention to the notion that a constraint can pull focus to its medium and perhaps by extension its creator:

[the constraint] forces the system out of its routine functioning,
thereby compelling it to reveal its hidden resources.
(Bénabou, 2007: 41)

The Oulipo can be considered, as their name suggests, with emphasis on the potential of their methods. Or they can be considered according to the vast body of work that the group have generated under constraint. However, there is a third way to consider the group – the discourse that surrounds it. This thesis is tied together with much of the commentary about the group, including that of Oulipians writing about the Oulipo, or third parties such as Christian Bök or Marjorie Perloff. This commentary exists because, as Bénabou notes above, constraints compel the system to 'reveal' its 'hidden resources', in other words – using constraint reveals something about literature. The mastery of form, together with a heightened

awareness of the constraints already at play in writing, allows the reader access to the mechanics of the literature. And so is the case in this study with performance practice. The practices as witnessed by an audience, the observation of performance generated under constraint, reveals something about performance.

Constraint Visibility & Revelation

In his article 'The Impact of Constraint Visibility on the Translation of Constraint-based Writing' (2016), Chris Clarke articulates the difficulties surrounding the translation of oulipian texts. The various levels of constraint visibility for the reader of oulipian texts is discussed by Clarke in relation to how a translator may approach the complex and layered task of translation. Clarke translates Marcel Bénabou's three definitions of constraint revelation as, *forced revelation*, *external revelation*, and *internal revelation* (2016: 879). These three types of revelation describe how a reader can come to understand the constraints that are at play in a given text.

These three types of revelation are equally applicable to the revelation, or visibility, of constraint in the practices generated in this study. Clarke, translating Bénabou, describes forced revelation as 'any case where the identification or awareness of the constraint is essential to the clear understanding of the text' (2016: 879). *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* (Queneau, 1961), discussed previously, is a good example of revelation of this kind because the identifying value of the text is wholly rooted in the constraint and the suggestions of potential contained within it. Essentially, forced revelation occurs when the reader *has to* know that there is a constraint at play. External revelation occurs in 'situations where the constraint is invisible to the reader who has not been otherwise informed' (Clarke, 2016: 880). Therefore, external revelation happens when the visibility of the constraint is not necessary for the text to be understood, consequently the constraint exists somewhat outside of the usual capital of the text. Clarke suggests, 'perhaps not by chance, the external revelation often concerns mathematical and structural constraints and processes' (2016: 880). Interestingly, it is the external revelation texts that might be working with the borrowed structures of mathematics, perhaps because these constraints are not so obviously connected with the existing structures of literature – external revelation may be the result of works centred around synthoulipism rather than anoulipism. Internal revelation is defined by Bénabou as '*Un texte écrit selon une*

contrainte parle de cette contrainte' (Bénabou in Clarke, 2016: 880). This translates as 'a text written according to a constraint speaks of this constraint' and is a central oulipian theme. A dual effect occurs when a constraint works with internal revelation. As discussed earlier in this chapter, a constraint exists not only as a generative tool but also as the content of the writing it generates. The example that Bénabou describes is *La Disparition* (1969), whereby the lipogram in e not only accounts for the formal qualities of the writing but also the subject matter of the novel – all characters and episodes in the novel centre around the theme of the missing letter (Bénaobou in Clarke, 2016: 880). Indeed, Clarke criticises Gilbert Adair's translation of *La Disparition*, translated as *A Void* (2008), because it does not deal effectively with the internal revelation, translating the text too literally, resulting in a robust translation that slightly misses the point (2016: 886).

Clarke goes on to describe that *non-revelation* is also a possibility and forms a particular problem for the translator, who may find that they are attempting to translate constraints that they genuinely can't decipher (2016: 886). He also points out that this is no problem at all unless there is a sense in the writing that a constraint is at play, 'the point is moot so long as they go unnoticed' (2016: 887). Of the three projects of this study, only the first gives a transparent explanation to the audience of the constraints that are being used, making it the only project that relies upon forced revelation. However, Bénabou's definition above that suggests forced revelation is when the reader must know the constraint in order to understand the text, is problematical even for Project 1. The performance involved the displaying of the name of each constraint via projected surtitles into the performance space. This happened during the performance moments that that constraint generated, a kind of live annotation of the performance text. Similarly, the audience were given a programme that included a glossary of all the constraints used, including full definitions of the constraints. Together, the moments of performance, the projection of the constraint names, and the glossary in the audience's hands led to a largely transparent demonstration of constrained performance. However, Bénabou's definition suggests that the reader must identify or be aware of the constraint in order to have a clear understanding of the text; the important term here is 'clear'. For example, any audience member could have watched the performance of Project

1 without looking at the glossary, and so would not have grasped the definition of each constraint, but could still have understood something of the performance. In that instance there would be no possibility for those audience members to have a clear understanding of how the performance was generated, but they of course could have watched, enjoyed, disliked or otherwise engaged with the work with clarity in their own terms. Similarly, Daniel Levin Becker, quotes Georges Perec as saying that ‘the problem, when you see the constraint, [...] is that you see nothing but the constraint’ (Perec in Levin Becker, 2013: 80).

Forced revelation of constraint changes the kind of reading that takes place, whether in literature or performance. The kind of constraint revelation involved in being an audience of Project 1, included a number of different kinds of reading; reading the performance text; reading the projected surtitles; and reading the glossary definitions within the programme. The physiological impossibility of doing all three of these activities at once meant that a forced revelation understanding, a complete understanding of the performance, would have paradoxically involved not watching all of the live action. This is providing, of course, that a fixed notion of clear understanding is either possible or relevant in the context of pataphysical and inexhaustible multiplicities of truth. The performance of Project 1 can’t be labeled as external revelation because of the signposts to the constraints littered throughout the experience of watching. Bénabou’s internal revelation is also applicable to the work of Project 1, whereby the constraints were not just a generative tool but also formed the content of the work presented, in adherence with the central oulipan theme that, ‘a text written according to the constraint speaks of that constraint’ (Bénabou in Clarke, 2016: 880), discussed earlier. Attention is drawn to the constraints of the work by the glossary and the surtitled constraints visibly invading the performance space. The surtitles simultaneously enabled a forced revelation but also comprised a part of the composition of the performance text. From this perspective, the audience observed an example of internal revelation, a performance equivalent of writing – *there’s a constraint in use* – in the margin of every page of *Life A User’s Manual* (1978). In Project 1 the constraints had been intentionally and additionally deployed to infiltrate the performance by the crassest possible means.

The constraint, the arbitrary factor demanding adherence, confronts notions of authorship for an audience/reader of the work. The human figures of authorship conventionally associated with theatre range in classification: director, playwright, deviser, collaborator, performer etc. However, we can consider a constraint, the individual, quantifiable liberator/disrupter, as a responsible participant in the generative process. In Project 1, the raising of constraint in an audience's consciousness created a problem. The audience was presented with a tension as to where the responsibility for the performance work might lie. This can leave the audience/reader with a sense of alienation, or the otherworldliness that Christian Bök describes when he wrote/constructed *Eunoia* (2008). The novel is comprised entirely of univocalisms, meaning that each of the five chapters consists only of words that contain one kind of vowel. Chapter one consists only of words containing the vowel 'a', chapter two only those containing the vowel 'e', and so on. Bök described this odd feeling:

I began to feel that language played host to a conspiracy, almost as if these words were destined to be arranged in this manner, lending themselves to no other task, but this one, each vowel revealing an individual personality.
(2007: 7)

Marjorie Perloff reaches a similar conclusion, stating that *Eunoia* may seem, 'on a first reading, like a mere language game, but it soon reveals itself to be a game where everything is at stake and where struggle is all' (Perloff, 2004: 38). The imposition of constraints can lead to a kind of anthropomorphism of language. This humanisation of literature is interesting when we consider it in terms of the relationship between tendency and constraint. The imposition of constraint disrupts the text, the specific work resulting from its application appearing as a kind of alien, or in the case of *Eunoia*, an unfamiliar visitor to the literature. This kind of work points up the mechanism that is causing the unfamiliarity, or even that the unfamiliarity *is* the knowledge of the constraint – the text speaking of the constraint. The destabilising of authorship for the audience, who are witness to internal revelation, positions the maker/performer as somewhat of an unknown quantity, perhaps rendering the work as unpredictable or unsafe. This results in an element

of risk, or at least perceived risk, even within the relatively fixed framework of Project 1. The operation of live constraint in Project 3, which will be discussed in further detail later in the thesis, permits constraints to add a greater degree of risk to the live space – an energy that an audience may acknowledge as uneasy, not specifically placing the audience or performer at risk, but placing the material at risk. The danger of constraint in performance is that it presents the possibility that not only might this work fail, but the unknown character (anthropomorphised) of the constraint might push the work in an unexpected direction. This raises the question, what happens when it is the constraints that have directorial agency? Here lies the distance between performance and literature. The ephemeral live moment of performance has multiple sensory demands that make it a complicated medium in which to consider constraint. The four dimensions of performance, developed from the already cross-disciplinary constraints of the Oulipo, tell us something about performance. They highlight that performance is experiential in its readership and the complications of intention make it, like pataphysical inexhaustible multiplicities of truth, subject to forced, external and internal revelation – simultaneously. Project 1 has demonstrated that content for contemporary performance can be generated through the imposition of constraints initially designed for deployment for literary generation. Live performance, as with the practices of the Oulipo, blurs the boundaries between analysis and synthesis and complicates constraint revelation because of the multisensory demands of observing live performance work. Constraints start to emerge here as a risky, live conduit of performance, simultaneously dominating, while being no-real-thing and potentially everything – a live demonstration of pataphysical *as if*.

A Moment of Reflection

My collaborator and I approached the undertakings of Project 1 in differing contexts. Of course, I necessarily explained to my collaborator the imperative behind the project, I told her about constraints and we discussed what I was ultimately trying to achieve through the workshops and final performance. However, my nuanced understanding of the ethos of the Oulipo created a gap between her and my intentions, both in the development of material and how we performed the work created. That said, the nature of the constraints involved, specifically their

prescribed clarity, meant that the generative method was equally accessible and available for both of us – we could both deal with the constraints, just in different ways. As detailed in a later section of this thesis, the recourse to humour was pervasive in both the development and the performance of Project 1. Humour performed as a safety-net of sorts; in method and delivery it helped to smooth the tensions created by a rigid and difficult set of processes. As previously stated, material for Project 1 was developed before presentation to the public, which comprised the replaying of these developed moments sequentially. However, as is symptomatic of live performance – and explicated later in this thesis by virtue of the clinamen performer – the public performance of Project 1 allowed for a degree of performer flexibility in the live moment. In the moment of presentation to a public audience the work took on a dialogic liveness. Consequently, I experienced, as did my collaborator, the liberating combination of fixed moments and live possibility. The final performance combined the rigidity of a work notated in a script and the subtlety and play of live contemporary performance. While this might not be especially unusual, the robust and unapologetically enforced arbitrariness that characterises material generated under constraint, for me became a pleasantly playful and perhaps paradoxically safe environment in which to perform. The scripted content provided comfort – allowing a personal distance to this material generated by constraint, which acted as its own arbiter – and brought with it a violent liberation. This liberation allowed for the possibility of playfulness in moments where such playfulness felt innate, even premeditated. The fixedness of constraint leads to performance material that feels robust, God-like through its lack of clarified author. This in turn inspires a confidence to take the opportunity to resist the material, to claim live moments for yourself. I have taken this learning forward into the following stages of this study and into my practice beyond. I am reminded of the somewhat infamous words of modernist composer Igor Stravinsky, ‘the more constraints one imposes, the more one frees one’s self of the chains that shackle the spirit’ (Levin Becker, 2012: 13). The live moment can be frustratingly unquantifiable. Nonetheless, I found that the public performance of constraint, with its own attempts to capture as much as possible, makes what is left, the unquantifiable, even more delightful and playful; a comfortable pleasure to perform.

Création & Rumination: Project 2

The design of Project 2 moved the consideration of constraints to a broader, holistic compositional level and responded to the following research question:

How might the methods of constraint of the Oulipo be used to design and shape the composition, construction and form of new performance work?

The Descent of Inspiration

Working within a context of conscious constraint raises the question of what other factors might additionally affect the creative process. Though we can acknowledge that a given constraint can be a guiding principle for a generative process, we must also recognise that the generative process is also dependent on the architect of the constraint.

In addition to the conscious application of constraint to a project, the director/actor/performer must also draw upon their innumerable existing skills in *how* they deal with the constraint. In Project 1, the openly playful form of the workshop allowed for instinctual undertakings by the workshop participants, who operated in a highly skilful way that was not consciously rationalised during the moment of practice. The decision to take a constraint in a ludic, satirical, or autobiographical direction, for example, was ultimately down to the individual artists' inclinations, perhaps how they became *inspired* during the activity of making sense of a constraint. This raises problems for this study. For the level of critical reflection necessary in this project, Schön's explanation of reflection-in-action discussed previously, although logical, is ultimately superficial. The justification of instinctual inspiration as reflection-in-action is problematic because inspiration is not a satisfactory method within oulipian poetics, as I will now explain.

Founder member to the Oulipo Raymond Queneau wrote extensively on the problems of inspiration and this highlights a principal difference between the Oulipo and the surrealists that preceded them. 'The Surrealist Manifesto' (1924) states that '[the mind] has seized nothing consciously' (Breton, 2008: 37). The movement can

be positioned in direct opposition to the oulipian ideals of control and mastery. One can imagine how a technique like automatic writing, with the attempted removal of constraining structures, might enrage the Oulipian. The Oulipo's perpetual challenging of mystical terms forms a clear opposition to the surrealist's Freudian and 'modern' obsession with accessing the unconscious mind and being inspired. Queneau positioned inspiration as an extension of technique mastery. Peter Consenstein in *Literary Memory, Consciousness, and the Group Oulipo* (2002), observed that Queneau believed:

A 'true' poet, an 'inspired' poet, is one who is skilled enough to shape an idea with technical mastery, since technique and inspiration are 'the same thing'.
(2002: 125)

Queneau is dismissive of inspiration as an unconscious activity liberated from skills and conscious techniques. This challenge to the idolising of the unconscious mind as a resource to be tapped into presents a similar issue to Schön's recognition of reflection-in-action – an account of the inaccessible, intricate workings of the brain that cannot be reached by conventional analysis. Queneau goes on to describe the '*fausse idée*' (misconception) (Consenstein, 2002: 126) that inspiration means exploring the subconscious for self-liberation, stating that a poet is never inspired if inspiration is a function of 'a state of mind, temperature, political circumstances, subjective encounter' (2002: 126), all of which can be controlled and mastered. As may be the case with reflection-in-action, the misconception of legitimising the mystified, rather than the codified, is a way of defining action without real explanation. The rivalry between the surrealists and Queneau (of the Oulipo) is described by Oulipian Jacques Roubaud as an argument between the Ancients and the Moderns (2002:116), that roots firmly oulipian ethos within acceptance of, and most probably allegiance to, the literary canon. Consenstein comments that:

the Modern's rejected poetic constraints to give free reign to the voice of inspiration, which they believed came from God. Breton [André Breton, Leader of the surrealists] agreed, yet he rejected God in the name of the subconscious.
(2002: 128).

In 1937 Queneau wrote a novel titled *Odile* (2009) placing a fictionalised version of himself and a fictionalised André Breton arguing within the narrative. The two characters persistently disagree on subjects of mathematics, reason and unconscious, and throw into relief Queneau's position that the surrealists were 'intent on annexing territory for the greater glory of his [their] name' (Consenstein, 2002: 119). By placing so much emphasis on the unreasonable subconscious, the surrealists were, according to some Oulipians, self-aggrandising through the exclusion of writing's established rules and techniques. Breton's possible rebuttal can be found in the 'Second Manifesto of Surrealism' (1930), he writes:

It is commonly said that it [inspiration] is either present or it is not, and if it is absent, nothing of what, by way of comparison, is suggested by the human cleverness that interest, discursive intelligence, and the talent acquired by dint of hard work obliterate, can make up for it.
(Breton, 2010:161)

This bloody-minded positioning of the author as a channel for metaphysical inspiration can be unpacked according to psychoanalysis, but that would be a conversation about why the unconscious is untouchably Godly. Rather, Project 2 of this study sought, in the spirit of oulipian poetics, to remove the need for inspired activity by becoming consciously aware of as many creative decisions as possible in order to master the design and delivery of constraint.

Queneau uses a succinct analogy that helps further illustrate the departure from reliance on unconscious inspiration, suggesting that a poet waiting for inspiration is like a meteorologist waiting for a storm – they are not experimenting, they're gathering data (Consenstein, 2002: 125-126). The suggestion is that relying on the opaqueness of tacit knowledge is not the maker's task, instead they must analyse why they should/could make particular decisions. In reference to Project 2 this means that creative decisions were decided by their relationship to other creative decisions, whether they be constraint-driven or otherwise. Georges Perec did not only consider the absence of e when writing *La Disparition* (1969), indeed he had to engage in a careful consideration of the other tools in his arsenal during that exercise. The constraint makes the writer/maker hone their skills by their analysis of

them. The constraint is not just a liberation, it is a training for one's art, undertaken to become a better practitioner. Constraint enables the artist to understand their limitations and strengths and to carefully consider the work they are doing through consideration of the work of others. This conflation of generation and study, of poiseis and mathema, of the subtle channels between anoulipism and synthoulipism, is an approach unique to the Oulipo. It is an approach that attempts to leave as little as possible uncovered, to avoid the relegation of creative undertaking to the workings of the unconscious.

Queneau's detachment from the surrealists inevitably distances the Oulipo from a range of critical thinking that the surrealists inspired. In their article *README.DOC* (1988), Thomas and Hilliker note how Oulipian Jacques Roubaud is in opposition to thinkers such as Julia Kristeva and accepted notions of the conflation of the subject and the writing subject:

[H]e is particularly distraught by the fact that she comforts herself with the illusion that, in order to elude the rules of language and literature, it is possible to behave 'as if they don't exist'.
(Thomas and Hilliker, 1988: 21)

Oulipian philosophy dictates the need for the 'distinction between psychological subject and *subject of language*' (Thomas and Hilliker, 1988: 21). Situating the activity of writing as a conscious exercise, the Oulipo can fundamentally exemplify this distinction. By the application of granular constraints, the group bring to the foreground a conscious understanding of the constraints' effects on the practice of writing and the implications for the surrounding activity. In terms of my study, this additionally pulls tacit knowledge to the foreground and consequently the activity of the artist under constraint, raising a conscious awareness of all creative tools and practices, or as we will come to discuss, all tendencies. Thomas and Hilliker describe these oulipian characteristics as essentially transformative, rather than descriptive because:

It is an enterprise based not on a classification of states of a language but on a repertoire of *operations* implied in the production of a text.

(1988: 23).

As discussed previously, oulipian poetics are generative and built on practice, 'we try to prove motion by walking' (Queneau in Bök, 2002: 66), which is why they are so entirely suitable to a practice-led study of this kind. Consenstein describes this transformative methodology as one that leaves the writer as 'ultimately reconfigured' (2002: 22), an effect I have experienced throughout this research. The un-analysable generative decisions taken throughout Project 1 highlighted a need to further recognise and control the structures of generation during Project 2.

The Misconception of Chance

There is a common misconception about the group Oulipo that their theories and practices are aleatory, a label fiercely denied by members of the group. Queneau stated, '*n'est pas de la littérature [...] aléatoire*' (it is not aleatory literature) (James, 2009: 118). Claude Berge protested, '*Nous sommes essentiellement anti-hasard*' (we are essentially anti-chance) (James, 2009: 109). Alison James in her book *Constraining Chance* (2009), suggests that anti-chance has become something of a motto for the group and is further evidence of their desire to be distanced from the surrealists. The Oulipo wishes, through their desire to ultimately control all variables, to remove chance from their processes completely. That said, James describes chance as a relative concept and defines it as an absence of authorial control, but not an absence of authorial cause (2009: 116). The caveat of cause is, of course, what allows aleatory practices to exist at all – there must be a person to start the dice spinning as it were – chance-based practices must exist within some kind of controlled frame. The admittance that chance-based practices exist within a practical structure might appear to pull back the practices of the Oulipo to methods that might be labelled aleatory. The displacement of authorial control however, is the very antithesis of oulipian ethos and most likely why the group will dismiss themselves from associations with chance. However, as discussed later in this chapter, the unpredictability of the results of an applied constraint are exactly what defines it, and at some level this could be described as chance. James recognises the tension in oulipian poetics between potentiality and conscious control (2009: 119) and the group are aware of this tension. Oulipian Jacques Bens addresses the

issue by shifting the terms slightly and distinguishing between *uncertainty* and *randomness* (2009: 119). I move forward in this study with the premise that constraint is designed to elicit uncertainty, rather than chance, in opposition to randomness which has little to no constraining guidance.

From Light to ‘ard

As described in the introduction to this thesis, the output of the Oulipo can be considered as two relatively distinct writing forms. In the first instance there are the short exercises of imposed constraint that result in often small, poetic forms. These outputs are generated from the kind of constraints that populate the oulipian glossary of constraints that were used to generate theatrical equivalences in Project 1. While these individual constraints have been used by members to develop more substantial work, the lipogram in *La Disparition* (1969) for example, for the most part the individual application of these constraints results in much shorter forms.

Similarly, the poetic games and linguistic peculiarities of such literature are similar to those showcased at the group’s monthly *Jeudi* (Thursday) meetings; one might reasonably assume that both the spoken and written forms of these kinds of oulipian games can be labelled Oulipo light (Levin Becker 2012: 62-63), and complement the initial oulipian desire to concentrate on the potential of constraint rather than the completion of lengthy forms, such as the novel. Volumes like the *Oulipo Compendium* (2005) and *Oulipo: A primer of potential literature* (2007) showcase the results of these constraints in compilation format, and the relative shortness and simplicity of the forms illustrates the open-ended nature of the principal ethos of the Oulipo – potential.

The joining of Georges Perec to the group in 1967 brought with it an altered tendency to the group and a different kind of output. The new tendency was towards exhaustion and with it came a more complete kind of literary work. The novelistic form provides a greater literal space for text to occupy. The growth of the oulipian novel, or the substantive work, corresponds exactly with Perec’s undeniably influential interests in exhaustion that became the second focus of the group. Such works as the *Winter Journeys* corpus (Perec & the Oulipo, 2013) and *My Life in CIA* (Harry Mathews, 2005) demonstrate how a constellation of constraints can be used

in order to produce an Oulipo 'ard (Levin Becker 2012: 62-63) volume that contains multiple constraining devices. Project 1 of this study is a representation of the Oulipo light activities of the group, the smaller demonstrations of how individual constraints can generate material. Project 2 approaches an equivalence to the more substantive oulipian work that considers the formal tendencies of the medium (literature/theatre) more overtly. This echoes the developments and journey of the group itself, most likely instigated by Perec, as the group's poetics transferred over time to genres of prose, in particular the novel (James, 2009: 109). This departure to the characteristics of the substantive work provides a number of interesting characteristics to consider in relation to this study: length, formal demands and theatrical expectation.

On Long

In the first instance, a novel, or substantial work that may be defined as a volume in its own right, provides a physical space that allows for a large number of words to be deployed in its creation. The size of the substantive volume lends itself to the possibility of exhaustion because there is literally the space to record permutations. These volumes needn't be huge however, Perec's *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris* (1975/2010), is an example of a complete work and even though the book as an object is relatively slim, it is summative in its delivery. The content of the book comprises Perec's documentation of everything that he observed over three days sat in cafés at the Place Saint-Sulpice in Paris. As the title of the book describes, its effort towards exhaustion requires some substantive literal space to exist in its entirety. This is a distinct move away from the previously prioritised focus of potential. To return to Queneau's perfect example of potential literature described in the introduction to this thesis, if written out in its entirety *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* (*A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*) (1961), would need to be 100,000,000,000,000, or one hundred trillion pages long, which would make a physical book that was just short of 22 million miles thick. The potential/exhaustion paradox means that, in the instance of the substantive volume, while the potential should always remain just that, there is an opportunity to realise exhaustion. The work of Project 1 can be compared to the *Compendium* (2005), a set of examples placed in series for the reader/audience to gain an insight into the effect of

constraint. Project 2 however, allows room for larger, holistic constraints to have space and, crucially, time to be (re)read, developed and perhaps even exhausted. As a point of literary comparison, the serialised book illustrates well what can be achieved in longer forms and is additionally echoed in the popular success of long-narrative drama in television. Many of the constraints used in Project 2 of this study demonstrate this shift of emphasis to larger, holistic and encompassing constraints in time and space.

On Demand

The second of the characteristics of the substantive work is that it places particular demands on the volume. The most obvious of these is the expectation to become novelistic. The demands of the novelistic form on substantive works worry critics of the Oulipo. For example, although he appears unaware of the shorter kinds of oulipian output, Scott Esposito describes the group in the following way:

Oulipo is best construed as an attempt to develop new forms that can withstand the strains of being made novelistic.
(Elkin and Esposito, 2013: 21)

When an oulipian text looks like it might be a novel, the tension of what that literature is doing can be felt. Alison James references Christelle Reggiani's highlighting of this tension in oulipian poetics. Specifically Reggiani mentions the paradoxical relationship between the 'rhetorical regime' and the 'scholastic ideology' of the Oulipo (James, 2009: 121). The group's desire for exhaustive systematic processes is conceived through an attention to the process of generation, a practice of experimentation. However, an emphasis on the undertaking of a procedure and the rigid allegiance to constraint is not necessarily sympathetic to the creation of a credible art object, in this case a piece of literature. The scholastic ideology that Reggiani mentions is an allusion to the unity of the text, a desire for the resulting work to reach a satisfying and expected conclusion. The scholastic and the rhetorical challenge one another. The rhetorical regime demands a lack of arbiter but the scholastic ideology calls for an author. James likens this relationship between the chaotic and coherent to a kind of Kabbalist approach to unification, or the 'total book', citing how Perec justified his use of the lipogram by using the

Kabbalah (2009: 123). Consenstein references Oulipo scholar Warren Motte's observation that the Oulipo project is one of 'reconstruction [of] *la langue originelle*' (original language) (2002: 24). Motte claims 'there is no schism within the sign' (2002: 24), echoing Raubaud's concerns about Kristeva's theories of poetics mentioned earlier. This is understandable in the context of an oulipian desire to deploy complex and varying permutations of constraint to uncover meaning, while still, as Reggiani mentions, at the most eyeing the whole truth and at the least exhausting the subject of language (2009: 121). Arguably, Esposito's claim above that the Oulipo is an attempt to develop new forms that withstand the strains of being novelistic is problematized. If withstanding strains is indicative of success, then substantive oulipian works must at some level be *like* a novel, and while this subjective demand to some extent seems absurd, there is truth in the claim that constraints can challenge readers' expectations. The rules of a particular form play a large role in this study and will be discussed later, but as I introduce more details about Project 2, it is worth noting that the expectations of theatre have been increasingly raised in the consciousness of this writer through these observations, and particularly through the process of moving from Project 1 to Project 2. Project 1 was a demonstration of examples of theatrical constraint, short pieces of material developed under constraint and placed end-to-end for an audience to observe. In comparison, while undertaking Project 2 I desired to produce a work that approached the notion of theatre in more complex and interwoven ways, with a tendency towards the holistic, the 'total book', the event of theatre. This required a new mindfulness in the design of constraints and how they operate within a larger theatrical frame. The purpose of Project 2 was to consider the formal possibilities of performance under constraint as an equivalent to the possibilities of exhaustion in the substantive literary form.

As described previously, in the theatrical presentation of Project 1, the examples of constraint-generated material were placed in series much like the *Oulipo Compendium* (2005), essentially arbitrary in sequence. Interestingly, the *Compendium* is actually organised under an alphabetical constraint. Project 1 was not ordered according to a constraint, I was the subjective arbiter of the ordering. However, because of the chaotic nature of the material generated, which was

largely thematically unrelated and differing in tone, I ordered the work according to some subjective rules of theatrical presentation. I selected sections for presentation that were not too similar to keep the rhythm of the work from being upset and unpalatable. I placed material with simple narrative content towards the start of the performance, placed the sincere autobiographical material towards the end of the performance, and placed the ludic silliness in the middle. These were not actions undertaken in direct relation to any specific constraint, but nor were they an inspired unconscious working. The constraints used during the process of Project 1 had given me disparate and unrelated material, absencing narrative concerns from my organisational choices, and leaving me with the need to further consider the construction of the presentation. In summary, constraints raised a consciousness of construction, or in Motte's terms a *reconstruction* of the language of performance (Consenstein, 2002: 24). At any rate, the exercise of ordering had certainly caused me to think deeply about structuring performance material in line with Consenstein's assertion that constraint 'modifies [the] researcher's reasoning' (2002: 205). While I wished to be even more aware of constraint design in theatrical contexts, I have no doubt that the constraints caused in me a consideration of, or *reconstruction* of, the language of contemporary theatre. We are additionally reminded here of Haught-Tromp's 'The Green Eggs and Ham Hypothesis' (2017), discussed in the previous chapter, and her assertion that taking unfamiliar directions can provoke creativity (2017: 10-17).

On Expectation

The third characteristic of the substantive work, in the context of this study, is theatrical expectation. Just as oulipian substantive works are full of literary references and homages, the theatrically 'ard work of Project 2 addressed, however subtly or limitedly, the expectations of theatre. While the definition of what constitutes theatrical performance is broad, there were necessarily some specific theatrical characteristics to address in Project 2. Similar to Esposito's claim that oulipian writing should be novelistic (Elkin and Esposito, 2013: 21), or to be satisfyingly complete according to Reggiani's scholastic inclinations (James, 2009:121), for Project 2 I wished the theatre I was creating to be theatrical. The principal ingredients, or subjective rules of this endeavour, included the presentation

of characters and relationships and an acting style that involved the actor pretending to be someone they are not. This was quite different to the more presentational, self-conscious style of the performance of Project 1. For this reason I selected an existing playtext, *Enemies* (Boyce & Hapgood, 1921), to be the foundation of Project 2. The insertion of an actual playtext into the process automatically led to some of the structural tendencies of theatre.

The formal tendencies that result from the use of a playtext, potentially limit the level of indeterminacy elicited by a constraint. The purpose of a constraint is to open up the unexpected, or indeterminate potential, through the creative act of being constrained. However, the architect of that act will be responsible for controlling how that potential is reached. Umberto Eco writes:

[T]he very notion of the 'work' of art sets limits to indeterminacy; even the mutability of 'open works' is always deployed within the specific limits of a given taste, or of predetermined formal tendencies, and is authorised by the concrete pliability of the material offered for the performer's manipulation.
(Eco in James, 2009: 121)

This is relevant because it narrows the scope of all creative activity by acknowledging the limitations of the artist. The formal tendencies of theatre are of course wide-ranging, but will always involve a consideration of the live moment by some party at some point on the journey to theatrical presentation. This includes the predispositions and tastes of the author/director/actor being geared towards producing a recognisably theatrical form in their own terms. The decision to have a playtext form the foundation for Project 2, to have actors learn lines and to perform to a live audience, was a way for me to realise, or reconstruct, my subjective version of traditional, theatrical concerns. As discussed previously, the notions of inspiration by the surrealists and the tacit knowledge of Schön's reflection-in-action are not particularly useful here, presenting as they do decisions and actions as essentially inaccessible to the conscious mind. Eco affords me the opportunity to draw out that which can be considered a constraint in the language of the Project, and that which can be recognised as predetermined formal tendency, or *rules* as latterly described in this chapter.

Eco's sentiment, recognised in the context of an aleatory art champion, further illuminates the Oulipo's penchant for both chaos and order. That is, their desire to produce indeterminate results from constraints that liberate through full understanding of formal tendencies. Eco demonstrates that indeterminate results through the application of constraints can never be fully realised because of all the complicated matters of predisposition to taste and rules that guide creative decisions. The opportunity for the Oulipo to exhaust all combinations is challenged by the culturally-bound limitations and nature of the author/architect of the constraint. *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*, would be positioned by Perec as not structurally aleatory because of his 'choosing' of the locations (if not the details observed from them) and the mode of documentation – his control over the factors dictating the form. However, Perec himself, given that he is neither a God or other pervasive, all-seeing sentience, is caught in a paradox. Any claim to indeterminacy is undermined by the inevitably narrow focus of the human endeavour; any claim to control is compromised by the fallibility of the same. Perec and all Oulipians are simultaneously attempting to exhaust and unify while existing within the limitations of themselves. It is with this caveat that I move the discussion forward to the particulars of Project 2.

Towards a Theatre of Constraint

While the constraints in Project 1 were concerned with generating short moments of performance, Project 2 more broadly considered constraints geared towards holistic theatrical ingredients including: visual composition of the performance, scenography, narrative, vocal quality, and costume.

The first constraint to mention is one borrowed from Project 1, the *stimulum primus* (all constraints for Project 2 can be found in Appendix C), a constraint that gives a theme or subject onto which one might apply additional constraints. In Project 1 the *stimulum primus* was a paragraph of text from Will Self's anthropologic novel *Great Apes* (1997). The role of the *stimulum primus* in Project 2 was quite different and, as mentioned previously, took the form of a whole playtext. I selected *Enemies*, a

play by Neith Boyce and Hutchins Hapgood, written and set in 1921.⁸ The play comprises a conversation between a husband and wife that involves several philosophical and literary divergences as they ponder the condition of their relationship. There were a number of reasons why this play was selected. Firstly, I enjoyed the playwrights' use of referencing (predominantly literary) in the dialogue, which reminded me of the oulipian methods of analysis and revisiting. Secondly, the play was allegedly written (and originally performed) by Boyce and Hapgood collaboratively, each writing only the text of one character. Thirdly, the play, not least due to the cultural references included in the writing, is also very easily recognisably as a play written some years ago, a language signifier that was to become important as I started to manipulate the text by applying constraints involving time. Fourthly, it was the right length, about 30 minutes in performance time. As with *Great Apes*, *Enemies* seemed to be a rich starting point from which to depart. It should be noted however that despite the briefest of selection criteria above, the selection of *Enemies* was largely arbitrary.

The arbitrary selection draws parallels from Richard Schechner's theatrical experiment *The Marilyn Project* in 1975, as discussed by Michael Kirby in *Formalist Theatre* (1987: 126-132). *The Marilyn Project* is a play written by David Gaard that Schechner directed with duplicate set and casts performing the play twice at the same time. This overt structural decision, to paraphrase Kirby, made it impossible for the audience to become too involved in the narrative of the work (1987: 131). Instead their focus was drawn to the similarities and imperfections between the two simultaneous versions of the play. This echoes the sentiment of Motte (Consenstein, 2002: 24) that the application of a constraint, in this case the simultaneous performance of the same play twice, can bring insight into how language functions, or in this case how theatrical language behaves. Certain formal qualities of theatre would be thrown into sharp relief when witnessing everything twice. One may have become more conscious of the movement of the performers that otherwise might be lost within the conventions of naturalism. Every performers'

⁸ There is actually some dispute as to when the play was written. I am now largely convinced that it was written in 1916, five years earlier than stated above. This impacts the decisions explained later, particularly concerning constraints imposed relating to when the play and its variants were/are set. This is not a problem in the least; see Haplography, Booles Rule and Dord for instances of brilliance from error (Motte, 2007:209-214).

utterances would be witnessed in comparison to the sister performer; variations of accent and intonation would be noticed, presenting the audience with a parallel reading, a chance to consider alternate permutations. The progression of narrative and time in a usual way would therefore be compromised, the peaks and troughs of the drama perhaps highlighted by their duality. I found Schechner's structural manipulation of the Gaard play fascinating and I immediately started to consider the potential in the decision Schechner had taken.

This indicates James' assertion that 'the creativity of Oulipian constraints depends precisely on their capacity [...] to enable the writer to take chances – while at the same time pointing the way to aesthetic closure.' (2009: 131) The possibilities of the multiple, synchronised playing of the same material in Schechner's doubling constraint had led me to consider further constraint possibilities in the aesthetic context of theatrical presentation. This is another example of Reggiani's observation of the tension between the 'rhetorical regime' and the 'scholastic ideology' of the Oulipo (James, 2009: 121). Balancing the various and multiple new ideas with the need to bring a project to fruition proved a necessary part of the journey of Project 2. Consenstein points out that 'if an author does not define his or her constraint, the constraint will in turn define their work for them' (2002: 17), going on to rightly suggest that it is the raising of consciousness of constraint that signifies the Oulipo's greatest achievement (2002: 17). During Project 2, I considered that the limiting of constraints at play may be a necessary strategy for the maintenance of control. This strategy for control would mean deciding, firmly, what a constraint would be and ignoring the many permutations of what it could be.

Constraint Visibility & Revelation

The move towards the substantive work brings with it a new perspective on constraint visibility and the effect that visibility may or may not have on readership. Consenstein has noted that consciousness of constraint in the minds of the author allows for confident manipulation and control of constraints (2002: 17), and we are additionally aware of Bénabou's arguments on constraint revelation described in the last chapter (Clarke, 2016: 879), that consider the effects of constraint visibility on the reader, or in the case of theatre, the audience. As discussed previously, the

particularities of live performance can make it subject to the conflation of forced, external and internal constraint revelation.

The performance of Project 2 did not include the publication of the constraints to the audience, during, before or after the moment of performance was delivered. The only published clue to constraint was the programme note that stated that constraints were at play in the performance. This allusion to constraint problematizes the specificities of Bénabou's three kinds of revelation. Forced revelation existed in the sense that the audience had been made aware that constraints were in play at all. Although Bénabou defines forced revelation as when knowledge of the constraint is 'essential to the clear understanding of the text' (Clarke, 2016: 879), when constraint is raised to any degree in the audience consciousness, it arguably becomes part of the text. Equally, external revelation plays its part here too. External revelation occurs in 'situations where the constraint is invisible to the reader who has not been otherwise informed' (Clarke, 2016: 880). Within Project 2 there were certain constraints that were indecipherable to the audience. These constraints informed the generation of performance content but there was no way an audience member could have been aware of their specificity.⁹ Internal revelation also features to some degree in Project 2. Described as 'a text written according to a constraint speaks of that constraint' (Bénabou in Clarke, 2016: 880), internal revelation can be observed in the overt scenographic constraints of the project, many of which are discussed later in this chapter, that dominate the content of the work, or the wholly disruptive *jolted quotations* constraint.¹⁰ As was the case with Project 1, Bénabou's ternary of revelations cannot remain distinct in classifying moments from the projects of this study. Instead they become critical tools for discussing the visibility of constraint.

⁹ For example, *Rublev's Trinity Costuming* constraint, whereby the colour blue is used as a predominant feature in the performers' costumes, replicating the use of blue as a signifier in Andrei Rublev's *Trinity* (1411) for divine celestial nature.

¹⁰ *Jolted quotations* - complete artistic departure from content of the performance. In this case the performance comes to a complete stop exactly half way through and a voiceover describes a narrative containing homophones for famous dance practitioners. These homophones trigger dance gestures in the performers that relate to each practitioner.

How the reader might observe the results of constraints can lead the audience to a particular kind of relationship to authorship. The combination of various kinds of constraint revelation to the audience, particularly forced and internal revelation, enables an audience to not only read and interpret the material presented in performance, but also to read and interpret the way that the material may have been generated. This inevitably leads to an audience considering the author of the work. Instances in substantive works where the visibility of formal devices push the reader towards a consideration of the writer are not limited to the output of the Oulipo. In the existential crime-fiction of Paul Auster or the epoch-shifting narratives of David Mitchell, one can be left attempting to decipher the authorial devices that sit somewhere between form and content, contemplating not only what they are doing but how they are doing it. At this interstice a most satisfying position as a reader can be located. James suggests that Roland Barthes heralding of the signifier above all things is a kind of Cratylishm (2009: 121). This position is reversed when writing strategies are seriously considered in conjunction with narratives and usual formal tendencies, the authorial God returns as enigmatic and present as ever. This is interesting both in the context of the Oulipo and my own work.

For example, Perec's *Life a User's Manual* (2010) provides a highly satisfying duality in both the narrative of the book itself and in Perec's position within/to it. Incidentally, Perec did place himself in the narrative of the book as the character Valène, one of his pseudonyms. In any case, the multiple constraints at play in the construction of *Life*, some of which are obviously visible and some of which are not, make the reader conscious of the possibility of constraint and start to consider Perec himself, the architect of the work, as a presence within their narrative understanding. Perec's reputation for complex codification brings his presence to the foreground of the reader's consciousness in terms of both forced and internal revelation, provided of course they have a prior understanding of the author. In these instances the presence of Perec in the volume occurs in direct correlation with his reputation as a writer of the Oulipo. Indeed, taking *Life* as a specific example, the novel has birthed an entire discourse around the unravelling of its many constraints, activity perpetuated by Perec himself publishing a list of the constraints used in the book, even teasingly alluding to the fact that the list was incomplete.

This spawned a set of commentators and academics to contribute to the argument. The complexities of internal revelation orchestrated by Perec in *Life* additionally involve the actual narrative of his novel alluding to the metaphor of constraint. In the novel *Bartlebooth* endlessly searches for and re/de-constructs images; he spends his life turning photos into jigsaws, dispersing the pieces, locating them again, putting the images back together, and ultimately throwing them away. This not only references the group's emphasis on reconstruction mentioned earlier by Motte, but prophetically imagines the huge discourse the book would elicit after publication. This new perspective of oulipian poetics has been illuminated through the collapsed ternary of constraint revelation that resulted from the undertakings of Project 2.

In Project 2, the structural oddities of the performance that resulted from the various constraints I imposed led the audience to consider the relationship between narrative and form. It is the particular blending of these two concerns, as a result of the constraining devices at play, that substantiated both, and was a principle characteristic of the work. What the playtext *Enemies* became through the process of applied formal constraints is unique to Project 2 and of course resists the primary formal tendencies of the two-hander playtext. The formal disruptions, similar to the territory that Schechner was wishing to occupy with *The Marilyn Project*, that so swamp the narrative, also change it and transform it. For an audience, the forced revelation that constraints are at play in the performance of Project 2 may have drawn their attention back to me, the work's architect, then through a kind of internal revelation my own character may have become embroiled in the readership. Of course this might usually happen in theatre to some degree anyway. An example might be the audience member who wishes to always see the latest work of playwright/director Alan Ayckbourn because he does farce so well/amusingly/expectedly. In the case of Project 2, the programme note (if read) forced constraint revelation, inclining an audience member to locate that constraint, encouraging a mechanical deduction in the audience that is unusual in the context of the formal tendencies of a staged playtext.

Though the results of some constraints were obvious in the performed work, *Simultaneous Play Triplication* for example (causing the play to be performed three

times, with triplicate casts, at the same time), some remained more subtly present and in the moment of the performance would not be easily discernable or decipherable. The question of constraint visibility and revelation forms a major part of the discourse concerning the Oulipo, not just in the conversations following the publication of *Life* or other texts, but the more general philosophy of the covert/overt position to constraints that have impacted so prevalently on the work created. French literary expert and commentator, John Sturrock notes:

This is the classic dilemma of the practical joker: whether to play your joke and creep quietly away without revealing yourself, or to wait immodestly on the spot for the acclaim to start.
(1998: 196)

Oulipian methods of raising consciousness of constraint, or otherwise, suggest that the question of visibility is important to the poetics of the group. Quoting Percec, Oulipian Daniel Levin Becker notes that “the problem, when you see the constraint,” Percec complained once, ‘is that you see nothing but the constraint’ (2013: 80). There is a dual concern here, raising consciousness of constraint for the maker in order to further control the variables is of course central to oulipian philosophy, but the desire to locate a constraint as a reader/audience is another matter. This desire may overshadow and ultimately change the work itself, or at least take its interpretation in a direction undesired by the author. Unsurprisingly the Oulipo place most focus on the act of writing rather than the act of reading and the latter is perhaps a little overlooked by the group, if not their critics. In both performance and literature the visibility of constraints is also dependent on the kind of constraints being used and the kind of work being produced. For example, a Snowball¹¹ constraint in a piece of poetry will certainly be more visible, to a casual observer at least, than taking a poem and submitting it to ‘*tireur a la ligne*.’¹² Interestingly, Raymond Queneau, according to Motte, felt that ‘constraints must not overshadow the finished work, and pretext should never override text’ (Levin Becker, 2012: 79). This firmly roots oulipian methodology in practice. Described by Consenstein as

¹¹ Snowball - a form in which each segment of a text is one letter longer than the segment preceding it. (Motte, 2007: 213) An example of a Snowball poem is included in the introduction to this thesis.

¹² *Tireur a la ligne* (Puller on the line) - taking two sentences in a given text and interpolating a new sentence, then two new sentences in the interstices thus created, and so forth. (Motte, 2007: 213)

'not a literary movement' and 'not a scientific seminar' (2002: 116-117), the group's resistance to its own summative classification (and political inclinations) is a testament to its fascination with experimentation and flexibility. This places a focus on constraint as a generative tool rather than an observational lens. Nevertheless, the impact on constraint visibility and revelation on readership has been considered within this study. Not publishing the constraints to the audience in Project 2 intentionally made it difficult for the audience to read specific intention. Similarly, James notes that 'the reader's knowledge of a text's oulipian status exacerbates the tendency to over interpret' (James, 2009: 126). This means that the mystification of revelation can lead to the creation of ghost-constraints that never existed in the first place.

Constraint as an observational lens means that an obvious or pronounced constraint has the potential to become the central thematic content of the work. In Project 2 the visually obvious constraint of *Simultaneous Play Triplication* may have been so overt in the performance as to render some of the other constraints invisible. This is in addition to potentially overshadowing the non-constraint-based content of the performance. Levin Becker observes that the observational lens of constraint may destroy the art object completely, describing how many readers opt out of reading *La Disparition* when they already know the lipogram it is constrained by (2012: 84). This posits a problem for those authors and architects of constraint who wish for recognition of their craft through revelation. Even as a group that privileges potential, oulipian poetics still demand application and practice, results must at some stage be demonstrated. The *idea* of a novel in the lipogram of e may be satisfying enough for the (non)reader, but it isn't unfair to assume that Perec would have wanted people to actually read the book too. As highlighted earlier, this tension is echoed by individual Oulipians' desire to either publish their constraints, perhaps as evidence of artistry (or at least labour), or to more confidently make the reader aware of the complexity and cleverness contained within by letting them work out the constraints for themselves. For considering the audience engagement with constraints in Project 2, Levin Becker offers a comforting assertion that awareness of the constraint, either by its observable mechanics or the possibility of its existence, is in the best cases:

a question of making you, the reader, aware of your own effort and engagement, of putting you in control, of diminishing the distance between finding and making.
(2013: 86)

This observation presents a rare occurrence of an Oulipian considering the position of the reader (audience) in relation to generated material and is why I find the strategies of Project 1, declaring all, and Project 2, declaring less, equally profitable for the audience. As discussed previously, the collapsing of Bénabou's revelation ternary through an investigation of performance practice, problematizes these clear delineations for literature generation too. As the maker of creative practice I am only in control of the flow of information one way and my efforts at control are unescapably inexhaustive; my explanations of exactly how an audience may have read my work, or indeed the works of the Oulipo, are inevitably speculative.

Consciousness, visibility, or revelation of constraint are not only applicable as a concern of the author/creator and reader/audience, but are also relevant to the visibility of the Oulipo as a literary group. Peter Consenstein argues that the group's focus on the consciousness raising of existing constraints and their inherent pervasiveness in all literature, make the group itself function under the literary radar (2002: 18). He points out that the broad reappropriation of linguistic and mathematical structures is so uncompromisingly inclusive, that 'its transparency verges on invisibility' (2002: 18). This coupled with the group's refusal to classify itself as a movement or engage in any political positioning has led to the perceived character of the group as, at best, introverted and, at worst, arrogant. In any case, the subtleties of variation in consciousness, visibility and revelation have made for rich territory to mine during this study.

Constraints and Rules

It is important to articulate the difference between a rule and a constraint, both in terms of oulipian poetics and the development of applicable language in this study. The move of Project 2 to a more substantive work that considers the formal tendencies of theatre means that the isolation of constraints as distinct from

tendency, convention, expectation and rules, allows us to hone the scope of the practice and talk about the particulars of some of the constraints at play in the project.

There are rules within all literature. This is a notion discussed in this thesis and one that is at risk of obscuring the practice of working with constraint. The question of whether it is relevant to approach these rules directly is swiftly answered by the consciousness raising arguments discussed earlier. Oulipian Marcel Bénabou describes how many existing literary rules escape discredit or criticism because they are widely accepted practices:

For four centuries, we have been very comfortable, apparently, with the laws of prosody – with the fact for instance, that an alexandrine has twelve syllables, that a sonnet has fourteen lines, whose rhymes are disposed according to a precise order.
(Motte, 2007: 40)

Bénabou describes how rules, like the sonnet structure mentioned above, seem to be perceived as ‘natural fact’, while constraints, the inspiration-denying work of the Oulipo for example, are perceived as ‘shameful artifice’ (Motte, 2007: 40). The explanation of this disjuncture between essentially similar devices is that the expectations of certain constraints have made them conventional, have turned them, in fact, into rules. Queneau elegantly observes that ‘the sonnet is just as constraining but its insertion into literary tradition attenuates our sense of the arbitrary’ (James, 2009: 114). Consenstein references biologist Gerald Edleman, stating that ‘for ‘success’ in scientific observation, rules must be strictly applied’ (2002: 205). This means that a rule has an essential purpose, most likely with a predictable outcome, and it is here that we can locate the difference between a rule and a constraint. A constraint is applied with a level of indeterminacy towards its results of application, chiming with the Oulipo’s ethos of potentiality and Jacques Bens’ differentiation between uncertainty and randomness mentioned previously (James, 2009:119). A rule is quite different in that it is a well-tested and established strategy or structure that exists to be deployed in a specific direction for a specific purpose. Bénabou suggests that constraints become rules over time (Motte, 2007: 40-41), and this resonates with the desire of the Oulipo to first analyse and

consequently synthesise, to exhaust permutations and to venture into the unknown using combinatory structures in new ways. The result is unpredictable and consequently experimental and challenging. Consenstein quotes Roubaud as stating that 'constraint is a principle not a means' (2002: 206), again giving weight to the idea that the outcome of a constraint is not predictable, whereas a rule will get you to where you know you want to be. A rule might be a formula to guarantee an end point, or form a part of a prediction or hypothesis, a constraint rejects this conclusive outlook.

The Oulipo of course does not seek to impose any thesis; it merely seeks to formulate problems and eventually offer solutions that allow any and everybody to construct.
(Bénabou in Motte, 2007: 46)

This resonates with theatre maker Michael Kirby's postulation that a theory that tends to completeness may be creatively less interesting, as its conclusiveness makes it applicable only retrospectively to completed works. He proposes instead an amalgamation of analysis and theory, and analysis as theory, proposing 'an open and deductive system [...]. As theory, the analytical system is intended to be provocative and stimulating rather than prescriptive' (1987: xix). It was Kirby that brought *The Marilyn Project* to my attention and the open and deductive system that he describes for theatre resonates with oulipian analysis and synthesis, but also a methodology for approaching constraint as distinct from rules. The distinction of constraint from rules is important because it defines that which one might attempt to control and manipulate from that which one can't or won't. The debates described previously in this thesis regarding Schön's perhaps opaque reliance on tacit knowledge and the apparent paradox of the application of constraint when it is already pervasive, can be observed and moved beyond by the distinction between constraints and rules. Both constraints and rules can be considered for the remainder of the study through these definitions. Additionally, these distinctions and the debates leading to them, all serve to raise important observations in the context of generating performance work from constraint and in turn reflecting back on the Oulipo through that practice-led lens.

One might ask at this juncture the question of why constraints have been seen as shameful while the rule is largely viewed as entirely natural (Bénabou in Motte, 2007: 40). This is characteristic of attitudes to the untested and therefore unusual. The observation of the arbitrary and therefore the unexpected, often leads to a phobic response. Not all constraints become rules of course, it seems that the lipogrammatical text will remain forever shameful and odd, given that it has so far endured fringe-status for thirteen and half centuries since its first usage (Curtius, 2013: 282-283). Clearly longevity and repetition are no guarantee of wide acceptance.

Constraint & Formal Tendency

Project 2 involved working with six performers with myself as director.¹³ All of the constraints realised in Project 2 were decided in advance of working practically with the performers. The practice of design was located in the pre-rehearsal development of the constraints. The application through instruction of the constraints, as an activity, was largely pragmatic. The constraints of Project 2 were results of both analysis and synthesis in oulipian terms, as discussed earlier in the thesis. The constraints included those taken from the recently developed theatrical constraints of Project 1; existing oulipian constraints appropriated to theatre; and others of my own design influenced by oulipian poetics. What follows is a detailed explanation of some of the constraints used during Project 2 that attempts to capture and reflect on the methodology I have developed and employed. To avoid repetition, I have selected to unpack constraints that will ensure that the reader will have insight enough to unpick and understand the rest of the constraints.¹⁴

Christian Bök refers to oulipian structures and constraints as ‘an array of rules for exploring an array of rules’ (2006: 183). Similarly, the imposition of constraints in Project 2 led to the imposition of more constraints, such was the causal chain.

Bénabou considers the results of the application of constraints:

¹³ A precise definition of the word Director is not terribly important here, it could variously mean writer, dramaturg, blocker, lead personality etc. However, it is important that I was ‘outside’ of the performance, at least literally.

¹⁴ As a reminder, the full list of constraints is available in Appendix C.

Linguistic constraints, for their part, granted their arbitrary exigencies, directly create a sort of “great vacuum” into which are sucked and retained whole quantities of elements which, without this violent aspiration, would otherwise remain concealed.
(Bénabou in Motte, 2007: 43)

This metaphor of the vacuum is similar to my articulation of a causal chain of constraints, whereby one constraint decision leads to an unpredicted other. Contrary to Project 1, where constraints were trialled more or less alone and independently of one another, in Project 2 a clearer focus on the work to be produced led to a developmental progression through the constraints. A constraint could easily create a paradox, simultaneously demanding strict adherence while forcing me to select the appropriate rules to continue.

If one can measure what one is talking about and express it in numbers, which constitute the sole reality, then one has some knowledge of one's subject.
(Jarry, 1996: 101-102)

In the first instance I wish to discuss threes. The number three has a pleasing locus in mathematics and art. Three is the first odd prime number, it features in the Fibonacci sequence and is the closest whole number to π . Three is the smallest plural odd number, it makes symmetry problematic and so presents compositional interests for me. My interest in the creative potential of *the number*, connects the mathematical fascinations of the Oulipo to Alfred Jarry's comment from *Dr Faustroll* (1898) above, connecting with the Oulipo's traceable lineage from pataphysics discussed in the previous chapter.

As a fundamental shaping constraint of the project it is appropriate to start with *Simultaneous Play Triplication*. *SPT* is a development of Schechner's duplicate cast of the *The Marilyn Project*, and dictated that the play would be performed three times at the same time. This involved using triplicate casts. This overt constraint was the most visible and, like *The Marilyn Project*, disrupted the usual viewing experience for the audience. This constraint simultaneously involved all spoken text and actions of the play being performed three times. There was consequently potential that, even though the narrative would be repeated and restated, the

repetition would also make it difficult for an audience to comprehend the narrative in a usual way. *SPT* sucked into its vacuum additional number-three-based constraints. *SPT* created architectural problems that required resolution through the application of new constraints, as discussed above and in keeping with the Oulipo's most recognisable quotation:

Oulipians: rats who must build the labyrinth from which they propose to escape.
(Queneau in Motte, 2007:22)

Each constraint: a wall, a vacuum. The performance: the labyrinth, the rule. The Oulipo draws attention to how the value of a constraint may be determined by its potential:

Speculating about a constraint's potentiality involves discerning the extent to which it is apt to trigger variations and mutations; the extent to which it will naturally and productively participate families of constraints; and, finally, the extent to which it might evolve over the course of time.
(Levin Becker, 2012: 168)

SPT was a constraint that triggered many more, it was the initial constraint that opened up the potential for myriad new possibilities. The combination of *SPT* and theatrical rules advanced the project. The experiment of bringing this constraint together with the conscious selection of rules was begetting (Consenstein, 2002: 206), together producing a work of theatre. It is the combination of rules and constraints in this way that enabled the families of constraint and causal chains mentioned previously to develop. Additionally, I have found theatrical constraints like *SPT* to be valuable as tools for creation and are perhaps the closest I have come to finding the theatrical equivalence, rather than version, of oulipian constraining devices. An example of a constraint opened up by *SPT* is the immediately obvious *120° spatial wedging* constraint. This constraint dictates that each of the three performed plays occupies a third of an in-the-round performance space. This constraint pins down a decision that might seem both obvious and/or unconventional, there are of course many ways that the space could have been configured scenographically to make sense of the *SPT* constraint. The labeling of a constraint

is firstly a testament to its open-ended, experimental, unpredictable nature and secondly a demand that it be upheld. Bök points out that it emancipates the artist from the infinite possibilities that could exist by asking them to take control; because if they don't, they will fall foul of convention (2006: 82). A theatrical version of this philosophy can also be found in Anne Bogart's reflections on violent decisions, 'Art is violent. To be decisive is violent.' (2001: 45).

The *180 year time span* constraint is also causally connected to *SPT*. Designed to explicitly create differences between the versions of the play, this constraint alters the year in which each version is set in graduations of 90 years. As a result the first and last variants of the play are 180 years apart. The original play was written in 1921, approximately 93 years before the time I began working on the project. 93 years rounded down, to keep the numbers clean, to the nearest 10 is 90. Adding 90 years to the original year places the middle play in the year 2011 (more or less a contemporary year) and the third play in 2101. The time graduations of 90 years and the total span of 180 years have clear, if coincidental, commonalities with the degree divisions of a circle, although in hindsight, deviations of 120 years may have been even more aesthetically gratifying by mirroring the thirds of the 360° of a circle.

180 year time span opened another vacuum to be populated by its unpredicted offspring. Rules of theatre dictate that the language and vocal qualities used by the actors in a play will, along with design decisions, scenography, costume etc., indicate the period of the play. While there exists no rule to achieve this over three differing time periods at the same time, the notion that this is how time may be indicated led to the design of the *assumed period rewriting constraint*.¹⁵ Rule and constraint worked together as follows: The first variation of the play, set in 1921, would remain true to the original text, the other variants would be re-written according to playwrights' assumptions of that period. The constraint was designed to mine the resource of the author's existing knowledge and know-how. This was not an automatic, surrealist inspiration exercise, rather a conscious acknowledgement of one's own subjective pre/mis-conception, prejudice and

¹⁵ This constraint is a variation of my own Project 1 constraint *Chronosparelthónymagynlogos* – Speech that replicates, in sound and composition, a time in the past as imagined by the speaker.

general knowledge. *The assumed period rewriting* constraint was consequently both limiting and liberating.

Writing the play to be set in 2011 involved the careful reading of the existing 1921 text and modernising it through re-writing in contemporary language. This included replacing cultural references where appropriate, through a kind of *isosyntaxism*,¹⁶ and making the elaborate language simpler, a little like a version of the Oulipo's *slenderizing*.¹⁷ There are many generative constraints in the Oulipo's repertoire, the results of *anoulipism*, that involve the altering of existing text. The results of this relatively simple task of comprehension and translation were of course unique to me and based on my own expectations, tastes and rules of accessibility, no one else would have made the exact translation that I made. In the writing of the 2101 version, the causal chain demanded, in the absence of existing rules, an additional constraint. In this instance, I needed to address how I might predict how the spoken text might sound in the future. I designed another constraint by devising a simple formula to alter the vowel sounds of words in order to generate a new accent. With an understanding that vowel sounds shift according to geographical barriers and the passing of time and that this, like any other kind of evolution, is due to the relative levels of success and sustainability of those sounds, it felt legitimate to use the following *accent modifier* to alter the sounds of words:

¹⁶ Iso-syntaxism – or Homosemantic translation. 'A translation in which the vocabulary of the source text is changed while its sense is kept. At its simplest, it applies the procedure normally used to translate a text from one language to another to transforming a text within a single language.' (Mathews & Brotchie, 2005: 159)

¹⁷ Slenderizing – in which stripping a text of each occurrence of a single letter changes its sense (Levin Becker, 2012: 185)

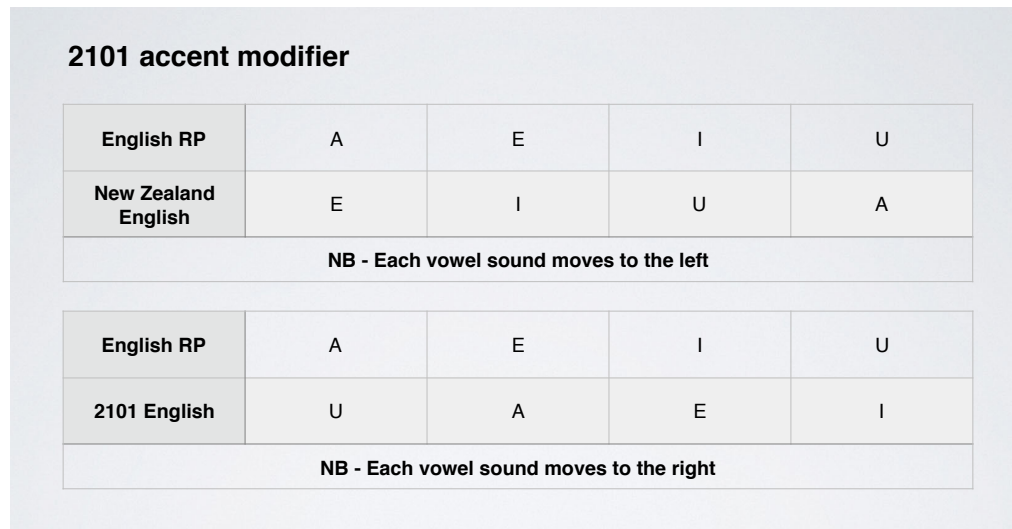


Figure 1 Accent Modifier Diagram

Because the *accent modifier* was to have such a profound effect on how the text sounded, I decided to only alter the sounds of the words and not to alter the actual words as well (perhaps another kind of *isosyntaxism*), so no translation took place. The result was that the fundamental syntax of the 2011 and 2101 texts were the same. By positioning the 2011 version as a benchmark to aid the audience in listening to the 2101 version, an adherence was made to the rule or theatrical tendency that the audience should understand the sense of what they were hearing. This is similar to Esposito’s assertion, mentioned previously, that oulipian writing should ‘withstand the strains of being made novelistic’ (Elkin and Esposito, 2013: 21). I also applied the accent modifier because designing a vowel altering constraint was a considerably more imaginable task than predicting the actually likely changes in language structure, a formula to aid which, of course, doesn’t exist.

SPT also presented further possibilities for the relationships between each version of the play. As opposed to Schechner’s *The Marilyn Project*, which highlighted the attempt and failures of synchronicity, the permutations thrown up by *SPT* that I wished to exploit centred around the variation in the relationships between the versions. I designed *the hour-glass text overlap* constraint to impose on the relationship between the three plays and the spoken text. The constraint works by

placing a diagram of an hour-glass over the top of a diagrammatic representation of the sections of the play as follows:¹⁸

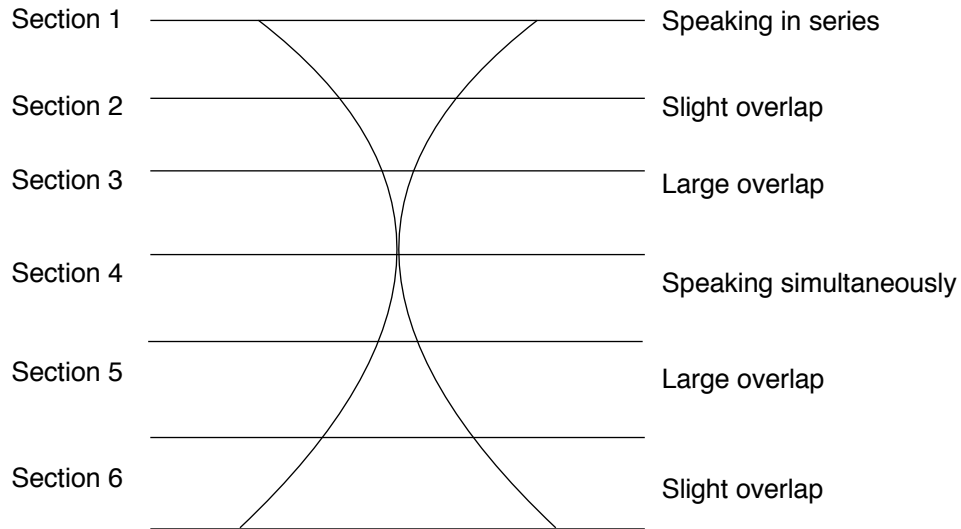


Figure 2 Hour-glass Text Overlap Diagram

At the start and end of the performance, where the hour-glass shape is diverged, the text of each triplicate character is delivered separately, in series. Gradually, as the play continues, the spoken text of the triplicate versions starts to overlap, until the hour-glass shape has completely converged and the triplicate versions of text are being spoken simultaneously, like in *The Marilyn Project*. As the performance continues, the reverse occurs and the hour-glass shape diverges again until the triplicate versions of characters are speaking again separately and in series. While the outcome of this constraint was unpredictable, this was very different to aleatory, chance-based procedures – as discussed earlier, the results were uncertain but not random.

In order to represent this in a legible way for the performers, I designed the script to be laid out in three separate columns, one for each version of the play, to allow enough space for each to be easily followed and learned in preparation for rehearsal. An example of the script format can be seen below:

¹⁸ The sections were calculated according to numbers of lines, rather than moments of action or narrative.

SHE	[glancing critically at the lamp] This lamp seems to me to be all right. It obviously has oil in it or it would not burn, and the chimney is not smoked. As to the wick, I trimmed it myself today.	[glancing critically at the lamp]	[glancing critically at the lamp]
		The lamp is fine, you just need to change the bulb, the heating's on low as it happens, and there are some spare bulbs in the hall cupboard, I bought some more today because I noticed that one had blown.	
			Tha lump es fene, you jist nade to chunge tha bilb, tha hayteng's on low us et huppans, und thuh are some spure bilbs en tha hull cipboard, I bought some more toduy bacause I notessed that win hud blown.
HE	Ah, that accounts for it.	Ah, right, that makes sense, do half a job.	Uh, reet, thut mooks sanse, do half uh job.
SHE	Well, do it yourself next time, my dear!	Well, you can buy your own bulbs next time, my dear!	Wall, you cun buy your own bilbs naxt teeme, my darr!
4 of 41			

Figure 3 Project 2 Script Example

Of course, the theatrical tendency of dialogue means that the other character (the other two versions of She or He) would need or desire to respond to the spoken text of their partner, a tendency I wished to adhere to. If each triplicate couple were immediately replying to their relative partner, the performance would sound like a cacophony. Similarly, if text overlaps between the text of Play 3 (2101) and Play 1 (1921) were in place, the action would move too swiftly to be coherent. Again, no existing rule can remedy this situation so further constraint needed to be designed in

order to ensure that the performance adhered to my own theatrical desire for the spoken text to be audible and coherent. I designed the *step-and-reset-dialogue* constraint to make sense of this issue. *Step-and-reset-dialogue* involves the speakers in Play 1 (1921) always waiting for the previous text (speakers in Play 3) to be completed before moving the dialogue on. There is no cyclical overlap in dialogue transitioning between Plays 3 and 1, as illustrated below and in the script example above:

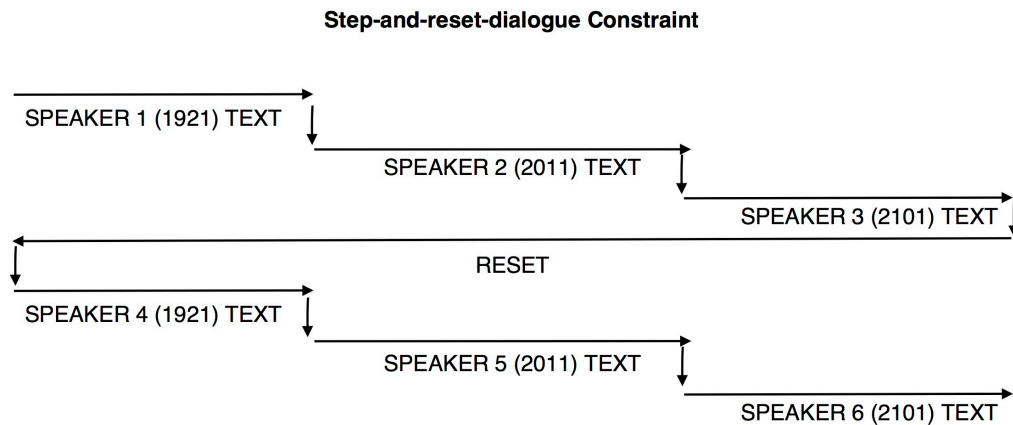


Figure 4 Project 2 Step-and-reset Dialogue Constraint Diagram

This again demonstrates the causal relationship between the constraints used during Project 2. The application of a constraint demanded that I adhere to it, which would lead me to recall existing skills, follow formal tendencies, apply additional rules or develop and deploy new constraints. This causal chain of development and permutation is a result of the inculcation of the oulipian inclination toward exhaustion and their forefathers' pataphysical desire to see out a hypothesis, however bizarre:

Queneau and Arnaud [...] have traced the spirals of their own cognitive *gidouille*, deriving the *reductio ad absurdum* of an impossible hypothesis.
(Bök, 2002: 68)

The typical example of a causal lineage in Project 2 described earlier in this chapter can be summarised in the following way:

Simultaneous play triplication
 leading to
180 year time span
 leading to
Assumed period rewriting
 leading to
Accent modification

However, not all constraints worked in such a directly causal way, but were nonetheless interrelated and clearly influenced by oulipian poetics. For example, my theatrical tastes desired all six of the performers to occupy all of the different areas of the performance space that resulted from the *120° spatial wedging constraint*. Through studying George Perec’s *Life a Users Manual* (1996) I became interested in Græco-Latin bi-squares.¹⁹ Perec utilised these squares while designing the content of the chapters of his novel (Bellos, 1988: 63-78). In my version below, which is not technically a true use of the Græco-Latin bi-square, I ensured that each performer occupied the same space as their possible counterpart at least once and additionally occupied all possible spaces during the performance:

SPACE OCCUPIED AT START OF SECTION						
SECTION 1	PAST	PAST	PRESENT	PRESENT	FUTURE	FUTURE
SECTION 2	PAST	PAST	PRESENT	PRESENT	FUTURE	FUTURE
SECTION 3.1	PAST	PRESENT	PRESENT	FUTURE	FUTURE	PAST
SECTION 3.2	FUTURE	PRESENT	PAST	FUTURE	PRESENT	PAST
SECTION 4.1	FUTURE	FUTURE	PAST	PAST	PRESENT	PRESENT
SECTION 4.2	PRESENT	FUTURE	FUTURE	PAST	PAST	PRESENT
SECTION 5	PRESENT	PRESENT	FUTURE	FUTURE	PAST	PAST
SECTION 6	PAST	PRESENT	PRESENT	FUTURE	FUTURE	PAST
SECTION 7	PAST	PAST	PRESENT	PRESENT	FUTURE	FUTURE
	HANNAH	DAN	BETH	ADAM	SARAH	DAVE
SPACE OCCUPANCY (OUT OF 9)	5	3	2	2	2	4
	2	4	5	3	2	2
	2	2	2	4	5	3

Figure 5 Project 2 Græco-Latin Bi-square Diagram

¹⁹ Græco-Latin bi-square – or orthogonal bi-square. ‘Claude Berge [...] defines it: ‘a Græco-Latin bi-square of order *n* is a figure with *n* x *n* squares filled with *n* different letters and *n* different numbers; each square contains one letter and one number; each letter appears only once in each line and each column, each number appears only once in each line and each column.’ (Mathews & Brotchie, 2005: 154)

By placing section markers down the left axis of the square, I was able to map these pairings and the occupation of space in performance time. At the same time I was attempting to mirror the cyclical *hour-glass text overlap* constraint and include the satisfaction of the theatrical tendency of aesthetic resolution in having the performers' locations end as they started.

Some Project 2 constraints were independent of the other constraints, an example of a constraint like this was *performer to character homogeneity*. This was as close as a constraint could get to a rule in that it was to some extent a formulaic treatment towards a desired outcome. However, the results of application remained unknown. The constraint involved getting the performers to participate in ethical discussions, recording how many times they interrupted each other and using that number to propose a scale of aggression. The full formula is below:

DAN	3	4	3	3	1	
HANNAH	0	2	0	0		2
ADAM	6	5	2		7	0
BETH	1	6		2	0	0
DAVE	3		1	0	1	0
SARAH		3	3	4	2	0
	SARAH	DAVE	BETH	ADAM	HANNAH	DAN
Interrupter						
Total Interruptions	13	20	9	9	11	2

Table 4 Project 2 Ethical Discussion Interruptions

The total interruptions were divided by 2 and the resulting number was used to place performers on a spectrum according to their inherent levels of aggression in heightened circumstances in real life, i.e. a debate situation. The spectrum was 0 to 10.

0 = indifference
5 = normal for the performer
10 = aggressive conviction

The performers were then encouraged to perform in the play at this given level repeatedly until all three character variants had adopted each others' characteristics in an effort to homogenise as versions of the same person. My own aesthetic tastes were knowingly attending to theatrical language in this exercise. I could have just told the performers *how* to act, but the desire to elicit the unpredictable results of this experiment is what still classifies this exercise as a constraint. The advantage of doing the latter in this instance is the methodical guidance afforded by the constraint. The telling of how to act would have involved my directing three actors towards a particular set of behaviors. I would have needed to imagine characteristics that were not in the room and project these imagined personalities onto the actors. As it was, the method illustrated above used a mixture of mathematics (like certain oulipian constraints) and each actors' predispositions (to interrupt each other) as a way to homogenise performance style. Arbitrary as it was, this process avoided me needing to digress from my own theatrical tendencies and instead let the constraint dictate the direction of creative travel.

Another example of a non-causally linked constraint includes *action according to body weight*, where each performer's body weight was used to determine the frequency that they got up from their chairs in the performance. How this constraint worked is outlined on the following page:

Lines divided by time over weight.

or

$$\frac{\text{Total lines in the whole performance (L)}}{\left(\frac{\text{Total time of the performance in seconds (T)}}{\text{Performer body weight in pounds (W)}} \right)}$$

or

$$\frac{L}{\left(\frac{T}{W} \right)}$$

Resulting in the following frequency

NAME	TOTAL LINES	TOTAL SECONDS	BODY WEIGHT	Get up every...
HANNAH	396	1973	103	20.67308667
DAN	396	1973	140	28.0993411
BETH	396	1973	140	28.0993411
ADAM	396	1973	233	46.76533198
SARAH	396	1973	121	24.2858591
DAVE	396	1973	256	51.38165231
				...lines of your partnership text.

Figure 6 Project 2 Frequency of Standing Up Formula

Finally, another independent constraint is the *jolted quotation*, which involved a complete artistic departure from the content of the performance. Related to the Surrealist Jolt (Barthes, 1977: 144), whereby an expectation is rejected, this constraint is oulipian rather than surrealist because the jolting is not automatic but instead situated within an existing oulipian constraint. The constraint works by introducing a complete stop to the existing rhythm of the performance. Exactly half way through the performance a prerecorded voice-over described a narrative

containing 'homophones'²⁰ for famous dance practitioners. These homophones triggered dance gestures in the performers that related to each referenced dance practitioner. The change of direction was controlled in delivery and construction, but arbitrary in content.

The constraints of Project 2 have at their core a relationship to my subjective, formal tendencies in theatre. It is the synergy between these tendencies and the imposed constraints of the project that have led to the insightful realisation of an holistic theatrical event.

²⁰ Homophones - each of two or more words having the same pronunciation but different meanings, origins, or spelling. (Oxford English Dictionary)

Practice Documentation, Project 2

You are now invited to watch the performance work of Project 2,

The Elision of Scaff'

Documented show performed 10th April 2014 at Stage@Leeds, University of Leeds

Audience approx. 80, seated in-the-round

<https://vimeo.com/241685687>

password – **constraint**

Changing *Enemies*

Raymond Queneau has described oulipian constraints as ‘scaffolding’ (Consenstein, 2002: 19) and this metaphor combined with the slenderising speech form *elision* led to my titling of the performance of Project 2 *The Elision of Scaff*. *Scaff* consequently became the renamed central protagonist of the playtext *Enemies*. I mention this here because it is one of the many subtle ways that I have amused myself in keeping with the wry and playful nature of the Oulipo. Consenstein describes this as seriousness and fun forming a two-step (2002: 31). Any oulipian expression of sincerity or anger is usually coupled with a tongue in cheek and often overly-articulated polemic joke. The group’s ludic trope forms a central part of the methodology for Project 3, but it is worth noting here that as this researcher’s analysis of Oulipo has deepened over the years, so it has influenced the language of my own practice in terms of this playfulness. The constraint ‘treatment’ of the playtext *Enemies*, which itself was not without comedy, when revealed in the simultaneous triptych, incongruous scenography and absurd accent modification in one third of the characters – became very funny. It is the combination of lightness and complexity that is so attractive in researching the Oulipo, both in the work I have created and the observation of serious silliness: ‘the group is very serious, we often have a very good lunch when we meet’ (Fournel in Schott, 2009).

The ludic influence was not all that changed in *Enemies* during this process. Using Motte’s use of the term reconstruction (Consenstein, 2002: 24) described earlier, the playtext was exhibited to the audience in a new language, which heightened the various qualities already there. The scenography highlighted the era-bound cultural tropes of the play as first written, including becoming something of a satirical microscope on the gender relationships of the 1920s. With all three versions of the play sitting together, the same material (relatively) presented three times encouraged a deep, live analysis of the play’s content; the themes of relationships, love and literature were heightened to absurdity. This reimagining could not have happened without the imposition of constraints, together with their unpredictable results.

Sometimes [the] artistry is directly related to the constraint at hand, but just as often it's not – you've just pulled a fast one on yourself and unlocked this weird, encouraging accidental profundity.
(Levin Becker, 2012: 98)

As I have articulated in this chapter, the artistry that Levin Becker alludes to above is a combination of the limits that Eco described as 'given taste' and 'predetermined formal tendencies' (2009: 121) acting within constraints. The application of constraints in Project 2 shaped the form of the work in unpredictable ways that established rules would not. Constraints led to further constraints through causal chains and although designed predominantly before the construction of the performance work, their imposition drove the constitution of the work presented to the audience. The uncertainty of constraints was tempered by a conscious application of rules and my own theatrical tendencies. This led to the generation of a whole theatre work, with parallel and layered constraints that designed and shaped the composition, construction and form of the work generated.

A Moment of Reflection

As outlined during this section, the constraints of Project 2 were developed pre-rehearsal, leaving the process of actually creating the work with the performers largely instructional. Indeed, several of the constraints used during the project were in contradiction to my preconceptions of a director realising a vision in a hands-on way with her actors. I suppose now that I might have been resistant to my subjective notion of traditional directing and was perhaps avoiding it without realising. An example of my implicit aversion is the *Performer to character homogeneity* constraint, facilitated by the ethical discussions formula. This involved a kind of character development that meant I didn't need to concern myself with characterisation or some other such technique in which I'm likely unproficient. The group of performers I worked with brought their own theatrical tendencies and understandings to the project. The performers comprised of a professional actor, a dancer, a choreographer, a live artist and two post-graduate performance students. While their histories and expertise had little bearing on the methods I introduced during the project, their anecdotal reflections were interesting. They all unanimously stated that they didn't really observe me doing any 'directing' at all during the

process. I can admit my surprise at this initially, but nonetheless this response serves as useful testimony in terms of the relative success of my constraint imposition. In line with oulipian poetics, there should be little need, once constraints have been developed/designed, for the director to then introduce a further layer of generative method upon the process.

Although I was frustrated when the performers were unable to follow their instructions, I was able to rest assuredly, as I was with Project 1, that my responsibility lay in the creation of a structure of constraint, not in the maintenance of each performer's subjective ability to follow their instructions. The process of Project 2 delivered a set of instructions, the results of imposed constraints, that the performers were invited to follow without any traditional directorial involvement from me. Additionally, from my own perspective, I was able to allow the constraints to successfully (or otherwise) do their work, with no need to act on an impulse to fix or intervene when a performer failed to keep up with a constraint. Here again, as with Project 1, the liveness of public performance affected the ebb and flow of the work. Illustrative of the difference between the fixedness of literature and the ephemerality of live performance, the path towards the discovery of the clinamen performer continued. The material presented to the audience, like in Project 1, was at certain moments ludicrous and attracted a humour in its reading. In particular, the accent modification of the third version of the play appeared to delight the audience, inducing laughter that disrupted the set rhythms of the work. Consequently, the ability of the performers to keep up the *step-and-reset-dialogue* constraint for example, was compromised and on occasion some of the performers lost their place. These errors remind me of the Theatre of Mistakes, a part of my lineage that remains implicit in my artistic sympathies. I'm similarly reminded of Schechner's pleasure of observing the syncopation of the dual casts of *The Marilyn Project* (1987: 126-132). The experiment had worked as perfectly as it could and I believe the work was interesting both within and without its research context – but the live performer remained a problematic exception to the rigorous processes of constraint imposition, a problem to be carried forward.

Création & Rumination: Project 3

To explore the potentialities of constraints for live work, Project 3 marked a departure from the use of written text in Projects 1 and 2. In Project 1 constraints were used to devise spoken content, this content was then transcribed into a script format and performed as a live demonstration, or annotated example, of a constraint being used to generate performance material. The presentation of the findings in this way gave primary insight into constraints driven by content generation. In Projects 1 and 2 constraints were designed to generate material to be eventually performed live, using scripts as a method of recording, scoring, and rehearsing the performances. Both Projects 1 and 2 accounted for the inherent unpredictability of the live moment, and constraints were to some extent designed with this in mind, an unpredictability likened to the oulipian appropriation of the clinamen discussed later. Project 3 saw a new way of considering the live concerns of working under constraint. Improvisation was used to put the process of performance making under constraint in front the audience in real time. Project 3 culminated in four public performances, each lasting 30 minutes. These solo works involved me improvising the performances according to a number of constraints designed to generate performance material in the live moment. Project 3 responded to the following research question:

How might the methods of constraint of the Oulipo be used to guide and direct the live moment of performance?

The constraints of Project 3 were live-working constraints, used in the moment of presentation to an audience, within the context of theatrical tendency and rules discussed in the previous chapter. Live-working constraints mark a developmental departure in the use of constraints within this study. Constraints of this kind offer no opportunity to rework material, tweak, or finesse content. The use of constraints in Projects 1 and 2 held the potential for other craft or artistry to intervene between the constraint-driven process and the moment of presentation to an audience. Project 3 was given over to discovering how constraints can guide and direct the live moment. This further addressed the differences between literary and theatrical constraint, by way of a sharpened focus on the performer and their behaviours while operating

under constraint in the live space. The project placed the constraint as close to the performance work as possible, to narrow the scope of theatrical tendency to intervene within the work. In Project 3, the constraint, for the first time in this investigation, became the director of the work.

By positioning the constraint as a director of the work, greater emphasis was also placed on the performer. Rather like the direct link between the printed words of an oulipian text and the Oulipian who wrote it, in Project 3 a direct line can be drawn between the theatrical constraint and the performer. Everything I did as a performer during the 30 minutes of each performance depended on how I dealt with the constraint. In the previous projects additional performers meant that I could occupy a position of interlocutor between constraint and performer, I was able to intervene before the fact of performance. The unpredictable behaviours, the embodied knowledge of my own performance abilities, my immediate theatrical tendencies, which included the knowledge gained from the previous projects, made Project 3 a cumulative demonstration of theatrical constraint. Without the work undertaken as part of Projects 1 and 2, Project 3 couldn't have occurred. During the earlier projects of this investigation the tools for designing theatrical constraints needed to be unpacked with an essential intermediary, in these cases a directorial eye, keeping theatrical lookout for the work. The difference between Projects 1 and 2 and Project 3 in this regard are shown in the diagram below:

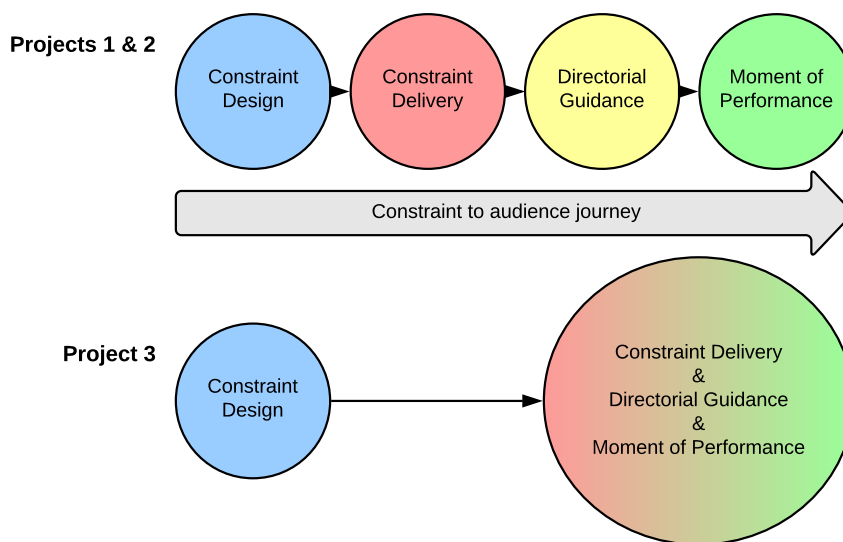


Figure 7 Stages of Constraint Application Diagram

The diagram illustrates that the stages of constraint delivery, directorial guidance and the eventual performance moment were separate in Projects 1 and 2, but conflated in Project 3. The activity of the live-working constraint being realised led to a blurring of these stages and an inevitably riskier moment of performance. The oulipian tendency to privilege writing mastery, positions the author centrally by drawing a clear line between the writer and the text generated. Live performance however involves a multiple authorship, even before presentation to an audience, that problematises the concern of authorial intent. The pulling together of the constraint and the live moment in Project 3 marks a step towards the particular authorial poetics of the Oulipo. Both of the previous projects generated theatrical content by the use of constraint, whereas Project 3 shifted perspective to constraints affecting the moment of performance. This chapter will articulate how dealing with constraints in this way required a particular kind of performer training.

Ludics, Earnestness & Play

Warren Motte is a long-time Oulipo collaborator, translating many oulipian texts and writing extensively on oulipian methodology. Publishing oulipian commentary for a period of over 30 years, his contribution to the discourse surrounding the Oulipo is very large and he is referenced extensively in this chapter. In his article 'Playing in Earnest' (2009) he writes convincingly on the role of ludics in literature and successfully characterises the role that play assumes in the poetics of the Oulipo. Motte describes how the playful and the earnest are most often positioned as mutually exclusive in so far as they 'color our ways of being and doing but must never commingle' (2009: 25). He describes how the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines each in opposition to the other, but perhaps more interestingly how the 'earnest is invested with meaning, importance, and value, while the playful is relegated to the domain of the trivial' (2009: 25). Oulipian texts and Oulipians themselves are clearly playful, yet the care, rigour and systematic nature of their processes and method shares a common definition with earnestness. This unique tension has perhaps been a recipe for success, causing a distinctiveness that has led to the group's longevity. To consider the playful, or ludic tendencies of the group, let us start as Motte does, with the father of studies of play, Johan Huizinga. In his

book *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (2016) written in 1938, Huizinga defines the play-concept in the following way:

Play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and space, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is 'different' from 'ordinary life'.
(2016: 28)

Huizinga is careful to note that this is a 'tolerable' definition (2016: 28) and one that he goes on to unpack critically. For the purposes of this study, Huizinga's tolerable definition is a suitable starting point, firstly for Motte's problematising of Huizinga's work and also as a representative example of conventional acceptance of the term. The quotation brings to light two important elements of play. The first is that play exists when rules are freely accepted but absolutely binding, essentially play exists within a context of adherence. Secondly, the consciousness that play is different from ordinary life, distinct from work that by extension needs to be, or must be, undertaken. One reason Motte finds Huizinga problematic is his suggestion of the inherent hierarchical structures implicit in the play/earnest binary, particularly the allusion to play being distinct from ordinary life (2009: 27). Motte states that although Huizinga concedes that play is productive in the generation of meaning, he also positions play as essentially irrational (2009: 26). Irrationality draws back to Alison James' highlighting of the Oulipo's position of being anti-chance (James, 2009: 109). Chance is irrational, if play is also to be considered irrational, by extension it may be considered within the realms of an aleatory activity. Oulipian methodology is based on resistance to the infiltration of the irrational but, as we will discuss later, the group may additionally be described as extremely playful. Motte finds Huizinga's thoughts around seriousness problematic, describing him as 'arguing against himself' (2009: 26), suggesting that Huizinga can't simultaneously claim that play is 'central to human experience' (2009: 26) but also be outside of ordinary life or 'marginal' (2009: 36). Two significant aspects of Huizinga's work are of particular interest to this study. In the first instance, Huizinga cites poetry as a close partner to play:

All poetry is born of play: the sacred play of worship, the festive play of courtship, the martial play of the contest, the disputatious play of braggadocio, mockery and invective, the nimble play of wit and readiness.
(2016: 129)

As we know, poetic forms constitute a major part of the Oulipo's output and Huizinga's assertion can be used to confirm the characteristically playful qualities of the group. The inclusion of worship as symptomatic of the poetry form aligns clearly with the historical obsessions the group have with their literary lineage, connects supportively to Harold Bloom's 'misprision' (1972), and to notions of the *clinamen* discussed later. Huizinga's use of mockery and invective chimes with the group's refusal to 'seriously' adhere to any prescribed character of historical lineage, interested as they apparently are in generative structures as opposed to cultural phenomena. Huizinga also states that 'to understand poetry we must be capable of donning the child's soul like a magic cloak and forsaking man's wisdom for the child's' (2016: 119). The substitution of child's wisdom for adult wisdom suggests a naiveté is required to engage with poetry, naiveté unspoiled by the culturally mature knowledge of the adult. The notion that naiveté is required to undertake play, reinforces the connectivity between seriousness and maturity, and the binary between adulthood/seriousness and childhood/playfulness. This is a challenge to the playfulness of oulipian poetics. This challenge is demonstrated in Motte's dissatisfaction with Huizinga's position on playfulness:

Clearly, the notion that play stands somehow apart from 'real life' is one to which Huizinga is deeply wedded, one that subtends all of his reflections on play and skews them in certain key ways. Play as we may in our leisure, for Huizinga, we are obliged to face our daily life, with all of its attendant constraints, in a spirit of sobriety that excludes the ludic impulse.
(Motte, 2009: 27)

The Oulipo of course are apparently very sober in their adherence to constraints, but playful in their deployment. Written in 1938 and much revisited, *Homo Ludens*, takes as definitive that such a real life exists at all in order to place it in opposition to being playful. Huizinga's modernist perspective is of course challenged by a group whose project is one of 'reconstruction' of '*la langue originelle*' (original language)

(Consenstein, 2002: 24), via playful means. Motte also cites Jacques Ehrmann (and Roger Caillois, who we'll come to shortly) as being critical of Huizinga for making the assumption that there is a baseline, objective reality, from which to compare play. Motte quotes Ehrmann as saying:

we are criticising the authors chiefly and most seriously for considering 'reality', the 'real', as a *given* component of the problem, as a referent needing no discussion, as a matter of course, neutral and objective. [...] For – we need not insist upon it – there is no 'reality' (ordinary or extraordinary!) outside of or prior to the manifestations of the culture that expresses it.
(2009: 32)

Ehrmann is unhappy with the fixedness of the idea of reality, or real life, being used as a benchmark next to which to sit the more altered and consequently useless impulse to play. This is a (post)modernist binary, and Ehrmann's call for the anchoring of reality to culture rather than an objective baseline is a poststructuralist challenge. The Oulipo however, cannot recognise this binary. The group's simultaneous antagonism towards language, together with an anti-chance philosophy that must necessarily include venturing into the unknown, perhaps accounts for the reluctance or inability of the members to participate in discussion pertaining to cultural relevancy. Instead, the group sticks to a position of the purity of literature. Motte also highlights Huizinga's assertion that the binary between play and seriousness is aligned with myth and mythology (2009: 28). Drawing attention to the following quotation from Huizinga:

Living myth knows no distinction between play and seriousness. Only when myth has become mythology, that is, literature, borne along as traditional lore by a culture which has in the meantime more or less outgrown the primitive imagination, only then will the contrast between play and seriousness apply to myth – and to its detriment.
(2016: 129-130)

Huizinga is describing how the isolated myth, with no real underpinning foundation, is essentially baseless and akin to play. Whereas the constellation of well-established myths that comprise mythology, which he likens to literature, can easily be substituted for culture, are, as Motte puts it, a 'degraded form of play' (2009: 28).

This is of particular significance because there is a direct comparison that can be drawn between the journey of myth to mythology and the journey of constraint to rules. As established in the last chapter, a constraint is applied with a level of indeterminacy toward its results, a rule is a well-tested and established strategy with a predictable outcome. If constraints are synonymous with myths, and myths are synonymous with play, the ludic impulse underpins the synthetic part of oulipian poetics. Similarly, if rules are synonymous with mythology, and mythology is synonymous with seriousness, the earnest impulse underpins the analytical part of oulipian poetics. Analysis is the serious work of investigating existing rules and mythology of literature. Synthesis is the trying out of constraints, the inherently playful application of myth.

Additionally, there are other implications if we are to assume that myths are constraints and mythology is rules. The Oulipo is not a group governed by any set of fixed, predictable rules. Indeed I believe the group might distinguish or describe its infrastructure, or core principles, more easily than its superstructure, or culture, or mythology. The disparate and diverse outputs of the group can have extraordinarily little in common in terms of content and cultural genre (other than being literature). The predictability of the mythology or culture of the group is very difficult to grasp. This, again, may explain the allusive and slippery properties of the group's character, a flexibility that has enabled its longevity. The group was conceived out of a set of myths, or approaches that do not cohere to a working mythology or set of rules. The colloquial myths of the group, for example the fact that you can't leave it (Schott, 2009), help characterise the group, but are not systematically recorded or required, unlike the actual working mechanisms of the constraints used in the generation of the literature. This perhaps is how the constraints resist developing into rules, the myths of the group have been prevented from becoming a culture, too binding, prescriptive and descriptive, and so not constraint-like at all. Motte also introduces Roger Caillois as a thinker on play who defines the activity as marginal. Motte quotes Caillois:

It [play] refers to an activity free from constraint, but also without consequence in real life. [...] In effect, play doesn't produce anything, neither goods nor works. It is essentially sterile.
(2009: 29)

As mentioned previously, this kind of positioning again finds basis in the presupposition that play must be measured according to real life, which in the above case is also defined by usefulness and product. Unless one were to render all literature, and perhaps by extension all art, as useless, the products of play cannot be so easily generalised as insignificant. In terms of this study, Project 3 enters the conversation here because not only was the deployment of constraints during the project playful, the result was entirely unfixed until the moment of performance. The reality of a predictable product was completely denied until the last second, as was any authorial intention that preceded the performance in terms of detailed, readable content.

The spectrum of the playful to the earnest was additionally complicated by Project 3 in three ways. In the first instance, the performance work was characterised by a ludic quality that directly resulted from the established rules and conventions of the performer. Secondly of significance is how improvisation can be placed at the bottom of a theatrical hierarchy. Finally, there is the insight that improvisation can focus on the observation of how the performer is performing rather than what they're performing. In stand-up comedy for example, the perception of improvisation is so seductive because it potentially allows the audience to witness the revelation of something about the real person performing, apparently a result of the performer being placed under genuine pressure. For example, a heckle from an unruly audience member gives rise to a moment of improvisation, the fiction of the mode of performance is apparently disrupted and the audience get to peek at the real personality at play – and to observe the performer's ability to respond to the live moment, the interruption, successfully or otherwise. Of course, however improvised moments may appear, in this case even if the comic is genuinely interrupted, the performer still operates well within the rules of stand-up comedy. Stand-ups have to deal with hecklers, it goes with the territory and so no constraining device is in play at all, just another, conscious, shared fiction grown out of an established set of rules.

However, the ludic qualities of the stand-up do enable an implied breaking down of one fiction, a 'set-piece', replacing it with an alternative fiction, an improvised, supposed real world insight. The allusion to a real world is reminiscent of Huizinga's position on play. Moments like these are interesting to watch because they appear to cross into a more authentic world; in actuality they don't, they are parts of a theatrical tendency only, a different kind of fiction, and the real world remains unfixed. In any case, however real or constructed, improvised comedy relies on the potential for failure, the need to be seen to allow for deconstruction of the game and to hint at the possibility of collapse. Whether or not collapse actually happens, its potential is embedded in the rules of the comic moment, even if they are a fiction. The performance of slips and deviations remind us that there is a risk, but it is complicated because it is always premeditated, layered or manipulated by the performer, which is of course the real skill or work of play.

From classical Greek times, comedy has been viewed in contrast to tragedy. [...] Despite such gifted practitioners of comedy as Shakespeare, Molière, Lope de Vega and Jonson, critics and even practitioners tended to view comedy as a genre inferior to tragedy. (Banham, 1995: 234)

The various forms of theatre establish a hierarchy of sincerity too complex for detailed discussion here, but it is nonetheless worth brief contemplation because of the suggestion that comedy might hold less value than other forms of theatre. The well-established binary of comedy to tragedy can prevent comedy from being seen as additionally serious or earnest. Motte expounds Ehrmann's explanation of this problem:

If we habitually envision play as being 'for nothing' it is largely because the full dimensions of such economy are difficult to descry and because the surface phenomena of play encourage us in such an interpretation. (Motte, 2009: 32)

Again, challenging the baseline of reality underpins the perceived superficiality of play activity, eventually Motte explains that Ehrmann sees culture as not somehow featuring play but being 'constantly in *play*' (2009: 33). This post-structural collapse of binaries lifts play beyond applicable method and places it at the centre of

generative cultural methodology. This is a sympathetic observation when considering the poetics of the Oulipo. The very ethos of the group is playful, devoid as it is from the sentimental mythologising about past masters and denying the possibilities of inspiration and talent. The challenge to literature is real, earnest in fact, but is based around the open-ended qualities of playing a game with literary generation, making the methodology inexhaustible, lending an infinite quality to the challenge. Play can, but does not always, equal irony, but it does always engender humour or ludic sensibility. Challenge to convention will either be observed as threatening or playful, but rarely both. These French men playing games with literature weren't and have never been a real challenge, therefore they must be a joke. This jokey perception of the group is aided by their apparent self-amusement. For example, current Oulipo President, Paul Fournel said the following during a BBC Radio 4 interview:

Even people that are really irritated by Oulipo want to be a member of the Oulipo, which I understand because it's very comfortable to be a member of the Oulipo...you can eat for free almost every month...and have drinks.
(Schott, 2009)

Motte describes how Ehrmann's theories on play allow for more performative qualities to emerge in literature by the commingling of 'ludic impulse and earnestness of purpose' (2009: 33). This commingling is an effective way of describing the work undertaken in both the planning and delivery of Project 3. The idea of constraint imposition is an 'earnestness of purpose' and, in a methodological sense, it is about isolating and adhering to a set of structures. Earnestness, by inference suggests that the author has a sincerity that stretches beyond the purely mechanical. Adherence to constraint does not happen for the sake of it, the rigour is necessary for the group to hasten the progression of literature (Le Lionnais in Motte, 2007: 31). The ludic impulse is interesting in that oulipian playfulness is not only present in the group's approach to literature, but is also apparent in the text generated. We return to *Cent Mille Millions de Poemes* (1961), as described earlier in this thesis Motte suggests that the book presents an interesting question, born chiefly out of its absurdity of length and concept:

Is this literary text? An object d'art? A toy? A joke? Should we take it 'seriously,' or not?
(Motte, 2009: 34)

Motte goes on to describe *Cent Mille* as a 'laboratory of poetry' (2009: 34) and this is also a useful definition for the work of Project 3. The project offered no fixed performance conclusion, it was open-ended and its outcomes were unfixed and unpredictable. Like Jouet's *Metro Poems* (2002), discussed in more detail later, Project 3 presented not only a potential privileging of process over product but also a live demonstration of constraint working from the point of view of the reader, or audience. Demonstrating, like improvisation more generally, something of a disinclination to some established rules of performance, Project 3 inevitably pushed towards the ludic impulse, presenting the metaphor of nervous laughter – laughter that results from a threat to form, or uncertainty. Humour can destabilise the oppressive, a theatrical defence mechanism that paradoxically draws upon the rules of humour to survive, not in order to cover its own tracks, but in order to smooth the experiment, to perhaps gloss the shortcomings of the work in conventional theatrical language. Making an audience laugh is sometimes a disguise and one that can make the inaccessible accessible, the otherwise earnest and threatening, playful. In this sense the playfulness is not just a strategy, as it undoubtedly is, but speaks a language of absurdity – that which is unknown is ridiculous, indeed it is *seriously* ridiculous. The notion that the ridiculous should necessarily be a subject of ridicule is a tension that the Oulipo have not only played with, but owned. Motte describes how *Cent Mille* involves the adding of additional rules to the already constrained form of the sonnet (2009: 35). This 'exploiting and amplifying possibilities that are latent in the original system' (2009: 35), raises the question for me as to where I might locate the latent form of Project 3. Indeed Project 3 relied on these latent forms, they were built into the constraints. The constraints used in Project 3 can be accessed in Appendix D.

One of the constraints used in Project 3, *Scribe sectioning*, dictated that the 30 minute performance be split into five six-minute parts, each pertaining to one of the five stages of Eugene Scribe's well-made play: *critical event, exposition, obstacles,*

good fortune and resolution. Similarly the *Oratory Registers/Contexts* constraint drew upon five different kinds of public speaking (performance) – *award ceremony, wedding speech, stand-up comedy, Politician* and *courtroom*. These latent forms were layered with additional constraints, appropriated to a new context like the sonnet form in *Cent Mille*. Indeed, one might draw further comparisons from Motte's analysis of *Cent Mille*. For example, he states the book 'put literary possibility on display' (2009: 35). As mentioned previously, Project 3 put theatrical possibility on display by moving the process of performance from the rehearsal room and placing it in front of an audience so that they might have access to those discoveries in real-time. George Perec's lipogram in e, *La Disparition* (1969), is used by Motte as a pure example of earnestness and play in combination. Motte quotes Perec as stating the following about the novel:

My ambition, as Author, my point, I would go so far as to say my fixation, my constant fixation, was primarily to concoct an artefact as original as it was illuminating, an artefact that would, or just possibly might, act as a stimulant on notions of construction, of narration, of plotting, of action, a stimulant, in a word, on fiction-writing today.
(2009: 37)

Motte clarifies that Perec's game is in fact extremely earnest and that his work brings a further note to our attention, that 'an individual, playing freely, affirms himself free to play' (2009: 37). Similarly with Project 3, the playfulness of the performances, the full absorption into that live moment that the structure allows, is like all good games, 'the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles' (Suits, 1990: 41). It was a demonstration of freely playing and an affirmation of being free to play within constraints.

As alluded to earlier, another example of playful work is Oulipian Jacques Jouet's *poèmes de métró* (Metro Poems). How Metro Poems are constructed is best described in Jouet's first example of one:

From time to time, I write metro poems. This poem is one of them.
Do you want to know what a metro poem is? Let's say that your answer is yes.
Here then is what a metro poem is.
A metro poem is a poem composed in the metro, during the duration of a trip.
A metro poem has as many verses as your trip has stations, minus one.
The first verse is composed in your head between the two first stations of your trip (counting the station from which you departed).
It is transcribed onto paper when the train stops at the second station.
The second verse is composed in your head between the second and third stations of your trip.
It is transcribed onto paper when the train stops at the third station.
And so forth.
One must not transcribe when the train is in motion.
One must not compose when the train is stopped.
The last verse of the poem is transcribed on the platform of your last station.
If your trip involves one or more changes of subway lines, the poem will have two or more stanzas.
If through bad luck the train stops between two stations, that's always a ticklish moment in the writing of a metro poem.
(Jouet in Motte, 2009: 38)

Motte talks about the Metro Poems as being 'playful in spirit' but with 'earnest considerations' (2009: 39). The same applies with Project 3, the spirit is playful, the content is playful, the act of doing is playful, but the constraints are earnest and serious. The practice of this study is of course not localised to purely artist creation, it forms part of a broader academic research project – therefore I would hope all holistically contained herein is serious. There is a further interesting comparison to discuss with Jouet's *Metro Poems*. Jouet describes one virtue of the metro poem: 'I have no time to think of anything other than the poem' (Jouet in Motte, 2009: 39). This manipulation of time forces the hand of the author, perhaps entering a kind of flow, at the very least focussing on the task at hand but at the most being so consumed in the task of being constrained that there is no choice but to create. In Project 3, the temporal constraint of 30 minutes was coupled with the reality of no pre-existing content being to hand. Armed only with constraints, my mind was sharpened, the generation of material was all there was to concentrate on; it was play or be played by the structure, both of which could be equally valuable.

Returning to Motte's observation of playing freely meaning that one is free to play because of constraints, to be in the moment of the game one is simultaneously under the power of the constraint while also completely being (if preparation is undertaken properly) in control of it, and so liberated from/by it.

On Time & Space

Jouet's subway stops rule of the *Metro Poems* provides a 'metronome, [such] that its rhythms in time and space provide an excellent template for poetic meter' (2009: 39). Similarly a time and space structure was necessary for the creation of the performance material in Project 3. In this project the consideration was not, as in previous projects, about designing constraints with the potential to generate new material, but to consider how the constraint itself affects the environment in which the constraint may be used. This is where Jouet's work departs from the more usual literary constraints of the group. The conditions for the application of Perec's constraints are contained within his mind and body, they are dependent on Perec and Perec alone (not least his incredible ability to deal with them). Jouet's time restrictions in the *Metro Poems* are in essence a kind of training, like all play activity, over time they can be practiced and rehearsed. Of course you can train yourself to be better at anagrams by repeatedly doing anagrams, but there is no temporal or environmental quality that can be manipulated built into the constraint; there is no embodied training culminating in an ability to make decisions about how to deal with constraints with immediacy. Project 3 relied entirely on these temporal and environmental structures because time and space are the constituents of live performance. A targeted emphasis on time and space distinguishes Project 3 from the other two projects in a number of ways. The first is that the project tackles constraints in a live context, marking a very different approach to theatrical constraints compared to the previous projects. The role of the performer in Project 3 was particularly different. In Project 1, the performance created was a demonstration of constraints that had already been used to develop performance material by the performers in a workshop context. In Project 2, the constraints were less performer-centred than the previous performance, they were for the most part designed to shape the performance from an external position, and therefore the relationship of the performers to the work they were performing was not directly

connected to the constraints they were working under. Although the performers were dealing with constraint in an instructional way, their relationship to the final work presented was much the same as it might be in any directed work. In Project 3 however, the audience witnessed the performer dealing directly with the constraint in the live moment, as the performance unfolded – the content of the performances was not fixed before the events occurred. This difference can be articulated by considering another of Jacques Jouet’s works that was briefly mentioned in the introduction to this thesis. In 2009 as part of the *Paris en toutes lettres* festival, Jouet sat in a tent for eight hours a day for the duration of the festival, writing a novel titled *Agatha de Paris* (Levin Becker, 2012: 67). In this durational novel writing exercise, where the author is notionally placed under constraint, it was not just the structure of the writing that was constrained but the act of writing itself. The Project 3 performances were the result of a process undertaken by the performer, not to create and rehearse a performance, but to create the potential for a performance. In this sense rather than a devising/rehearsal process, Project 3 preparation had more in common with a training regime.

The preparation for Project 3 involved understanding the constraints at an intuitive level, so that I might use them to generate a performance live. This planning involved several tasks that were concerned with temporality. The first of these exercises was time-keeping; a task that would give me a pragmatic understanding of how long a period of time ‘feels’, or perhaps more importantly a conceptual understanding of how much content can fit into that amount of time. The *Scribe Sectioning* constraint described earlier involved separating the performance into parts that related to Scribe’s well-made play. This meant the 30-minute performance was separated into five intervals of six minutes, my version of Jouet’s metro stops as it were. These six-minute intervals had a major impact on the shape and tone of the performance. I spent many hours listening to an interval timer set to six minutes in order to understand that duration. I did this in an effort to comprehend the ‘shape’ of that time, to be able to visualise the quantity of content and the kinds of narrative that could fit within in. Because the performance material wasn’t fixed, and so there was no content to learn, this understanding of time was crucial – it was one of the constants available to me in terms of my understanding of the work – time was one

of the few things that didn't shift. The six-minute sections gave the performances a pacey, urgent quality, perhaps the result of the attempt to convey information quickly. Like Jouet's *Metro Poems* and his durational writing at *Paris en toutes lettres*, time became an environmental factor that suggests a form to the work, more than just a metronome for the live moment, a material to shape it.

The context of Project 3 problematized the idea of rehearsal. The work was heavily dependent on a live audience who would ultimately be a large part of the conditions necessary for the realisation of the content of the final work. For examples of audience related constraints see: *Stolen objects*, *Paper/document motivators/resolvers*, *Physical mirroring*, *Out of the ordinary inculcation*, *Clean questions and Content cues* (Appendix D). Because of this dependence on the audience, any rehearsal would mean actually doing the performance for real, rendering it not a preparatory rehearsal process at all. Consequently, a different kind of preparatory process was required. Rehearsal for Project 3 involved having the various constraints of the work written on flash cards and spending time cross-referencing these constraints with the conditions around me. For many hours I would observe everyday performance/occurrences in a range of contexts and attempt to find the potential in those observations for generating material. This inculcation of broader observed contexts and behavioural traits, rather than a theatrical audience, into my training process was particularly useful. For example, simple constraints like *Vibe reversal*, *Physical mirroring*, and *Out of the ordinary inculcation* were addressed in this context by visualisation rather than rehearsal. Visualisation, as well as having traditions in both performance and sports preparation, resonates profoundly with the idea of potential. By visualising rather than actually doing, the performer is able to consider many more possibilities for performance without needing to engage in the arduous and exposing activity of doing the performance before being ready. The observation of potential moments is like the 'Rumination' item of the Oulipo's monthly meetings, whereby unrealised procedures/constraints are considered (Mathews in Schott, 2009). Rumination without creation for the group is of course perfectly acceptable, exemplifying as it does potential within oulipian poetics. This approach works particularly well when considered in the context of preparing for work that can't or won't be repeated. That

is, the mental rehearsal involved in this preparatory process prevented the temptation to fix live moments for the actual performances. Similarly, the less heightened environment of everyday life gave opportunity to trial constraints with other people. Practicing constraints like *Oratory registers/contexts* or *Clean questions*, outside of theatrical context, gave me a safe opportunity to engage with constraints without the pressure and finality of a theatrical environment. To see a situation at a train station or in a café and understand the potential in that moment and how it might be unlocked, was excellent preparation for a performance of this kind.

As previously discussed during my reflections on the relationship of constraints to each other in Project 2, I discovered that causal chains in constraints led to families of constraints; one constraint triggered the need for another, allowing as Levin Becker describes, constraints to 'evolve over the course of time' (Levin Becker, 2012:168). These causal relationships led to constraints that were related but still temporally and conceptually in series. Project 3 however, saw determined constraints working with and reacting to the immediate environment in a rhizomatic, interrelated web of parallel processing in addition to causal reactions. In this sense, with many constraints operating simultaneously and interdependently, Project 3 became the most constrained performance to date, yet also the most liberated from structure, certainly in the experience of performing it. Motte describes both *La Disparition* and Jouet's *Metro Poems* as 'a declaration of principles [...] that relies upon systemacity and rigorous but freely accepted rules; one that points to exhaustion of possibility, and, through the same gesture, towards the invigoration of potential' (2009: 40).

The Clinamen Performer

In Epicureanism, a philosophy based around notions of free will, the clinamen is defined in opposition to causality. The clinamen challenges causality by problematizing its most significant feature, linearity (Motte, 1986: 163). The challenge comes in the form of a swerve from an otherwise determined route:

Here too is a point I'm eager to have you learn.
Though atoms fall straight downward through the void
By their own weight, yet at uncertain times
And at uncertain points, they swerve a bit –
Enough that one may say they changed direction.
And if they did not swerve, they all would fall
Downward like raindrops through the boundless void;
No clashes would occur, no blows befall
The atoms; nature would never have made a thing.
(Lucretius in Motte, 1986: 164)

Named by Lucretius as *clinamen atomorum*, or the swerve of atoms, the clinamen represents the Oulipo's only concession to their unwavering devotion to constraint, defined by the group as 'a deviation from the strict consequences of a restriction [...] often justified on aesthetic grounds: using it improves the result' (Mathews and Brotchie, 2005: 126). Of interest in this discussion are two main points. The first is pragmatic, the clinamen for the Oulipo is a rule-break, an anomaly to the unwavering support of rigor and discipline in upholding constraints that has been discussed at length during this thesis. Alison James, in her chapter 'Perec's Constraints: Combination, Coincidence, Clinamen', describes how the Oulipo use the clinamen as a 'counter-mechanical principle' (2009: 142), particularly in works so highly structured as *Life a User's Manual* (1978). The clinamen in this sense could potentially pose a threat to the whole methodology of the group. What does it mean for a writing movement based on the upholding of constraint to change direction and allow for constraints to be broken? Secondly and perhaps more profoundly is the implication of the clinamen to the group in terms of Epicurean/Lucretian philosophy, that suggests, as articulated above, 'if they did not swerve [...] nature would never have made a thing' (Lucretius in Motte: 1986: 164). James insists that 'the Oulipo's collective works do not propose any coherent theory of the clinamen' (2009: 143). This accounts for why its usage is conceptually problematic. What is clear however, is that the clinamen is not purely a tool to avoid the application of constraint, as we will go on to explore, rather it needs to exist within the group's repertoire so that new territory might definitely be explored. However, the clinamen still initially appears to be something of a challenge to the Oulipo and their position on constraints. As articulated previously, the unpredictable outcomes of the applied constraint, that differentiate it from being a rule, appear to

be competent enough to unravel old rules and to generate new literary material. This raises the question of the clinamen's necessity as a tool and the Oulipians' compulsion to use it. Motte cites three contemporary figures as having used the term clinamen, Harold Bloom, Alfred Jarry and Werner Heisenberg (1986: 266-277). Bloom's literary analysis will be discussed later, but in the first instance it is valuable to note that the father of Pataphysics, Alfred Jarry, returns to this study with his own representation of the clinamen in *Dr Faustroll* (1898). Various and not uncharacteristically opaquely, he describes the clinamen as a kind of result of a random painting machine that 'follows its own whim', leading to 'the unforeseen beast clinamen' (Jarry: 1996: 88-89), Motte describes Jarry's clinamen's function as operating 'to maintain a sufficient level of chaos in the universe' (1986: 266). Of note here is that the clinamen in Jarry's terms takes the form of a figure rather than a concept or tool, (although easily described as an embodiment of a concept), an incarnation of chaos and uncertainty. This becomes resonant when considered alongside my own reflections on the clinamen performer discussed later.

Werner Heisenberg features in Motte's list because of his uncertainty principle, based on indeterminacy (Motte, 1986: 267). The uncertainty principle states that:

it is impossible to specify or determine simultaneously both the position and velocity of a particle as is wished. It is, to be sure, possible to fix either of these qualities as precisely as desired, but only at a price, for the greater the precision in one, the greater the inevitable lack of definiteness in the other.
(Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1962: 680)

Motte notes that Heisenberg's usage of clinamen 'acceded, provisionally at least, to the status of scientific truth' (1986: 267). He goes on to note that Jarry and Heisenberg are 'exemplars of the two tones of the voice that speaks through *De rerum natura* [Lucretius' text mentioning the clinamen], the physicist and the poet' (1986: 267). There is of course resonance that can be drawn then, between this sentiment and oulipian philosophy. The Oulipo's imposition of mathematical and scientific structures to the poetry form are perhaps the generative results of these two tones. Both directly, in the case of Jarry, and indirectly, in the case of Heisenberg, these two thinkers can represent the twin arms of the Oulipo, looking

respectively to poetry and science. Jarry and Heisenberg are two early 20th century observers of the clinamen that paved the way for the Oulipo to break their own rules. Oulipian Paul Braffort, suggests that the group became aware of the clinamen during the early 1970s and it then assumed an 'essential role' (Braffort in Motte, 1986: 274) within the group's work. Motte suggests that Perec moved the group's use of the clinamen forward:

Perec gradually became convinced of the creative efficacy of the integration of a minimal element of chaos into literary structures of this sort.
(1986: 274)

Georges Perec's masterpiece of rigorous constraint, *Life a User's Manual*, provides a clear example of the clinamen, which according to the mathematical structure of the book, should consist of 100 chapters, but instead has only ninety-nine:

More fundamentally, this chapter must disappear in order to break the symmetry, to introduce an error into the system. [...] It must not be rigid; there must be some play in it; it must, as they say, 'creak' a bit.
(Perec in Motte 2007: 19-20)

It is here we may locate an answer to the question of purpose to the clinamen and while signified as a figure by Jarry and as the critical theory of 'misprision' by Bloom discussed later, the clinamen can only be introduced by the creative, the author, who in their wisdom is able to conduct a swerve that a machine or automaton can not. The clinamen however, still calls into question the rigor by which the Oulipo adhere. That is of course, until the clinamen itself may be recognised as a constraint. There is no doubt, as discussed earlier with regard to ludic impulses, that the seriousness of play is where ludic and earnest impulses come together for the group. Mathews and Brotchie point out in the *Oulipo Compendium* that:

But there is a binding condition for its use: the exceptional freedom afforded by a clinamen can only be taken on the condition that following the initial rule is still possible. In other words, the clinamen can only be used if it isn't needed.
(2005: 126)

The rule-break of the clinamen being only allowable when unnecessary, might leave the author needing to undertake *more* work, displacing the notion that breaking adherence to rules may be undertaken to reduce labour. It is perhaps here, with the clinamen used not as a get-out clause or simpler option, but rather as a [h]'arder one, that absurdity draws the Oulipo away from its physics/mathematical cousins. Empirical science values simplicity above all things, admiring the beauty in working reductionism. The Oulipo break a rule only to keep the game moving, to keep playing, to keep being silly and avoid reaching the finite and inevitable conclusion and exhaustibility of literary exploration – perhaps avoiding by extension the death of the author that birthed the poststructuralism the group so apparently abhor.

Motte uses Perec's heterogrammatic poetry (1986: 275) as another example of him using the clinamen. Heterogrammatic poetry involves the next verse of a poem using the exact letters of the previous verse (Motte, 2007: 211). Perec introduces a revised model of heterogrammatic poetry by allowing 'a variable letter that is chosen 'freely' in accordance with the poet's needs' (Motte, 1986: 275). Motte points out that the 'consequences [of the revision] are considerable' (1986: 275). Motte describes this as in line with Lucretius' usage, in that freewill is imposed but also that the results are normative, making them more readerly and less writerly (1986: 275). The clinamen used as a vehicle towards more readerly texts, that is those that require less work from the reader, sometimes referred to as *classic* texts, raises a serious question of constraint visibility that we will return to later. The generation of readerly texts might equally be part of a strategy which either pushes the constraint to the forefront of the readers mind for obvious and easy deduction, or conversely disguises the constraint so well that consideration of the constraint is not necessary in order to enjoy the reading. In Bénabou's terms discussed previously, this is the difference between the writing mobilising forced or external revelation for the reader.

This is an example of an author's desire to produce work that is less opaque. This does not result in the writer undertaking less work, which is an additional concession of some kind to the sanctity of the constraint for the Oulipo. The use of Græco-Latin bi squares, which I used during Project 2 as influenced by Perec's usage in *Life a*

User's Manual, also provide a site for Perec's clinamen. Perec uses the squares in the novel to formulate the various constituent elements of each of the chapters. Perec introduces clinamens to his list of elements. The uses of the categories of *manque* (lack) and *faux* (false), whereby the referent of either element can either, respectively, 'eliminate one of the other elements' or 'replace an element' (James, 2009: 143). Motte quotes Benard Magné as remarking that by using this strategy 'the dysfunction of the system is itself systematised' (Magné in Motte, 1986: 275). This observation by Magné really doesn't qualify the clinamen, in my opinion, as 'often justified on aesthetic grounds' (Mathews and Brotchie, 2005: 126), but instead suggests that it exists in order to break the original constraint system in order to give further rise to on-going permutations. It does this in order to avoid the predictable, perhaps even the finite or exhaustible.

When the Oulipo state boldly in their First Manifesto that 'recourse to machines' (Le Lionnais in Motte, 2007: 27) may be inevitable in the work of the group, this is in order to aid the human labour otherwise required to undertake such mammoth tasks as combinatorial systems demand. One is reminded of Christian Bök's *Eunoia* (2008), described earlier in this thesis. The novel is comprised entirely of univocalisms, meaning that each of the five chapters consists only of words that contain one kind of vowel. Chapter one consists only of words containing the vowel 'a', chapter two only those containing the vowel 'e', and so on.

I read through all three volumes of the Webster's Third International Unabridged Dictionary, doing so five times in order to extract an extensive lexicon of univocal words, each containing only one of the five vowels. I could have automated this process, but I figured that learning the software to write a program would probably take just as long as the manual labor itself – so I simply got started on the project. (Bök, 2007: 7)

In this instance we could see Bök as the clinamen, the potential error in a system that could be automated. However, I believe that Bök may have had an additional creative rationale for him *reading* each of the words that he would go on to use in his writing; his undertaking of the building of his lexicon would have given him a greater sense of how to then use that lexicon. Oulipian Italo Calvino states similarly

in his essay 'Prose and Anticombinatorics' (2007) that the use of the computer in constrained writing is so that the artist can 'liberate himself from the slavery of a combinatory search, allowing him also the best chance of concentrating on this 'clinamen' which, alone, can make of the text a true work of art' (2007: 152). A similar idea is James' assertion that 'the clinamen's disruption brings creative freedom into a system that is too well programmed' (James, 2009: 143). In this sense the clinamen is a very specific tool, a targeted non-adherence to a system that is *too* systematised. Perec's reputation for adherence to complexity and rigor suggests that of all the Oulipians using the clinamen he is probably the most likely to do so, his structuring and systemisation were simply too successful. James highlights the tension created by 'the two valorizations: one of expression and one of an order that transcends the human' (2009: 143). I remain convinced that this tension is the essential basis for much problematising of the Oulipo, not helped by their avoidance of aleatory processes (at least their suggested avoidance of it) and is the basis for much criticism of the group. James suggests that the rigid application of the clinamen essentially 'does indeed represent a form of anti-chance' (2009: 144). In other words, when subjective intervention seems inevitable, a clinamen is utilised, systematically, like in *manqué et faux*, to swerve the direction of the generation without the introduction of chaos. The clinamen allows this debate around valorisation to continue but also neatly captures the humanness of the writing/creative process. At the start of this study I was convinced that the clinamen was an excuse for the rule-break, reasonably, as the Oulipo describe the clinamen as 'a deviation from the strict consequences of a restriction' (Mathews and Brotchie, 2005: 126), but now I see it quite differently. The clinamen is a constraint itself, one that is not an excuse for non-adherence, but a way of defining chaos, a way to make as many leaps forward as one might towards a recognition of the human. As James quotes Christelle Reggiani as stating, the clinamen 'represents a rejection of 'mechanographic' writing and an assertion of authorial control.' (Reggiani in James, 2009: 143).

The clinamen has repercussions for the live practice of this study. While one might be able to imagine the purely mechanical possibilities of a writing exercise, the live performer prevents this kind of pure automation in a live space. That said, the

tendencies of theatrical delivery, in which an actor learns lines, moves according to prescribed direction and repeats this action performance after performance, may be as close to automation as theatre can get. In Project 2 of this study, the actors in the work dutifully followed their instructions, in the broadest sense producing a reproducible performance product. Project 3, with its strategies of improvisation, was, like any works that don't demand a fixed set of actions and delivery, a direct challenge to a particular theatrical orthodoxy. However, in the case of Project 3, the practice was questioning the rules of a particular kind of theatre, while additionally doing so under constraint. We return again to the question of liveness, the clinamen is present in the form of a non-mechanographic performer, or as I will call her, the clinamen performer. While the clinamen performer may be present in all live work, in the case of Project 3 it is recognised and mastered, acknowledged and harnessed, to avoid the chaos that it might otherwise elicit. The clinamen as a fallible human being becomes synonymous with Jarry's monster-machine, that keeps generating material art, rather than a tool to reduce the possibility of inevitable product. It is worth noting that James does not believe that the clinamen has all that much impact on the final outcome of the work produced, 'it is hard to argue that such clinamens [*manqué et faux*] play more than a peripheral role in the system and in the final form of the novel' (2009: 144), suggesting that the 'effects [...] are actually fairly limited' (2009: 144). When criticising more broadly the use of the clinamen, albeit in anything beyond literature, physician René Thom in his aggressive polemic, 'Stop Chance! Silence Noise!', states that he:

[C]an hardly explain this fascination with the 'clinamen', with the small fluctuation initiating large events, except by a certain literary affectation. [...] imagining oneself at the crossroads, and by an involuntary flick of the finger hurling the world into an abyss of successive catastrophes. (Thom, 1983: 17)

While Thom is predominantly criticising philosopher Michel Serres for attempting a more literal appropriation of the clinamen to physics, this gives further credence to the notion that the clinamen is perhaps a subtle tool rather than a catastrophic spanner in the works of literature. However, this top-down retrospective observation of the clinamen is precisely problematized by the cyclical problems of Bloom's

'misprision', discussed later, and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, which mean that deducing the exact moment of a swerve is impossible. More significantly however, Thom's concerns are undone by Sydney Lévy's work on 'emergence' (2004), which describes how ineffectual it is to try to retroactively understand the constituent parts of a whole by observing only the whole.

Constraint Visibility and Emergence

Sydney Lévy, in his article 'Emergence in Georges Perec' (2004), draws our attention to the notion of emergence. Lévy outlines in footnotes to the article that most commentators trace the first usage of the term to John Stuart Mills during the mid 19th century, but Lévy settles his own definition as follows:

Going from a linear succession, from a sum of elements, to a coherence or organization is precisely what is today called "emergence" – the name given to the notion that 'the whole is more than the sum of its parts'.
(2004: 42)

Lévy comments that in *Life A User's Manual* there is a connectivity between the chapters. He states that even without knowledge of the structures at play the reader can 'without paying attention, without being aware of it, not [...] bump themselves going from chapter to chapter and [...] feel comfortable in its highly complex network of continuities' (2004: 39). It is the connectedness of a fragmented process that leads to emergence, when the multiple constraints in Perec's work become something tangible beyond themselves. This kind of legibility is how much of oulipian literature operates on the boundary between writerly and readerly texts. Somehow the varied and often arbitrary constraints form a legible whole for the reader. In Project 3 of this study, the final work was so full of unknowns and the constraints at play were not cohesive, but there remained a hope that an audience would find the work legible. Lévy quotes Anne Fagot-Largeaut as stating that 'the characteristic properties of a whole cannot be deduced from the properties of the parts studied separately' (Lévy, 2004: 42). This is where the uni-directionality of time is not sympathetic to my reflections on Project 3. Of course the training I undertook in order to work effectively with the constraints happened over time, ever drawing close to the moment of performance, however it is not possible to add up

the constraints and the regime and arrive at the work produced. The work emerged from those constituent activities but is not just the sum of them. The following is taken from Perec's preamble at the start of, *Life a User's Manual*:

[It] is not the sum of elements to be distinguished from each other and analysed discretely, but a pattern, that is to say a form, a structure: the element's existence does not precede the existence of the whole, it comes neither before nor after it, for the parts do not determine the pattern, but the pattern determines the parts: knowledge of the pattern and its laws, of the set and its structure, could not possibly be derived from the discrete knowledge of the elements that compose it.
(Perec, 1996: preamble)

Similarly for Project 3, the constraints that composed the final work presented to an audience do not determine it. They come neither before or after it, that is to say either during the preparation for the work or now, retrospectively attempting to unpack the work presented (although by necessity some of this needs to happen for the purposes of this study). I speak of the 'pattern' here as the final work, not the menu of constraints that can be found in Appendix D, which is nothing more than a list. It is the life of the cohered content, the emergence of the performance moments that are the critical object. This critical analysis seeks neither to provide the individual building blocks of the final work, nor an attempt to piece together the jigsaw of an already constructed and then fragmented picture. Lévy notes that:

Reading for Perec is a bottom-up, top-down emergent phenomenon where, from a linear succession of elements, emerges an organization, which in turn determines the elements.
(2004: 45)

Rather like Heisenberg's uncertainly principle touched upon earlier, whereby the means of measuring an experiment inadvertently alters that which one is attempting to measure, the paradoxical reading described above by Lévy involves the product determining its constituent parts as well as the constituent parts determining the product. We are additionally reminded here of the cyclicity of Bénabou's internal revelation of constraint, whereby the text created under constraint speaks of that constraint (Clarke, 2016: 880). This cyclical chaos is also reminiscent of

Bartlebooth's fruitless narrative within *Life A User's Manual*, described in the previous chapter, another example of a constraint speaking of itself within a text (Bénabou in Clarke, 2016: 880). According to Perec and Lévy then, the attempt to decode the constituent parts of an emerged work might be fruitless, which could bring the debate around constraint visibility to something of a halt. That said, it is also literally not true. One can appreciate the lipogram of e in *La Disparition* and one can immediately recognise the characteristics of snowball poetry when presented with it. The same applies to Project 1 of this study, where the constraints were visually available to the reader by being literally paired with the product. But the counter argument here is that by following the constraints live in Project 1, the emergent performance had not fully emerged, the audience were perhaps tethered to a process that could/should have been let go. By extension then, either Project 1 wasn't an example of emergence at all, or wasn't a performance at all (perhaps it was a demonstration), or was an example of emergence but the constraints on display were not constituent parts, mere ghosts of a process that cannot be deduced from the final work. Whereas with Projects 1 and 2 I prepared a score for those works, which now act as a relic of the live moment in literary form, in Project 3 no such formal relic existed before or after the live moment of performance emerging from constraints. There is of course the video documentation of the performance, which you will shortly be invited to watch, but more than previously, this work is not an accumulation of process or prescribed set of actions, rather it is a set of live moments, each different from one another and each distinct from the constraints that prompted them. In any case, Lévy reiterates:

Also, emergent properties are irreversible: in saying – with Perec and with the classical definition of emergence – that knowledge of the whole could not be deduced from discrete knowledge of the elements, we are also saying that we cannot establish a top-to-bottom reverse causal chain, and trace the effect to its precise source.
(2004: 45)

Lévy draws attention to Perec writing on free jazz, particularly the relationship between freedom and constraint and he quotes the following:

One can, roughly speaking, find in a free piece [of jazz] two types of characteristic elements: elements that could be called 'negative' whose function is to break the underlying traditional structure [...] and 'positive' elements, true 'operators of unity', from which, it really seems to me, the piece develops.
(Perec in Lévy, 2004: 48)

For the purposes of this study we conflate 'underlying traditional structures' with rules and the negative element that disrupt them are, as discussed previously, constraints. The positive structure, the operators of unity, although harder to define, are the elements that ensure legibility, or readerly texts. In performance these are the factors that pull the performance together and make its disparate parts coherent. Lévy goes on to describe unifying strategies in *Life A User's Manual*, and another Perec novel, *W or The memory of Childhood* (1988). Without going into the details of these examples here, Lévy essentially describes occasions of transitions and of repetition that maintain coherence for the reader. There were a number of operators of unity within Project 3 that use transitions and repetition to good effect. Visibility of constraints in Project 3, specifically the audiences' potential expectation of the constraints being traceable, necessitated the use of transition and repetition.

The success of Project 3, in terms of constraint visibility, relied on two factors: firstly that the audience knew they were watching something improvised, and secondly, that they were able to see the causal relationship between the material presented and where that material had come from. The programme note for the performance outlined that the performer was improvising under constraint (Appendix E). Having the audience realise the presence of a constraint was important. As discussed previously, this also involved a conflation of Bénabou's different kinds of constraint revelation. The expectations of the performances, most likely bound up with the expectations of watching improvised work, made the viability of the material reliant on the audience perceiving constraints being used in the moment of performance.

Practice Documentation, Project 3

You are now invited to watch the performance work of Project 3,

Of This Room

Documented show performed 5th December 2014 at Contact Theatre, Manchester

Audience approx. 80, seated in traverse

<https://vimeo.com/241500569>

password – **constraint**

A Final Note on Emergence

James uses Lévy's term emergence as a way of explaining the generation of text under constraint (2009: 144). She also refers to Jacques Neefs' observation that 'the system is a prior condition of the text's possibility but cannot 'explain the text that ultimately liberates itself from the system' (James, 2009: 144). James suggests that emergence requires 'a whole set of uncodified intentions and rules' (2009: 144), which resonate with earlier discussions in this thesis about defining rules as established, or codified constraints. The results of constraints are based in potential, whereas rules have predictable outcomes. This balance is the key to unlocking the intentionality in Project 3. Some outcomes were necessarily predicted, for example there would be a set of performance moments, the audience would observe these moments, each iteration of the work would last 30 minutes, and so on. Therefore, a set of rules had to be adhered to, consciously or unconsciously, in order to allow for a performance to happen at all. The opening up of the performer's theatrical baggage, or performance arsenal, needed to be mediated with the recognition of the clinamen performer. The clinamen performer in this sense, although classified as a kind of constraint, operates somewhere between rules and constraints, an important, unquantifiable but recognised conduit to the live moment of performance. Indeed, emergence relies heavily on rules, something of an undoing of the group's ideology but necessary for the positioning of this study based as it is in live practice, more so than would be necessary in the generation of literature.

Misprision

Warren Motte suggests that literary critic Harold Bloom is important to the reinvigoration of the clinamen. Motte quotes Bloom as stating that the 'clinamen is freedom' (1986: 268). In Bloom's article 'Clinamen or poetic misprision' (1972), the inability to thoughtfully analyse one's poetic predecessors is used as a rationalisation for all interpretation necessarily being misinterpretation. This misprision – intentional, or at least self-aware, misinterpretation – for Bloom is a kind of clinamen because it is a swerve away for the linear trajectory of a given poet's historical lineage. Bloom links this back to Jarry's use of the clinamen and absurdity generally. In the introduction of *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature* (2007), Motte notes that the clinamen having been 'stone-dead for nigh on two millennia'

(2007: 19), was resurrected by both the Oulipo and Bloom independently, however, both realisations were heavily influenced by Alfred Jarry (2007: 19).

If a creative interpretation is thus necessarily a misinterpretation, we must accept this apparent absurdity. It is absurdity of the highest mode, the apocalyptic absurdity of Jarry, or of Blake's entire enterprise. (Bloom, 1972: 389)

Going on to suggest that every reading is 'necessarily a clinamen' (1972: 390), Bloom elevates the clinamen to a holistic, all encompassing trope of the creative act, rather than a targeted dislocation or swerve away from a predictable outcome. The clinamen in this instance, one of apocalyptic absurdity, is the knowledge of powerlessness of control in creativity. The Oulipo are fixated on their understanding of literary lineage, playfully referencing, celebrating, playing homage to and discrediting their literary ancestry. The *potentielle* of the group's name may be interpreted as a testament to the impossibility of summation of their life-long audit. The clinamen exists for them as a valuable tool for tweaking creative direction, but additionally throws into relief the futility of automation, their keen desire to bring back the human, to never lose sight of the author. Additionally, the absurdity resulting from misprision can account for the ludic impulse of both the Oulipo and the work of this study. There is humour in futility, accessibility in failure. Motte draws attention to the following Bloom quotation about realising the clinamen swerve in misprision:

A poet swerves away from his precursor, by so reading his precursor's poem as to execute a *clinamen* in relation to it. This appears as corrective movement in his own poem, which implies that the precursor poem went accurately up to a certain point, but then should have swerved, precisely in the direction that the new poem moves. (Bloom in Motte, 1986: 269)

This realisation of an error in the precursor poem destroys the truth of the precursor poem. The freewill of the clinamen does not only upset the linearity of determinism at a particular moment, but must be applicable cyclically and holistically. That is, the precursor poem and all poems in fact, must have swerved or still be swerving. The lack of ability to retroactively deduce the constituent parts of an emerged product,

highlighted by Lévy, similarly renders the swerve untraceable. By extension, we are drawn to the poststructuralist baseless sign, the notion that no authentic poem exists. This observation is equally sympathetic and challenging to oulipian poetics. The clinamen undoes the fixedness of language that the group hold so dear, but simultaneously allows for the reinstatement of the authorial control. The cyclicity of language also aligns to the oulipian notion of anticipatory plagiarism, whereby any previous literary work that uses constraint but was written before the conception of the Oulipo may be claimed as oulipian (Levin Becker, 2012: 30). Interestingly, if the clinamen calls into question the fixedness of language it must also do the same to established and predictable rules, which is sympathetic to the oulipian ethos of potential and growing permutations.

Motte points out that Bloom never coins his own terms but rather resurrects those from the past (1986: 270). By doing so, Bloom is 'executing in this manner a clinamen both toward the discourse in which these terms were initially lodged and toward contemporary critical discourse' (Motte, 1986: 270). The backwards and forwards-facing notion, again cyclical, is aligned with and similar to the oulipian notions of analysis and synthesis – the group's desire to master past processes and strategies in order to generate new constraints that will push literature forward and in doing so contribute to contemporary critical discourse. Equally cyclical is the re-naming or appropriating of existing terms, not necessarily concerned with originality, but with reordering and reclaiming established rules and trajectories – swerving from them and turning them into constraints. As discussed previously, the Oulipo have translated analysis and synthesis to anoulipism and synthoulipism (Le Lionnais, 2007: 26-28), respectively, to point to their targeted deployment within oulipian poetics. Anoulipism and synthoulipiam, if not resurrected terms then subtly altered ones, with the addition of the clinamen, are analysis and synthesis operating within the absurdity of constraint. This all raises a new ludic position to the group's insistence on fixed language and signs, while their own clinamen rationalises all literature as misprision, as error. We return again to Bloom's absurdity that results from the realisation of misprision. The results of the work of Project 3 are full of playful humour, a kind of danger and risk – a result of the recognition of the absurd balance of rules, constraints and the clinamen performer and the need to make

sense of all of this in a live space. In 'Clinamen Redux', Motte aligns the two tendencies of the Oulipo, analysis and synthesis, to what he describes as 'literal constraints', based on the manipulation of letters of the alphabet as forming the basis for analysis and the basis of synthesis being defined as elaboration through 'combinatorics' (1986: 273). This development can be traced through my own projects. As described previously, Project 1 was an analytical exercise, resulting in an annotated example of generation performed live; Project 2, placed in a more overtly theatrical context considered the manipulation of holistic theatrical rules; and the real synthesis of Project 3 presents a combination, not just of developed constraints but a synergy between performer (writer) and constraint.

Project 3 of this study saw the implementation of theatrical rules and instincts more than the other projects because it relied so heavily on established languages of performance. The project needed to rely on these theatrical rules in order to survive itself because so many other rules were absent. The biggest absent rule was the fixedness of the proceedings, or the fact of the improvisation, that required a number of other rules to enable the theatrical event to occur. The constraints of Project 3 can be discussed and unravelled but attention must also be drawn to the rules used in addition to these constraints. These rules needed to be put in place in order for the constraints to work. Emergence is the whole that is greater than the sum of its parts, in this case the whole was a piece of performance work, facilitated by the careful scaffolding of rules. Paradoxically, the most present of these rules was me, the (clinamen) performer. I had to be a skilled performer, able to embody the required rules and expectations of performance in order to use the constraints effectively. Crudely expressed, Perec couldn't write a novel using only the letter e if he wasn't able to skilfully write a novel. The result of the unskilled novelist would at best be an opaque, overly-writerly text, at worst impenetrable nonsense. This reminds us of Scott Esposito's claim that the 'Oulipo is best construed as an attempt to develop new forms that can withstand the strains of being made novelistic' (Elkin and Esposito, 2013: 21).

Esposito claims that new forms are dependent on existing within old forms. And so it was with Project 3. This was a piece of theatre and that form needed to be

recognisable to be coherent, in however unruly a way, to the audience. As the performer, I needed to be theatrically skilled in order to grasp the rules of coherent presentation.

Combinations and multiplicity

James draws attention to the 'formal thematic tension between coherence and unity on the one hand and multiplicity and fragmentation on the other' (2009: 148-149).

The system of a combination of constraints in *Life A User's Manual* means that although the systematisation is there for the author, the result for the reader is one of disjuncture and fragmentation (James, 2009: 148-149). Similarly with Project 3, one result of the combination of constraints was that changes of narrative direction were inevitable. This was a result of a combinatory rationale of constraint, but can be read for the audience as a surrealist jolt (Barthes, 1977: 144), a change of direction that while systematic, appears chaotic. In contemporary theatre practice this same observable result may come from a strategy of juxtaposition or intentional misdirection. However, these are processes quite different from those used in Project 3. Project 3 involved carefully constructing live moments from applicable constraints, constraints that allowed for the clinamen performer to behave as an autonomous conduit. James states that in *Life A User's Manual*, 'the constraints, although they are an organizational principle, also create fragmentation and unpredictability that remain perceptible on the surface of the text' (2009: 151). James quotes Perec on his use of bi squares as saying that they are, 'the most adequate expression of a determined randomness' (2009: 149). The building of combinational instruction is essentially deterministic, but at the same time allows for freedom and most importantly unpredictability. This is an instrument towards freewill, which is the starting point to the original Epicurean usage of the term clinamen. This clarifies the problem of that which is deterministic and that which is a result of freewill. Perec is essentially acknowledging the necessity of freewill in the creation of art, but in so far as it is an essential organising principle rather than the result of an inspired artist.

James calls Perec's work a 'paradoxical programming of chance' (2009: 151). However, we must recall the discussions previously outlined in this thesis that

include Oulipians Queneau and Berges' proclamations on being anti-chance (James, 2009: 109-118). For the Oulipo, the clinamen presents a clear medium, not for chance but for choice, and this is an important distinction. The clinamen paves the way for controlled or informed choice: or by another name, play. The best play happens when the players know the rules of the game well and are then left to freely operate within its restrictions. Knowledge of the fact of the restrictions makes the playing tenable. Project 3, like *Life A User's Manual*, worked in combinatorial format, with me, the performer, working simultaneously with several different constraints.

The application of constraint in Project 3 developed from the families of constraints found in Project 2. In Project 2, the design of constraints created both potential and necessity for more constraints, as discussed within Bök's assertion that oulipian structures are 'an array of rules for exploring an array of rules' (2006: 183). In Project 3 however, constraints were used differently. Rather than being used in advance of the performance to shape material, the constraints needed to be held within the performer's consciousness, ready to be implemented when triggered by the performance environment. These constraints formed something of a rhizomatic web, operating as a set of interrelated chain reactions. The performer needed to simultaneously remember what the constraints were, while looking for the potential in the performance environment to implement them. This took the form of a kind of parallel processing. As Daniel Levin Becker points out, potential exists in the successful development of constraints that have a future (2012: 168), that can stretch beyond themselves and evolve into multiple iterations and generate a lineage. An example of this is the *Material Triangulation* constraint of Project 3 (Appendix D). Influenced by the Project 2 constraints that involved threes, this constraint was based on the idea of being able to map, or pinpoint a location for material to be generated. Although triangulation usually happens in the physical world in a geographical sense, in this case it was used metaphorically to uncover performance material. This marks for the first time in the investigation the use of cumulative constraints or stimuli coming together to create performance material during the performance.

Constraints in Action

In the live moment, multiple constraints were applied simultaneously. For example, by using the *Content from the day in history* constraint, which involved pre-performance research into historical events of the day, I discovered that for one of the performances the day marked the anniversary of the first telegraph message sent between London and Paris. I began improvising the possible content of that telegraph message while simultaneously deploying the *Oratory registers/contexts (Stand Up Comedy)* constraint and the *Content Cues* constraint – in this instance, the presence of my mother in the audience (who was born in colonial France) – resulting in a French accent. The content generated in this moment came together through the *Material Triangulation* constraint – the result of a given triangulation of the constraints and the material gathered from those constraints. The result of this specific example can be seen in *Project 3 Example 1*.²¹ Of course, this kind of performer behaviour may occur in any kind of improvisation exercise. *Material Triangulation* does not need to be named in order to occur. However, in line with oulipian poetics, it is the raising of these constraints in the consciousness of the performer that allows the performer to first understand them, and then to master them. *Material Triangulation* could in essence be considered as rule, strategy or theatrical tendency, but in this context it was heightened and forced to occur outside of the usual phenomena of improvisation, this is what turns it into a constraint that pushes the generative results into unpredictable territory. As outlined by Levin Becker below, constraints exist despite our acknowledgement of them; and as Bök continues, we must know them to become emancipated from them:

Writers are constrained whether or not they acknowledge it – not just by the strictures of poetic forms like the sonnet or haiku, but also by the conventions of their chosen genre, the format in which they publish, even the grammar and lexicon of their native (or adoptive) language.
(Levin Becker, 2012: 12)

²¹ <https://vimeo.com/241501444> password – constraint

Oulipo argues that to fathom such rules emancipates us from them, since we gain mastery over their unseen potential, whereas to ignore such rules quarantines us in them, since we fall servile to their covert intention.

(Bök, 2006: 182)

An explanation of how *Material Triangulation* worked in the example described above can be seen in the *Constraint Relationship Diagram 1.0* below:

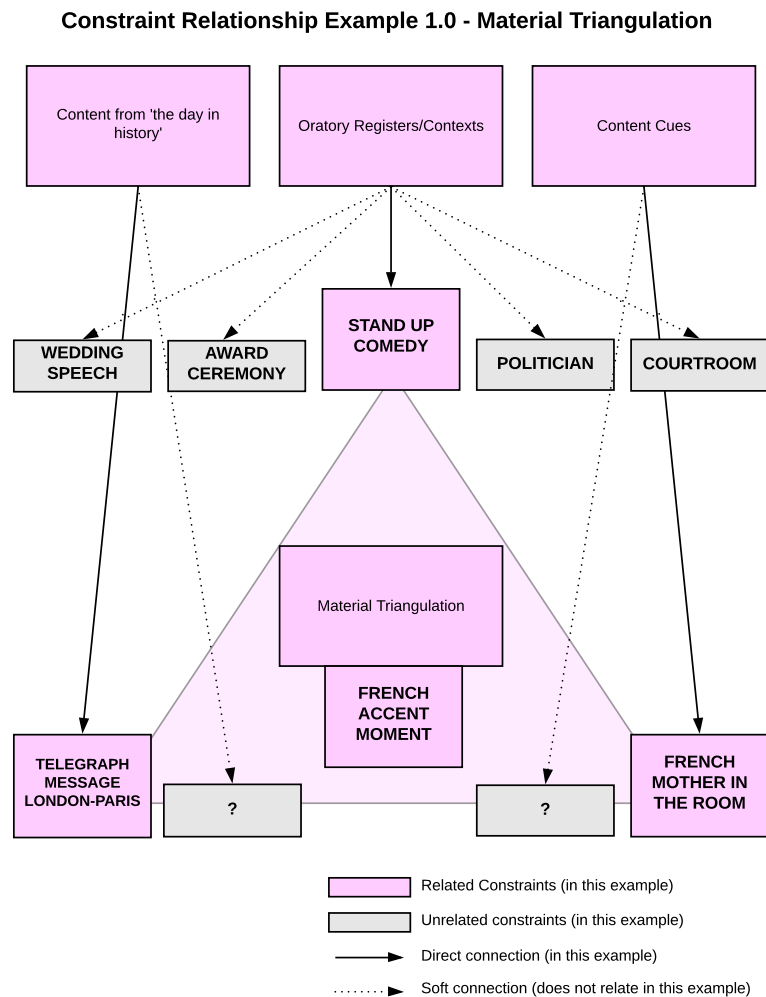


Figure 8 Project 3 Constraint Relationship Example 1

The next example of Project 3 material involves constraints working in a combination of both parallel and in series processes, to create a performance moment. Each *Oratory registers/contexts* constraint was placed within one of the six-minute intervals that resulted from the *Scribe's Sectioning constraint*, described earlier. This pairing meant that the constraints occurred in parallel. In the moment

of performance the *Oratory registers/contexts properties* constraint was then used to add physical objects to the predominantly verbal constraints of the oratory registers. In order to locate a property to use, the performer had the option of using the *Stolen objects* constraint. As this chain reaction continued, another constraint was used to pull together the potential of the constraints into a performance moment. The *Paper/document motivators/resolvers* constraint, developed again from Scribe's well-made play, was used to tie the constraints together. *Constraint Relationship Diagram 2.0* illustrates the links between constraints in this moment:

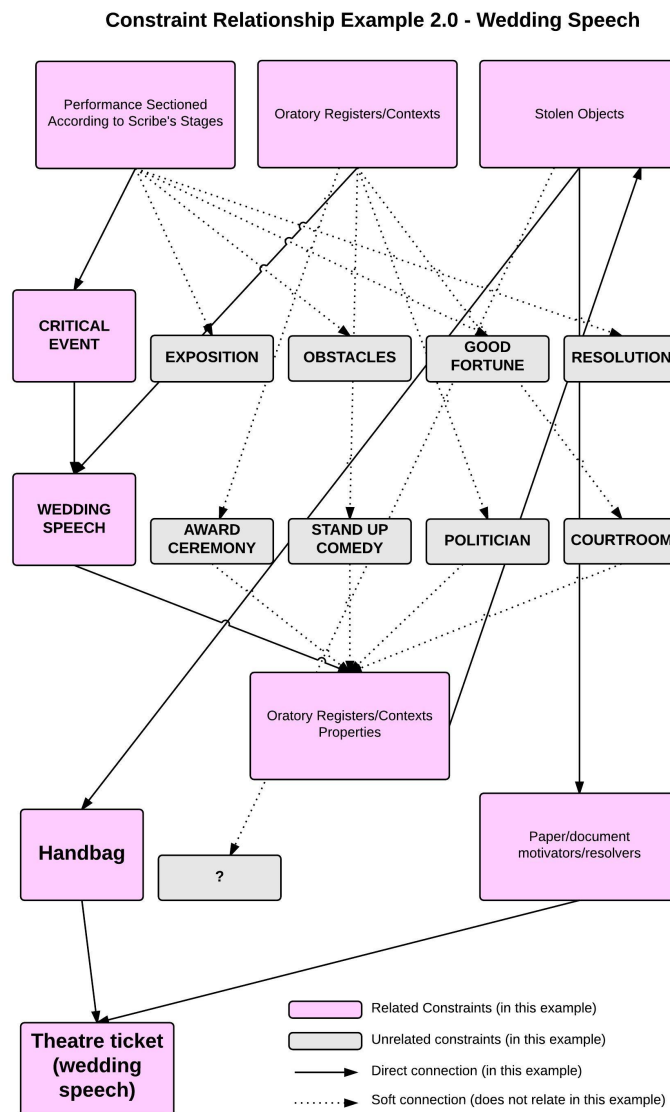


Figure 9 Project 3 Constraint Relationship Example 2

The table below steps through the outcomes of these constraints in the moment of performance, the resultant moment of performance can also be seen in *Project 3 Example 2*:²²

Performance Moment	Related Constraint
Performer outlining material that could be considered a critical event.	<i>Scribe's sectioning constraint (Critical Event section)</i>
1) Performer takes a glass of wine from an audience member. 2) Performer takes a handbag from an audience member.	<i>Stolen objects</i>
Performer stands at the microphone and behaves as if about to deliver a speech.	<i>Oratory registers/contexts (Wedding Speech section)</i>
Performer holds the wine and performs as if inebriated. Performer behaves as if trying to find a prepared speech.	<i>Oratory registers/contexts properties</i>
Performer searches handbag for a document (a used theatre ticket) and reads as if it is a wedding speech.	<i>Paper/document motivators/resolvers Content from 'the day in history'</i>

Table 5 Project 3 Performance Moments Example

Some of the constraints used above are part of the same family, they are causally linked and/or make sense together through *Material triangulation*. The constraints are designed to fit and mould around one another, some do so very obviously, others offer the potential to do so.

In oulipian work, James points out, 'it becomes difficult to distinguish between the 'mechanical' and the 'expressive'' (2009: 151-152). The same is true for Project 3 and this is part of what makes the group, and perhaps my work, successful. From a readership point of view, the work is both readerly and writerly: accessible, relatively

²² <https://vimeo.com/253036367> password – **constraint**

normative, but still needs to be worked out. Project 3 presented an inability for the audience to either top-down or bottom-up decode the constraints at play. The performance material emerged from a distinct training regime that saw the central constraining conduit to the content, the clinamen performer, complicate the traceability of the work presented. In Project 3 the clinamen performer, the person inhabited by constraint, provides a live articulation of performance misprision. This swerving from the predicable through the creation of live performance work that is uncertain, by extension questions the certainty of performance.

A Moment of Reflection

Before and while embarking on the journey of Project 3, I was personally convinced that this would be my favourite kind of work to perform. I predicted that a set of structures and constraints, absolutely fixed in concept, but unfixed in process (generation) would combine the most exciting of my theatrical tendencies. Reflecting on the public performances of Project 3, I notice myself at my happiest and unhappiest moments of performing. I deployed my arsenal of theatrical skills to engage an audience; playing with humour, silence, eye contact and irony; I struggled to keep up with myself as I attempted to synthesise my learned constraints. While watching the documentation of the work, I notice the profitable decisions I made (some of which have already been highlighted), and crucially, I see myself improve over the course of the four performances. Experience in dealing with the constraints accounts for some of this improvement of course, but I also saw myself more confidently manoeuvring in and out of the risky situations that so thrill me as a performer. As a performer, I like to improvise, I like to inhabit the live moment and I like to set risky challenges for myself in the performance space. My practice before this study often involved setting myself problems to solve in the live moment, for example interacting with the audience²³ or setting myself extremely difficult tasks to sustain.²⁴ However, I am a calculated risk taker and the thrill of tackling a challenge in the moment of performance has always remained tempered by a desire to operate confidently within the limits of my own capabilities. Project 3

²³ For example, in my performance *Villa* I bring audience members into the space to assume roles in the show (2009).

²⁴ for example, in my durational performance *The Speech Maker*, I deliver a 12-hour uninterrupted speech (2011)

presented an interesting proposition: to train myself to deal with the riskiest situation I have ever encountered as a performer, but in a context of specific, distanced stability. Constraints, as articulated previously in this thesis, allegedly remove recourse to talent or inspiration, they are the sole muse. The personality of the constraint is intended (whether or not an audience realise this) to overshadow the personality of the author. Of course, in Project 3 and performance work of this kind, the author is literally present in the work and the mastering of the constraints of the training regime was crucial in dealing with the situation of generating content live. However, I have also learned that my own capacity as a performer, my own tendencies and the bents contained within my body, are synonymous with the clinamen performer. I am a constraint, and a better performer for realising it.

Conclusion

To conclude, I return to my research questions and summarise my findings. My central research questions were:

**What are the performance applications of the poetics of the Oulipo (Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle) and how might they service the creation of new performance work?
In turn, how might these performance applications illuminate the Oulipo?**

Each Project addressed the central research questions through an additional project question. Each of these project questions necessitated a practical focus on particular aspects of oulipian poetics that would in turn help illuminate the Oulipo.

The project research questions were:

Project 1 research question:

How might the constraints and methods of the Oulipo be used to inform a new lexicon of terms that can generate performance content?

Project 2 research question:

How might the constraints and methods of the Oulipo be used to design and shape the composition, construction and form of new performance work?

Project 3 research question:

How might the constraints and methods of the Oulipo be used to guide and direct the live moment of performance?

These project research questions formed extremely valuable starting points for each piece of practical exploration. Although undertaken in series, the projects will be drawn together for this conclusion and discussed in parallel. This will best represent the cumulative learning of the study in relation to how constraints serviced the creation of performance work and led to a further illumination of the Oulipo.

Création

My unravelling of the Oulipo through the consideration of constraint in performance practice was, due to the unidirectional nature of time, undertaken in series, one project at a time. Knowledge, of course, is not unlearned and so this study has a cumulative quality. The study started with consideration of the group's poetics drawn from a primary oulipian source, the *Lipo*, specifically approaching the methods of analysis and synthesis, or anoulipism and synthoulipism (Le Lionnais, 2007: 26-28). Reductively expressed in binary terms as firstly the understanding of, and secondly the making of, literature, Le Lionnais, also in *Lipo*, clearly points out that between these two undertakings there exists 'many subtle channels' (2007: 28). The blurring of distinctions here echoes Bök's ruminations on poesis and mathema (2004: 70-71), defined by Bök as generation and study respectively, and alludes to an inherent flexibility in oulipian poetics that is perhaps not immediately obvious. Bénabou's theories of revelation (Clarke, 2016: 877-891), when considered within the performance practice of constraint, are a ternary that becomes quickly untenable. The conflation of forced, external and internal revelation is largely due to the overlapping and complex ingredients of performance practice that additionally allows us to reconsider Le Lionnais' indication that subtle channels must exist between anoulipism and synthoulipism. The subtleties of literature and the Oulipo have been thrown into relief by this study because performance practice necessarily problematises the relationship between authorship and readership. In performance practice, the complexities of a three dimensional context, often created collaboratively, together with a self-directed reader, provides a valuable lens for unpacking the Oulipo, one which a study of literature alone simply can't manage. The subtle channels that exist between anoulipism and synthoulipism in oulipian literature become not-so-subtle channels in performance practice. Analysis and synthesis within this study, together with different kinds of constraint revelation, have occurred simultaneously because performance practice demands a collaborative approach and dialogic relationship with the reader that literature, at first glance, does not. Consequently the relationship between the reader and writer, specifically the author's readerly presence in constraint-based literature, is

illuminated by the demonstrative expansion of this issue in performance practice and has been discussed in this thesis.

The generation, or synthoulipism, of performance material in this study (in particular Projects 1 and 3) occurred some distance from the literary page. Instead, the generation occurred in the live space of a workshop (Project 1) or the moment of performance (Project 3), and this required a combination of thought processes that problematized Kahneman's positioning of fast and slow thinking (2011) discussed earlier. The privileging of the slow, rational and calculated in oulipian literature, with some notable exceptions, is simply not possible in terms of the generation of live moments of performance. The apparent instinctual and therefore irrational (in Kahneman's terms) endeavour of the performance maker, forms a significant thread of the inquiry that runs throughout this thesis. Donald Schön's notion of reflection-in-action (1999), posits a model that superficially accounts for the tacit knowledge of the artist. Ultimately however, the persistence of mastery and conscious understanding in oulipian poetics meant that Schön was not sufficient in addressing this issue. Consequently, this study needed to articulate a deeper consideration of the relationship between the objective, slow and rational, and the embodied, apparently ungraspable and inspired undertakings of the artist. We have found transferable argument here in Queneau's conflict with the surrealists and their privileging of the unconscious. Queneau, as discussed previously, presents the notion that with enough labour the instinctual and unconscious mind are perfectly understandable after all. The Oulipo believe that an unwillingness to commit to the task of conscious mastery is all that prevents one from gaining it. That which we do by recourse to tendency, often established rules, has become a useful way of describing instinct in this study. Discerning the difference between rules and constraints further compounds the notion that consciousness of constraint elicits their potential, whereas a lack of awareness puts one at the mercy of them.

This distinction between rules and constraints, addressed in the reflections of Project 2 of this thesis, is crucial when considering constraints in live performance. Rules, in this thesis, are positioned as predicable and constraints are positioned as unpredictable (and therefore connected to potential). Constraints are super

conscious, intrusive and tied tightly to the work they generate. This super consciousness, in complete opposition to chance-based activity, aleatory art or any reliance on the unconscious, or at least that of which we are unaware, reinforces the oulipian desire for mastery. That generation can be mastered also reminds us of the quest for *la langue originelle* (Consenstein, 2002: 24), which asserts that language is not baseless as post-structural scholarship might suggest. Saussure's primary declaration of the interconnectivity of language (2005) is not only upheld by a group who obsess over language but is additionally seen as fully attainable, conquerable even, by working towards the finite and exhaustible original language and, ultimately, truth. In both literature and performance practices this quest for truth can be seen as an activity one might train for, a training regime that must leave no creative avenue unexplored – Oulipians believe that knowledge is power in this context.

Operating under constraint forces the artist to analyse their own tools and skills, to be self-reflective by fully understanding both their own limitations and strengths. Through a regime of visualisation and the labour of constraint consideration, I trained during Project 3 to become an author of live constraint in a very particular way. This training served not just as a potential method for the generation of performance material but also in positioning the human as central to discussion around constraint. The notion of training as a theatrical equivalent to the act of obtaining mastery in literature laid open the path for tackling constraint in performance at a fundamental level in Project 3. A text might speak of the constraint under which it was generated (Bénabou in Clarke, 2016: 880), and the natural extension of that concept in an improvised performance is the moment where the text is the performer. The performer is both subject to the performance constraints and the subject of the performer, a figure who embodies constraint to become a walking, talking content generator. We are reminded here of Jarry's chaotic machine in *Dr Faustroll* that constantly spews paint, over time creating and exhausting every artwork possible (Jarry: 1996: 88-89). Jarry's machine of course was the clinamen, which leads to my conclusions concerning the alleged unquantifiability of the human within the equation of generating constraint through performance.

As discussed at length in the reflections on Project 3, beyond the simple rule-break or departure from a constraint, the clinamen represents a deviation from the predictable outcome of a performance moment or process. In Projects 1 and 2 this was the live performer, clinamens in so far as they are difficult to quantify or predict. In Project 3 the clinamen became recognised as the clinamen performer, the personification of uncertainty, but additionally became a constraint in its own right. The clinamen is what prevents the myth, the constraint, the uncertainty, from becoming a hypothesis, an established rule, or as Michael Kirby would put it, a theory tending to completeness (1987: xix). The clinamen performer exists to ensure cyclical inexhaustibility through misprision, the human embodiment of imperfection that allows the oulipian game to keep being played. The discovery of the clinamen performer (always was there and so was never invented), sheds light on an oulipian poetics of misdirection, an homage to original language. The clinamen performer is an organising principle and not a gateway to the chaotic. The clinamen performer is unavoidable in performance practice, whether highlighted, as in this context, or subject to itself in an environment where it has no visibility. We are reminded again of Bök's assertion that failure to understand the constraint leaves us at the mercy of it (2006: 82).

Rumination

In March 2014, I attended a Teesside University hosted conference titled *Species of Spaces* (named after the Georges Perec text, *Espèces d'espaces*, 1974/2008), a transdisciplinary conference addressing the influences of Georges Perec on various arts practices. In 2016 I presented a paper based on Project 2 of this study at a transdisciplinary conference titled *Perecian Geographies* at Sheffield University. I'm currently developing that paper into a book chapter. In 2016 my article 'Playing with Constraint: Performing the OuLiPo and the Clinamen Performer', which addresses my performance in, and co-direction of, Perec's *The Machine* (2011) and my initial reflections on the clinamen performer, was published in *Performance Research Journal*. I am currently working on *The Raise (l'augmentation)*, another radio play of Perec's, for production later this year. In addition to their status as examples of

research, all three of the projects of this study have been performed in professional contexts.

I still have much to do following the completion of this study. The insight of constraint for the generation of performance practices has been solidified through all three of the projects in this study. Project 1 culminated in 26 unique constraints, ready for appropriation in theatrical terms. The processes of this study also delivered a clear articulation of how many existing literary constraints could be used in a live performance context. The disentanglement of rules and constraints, theorised in detail within this thesis, demonstrate clear evidence of the distinction between the rules and task-based activities of contemporary performance practice, and the overtly conscious consideration of constraints. This study has been my personal journey but the resultant practical learning can be applied by other artists. The layered, holistic constraints of Project 2 have articulated the results of direct application of families of interrelated constraints in guiding a work of theatre. This project not only demonstrated how constraints may be scenographically explored and how mathematical formulae can be conflated with the human qualities of the performer to direct the action, but also provided an interesting dramaturgical model for the approaching of existing playtexts using constraints. Project 3 articulated a model for improvisation and training under constraint, which considered the human tendencies of the performer and how they may become proficient in dealing with constraint in a live context. This involved the reconsideration of established, predictable rules and tendencies in combination with the uncertain results of constraint imposition. These are all examples of how this study has offered insight into contemporary performance making by appropriating the poetics of the longest running literary group in French history. The results of this research are tools, concepts and applicable models that are transferrable.

But this is only part of the story. The lens of contemporary performance making has additionally provided an opportunity to reflect on the poetics of a group geared towards the generation of literature.

Érudition

The shifting of variables from literature to performance has helped me consider in greater depth the philosophy of the Oulipo in ways not possible without the practical application of their poetics to performance practice. The culmination or cumulative effect of generating constraints in this study has built in the same way as the practices of the Oulipians themselves, consequently shedding new light on families of constraints for a group whose methodology is bound up in essentially reflexive activities. This illumination has occurred through the introduction of oulipian poetics to the live encounter, experienced by both audiences to, and performers in, the work.

To return to the notion of ‘many subtle channels’ described in the *Lipo*, the flexibility and movement this possibility allows between avenues of oulipian poetics is crucial. The Oulipo considers many ideas that settle into binary positions, many of which can be grouped. Using analysis and synthesis as a starting point, the relative binaries considered throughout this thesis are as follows:

Analysis	Synthesis
Mythology	Myth
Rules	Constraints
Seriousness	Play
Fixed	Unfixed
Past	Future

The first half of the table groups the serious activity of the analysis of established rules in the fixed mythology of the past. The second half of the table groups the playful activities of using the uncertain application of the constraint-myth to synthesise towards an unfixed future. These terms, all addressed within this thesis, paint a picture of areas of oulipian activity uncovered through the act of contemplating constraint in performance practice. However, the caveat of the many subtle channels between anoulipism and synthoulipism is equally applicable to the broader notions represented through the endeavour of oulipian poetics. As discussed previously, this flexibility explains the group’s apparent disinclination

towards a bigger politics or an established oulipian mythology. The Oulipo dive in and out of the various rules and conventions of literature, with a view to the transformation, by misprision – or unavoidable misinterpretation leading to their disregarding – of fixed notions of the written form. At their core, the group believes in the *langue originelle*, the finite but vast possibilities of language. The Oulipo recognise the complexity and enormity of their task, characterised by the foregrounding of potential, but similarly understand that these games of language can end at any given point; the sign is not floating as Kristeva suggests, there is in fact no schism in the sign (Motte, 2002: 24) – indeed, the sign can be mastered.

The consideration of multiple perspectives on constraint that live performance demands, for example in the generation of constraints for performance in Project 1, led those constraints to a kind of intertextuality or conflating of forms. The development of theatrical versions of literary constraints as practiced in Projects 1 and 2 were insightful in terms of their ability to generate permutation, families of constraints, and give insight into how constraints can work both in parallel and in series. Constraints like *Simultaneous Play Triplication*, deployed in Project 2, are the closest that this study has got to achieving a theatrical version of literary constraints. *SPT* progressed other constraints and provided a set of theatrical restrictions for the performers, but ultimately this was not the pure poetics that this study imagined uncovering at the start. The unquantifiable performer has prevented the purity of constraint in theatre that is so much more obtainable in literature. Generation of material for live performance demands multiple authors, or at least participants, and so throws into relief and problematises the logistics of the generative constraint. Constraints have been anthropomorphised in this study – rather like the literary character of vowels in Bök's *Eunoia* (2001) – and have been amplified by the clinamen performer. The cumulative effect of this burrowing close to the human in generative constraint was firstly built through the undertaking of workshops during the processes of Project 1. The human was considered further by the fallible triplication and overt differences in the actors of Project 2, together with the constraints that focussed on the individual human performer, like the ethical discussions formula and *movement according to body weight* constraint. Finally, Project 3 introduced the personification and embodiment of constraint. Project 3

involved the training of the clinamen performer in dealing with constraints through improvisation. This training positions the performer as a recognisable constraint, no longer positioning the constraint outside of the body. This training isn't synonymous with the labour of practicing to become an expert in writing in lipogram or portmanteau. Instead it is a recognition of the exhaustible human, with all their tendencies and bents, a realising of the consciousness of human limitation, an understanding of that which is vital to live performance work. The essentially limited nature of the human being engaging in constraint was highlighted earlier in this thesis by Umberto Eco's observation that the artist is subject to 'specific limits of a given taste, or of predetermined formal tendencies, and is authorised by the concrete pliability of the material offered for the performer's manipulation' (James, 2009: 121). The human, the clinamen performer, is fundamentally limited, making exhaustion of permutation impossible, similar to the oulipian penchant for order and uncertainty. The clinamen performer embodies the dual tendencies of consciousness and exhaustion, the potential in unquantifiable *as ifs* – the pataphysical multiplicity of all options imaginable. This elevates the clinamen further, positioning it not just as an oulipian option, but as a necessity. This indicates a rationale for the group's longevity and success. It is on these terms that the gradual discovery of the clinamen performer has acted as a critical conduit in reflecting on the Oulipo. The clinamen as constraint is an absolute certainty in the generation of live performance under constraint and illuminates the clinamen as an essential organising principle in oulipian poetics.

The poetics of the Oulipo represent an expansion of the possibilities of literature through the application of constraints that yield unpredictable results. The group's dedication to the paradoxical pursuit of the exhaustion of potential serves to uncover myriad possibilities otherwise unconsidered. The distinctiveness of the Oulipo is the group's committed desire to catalogue, to harness their various experiments, to provide documentation to 'inspire writing projects but also make them cleverer, richer, weirder – in short, liberate them' (Levin Becker, 2012: 33). This desire to capture is illustrative of the old arguments of the (post)Moderns and the Ancients alluded to by Oulipian Jacques Roubaud (Consenstein, 2002: 126). Failure to contain or master literature would result in the exploding of literature, leaving

fragments that demonstrate nothing more than disconnected pieces of language. However, the holding and fixing of the permutations of literature is elegant, it speaks of aesthetic closure, it is full, exhausted and complete – a settled, original language. But that which is fixed is in danger of falling foul of the predicable, of becoming conclusive and conventional. The clinamen, raised up and literally personified by the application of oulipian poetics to performance practices, is the swerve that prevents conclusive exhaustion and keeps the experiment from the threat of predicting itself. The clinamen performer is a perpetual breath of fresh air that, once recognised as a constraint for both literature and performance, tirelessly prevents the ultimate and perhaps deadly fixedness of both.

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Video Documentation

Project 1 Documentation, <https://vimeo.com/98730765> password – **constraint**

Project 2 Documentation, <https://vimeo.com/241685687> password – **constraint**

Project 3 Documentation, <https://vimeo.com/241500569> password – **constraint**

Project 1 Workshop Samples, <https://vimeo.com/70507350> password – **constraint**

Project 3, Example 1, <https://vimeo.com/241501444> password – **constraint**

Project 3, Example 2, <https://vimeo.com/253036367> password – **constraint**

Appendices

(overleaf)

Appendix A: Project 1 Constraint List

Oulipo constraints are taken from *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature* (Motte, 2007: 209-214)

Oulipo Constraint	Performance Equivalent Physical	Performance Equivalent Verbal	Performance Equivalent Temporal	Performance Equivalent Environmental
ALPHABETICAL DRAMA A short theatrical form in which the lines spoken by the actors homophonically mimic the sound of a person reciting the alphabet	Head nods when speaking - to mimic the rhythm of alphabet recitation.	Lines spoken by the performers homophonically mimic the sound of a person reciting the alphabet	Text must be delivered in exactly 26 seconds, or graduations of 26.	Space split into 26 sections, each performer moves through the sections sequentially according to the structure of the work.
ANAPHORA Repetition of a word at the beginning of successive utterances: e.g., I came, I saw, I conquered.	Physical repetition at the start of each sentence spoken, e.g. getting up and out of a chair (see also - PROTHESISIS & TAUTOGRAM).	Repetition of a statement at the beginning of successive lines e.g., "I have to tell you this...xxx", "Let me tell you this...xxx".	The first word of any line must take exactly 'x' seconds to pronounce.	Starts of sections/texts must start at the same point in the space (see also - TAUTOGRAM). ¹¹
ANASTROPHE Inversion of word order.	Inversion/swapping of two or more 'expected' physical movements during line delivery.	Inversion/re-ordering of words in each line of text, eg "A-B-C-D", replaced by "C-D-A-B".	Long words are delivered quickly, short words slowly.	Costumes/properties are available in inverse alignment to when they are required.

Oulipo Constraint	Performance Equivalent Physical	Performance Equivalent Verbal	Performance Equivalent Temporal	Performance Equivalent Environmental
<p>ANTONYMIC TRANSLATION (+ANTIRHYME) A process of textual production that involves the transformation of an utterance into its contrary, along a given axis of symmetry. The latter may be situated at any level: that of the individual word, of grammatical characteristics, or of the general signification of an utterance.</p>	<p>Partner directly offers the physical anti-version of the physical performance of the other performer.</p>	<p>Partner directly offers the verbal anti(antonym)version of text just spoken.</p>	<p>There is either no time, or too much time.</p>	<p>Proximity to audience is in direct opposition to appropriate content.</p>
<p>APHAERESIS The omitting of a syllable or a letter at the beginning of a word: e.g., bo for "hobo."</p>	<p>The omitting of any physical movement or gesture during the first section of a spoken line.</p>	<p>The omitting of a syllable or a letter at the beginning of a word: e.g., bo for "hobo."</p>	<p>Omitted movement or text (see previous 2 boxes) are played out at a later/earlier time.</p>	<p>The stifling of physical space at the start of a performance moment.</p>

Oulipo Constraint	Performance Equivalent Physical	Performance Equivalent Verbal	Performance Equivalent Temporal	Performance Equivalent Environmental
BEAU PRESENT Acrostic devise - first letter of words create a new message	Gesture sequence 're-sets' after initial movement (emphasis/importance of 'first-things')	Speaker pronounces only first letters (performed cumulatively with the rhythm of sensical words/phrases).	Cumulative time constraints (equivalent of hidden messages).	The most important word/moment in any sentence is spoken from the same (e.g. heightened) space.
BELLE ABSENTI A form of acrostic encoding in which the letters of a given name are the only letters not used in the text. In verse forms, one letter may be excluded in each verse the name is thus progressively spelled out in absentia. (presents through absence)	Overtly reference/mention movements that are not carried out - there by not being there.	Letters spelling a word/s (e.g. 'will self') are excluded (he becomes there through absentia)	Lengthy digression (aural/physical) over long periods without declaration (absence)	Large sections of space are described but uninhabited.
BRACHYLOGIA An abridged expression	'Face phrases' abridged.	Spoken sentences become abridged.	Time to comprehend this task is constrained (explanation opaque (not for both participants)).	Leaving out unnecessary parts of the space (by demonstration).

Oulipo Constraint	Performance Equivalent Physical	Performance Equivalent Verbal	Performance Equivalent Temporal	Performance Equivalent Environmental
CHRONOGRAM A text in which certain letters, when placed together, form a date in Roman numerals.	Body posed in roman numerals shapes e.g. V=arms up, X=arms legs apart etc.	A date is attributed to the subject of every sentence.	The style/genre/feel of the performance is played out as if in the past e.g. old language, past tense.	Mapping out roman numerals in the space while delivery text (i.e. date of birth).
CRASIS Contraction of two syllables/letters into one.	Movement only exists in simultaneous pairs or 'double bursts' into 'rests'.	Every two words spoken becomes one word e.g. Simon Dykes = Sikes.	Only allow moments of narrative disclosure to exist in 'pairs'.	Being in two spaces at the same time...
DEPORTMANTEAU WORD Division of portmanteau words into original constitutive elements.	Physical deconstruction of coincidental gesture.	Unpacking of texts meaning i.g. etymology of every word.	Words/movement are broken in two - first part delivered, latter part brought back later.	Space is structured as human body (birds eye view) verbal of physical emphasis in any given sequence must be performed in corresponding space.
DIARESIS The division of one syllable into two.	Every significant gesture is performed twice	Every spoken syllable becomes two spoken syllables	Sequence/movement/text - is repeated a different time. (Division of material)	Material divided (mirrored) in the space

Oulipo Constraint	Performance Equivalent Physical	Performance Equivalent Verbal	Performance Equivalent Temporal	Performance Equivalent Environmental
<p>EDGES OF POEM Process of textual production. uses first and last verses and last words of intervening verses of given poem.</p>	<p>Only using the edges of extremities e.g. finger, toes, tops of heads etc.</p>	<p>Speaking only the first and last sentences of the text and last words of intervening sentences.</p>	<p>Average sentence length is 14.3 words per sentence. First and last moments must last 14.3 times longer than sandwiched material</p>	<p>Only the edges of the space are used.</p>
<p>EPANALEPSIS (+ PALINDROME) Repetition at the end of an utterance of the word with which it began. "I would like that, would I".</p>	<p>Ending with the same gesture you started with.</p>	<p>Repetition at the end of an utterance of the word with which it began. "I would like that, would I".</p>	<p>Mirror sentences - "how are you you are how" or thematically with tense - future---past. "I'm going to the doctors, it was traumatic" (see also - METATHESIS).</p>	<p>Always ending in the same space that you started.</p>
<p>EPENTHESIS Insertion of a letter, phoneme or syllable into the middle of a word e.g. visitating for visiting</p>	<p>Insertion of dramatic physical gesture in the centre of moments.</p>	<p>Insertion of a phoneme or syllable into the middle of a word e.g. visitating for visiting.</p>	<p>Changes of pace/time (sloooow/fst) within words, sentences or moments.</p>	<p>Properties inserted in unexpected moments.</p>

Oulipo Constraint	Performance Equivalent Physical	Performance Equivalent Verbal	Performance Equivalent Temporal	Performance Equivalent Environmental
GEMINATION Doubling of initial syllables	Doubling of gesture at the start of moments.	Doubling of initial syllables spoken	Doubling initial phrases of movement.	Using the space in "T-formation".
HAIKUIZATION A process that retains the rhyming parts of a poem to form a new poem	"Seemingly" resonating movements are echoed/ carried forward.	Only pronounce words that rhyme.	"Seemingly" resonating pauses/increases of speed are echoed/carried forward.	"Best" spaces are inhabited most.
HAPLOGRAPHY An error through which a copyist deletes a segment of a text, due to the identity of the initial and final elements of the segment.	Crucial movement omitted.	Omission of "seemingly" duplicated sentiment.	Crucial details of events omitted.	perceivably frustrating performer positioning - facing the wrong way etc.
HENDIADYS A figure of speech using two nouns and the conjunction "and", rather than a noun and an adjective, to express a given idea.	Two gestures are amplified/ conjoined to add emphasis.	A figure of speech using two nouns and the conjunction "and", rather than a noun and an adjective, to express a given idea.	Tenses used in speech to produce more meaningful/ affective moments. "I was the best" to "I am the best".	Hemispheres of the space are bridged in order to reinforce potentially affective moments.

Oulipo Constraint	Performance Equivalent Physical	Performance Equivalent Verbal	Performance Equivalent Temporal	Performance Equivalent Environmental
HETROGRAM A text in which no letter is repeated.	A physical moment in which no movement is repeated	A spoken text in which no word is repeated	/	No physical space is never occupied more than once in a given section.
HOLOPOEMS Following the principles holography, holopoems are represented as images in space. As the reader moves under (or over, or around) them, new words or verses become apparent.	The performer slowly revolves 360 degrees during a section of performance.	/	/	Audience are seated in the round - 360 degree potential view (only one view at a time) (see also - POEMS FOR MOEBIUS STRIP)
HOMOEUTELEUTON Repetition of phoneme at the end of successive utterances e.g. Rhymed verses	Physical "tick" at the end of physical phrases.	Spoken text rhymes.	Similar acts are described, that occurred at very different points in historical time.	Ends of 'phrases' are performed in consistent spaces.

Oulipo Constraint	Performance Equivalent Physical	Performance Equivalent Verbal	Performance Equivalent Temporal	Performance Equivalent Environmental
<p>HOMOMORPHISM (+ HOLORHYME) A process by which new texts are generated, which imitate the structure of a master text. The different types of homomorphisms are defined by the structure imitated: homosyntaxism, homovocalism, homophony etc.</p>	<p>Performer physically copies other performer.</p>	<p>New narrative is invented that apes previous narrative.</p>	<p>Future acts are predicted dependent on acts already committed. We can predict the future by understanding the past.</p>	<p>A physical journey is mapped and then echoed/embellished there after.</p>
<p>JAVANESE STUTTERING A form of stuttering wherein syllables, rather than phonemes, are repeated.</p>	<p>/</p>	<p>Spoken text involves heavy syllabic stuttering.</p>	<p>/</p>	<p>/</p>
<p>LA RIEN QUE LA TOUTE LA - [the nothing but everything the]. A text without nouns, verbs, or adjectives.</p>	<p>Sensory deprivation - absolutely no seeing, touching, tasting, hearing, speaking.</p>	<p>Spoken text includes no verbs, nouns or adjectives.</p>	<p>Time stops (all temporal ingredients have been removed) how we behave in stopped time...?</p>	<p>Non-space/absence/ everything/nothing.</p>

Oulipo Constraint	Performance Equivalent Physical	Performance Equivalent Verbal	Performance Equivalent Temporal	Performance Equivalent Environmental
LIPOGRAM A given letter does not appear in the text)	No performer-to-performer eye contact.	A given letter does not appear in spoken text.	Memory loss.	Removal of light/darkness.
L.S.D "Litterature Semo-Definicionelle": Semo-Definitional Literature. Various effects are obtained through the substitution of the definitions of given words within a text for the words themselves.	Physical gesture of the partner is replicated through 'Verbal' L.S.D.	Each sentence/phrase of spoken must include a LSD for at least one word.	Any shorthand is fully explained - as if language itself may have become confused due to its etymological evolution.	Definitions of space (or factors of the space) are highlighted/described/discussed.
METATHESIS The transposition of letter or phonemes in a word: e.g., "modren" for "modern"	Transposition of gesture order in physical phrase.	Transposition of letter/phoneme in at least one word per spoken sentence	Swapping of tenses - see also EPANALEPSIS.	Reordering of space (not according rationale movement).

Oulipo Constraint	Performance Equivalent Physical	Performance Equivalent Verbal	Performance Equivalent Temporal	Performance Equivalent Environmental
PANGRAM A text containing all the letters of the alphabet.	Physical gesture must contain <u>all</u> possible variants of that gesture.	Spoken text must include <u>all</u> synonyms for at least one word.	Ingredients of time happen simultaneously - past/present/future.	Action that uses all of the three dimensional space available. (See also - SQUARE POEM)
PARAGOGUE The addition of a letter or syllable to the end of a word. Can be functional - drowned, or unnecessary - drowned.	The end gesture of a given phrase is repeated until firmly replicated.	At least one word in each spoken sentence must include an additional syllable at the end of the word.	Unnecessary added confirmations of conclusions	Additional items are perpetually added to the space, functional or unnecessary.
PARAGRAM Printers error resulting in the substitution of one letter for another.	Physical gestures include "errors" - irrational/nonsensical movement	Substitution of letters in all spoken text. I.e. A for E, etc.	Errors - temporal inaccuracy i.e. Wrong timings in movement, or wrong descriptions of events.	Errors within the space - lighting/sound/mics/props etc.
PERVERB (+ UNTRACEABLE LOCUTIONS) The juxtaposition of the first part of one proverb to the second part of another.	First performer takes the first section of a sequence of movement: Second performer takes the second part of a physical movement.	Spoken text sections juxtapose first part of one narrative with second part of another.	Narrative jumps - start/opening, immediately followed by end/conclusion.	/

Oulipo Constraint	Performance Equivalent Physical	Performance Equivalent Verbal	Performance Equivalent Temporal	Performance Equivalent Environmental
<p>POEMS FOR MOEBIUS STRIP The disposition of a poem onto a moebius strip.</p>	<p>Looped sequence of movement - with no obvious start or end point.</p>	<p>Cyclical speaking. Spoken text is on loop.</p>	<p>Time as cyclical - demonstrations of how time resets.</p>	<p>Played in the round - see also HOLOPOEMS.</p>
<p>PORTMANTEAU WORD A word that formally and semantically conflates two other words.</p>	<p>Combining of two movements in order to demonstrate a theme.</p>	<p>Combining of two words must occur at least once in each spoken sentence.</p>	<p>Conflation of two historical constraints.</p>	<p>Two environments are placed together - conflicting or complimentary i.e., dry/wet or cold/snow.</p>
<p>PROTHESIS The addition of a letter or syllable to the beginning of a word: e.g., "irregardless" for "regardless."</p>	<p>Common physical movement (sequence) issued at the start of section. (Physical Capitalisation) - see also ANAPHORA & TAUTOGRAM)</p>	<p>Addition of letter/syllable at the beginning of a word must occur at least twice in any spoken sentence.</p>	<p>More details at the start of moments/narratives than at the beginning, i.e. Highlighted contrast - massive 'set up', speedy finish.</p>	<p>Environmental overemphasis of the start of narratives. I.e., aggressive red light at angry early moment, followed by nothing.</p>

Oulipo Constraint	Performance Equivalent Physical	Performance Equivalent Verbal	Performance Equivalent Temporal	Performance Equivalent Environmental
S + 7 Each substantive in a given text is replaced by the seventh substantive following it in the dictionary.	Each movement sequence (task based) is replaced with a movement sequence that the performer predicts might occur if amplified by 7 (through quantity) - a Physical Skip.	Each spoken noun is replaced with a noun that the speaker predicts might be 7 nouns later in the dictionary.	Each movement sequence (task based) is replaced with a movement sequence that the performer predicts might occur if amplified by 7 (through time) - a Temporal Skip.	Technical/properties - delivered 7 cues early.
SNOWBALL (+ EURYPHALIC VERSE & RHOPALIC VERSE) Each segment of a text is one letter longer than the segment preceding it.	Each section of a performance text is more amplified than the last (may correspond with verbal constraint).	Within a section of spoken text - each sentence is one word longer than the preceding one.	Each scene is 'x' seconds longer than the one preceding it.	A given segment of the performance space, is incrementally 'x' cms larger than the last, the further away from the audience that it is
SPOONERISM A generally unintentional transposition of sounds in two or more words: e.g., "tee many martoonis"	/	Speakers text comprises of only spoonerisms.	Details of narrative resolution are embedded in early sections, conversely details of early sections are embedded at resolution stages. [rather like a pre-echo and strategies of 'a good story' or 'the well made play'].	/

Oulipo Constraint	Performance Equivalent Physical	Performance Equivalent Verbal	Performance Equivalent Temporal	Performance Equivalent Environmental
SQUARE POEM A form that exploits all possible permutations of a given set of four words.	Performer only has four movements they can use to communicate.	Speaker only has four words they can use to communicate.	All narrative/moments occurs in sections of 4. I.e. Only 4 parts to a story.	Three dimensions of space used (see also PANGRAM)
SYNCOPE The dropping of letters or syllables in the middle of a word or expression: e.g., "Halloween" for "all hallow even"	Physical dropping of the body during sequences of movement.	Speaker loses letter or syllables from phrases - resulting in shortening of phrase and creation of new words.	Losing of information according to conventional temporal order. (See also - S + 7).	/
TAUTOGRAM A text whose words all begin with the same letter.	All (minute) gestures start with exactly the same micro movement ('Targeted' Capitalisation, see also - ANAPHORA & PROTHESIS)	In any given sentence, all words must begin with the same letter, where possible.	All recollections/predictions start with the same detail.	All sequences start at the same place in the space (see also - ANAPHORA)

Oulipo Constraint	Performance Equivalent Physical	Performance Equivalent Verbal	Performance Equivalent Temporal	Performance Equivalent Environmental
<p>TIREUR A LA LIGNE (LARDING) Puller on the line. Interpolating of a new sentence between an existing two, then two further new sentences in the interstices thus created.</p>	<p>'Complimentary' movements after each sentence of text.</p>	<p>The addition of complementary sentences after every fixed sentence (complimentary = improvised, fixed = pre-set in workshop context)</p>	<p>Order of narrative is disrupted in time (re-ordering of sentences/action).</p>	<p>Offering 'relief/rest space' when required (e.g. large space or chair).</p>
<p>ZEUGMA A figure in which a single modifier applies in different ways to two or more words:., " the room was not light, but his fingers were."</p>	<p>A physical modifier is applied in different ways during a section of performance.</p>	<p>A spoken modifier is applied in different ways during a spoken phrase.</p>	<p>/</p>	<p>Reappropriation of space/ parts of space.</p>

Appendix B: Project 1 Programme Note

Glossary

Included here are the names of the constraints used within the performance. Some relate directly to OutLPO constraints, others less so. Some constraints have been designed through back-formation and some through front-formation.¹ All are composed of a not entirely rational, yet eclectic use of Greek, Latin, French and English. Feel free to attempt to follow the constraints live, or save them, for absorption later.

Anticsimiadæ

Ape like

Aponymagynprofanelogos

The replacement of a noun in speech by the profanity that one may imagine alphabetically follows it

Arithmosiogos

Speech pertaining to numbers

Chronoparethónymagyniogos

Speech that replicates, in sound and composition, a time in the past as imagined by the speaker

Cranial Alphabetisation

A short theatrical form in which the performer nods their head to mimic the rhythm of a person reciting the alphabet

Citation

The action of citing or quoting any words or written passage

Critical Haplogos

The omission of critical detail in speech through the error of believing the detail to be already present

Digredi Absque Déclârâre

Digression without declaration

Holo-observation

360° observation by the performer

"La Rien Que La Toute La" jouer avec le Temps

"The nothing but everything the" playing with time

Lipogrammatical Memory

A delivery of text, during which a given event (or events) of a memory is difficult to grasp or is absent completely

Logos 'Paraitiôn, Parôn, Méillon'

Speech that simultaneously occupies the past, present and future

Minaslogos

Speech pertaining to the months of the year

Narratiff-originâre from Stimulium-primus

The production of narrative that resonates with given stimulus material

Overt Subtexting

The heightening of 'subtext' in the delivery of a performance moment

Polar Binary Lighting

A lighting state may only exist in one of two states – lights on, or lights off

Somatic Antigrato-diaeresis

The division and duplication of one physical movement into two

Somaticbrachydiumâta

An abridged physical journey

Somaticpentthesis Profane

The insertion of a highly offensive physical gesture

Somaticpentthesis Ridiculus

The insertion of an irrational or nonsensical physical gesture

Somatic Planck Research

The brief, momentary but deep, examination of the constituent parts of a physical moment

Spaafinfirmos

A space of sickness

Spaocopypersonafavore

The occupation of the subjectively favourable spaces of an environment when in need of rest, comfort or safety

Square Narratives

A form of narrative that comprises four distinct events

Thesptâcheymagynempuscondensus

The performance of a given task as imagined with time condensed

Zeugma

A figure by which a single word is made to refer to two or more words in a sentence.

¹ 'Front-formation isn't a word because it just means 'formation'. After all, you wouldn't 'front-track' when you want to confirm an excellent point you've just made, you'd just say 'track' or something, right? Right.

The Stimulum-primus

A constraint alone is relatively meaningless and not particularly interesting. However, within each constraint there exists the potential, when gifted to a performer and applied to a subject, to shake forth beauty. In this case, the rich and provocative writing of Will Self has provided the initial subject matter.

Simon Dykes, the artist, awoke, his consort's hard teat cushioning his cheek. He sighed and burrowed down into the shaggy sweetness of her. The disturbing cadences of the lucid dream that, faded, replaced on waking with the remnants, the cool leftovers of their lovemaking, which cancelled out the worst of the hangover, the maculate froth from the spilt beer of last night's debauchery.

Warm water, thought Simon, that's what I need. Warm water, warm salt water up the crud-filled nose. Then coffee, then juice, then work. It would all begin in the rhinencephalon, that most ancient of neural pathways, which stretched across the front of the cerebellum, jerry-rigged by selection, the very embodiment of the individual, the cultural, peeling away from the phylogenetic, the primitive, the primate-ive.

Simon sniffed, simously. The clutch of large hairs on Sarah's teats was actually pushed up his nostrils, in amongst the crapulent deposits. A clutch of large hairs that smelt, indefinitely – for Simon – of chimpanzee. Chimpanzee, warm, cuddly furriness. Chimpanzee post-coital smell of sweat infused through fur. In its way a lovely smell – and all the more erotic for being braided with Cacharel, the perfume that Sarah always wore. The clutch of long hairs on Sarah's teat. . . . Simon lifted his head and looked full into the open, guileless, heart-shaped countenance of the beast he was in bed with.

And then he was on his feet, perhaps screaming – he could not have said because the whole world was roaring around him now. Roaring as he backed away from the bed where the beast lay, on its back, it's initially brute, dull eyes now on him with avowed interest, the white clearly visible, right the way round the greenest of pupils slit by hot jet irises.

He backed and tripped on an edge of rug, fell heavily against the windowsill feeling the hard shock of bone and wood that affirmed this was so – Sarah was gone and he had woken up in bed with this beast, or ape, or something that was so fucking big that its limbs were arranged in human attitude, the knees akimbo, the heels touching, the arms behind the torso now pushing up on the elbows to lift that animal mask towards him, the mouth opening, gaping to reveal teeth so large, canines so long –

"Wraaa!" Sarah shrieked, and then signed to the shaking figure slammed against the window, "Simon, what the fuck, are you doing, stop screaming like that!" "H'hooho!" Which Simon simply saw as the beast flexing and fiddling its hands towards him, to grasp him, with sickening speed, while it screamed, its breath whistling into carminorous yowls. So loud! The cries whined off the glass at the window, jarring his spine and back. So loud!

"Wraar-ah! Wraar-ah!" he cried, and then with deafening unoriginality, "Hoooh! H'hooh – Hahp!" He wanted to turn from the beast, turn from its mouth so large, its teeth, dripping with saliva, so long. He wanted to turn and see if he could get the sash up, if he could get down into the garden. Here he was thinking so inconsequentially – yet so pragmatically – that he considered the depth of the drop to the patio; and when it moved again he was caught off a guard he never had any way.

It moved so fast – the beast. It reared up, and then using its arms to effect springy leverage leapt bipedal. "Aaaaaa!" Sarah vocalised, truly scared now; Simon's muzzle was so pale and although not horripilating his fur was drenched with sweat. It hung in sopping hanks from those long, lovable arms, which a moment ago had been embracing her with infinite tenderness, and that now beat against the window, insensate with fear.

"Simon! 'Hooho!" I Point out to me, my love, what's the matter with you "huuu!"?

There was no thought of the window now, and the door had never been in the frame. The instant he had become aware of the beast in the bed Simon had gone fully, irreflexibly into shock. Like a silent sifter transfixed by a harsh flutter of wings, then the rap-rap-rap of beak scratching wall, scratching floor, Simon had a flying bird now in the utter confinement of his head. It was a very embodiment of the thing that he simply couldn't stand. The very alien embodiment of it. **The animal was upon him.**

Will Self, *Great Apes*, 1997

The Animal Was Upon Him



It's a ridiculous conversation, a wry two-hander of nonsensical, pseudo-philosophical badinage and silliness. It's a trip to a Victorian zoo, a filthy reading of astral constellations and what it's like to be an ape. But it's also really complicated, with more moves than the average game of chess* and a lot more sweating.

Since 1960, the *Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle*, the Workshop of Potential Literature, has used constraints and restrictions to generate new writing. This work is a live-annotated example of redesigned Oulipo constraints applied to a live theatrical context. Echoing the playful, often funny and unpredictably accessible ethos of the Oulipo, every moment of this performance is the result of an imposed constraint, without exception.

Directed by Oliver Bray, performed by Hannah Butterfield & Oliver Bray

Oliver Bray is a performance maker based in Leeds and a Senior Lecturer at Leeds Metropolitan University where he runs the MA Performance programme.

Hannah Butterfield is a theatre maker and facilitator based in Leeds. She is a member of theatre company The Souvenirs and has recently been awarded a BBC Performing Arts Fund grant working with Third Angel.

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*probably

Appendix C: Project 2 Constraint List

(1) Stimulum Primus

A theme or subject onto which one might apply further constraints.

(2) Simultaneous play triplication

In keeping with constraints involving *Three*. The play is performed three times, with triplicate casts at the same time.

(3) 180 year timespan

In keeping with constraints involving *Three*. Each version of the play is set in a different time zone, each 90 years apart.

(4) Assumed period rewriting

Each version of the play is adjusted according to the playwright's (potentially limiting/liberating) assumptions of that period.

Play 1, set in 1921, comprises original version by Boyce & Hapgood.

Play 2, set in 2011, comprises 1921 version rewritten by Oliver Bray.

Play 3, set in 2101, comprises 2011 version rewritten in predicted future dialectical form, see the formula here (Figure 1).

(5) Hour-glass text overlap

The dialogue of each play starts spoken separately, gradually increasingly overlapping until the text is spoken in unison during the middle section of the play. The text then gradually diverges again until spoken separately again in the final stages, see the model here (Figure 2).

(6) Step-and-reset-dialogue

The speakers in Play 1 (1921) always wait for previous text to be completed before moving the dialogue on. There is no cyclical overlap in dialogue transitioning between Plays 3 and 1, see diagram here (Figure 4).

(7) Performer to character homogeneity

Character traits in 'He' and 'She' characters homogenised according to the performers' response to an ethical discussion, see formula here (Table 4).

(8) 120° spatial wedging

In keeping with constraints involving *Three*. Each of the three plays has exactly 120° of the in-the-round space to occupy.

(9) Enabling spatial translocation

Movement made possible between each play space, see diagram here.

(10) Plotting spatial translocation

Movement between performance spaces is determined by a version of a Graeco-latin bi-square. Every performer occupies every possible space at least once and performs with every possible version of their partner (male/female couplings) at least once. See the formula here (Figure 5).

Exit cues are determined by performers' names numeric value, i.e. Joe Bloggs = 9, Joe would exit the space on line 9 in any given section.

(11) Action according to body weight

The frequency an individual performer standing up during the performance is determined by their body weight, see the formula here (Figure 6).

(12) Jolted quotations

Complete artist departure from content of the performance. In this case the performance comes to a complete stop exactly half way through, a voice over describes a narrative containing homophones for famous dance practitioners. These homophones trigger dance gestures in the performers related to each practitioner.

(13) Rublev's *Trinity* costuming

In keeping with constraints involving *Three*. The colour blue used as a predominant feature in the performers' costumes, replicating the use of blue as a signifier in Andrei Rublev's *Trinity* for divine celestial nature.

Appendix D: Project 3 Constraints List

Scribe sectioning

The performance sectioned according to the five stages of Scribes well-made play. Comprising crudely (1) Critical Event (2) Exposition (3) Obstacles (4) Good Fortune (5) Resolution. Each sections is afforded an equal quantity of time in the performance, i.e. a 30 min performance allows for six minutes per section.

Material triangulation

Whereby audience data is translated into performance material when combined with the other constraints. e.g. a particular audience member (known), is approached in Oratory Register (3) and encounters 'Vibe' Reversal. The three stimuli lead to an improvised moment.

Vibe reversal

Whereby the audience, or audience member's 'Vibe' is reversed in the tone of performance delivery.

Paper/document motivators/resolvers

As in Scribe's well trodden devise of using documents to compound or illustrate an important narrative. All documents must be sourced live.

Stolen objects

Whereby a bag (or similar) is apprehended near the start of the performance for the purpose of providing illustration/explicate narrative lines.

Physical mirroring

Whereby an individuals overt gestural traits must be mirrored by the performer.

Oratory registers/contexts

Loosely generated from the folk rhyme 'Tinker Tailor Soldier Sailer' and modified into: (1) Award Ceremony (2) Wedding Speech (3) Stand Up Comedy (4) Politician (5) Courtroom. These registers set a particular performance tone, or set of symptoms or traits, for the performer.

Oratory registers/context properties

Sourced live to creatively compliment narrative lines and Oratory registers/contexts.

Out of the ordinary inculcation

Whereby any unexpected event (including body, noise or other) is pulled into the content of the performance.

Clean questions

From Grove's clean language in psychology. Used as a way of extracting content from an audience member though asking open ended questions.

Heightened Aristotelian rhetoric

Whereby rhetorical emphasis is placed in either Logos, Pathos, or Ethos - potentially to the detriment of the other two forms.

Content from 'the day in history'

Whereby the date is used as a generative starting point for material.

Content from 'the space in history'

Whereby the the room (as a real place) is used as a generative starting point for material.

Content cues

Whereby the performer is in Csikszentmihalyi's 'Flow' and encounters personal resonances and triggers in response to the moment of audience/performance engagement - opening up potential performance content.

Performance duration

The performer must not finish before or after the specified time (30mins in this case)

Appendix E: Project 3 Programme Note

Of This Room

An exercise in dealing with constraints in a live context, this performance has not been determined, concretised or set down. Until now.

Oliver Bray's final foray into a theatrical OuLiPo*

**Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle*, translated as the Workshop of Potential Literature

This is the classic dilemma of the practical joker: whether to play your joke and creep quietly away without revealing yourself, or to wait immodestly on the spot for the acclaim to start.
- John Sturrock

An array of rules for exploring an array of rules.
- Christian Bök

The clinamen is a deviation from the strict consequences of a restriction. It is often justified on aesthetic grounds: resorting to it improves the results.
- Harry Mathews

LiPo does not always aim to reach quality.
- François Le Lionnais

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Special thanks to The Future

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