The Encounter: Sculptural Principles in the work of New York City Players

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Abstract

This doctoral thesis represents the first sustained analysis of the work of New York City Players from the perspective of sculpture and through the lens of spatial theory. By combining traditional and practice-based methods, this thesis interrogates how a 'sculptural' approach to theatre and the aesthetic framing of performer 'essence' or presence, shapes the encounter between the spectator and the work. The central question of my research asks: What is the value of applying the principles of visual art and sculpture to theatre, and how does this approach shape the performer/spectator encounter? In a world renegotiating and questioning the position of the human in relation to the non-human and the posthuman, what is the value of art that is founded on the primacy of heightened performer presence? What spectatorial mode does it invite and what are its wider social significances? By positioning spatial practices as a crucial component of aesthetic form, my research argues that the application of sculptural principles to theatre – specifically, an increased attention to and manipulation of space – invites an embodied, self-conscious spectatorial experience in which the objecthood of performance brings the subjecthood of to the spectator to prominence. In this way, the spectator is brought into contact with the construct of their own subjecthood, in relation to wider society. In my investigation of the social relationality of the performer/spectator encounter that is established through space, I draw on Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad in *The Production of Space* (1974) and Sara Ahmed's concept of an 'ethical encounter' proposed in *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (2000). I argue that a sculptural approach to theatre works to reveal gaps in experience within the performer/spectator encounter, and the impossibility of pure exchange, the impossibility of taking the place of another. I demonstrate that it is through the exposition of what is missing in communication, of what is absent, in which the potential exists for learning and discovering new ways of being together.

Contents

Introduction …….6

NYCP: Production History and Creative Context…….9

Research Focus – 'The Encounter: Sculptural principles in the work of NYCP' ……15

Practice-based research…….20

Key Theorists…….22

Existing Scholarship…….24

Chapter Structure of Thesis……..30

Chapter One: Formal and Spatial Liminality in the work of NYCP

Introduction……...33

Company Biographies……...35

Minimalism, Medium, Form…….41

The Evening (2015)……...47

Queens Row (2018)……...50

Conclusion…….55

Chapter Two: 'The Self Onstage is Activism': The Subject in Space in the work of NYCP

Introduction…….56

Lefebvre's Spatial Triad…….57

Ads (2018)……..60

Dévoiler (2019)……..74

Context and Synopsis…….75

Architectural Transformation…….77

Choreography…….81

Conclusion……..88

Chapter Three: The Minimalist Monologue in *The Evening Part 2*, *standing; remember* and *Queens Row*

Introduction…….90

The Evening Part 2…….93

'Narratable Selves' of the Performers…….95

Exposure of Means……..97

Task-based Approach/ Spectatorship…….....97

Radical Presence……..99

Voice and Emotion…….....102

standing; remember……...106

The Concept: Monologue as 'Narratable Self'……...107

Monologue of Movement……...111

Performance Theatre Deli/ Spectator Response…….113

Queens Row……...117

Monologue as Palimpsest: Collaboration/Relationality…….118

Development of 'Daughter' Monologue: Deconstruction……..121

Conclusion……..130

Conclusion…….131

Bibliography and Consulted Works……139

Appendix……155

Introduction

The monograph and documentary compendium *Richard Maxwell and New York City Players: The Theater Years* (2017) approaches the company's twenty-year history from a visual plane. In chronological order, productions are represented through 24-36 'screen grabs' – successive frames of grainy, low resolution, pixelated images captured from archival video recordings of productions. The images are surprising, in that they depict what might be considered peripheral, inconsequential detail – for example, a hand holding a plastic shopping bag; a bare stage or wall; an empty piano stool. Longshots of performers portray them as static figures, while close-ups capture glimpses of in-between moments: mouths open in the process of forming words; eyelids between blinks. Turning the pages of the book, you see people in various arrangements with each other. Two bodies have sex on a white plastic chair. One person holds another in a headlock. Three sets of limbs tangle on the floor. In a boxing ring, a hand rests on a shoulder. In a canteen, two people share a mop. There's a girl hiding her face with her hand. There's a naked man in a hotel room with a conspicuous hidden figure. The images operate through an interplay of presence and absence; of what is seen and unseen. They tell the missing parts of the story through what they don't show. In this way, meaning lies in what they had to omit.

The strangely compelling images stand in stark contrast to the artificiality of the classic theatre production still, crisp and high resolution, with a predisposition to expose the photographer's intentions and signpost meaning. The perplexing content of the screengrabs – the low-fi quality, blurred textures, unexpected details, and unanticipated attention to the seemingly unremarkable – makes a seductive request to the viewer to fill in the gaps, piece disparate fragments together, and construct their own meaning. Selecting images was, according to Richard Maxwell, the artistic director of New York City Players, an intuitive process based on 'having a feeling for how this particular frame captures some essence of that person'.[1] Framing a person's 'essence' is described by company member Jim Fletcher as a key aspect of New York City Players' work, which he understands as a form of 'profound portraiture', based on the personhood of the performer.[2] The production of the monograph therefore epitomises these two key principles of the company's work: framing the human subject, and privileging the agency of the spectator/viewer. These core artistic values inform the basis of this doctoral project, which examines NYCP's relationship to visual art, by viewing the work as situated at formal boundaries, and investigating the manipulation of 'sculptural' principles – including space, time, scale, material, repetition and architecture – within a theatrical context.

[1] Richard Maxwell 'An Interview with Richard Maxwell and Tim Reid', *The Art Book Review,* 20th December 2017, available at: https://theartbookreview.org/2017/12/20/the-theater-years/ accessed 18/06/17.
[2] Jim Fletcher, Personal Interview, 19th January 2020.

The first time I encountered New York City Players' work was as spectator at a performance of *The Evening* (2015) at The Kitchen in New York. The final scene sees the gradual dismantling of a complicated theatrical set representing a dive bar, and the steady departures of all performers and stagehands, until only one performer, Cammisa Buerhaus, is left alone onstage:

> CAMMISA: In the distance, Cammisa finds snow-capped peaks. She climbs... She looks out at the landscape, a line she thinks she sees against the sky.
> (*Pause. The fog rolls in.)*
> CAMMISA: Cammisa plunges down and walks at the bottom of oceans...She descends even further into the core of the earth.
> (*Cammisa walks away, tracing the boundaries, finally disappearing into the haze.*)[3]

The sequence lasts approximately ten minutes and sees the total transformation of the theatre space. All materials and detritus of the theatrical set – the walls, carpets, tables, chairs, a TV, musical instruments, glasses, pizza boxes, a scattering of playing cards – are removed till Buerhaus stands alone, isolated in a white fog that steadily fills the stage. The performer puts on a winter 'ghillie jacket' – a grey-white hunting garment designed to provide camouflage in snow – that further blurs the boundary between her body and her environment. The thickness of the fog renders the back wall of the theatre space invisible, giving an impression of endlessness, as, having finally wrestled herself free from the men and their hands on her body, Buerhaus walks alone into the distance. Is she entering an abyss? A void? Or some kind of opening? Is she disappearing? Or is she materialising in a new way? The potency of the sequence lies in its ambiguity. I remember having a physical reaction to the combination of stillness and motion in this scene. I became conscious of what felt like an embodied experience of an inner 'dismantling' in response to, and in time with, the choreography of the scenographic, material and formal deconstruction happening before me, which developed to create an acute sense of connection with the other spectators with whom I was sharing this spatial experience.[4] Reflecting on Merleau-Ponty's assertion that 'there is an immediate equivalence between the orientation of the visual field and the awareness of one's own body as the potentiality of that field'[5], I understood the manipulation of the physical, material components of theatre as containing the potential for instigating a spectatorial experience that could be profoundly embodied. Formal and thematic concerns of the company regarding the collapsing of boundaries between performer and character, body and space, fiction and reality, representation and abstraction are encapsulated in *The Evening*.

[3] Richard Maxwell, *The Evening*, New York, The Kitchen, 27/03/2015, 2015d.
[4] In this thesis, the term 'deconstruction' is being used in its sense of breaking down or dismantling preconceived or material structures, rather than the Derridean sense to the term.
[5] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* trans. Colin Smith, London: Routledge, 1962, p206.

This first spectatorial experience exposed a tension and possibility in the work of New York City Players that became a preoccupation for me and ultimately formed the basis of my doctoral research. Since then, I have sought to interrogate how formal and spatial liminality, and how the aesthetic framing of performer 'essence' or presence, shapes the encounter between the spectator and the work. In a world renegotiating and questioning the position of the human in relation to the non-human and the posthuman, what is the value of art that founded on the primacy of heightened performer presence? What spectatorial mode does it invite and what are its wider social significances? My doctorate represents the first sustained analysis of NYCP's work from the perspective of sculpture and through the lens of spatial theory, and pays special attention to two productions made with the participation of local communities. The central question of my research asks: what is the value of applying the principles of visual art and sculpture to theatre, and how does this approach shape the performer/spectator encounter? My subsidiary questions ask:

-How can the work of NYCP be said to produce a formal and spatial liminality?

-In what ways does the work of NYCP model objecthood through the interaction of representation and abstraction, image and object, body and space, and what are implications of this for spectatorship?

-How far can the manipulation and treatment of space be understood as both an aesthetic and social practice in the work of NYCP?

-How does the application of sculptural principles frame the representation of the relationship between the individual subject and space, the self and society, the individual and the collective?

-In applying Minimalist principles to the monologue form, how can presence and spectatorship be understood as 'materials' performance?

-How does the application of sculptural principles in theatre shape the role of the performer?

Through my selection of case studies, I pay critical attention and give value to NYCP's work since 2015, which has increasingly moved beyond theatre spaces, and has involved greater levels of community participation. My methodology of traditional and practice-based research represents a combination that uniquely examines the performer/spectator encounter in work situated at formal boundaries from an embodied, experiential position. In what follows in this introduction, I provide an outline of NYCP's production history and situate them in creative context; I set out my research focus on spatial, material manipulation in NYCP's work and the representation of the human subject, outlining the nature and methodology of my practice-based research, and the key theorists that informed my work; I survey the

existing scholarship about the company which includes critical perceptions of a representational 'paradox' at the heart of their work and of its relation to Minimalism. The introduction concludes by providing a brief overview of the chapters in this thesis and identifying the specific research questions with which each is concerned.

NYCP: Production History and Creative Context

Since their formation in 1999, New York City Players have become world-renowned for formally rigorous productions which have been presented in over twenty countries, with OBIE awards received for *House* (1999), *Drummer Wanted* (2002) and *Good Samaritans* (2005). The company have gained recognition for cultivation of an approach to theatre-making which combines disparate forms of representation and employs what might be regarded as contradictory aesthetic strategies, together producing a distinct mode of or invitation to spectatorship. While NYCP's oeuvre substantially engages with and builds on mainstream realist traditions of American drama, maintaining a commitment to fiction, notions of character and linear narrative, the company's acting and directorial approach, by contrast, is influenced heavily by the strategies of experimental performance, the avant-garde and principles of visual art. Persistent interrogation of the representational and spectatorial possibilities of theatrical form drives NYCP's mission to find new modes of expression, which in turn has led to experiments with performance style, technology, text and space. Negative space, stillness, silence, and the individual's encounter with the unknown all permeate NYCP's productions on spectatorial, thematic and formal levels. At the heart of the company's work, as I show, is a focus on the representation of the human subject, which over the years has extended beyond working with live actors to incorporate holograms, robots, effigies, and both 2D and 3D shadows. A constant through-line connecting these diverse representations of subjecthood is evident in the use of monologue, which, throughout two decades of work, has seen the stage action recurrently reduced to an extraordinary stillness, in which the performer, text and space are brought into dynamic, concentrated relation.

The major productions of NYCP's first decade of work were *Billings* (1996), *Flight Courier Service* (1997), *Burger King* (1997), *House* (1998), *Showy Lady Slipper* (1999), *Boxing 2000* (1999), *Caveman* (2000), *Drummer Wanted* (2001), *Joe* (2002), *Showcase* (2003), *Good Samaritans* (2004) and *The End of Reality* (2006). All these productions were written and directed by Maxwell and broadly centre on the lives of working-class people in domestic settings, positioned amidst the backdrop of a changing, contemporary American cultural landscape, in which neighbourhoods are steadily transformed by the rise of global capitalism, and where success means 'kind of selling out. Of being bed-fellows with the

same elements that we know will destroy the neighbourhood'[6]. References in the plays to, for example, churches being replaced by high rises[7] and torn down ballfields[8] serve to illustrate the destructive effects of late capitalism on communities. Removals workers, flight couriers, fast-food restaurant employees, janitors, security guards and unemployed youth populate the landscape of these early NYCP productions. Characters frequently encounter the limitations of their societal conditions whilst harbouring inner yearnings for a form of human connection, purpose or belief system to sustain their existence. Significant themes permeating these works include the myth of social mobility, the need for community, the social responsibility of the individual and questions of faith. The plays are characterised formally by the prevalence of monologues and a mundanity of vocabulary which, as reviewers frequently noted, feature performers speaking in 'the language of real life, complete with 'uh's', 'yeah's', and long pauses'[9]. Physical stillness was, and as I show, remains, a defining feature of the company's early work. A sense of interior confinement pervaded these productions' fictional spaces, which included hotel rooms, domestic homes and train compartments. In *Flight Courier Service*, the Stewardess reflects on the irony of a career about flight, travel, new vistas and perspectives that allows no personal freedom: 'What do I have? I have a crappy little room in Times Square that I see for 3 days a week – if I can open my eyes for 2 seconds 'cause I'm sleeping the whole time I'm there'[10]. Recurrently, the plays explored the loneliness of the individual, their unspoken desires, unlived dreams, their often alienated relationship to work, and their navigation of the structural inequalities and social stratification of contemporary American society. As well as this emphasis on the individual, the plays persistently examined the relationship between the individual and society. As previously mentioned, this focus is formally manifested in heightened form through monologues, a dramatic mode introduced early in the company's history and which continues to be important in their work. I perceive the monologue's foregrounding of the individual subject in the work of NYCP to draw attention to the concept of the individual and their relationship to others: their separateness and connectedness; their agency and lack of agency; subjecthood and objecthood. In its direct address, as I will show, the monologue also asks the spectator to reflect on their position as an individual within society.

Since the performance of *Open Rehearsal* for the Whitney's 2012 Biennial, NYCP's work has been increasingly presented in visual art institutions including *Paradiso* (2018) at Greene Naftali Gallery, New York; *Ode to the Man Who Kneels* (2018) and *Ads* (2018) at the Chinati Foundation, Texas; and *Queens Row* (2018) at the ICA, London. Recurrently labelled by critics, academics and audiences as 'minimalist', the company's work has become recognised for an aesthetic simplicity and directness, for

[6] Richard Maxwell, *The End of Reality,* New York: Unpublished Playscript, 2006.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Richard Maxwell, 'Boxing 2000' in *Plays, 1996-2000*. 'New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2004, p207.
[9] Alice Reagan, *Drummer Wanted* Review: *Theater Journal*, Volume 54, Number 2, May 2002, pp 314-315.
[10] Richard Maxwell, 'Flight Courier Service' in *Plays, 1996-2000*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2004, p38.

productions stripped of 'the histrionic excesses of traditional acting and stage design'[11]. A methodology of 'distillation and subtraction'[12], of 'reducing the actor and the script to their essence'[13], result in 'ultra-spare'[14] productions which are referred to by critics as 'artworks' as well as 'plays'. [15] NYCP productions are increasingly perceived as occupying a position between visual art and theatre: indeed, *Queens Row* was described by critic Matt Trueman as 'neither a play nor performance art.'[16] This resistance to definition in NYCP's work points to creative processes that transcend recognized and accepted notions of what theatre and performance can be. Being driven to describe the company's work in terms of what it is not, suggests that there is a deficiency of vocabulary when considering practice that is situated at the borders of art forms. ICA director Stefan Kalmár described the decision to programme *Queens Row* as part of the organisation's mission to support interdisciplinary practice, to 'host conversations and encourage overlaps between art forms'. Kalmár argues that 'if you look at contemporary artistic practice in the age of the internet, it's those in-between areas that are interesting', adding, of the ICA, 'that's also where our legacy is.'[17] It is the aim of this doctoral project to explore the work of NYCP as situated at the 'in-between' areas described by Kalmár, at the formal boundaries of theatre and sculpture.

When working on *The Frame* (2006) in Bonn, Maxwell explained that when directing a play in a foreign language, he found himself placing more emphasis on the communication of ideas through the visual, spatial and architectural aspects of the productions. This production served as a catalyst for developing a more explicit application of fine art practices and a more self-conscious exploration of formal boundaries.[18] Indeed, NYCP's contribution to a wider conversation in the context of contemporary artistic practice is demonstrated by the presentation of their work not only within the US but also through their participation in international touring circuits at prominent European arts festivals. In the last twenty years, productions including *Showcase* (2003), *Good Samaritans* (2004), *The End of Reality* (2006), *Ode to The Man Who Kneels* (2007), *People Without History* (2009), *Ads (2010), Neutral Hero* (2010), *Isolde* (2013), *The Evening* (2015) and *Paradiso* (2018) have toured worldwide. The company's work has been commissioned by venues and festivals recognised for boundary-pushing, experimental work including: Performance Space 122; Abrons Arts Centre, The Kitchen; Soho Rep; and Theatre for

[11] Ben Brantley, Review: Richard Maxwell Considers Life After Life in 'Paradiso', *The New York Times,* Jan 16th 2018.
[12] Ben Brantley, Queens Row Review: Richard Maxwell on Life After Doomsday, *The New York Times,* Jan 10th 2020.
[13] Hilton Als, Richard Maxwell's Essential Theatre, *The New Yorker,* Jan 5th 2018.
[14] Andrew Russeth, 'The American Way: At Greene Naftali, Richard Maxwell's 'Paradiso' Examines Community and Faith, *ARTnews,* Jan 12th 2018.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Matt Trueman,'How the ICA is Bringing Performance Back and Wants to 'Set the Agenda', in *The Stage,* September 25th 2018.
[17] Ibid
[18] Richard Maxwell, Personal interview with Richard Maxwell on 23/03/2017, 2017a.

a New Audience in New York; and the Wexner Center, Columbus; the Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis; Yale Union, Portland; the Barbican Centre, and the ICA London; Project Arts Centre, Dublin; Hebbel Am Ufer, Berlin, Theatre Bonn, Bonn; Under the Radar Festival, New York; Festival d'Automne and Theatre de La Commune, Paris; Kunstenfestivaldesarts, Brussels; Venice Biennale; and Mostra SESC de Artes, Sao Paulo.

These festivals and venues regularly present work by theatre and performance makers whose productions traverse borders of art forms, drawing on elements of theatre, performance art, fine art practices, installation, music, architecture and choreography. In *Social Works: Performing, Supporting Publics* (2011), Shannon Jackson examines social practice from an interdisciplinary perspective, and identifies two trajectories of artists whose work incorporates the dialogue between visual art and theatre. Jackson observes the 'visual artists' who turn to performance practices and the 'theatre experimenters' who turn to fine art practices:

> […] visual artists have begun to refuse the static object conventions of visual art, exploring the durational, embodied, social, and extended spatiality of theatrical forms [whilst] theatrical experimenters have renewed a Maeterlinckian preoccupation with the "static" to stall the temporal conventions of dramatic theatre, approaching the static, all-at-once, juxtapositive condition that art philosophers from Lessing to Reynolds have associated with painting. To be reductive but rhetorical, we might discern a kind of experimental chiasmus across the arts; a movement toward painting and sculpture underpins postdramatic theatre, but a movement toward theatre also underpins post-studio art. In such a chiasmus, breaking the traditions of one medium means welcoming the traditions of another. Experimental art performances use visual, embodied, collective, durational, and spatial systems, but a critical sense of their innovation will differ depending upon what medium they understand themselves to be disrupting, i.e. which medium is on the other end of whose "post."[19]

NYCP can be situated amongst the theatre artists cited by Jackson, disrupting the medium of theatre by turning towards painting and sculpture, and in a wider context of experimental theatre companies and artists that includes The Wooster Group, Forced Entertainment, Societas Raffaello Sanzio, Robert Wilson, and others, who consciously employ visual art practices to engage with issues of representation, albeit in different ways and to different effects.[20] The theatre artists mentioned in this category can be

[19] Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*, New York; London: Routledge, 2011, p2.
[20] Director Robert Wilson is widely recognised for his tableau work, understood by Stephen Melville as operating on the border between painting and theatre. Melville, Stephen (1981) 'Notes on the Re-emergence of Allegory, the Forgetting of Modernism, the Necessity of Rhetoric, and the Conditions of Publicity in Art and Criticism', *October* 19: 55–92. Discussing the production 'Einstein on the Beach' (1976) Nik Wakefield argues that Wilson achieves 'a painterly presence through the formal stillness' of tableau which allows for 'an instantaneousness in a medium that is still firmly conditioned by the passage of time'. Wakefield goes on to describe that 'Wilson not only uses tableau to make painterly theatre; in *Einstein on the Beach* the stage becomes a place to see nothing other than an actual painting. Wilson's training in architecture and visual art are evidence that the stage happens to be this artist's frame for tableaux and shape.' Nik Wakefield (2019) Theatricality and Absorption, Performance Research, 24:4, 35-43. Nick Kaye recognises that 'Since 1984 the English company Forced Entertainment have drawn explicitly on film, as well as television, video and visual art in work where concerns with media and mediation have found their way into the fabric of the performance itself.' For Kaye, in Forced Entertainment's 'presentation of a mis-fitting of elements and practices, such "hybrid" performance inevitably resists the attempt by the

understood to correspond, in varying degrees, to the 'postdramatic' – a description first proposed by Hans Thies Lehmann in his highly influential book *Postdramatisches Theater* (1999, translated into English in 2006). Observing that 'it is no coincidence that many practitioners of postdramatic theatre started out in the visual arts', Lehmann provides a philosophical framework for investigating contemporary experimental theatre practices which include the use of fragmented text; non-linear (or non-existent) narrative; use of multimedia and technology; irruption of the 'Real' on stage; repetition and slowness; parataxis/non-hierarchy amongst genres; simultaneity of signs; and the removal of traditional 'framing' devices.[21]

Lehmann argues that postdramatic performance 'emphasises what is incomplete and incompletable about [itself], so much so that it realizes its own 'phenomenology of perception' marked by an overcoming of the principles of mimesis and fiction'[22]. The incompleteness and incompletability Lehmann identifies point towards brokenness and failure respectively, and have manifested in the work of the companies mentioned above through a range of formal strategies including: a rejection of a 'fictive cosmos'; an embracing of the formal conditions of theatre including the 'eventful present, the particular semiotics of bodies, the gestures and movements of the performers, the compositional and formal structure of language as a soundscape, the qualities of the visual beyond representation, and the musical and rhythmic process with its own time'; a response to 'the omnipresence of the media in everyday life'; an approach in which 'theatrical means beyond language are positioned equally alongside the text'; and finally, a privileging of 'presence over representation'.[23] This set of formal components works not only to flag up the failure of mimetic representation, Lehmann argues, but to induce a new mode of audience perception through which 'the spectator…is not prompted to process the perceived instantaneously, but to postpone the production of meaning…and to store the sensory impressions with evenly hovering attention.'[24] Viewing the work of NYCP through the lens of postdramatic theatre exposes the way the work 'constructs' the spectator experience and makes the spectators acutely self-conscious of their own act of witnessing/watching.

Alongside this shift in NYCP's practice from theatres to art spaces, a number of textual, scenographic and technological developments have contributed to the company's formal progression towards visual

viewer to read and resolve the work *in its own terms'* Nick Kaye (1996) *Art Into Theatre: Performance Interviews and Documents,* Harwood Academic Publishers, Amsterdam, pp13-14. Formed in 1981, Societas Raffaello Sanzio make theatre that draws together music, painting, opera, technology and mechanics in exploration of classical texts including : *Gilgamesh* (1990), *Hamlet* (1992), *L'Orestie* (1997), *Giulio Cesare* (2001). The visual art backgrounds of the company's three core members: Romeo Castellucci in Painting and Scenography; Claudia Castellucci in Painting; and Chiara Guidi in Art History, strongly inform the development of their work.

[21] Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*. London: Routledge, 2006, p68.

[22] Ibid., p99.

[23] Ibid., pp 22, 35, 22, 55, 109.

[24] Ibid., p87.

art and introduced new forms of representation of the subject. In these works, from 2006 onwards, the subject on stage is no longer necessarily a living human being, but is replaced by alternative referents of that figure, or stand-ins for the live human. For example, *Ads* (2010) features holograms of the performers projected onto a stage space, whilst *Paradiso* (2018) features a robot performer. NYCP's interest in domestic settings persists later works, but their representation resonates on a vaster, potentially universalist scale through explicit references to ancient classical literature. Arthurian legend *Tristan and Isolde*, Homer's *Odyssey* and Dante's *Divine Comedy* provide referential frameworks for *Isolde* (2011) and *Neutral Hero* (2012), as for Maxwell's triptych: *The Evening* (2015)*, Samara* (2017) and *Paradiso* (2018). By weaving the domestic settings and figures of contemporary American culture into the tapestry of classical mythology, the company's work draws attention to significant ways in which such stories continue to shape the social, historical, cultural reality of contemporary life. In a review of *Paradiso* (2018) Helen Shaw of BOMB magazine recalls the way that NYCP's earlier works 'began with nearly conventional narratives, and only turned into reverie in their final moments'; by contrast, for Shaw, '*Paradiso* is all reverie' with the company 'excising the connections that would make it feel like a play, eliding and interrupting character'[25]. Shaw's observation suggests an act of removal, subtraction and elimination that result in the destabilisation of theatrical form and structure in the company's later work. Her use of the words 'eliding' and 'interrupting' imply a disruption of representation. What were once recognisable as 'plays', are now less representational, and less easy to formally categorize.

On a textual level, the company's oeuvre has broadened over the last decade or so to include monologues and texts that have been self-authored by project-specific collaborators. Productions to date made in this format include *Ads*, a collection of monologues written and performed by local participants in New York (2010), Salzburg (2010), Evry (2011), Marseille (2011), Toulouse (2011), Bonn (2012), Eferding (2013), Chicago (2015) and Marfa (2018); the writings of immigrant New Yorkers participating in NYCP's Incoming Theatre Division programme (2015-present); and the production *Dévoiler* (2019), which was collectively written by a group of participants from Aubervilliers, Paris, and which includes monologues exploring their personal experiences of migration. I discuss *Ads* and *Dévoiler* in detail in Chapter 2.

To summarise, I am entering my research at a point in the company's trajectory which sees significant aesthetic developments including: a deliberate application of visual art principles, an increased collaboration with different communities, and innovative engagements with space and architecture.

[25]Helen Shaw, 'Postmodern Pilgrims: Richard Maxwell's Paradiso', *BOMB Magazine,* Jan 31st 2018.

Research Focus
The Encounter: Sculptural principles in the work of NYCP

As established, the representation of the human subject is a crucial formal and thematic concern consistently pursued in the work of NYCP. Both form and content explore the relationship between the self and society, the individual and the collective, the individual and space. By positioning sculptural and spatial practices as a crucial component of theatrical form, my research argues that the application of sculptural principles to theatre – specifically, an increased attention to and manipulation of space – invites an embodied, self-conscious spectatorial experience in which the spectator is brought into contact with the construct of their own subjecthood, in relation to wider society. My practice-based research shows that the objecthood of performance brings the subjecthood of to the spectator to prominence. I go on to uncover the ways in which a sculptural approach to theatre, an approach that engages with, questions and transgresses form, has the potential to make 'material' and expose the complexities of social dynamics and positionalities.

The aims of this thesis are as follows:

-To focus on the ways in which the work of New York City Players is informed by principles of sculpture, and to examine how such an approach shapes the performer/spectator encounter and issues of representation.

-To examine the manipulation of space as both a social and aesthetic material in the company's work and to assess the meanings and possibilities that arise from this perspective.

-To use practice-as-research methods to find new modes of performance and spectatorial, meaning-making processes in work situated at formal boundaries, from the different positions of researcher, spectator, director, and performer.

-To bring spatial theory and cultural theory together with aesthetic analysis, and to apply these frameworks both to the company's work, and to my practice-based projects, in order to investigate the interactions taking place in the performer/spectator encounter.

By engaging with NYCP's work as situated at formal boundaries, I show that an engagement with form foregrounds the relationality of the performer/spectator interaction as an embodied encounter, embedded in culture, in which a complex interplay of objectivity and subjectivity takes place. Further,

I demonstrate that the material, sculptural manipulation of space in the company's work reveals 'gaps', rifts and fissures in the fabric of social relations and, in doing so, creates potential for a person to increase proximity to that which they do not know, and consequently to gain a heightened, embodied awareness of their own social positionality. In the spectator's embodied navigation of, and reflection on, their own position within a wider social structure, and in experiencing relationality with another person, they encounter the limitations of their own experience, which holds potential to challenge what they know, understand, think and believe. By examining two productions – *Ads* (2018) and *Dévoiler* (2019) - created with local communities in Marfa, Texas and Aubervilliers, Paris, I show how a sculptural approach to theatre works to open up gaps in experience within the performer/spectator encounter, and the impossibility of pure exchange, the impossibility of taking the place of another. It is the exposition of what is missing in communication, of what is absent, in which potential exists for learning and discovering new ways of being together. From this position, I seek to show that an engagement with form is inevitably an engagement with structures of social dynamics.

My research draws on theories of visual artists working in the medium of sculpture and spatial theorists. In his 1974 text *The Production of Space,* Lefebvre places the body at the centre of his theory of radical spatial politics. He argues that space does not pre-exist activity, but is instead produced through the movement of bodies, asking: 'Can the body, with its capacity for action, and its various energies, be said to create space?'[26] Taking up and responding to Lefebvre's question, I provide an analysis of the body of the individual subject in the work of NYCP and show this to be a site of spatial and sculptural production. Lefebvre argues that:

> each living body is space and has space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space. This is a truly remarkable relationship: the body, with the energies at its disposal, the living body, creates or produces its own space; conversely the laws of space, which is to say the laws of discrimination in space, also govern the living body and the deployment of its energies.[27]

Drawing on Lefebvre's concept of space as a relational, bodily practice, I argue that NYCP's sculptural approach to theatre-making draws attention, first, to the relational processes of production between the body and space; second, to the individual performer as an object both defined by space and a subject actively creating space; and third, to the relationality between performer and spectator. In close readings of *Ads* and *Dévoiler* through the spatial theory of Lefebvre, I argue that the application of sculptural, spatial principles to theatre, contribute to creating the potential for what Sara Ahmed terms an 'ethical encounter'.[28] For Ahmed, an 'ethical encounter' involves a way of 'holding proximity and distance

[26] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space,* trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. London: Blackwell, 1991, p170.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, New York; London: Routledge, pp137-160.

together'; it exposes power imbalances, by drawing attention to failure, gaps and blind spots in understanding and exchange.[29] It is by allowing difference, rather than erasing it, that there is the possibility for the encounter to be transformed. Ahmed asserts that:

> A politics of encountering gets closer in order to allow the differences between us, as differences that involve power and antagonism, to make a difference to the very encounter itself. The differences between us necessitates the dialogue, rather than disallows it – a dialogue must take place, precisely *because* we don't speak the same language. It is the work that needs to be done to get closer to others in a way that does not appropriate their labour as "my labour", or take their talk as "my talk" that makes possible a different form of collective politics.[30]

When faced with the impossibility of pure exchange, and with the impossibility of occupying the space of another person, one is forced to reckon with social, political forces that shape asymmetrical positionalities. As Ahmed states, 'it is through getting closer, rather than remaining at a distance, that the impossibility of pure proximity can be put to work or made to work.'[31] I argue that such 'gaps' in experience and exchange are made 'material' in the sculpturally informed productions of NYCP, and are therefore experienced on an embodied level. It is in the relational, embodied spectator experience that the political potency of the company's work lies.

To talk about the political in relation to NYCP's work, as I will argue, is to appreciate the way in which the formal strategies of the company's work cultivate an implicated spectator position. I show that this positioning invites a heightened awareness of social relationality and helps facilitate opportunities for Ahmed's 'ethical encounters' to occur. Within such an encounter – one that does not erase difference and power imbalances, but rather exposes them and invites active engagement with them – lies the possibility for the transformation of social relations. In this light, the definition of politics I apply in this thesis is that of a 'radical democracy', derived from the political theory of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, first put forth in their influential 1985 text *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics.* For Laclau and Mouffe, 'the problem with "actually existing" liberal democracies is not with their constitutive values crystallised in the principles of liberty and equality for all, but with the system of power which redefines and limits the operation of those values'.[32] In their seminal text, Laclau and Mouffe critique and regenerate Marxist theory by engaging with Gramsci's concept of hegemony. In doing so, they develop a theory which challenges existing power relations and liberalism's manifestation of such relations, and extend the scope of the liberal democratic principles

[29] Ibid., p157.
[30] Ibid., p180.
[31] Ibid., p157.
[32] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics,* 2nd ed. London: Verso, 2001, pxv.

of liberty and equality towards a more radical pluralism. This radicalisation of democracy extends beyond surface-level gestures of liberal assimilation and inclusion, by centring the utility of antagonism, and by adopting an understanding of the subject as relational. For theatre and performance scholar Tony Fisher, the political potential of 'radical democratic theatre' lies in its ability to 'provide the means for the effective suspension of the conditions of operation through which a structure of domination produces its effects'.[33] Fisher argues that:

> radical democratic theatre cannot 'liberate' anyone, but it can destabilize the matrices of a given political distribution and in particular release thereby what politics has suppressed – first, antagonism and dissent, and second, forms of reciprocal action and empathic identification on which new forms of sociality might be based.[34]

The practice of radical democracy within performance, then, can be understood as an intervention in existing power structures which instigates the development of alternative forms of collectivities, founded on a radical pluralism that *allows* difference. I argue that a sculptural approach to theatre, in which the spectator experiences an embodied relationality and heightened awareness of the construction of their own subjecthood, creates the potential for the suspension or interruption of the conditions of operation described by Fisher, and allows for an active engagement with difference, and a deeper level of social exchange. It is through Ahmed's 'ethical encounters', in which differences of experience, social positionality, viewpoints, power and antagonism are reckoned with, that radical democracy is practised.

The embodied, experiential knowledge produced from my practical projects (outlined in the next section) demonstrate that the performer/spectator encounter holds the paradox of being aware of oneself as both a separate being, and an interconnected, relational being. Drawing on Ahmed's conceptualisation of pain in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* my research shows that the embodied encounter invoked through the application of sculptural principles creates the potential to experience emotion in a way that facilitates profound moments of contact. In these instances of contact, the surfaces of one's being as being in direct relation the other are put into focus. As Ahmed describes, 'it is through the recognition or interpretation of sensations, which are responses to the impressions of objects and others, that bodily surfaces take shape.'[35] One gains form, and awareness of the boundaries of one's form, in the conscious acknowledgment of emotion. Ahmed goes on to describe the way emotions have the potential to both construct and deconstruct the borders that delineate us from each other:

[33] Tony Fisher, 'Radical Democratic Theatre', *Performance Research,* 2011, 16:4, 15-26, p26.
[34] Ibid., p15.
[35] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2nd ed, 2014, p25.

> To say that feelings are crucial to the forming of surfaces and borders is to suggest that what "makes" those borders also "unmakes" them. In other words, what separates us from others also connects us to others. The paradox is clear if we think of the skin surface itself, as that which appears to contain us, but as where others impress upon us. This contradictory nature of skin begins to make sense if we unlearn the assumption that the skin is already there, and begin to think of the skin as a surface that is felt only the in event of being "impressed upon" in the encounters we have with others.[36]

Ahmed suggests that one gains the sharpest consciousness of the borders of one's own being in experiencing or witnessing feelings and emotions in relation to others. I argue that framing the 'essence' of the human subject as a sculptural 'material' of performance, facilitates an expression and witnessing of emotion that brings the subjecthood of the spectator to prominence, and allows performer and spectator to experience the outlines of their own subjecthood, in direct relation with each other and to gain an increased consciousness of existences as both interrelated and separate.

In its investigation of the work of New York City Players, this doctoral project fills a research gap by examining the company's work explicitly from the angle of visual art and by looking closely at the treatment and manipulation of space as both a social and aesthetic practice. Further, by choosing to examine the company's work outside of formal theatre spaces and those made with the participation of local communities, I reveal that the aesthetic developments of the company's work, the engagement with form, material, architecture and space, is also the development of a social practice. My practice-based research offers a multi-faceted, embodied, experiential analysis of work situated at formal boundaries and of the performer/spectator encounter from the varying positions including: research scholar, performer, director and spectator. My doctoral project therefore, offers an original contribution to knowledge of art practice that is consciously situated across formal boundaries by focusing specifically on the performer/ spectator encounter as a space in which humans may, I argue, usefully and productively, come into contact with the construct of their subjectivity and its limitations, which is the first step in finding new ways to be. I demonstrate that foregrounding gaps in experience and communication, decentres, to some extent, the human subject. An embodied spectatorial encounter in which one inhabits a space of doubt, uncertainty and unknowing, in which one *sees* one's seeing, and further sees what one *does not* see, destabilises and undermines the human as the centre of all knowledge, and in doing so creates an opening for discovering alternative ways of being together.

The research findings outlined in this thesis are not only pertinent to the work of NYCP but to other practices situated at formal boundaries. The 'sculptural' way of seeing theatre, of viewing space as both an aesthetic and social product, could potentially unlock social meaning and potential in other theatre and artistic practice. In the context of post-Covid world in which so much of life is lived online, by

[36] Ibid., pp24-25.

positioning spatial practices as a crucial element of aesthetic form, my research demonstrates that there is social value to the embodied spectatorial experience that an in-person encounter invites. In the example of *Ads* and *Dévoiler,* the transformative social potential of these productions rely on the spectator's live presence and physical interaction with space and the other people they share the performance event with. It was essential that the spectators to *Dévoiler* shared and produced space with the migrant performers of the production. *Dévoiler* could not have produced its spatial and social intervention online, without the physical co-presence and collaborative co-production of space of the bodies present. Judith Butler makes a convincing claim for the importance of public assembly when she states:

> After all, there is an indexical force of the body that arrives with other bodies in a zone visible to media coverage: it is *this* body and *these* bodies that require employment, shelter, health care, and food, as well a sense of a future that is not the future of unpayable debt; it is *this* body or *these* bodies, or bodies *like* this body or these bodies, that live in the condition of an imperilled livelihood, decimated infrastructure, accelerating precarity.[37]

Butler argues that being collectively, physically present in space, draws attention to the specificity and humanity of the bodies present, and to the existence of bodies present within a shared structure that is unbalanced in its distribution of power, wealth, resources, and opportunity. A sculptural approach to theatre in which space is a key material, I argue, facilitates a direct engagement with bodies and space within this uneven social structure.

Practice-based research

I began this doctoral project as a theatremaker and facilitator. Having spent several years working in a variety of community theatre and drama education contexts, I knew first-hand the value of gaining knowledge through practice, and indeed that certain forms of knowledge can only be accessed through the experiential, the embodied, the collaborative. The socially engaged dimension of my professional theatre practice, my practice-based postgraduate study, and my experience working and training as a performer with theatre companies including Gardzienice, Shared Experience, Sad Siren Theatre and Failbetter, positioned me to conduct this doctoral research with a variety of creative experiences to draw on, and depart from. During the period of my doctoral research I went on to work as a performer-collaborator with The Wooster Group, devising and performing in the production *Desire: An Encounter with a Play by Kathy Acker* (2019) at the ICA, London, and as a facilitator for Forced Entertainment's

[37] Judith Butler, *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly,* Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2015, p10.

participation programme *Art Breakers*, both of which fed into the development of my own practice alongside the work I undertook with NYCP.

For this doctoral project, I have made work both with New York City Players and independently. I adopted Robin Nelson's triangular model for Practice-as-Research (PaR), and maintained a constant conversation between my own practice, critically informed reflection on this, and analysis both of the work of New York City Players and of relevant academic literature.[38] To document and account for my practice, I used a combination of reflexive journals, semi-structured artist and audience interviews, feedback forms and video documentation. In this way, the project created a space for rigour and innovation, and enabled me to synthesise practice and theory.

In the first two years of my PhD, I undertook two research trips to New York to assist on the productions *Good Samaritans* (2017) and *Paradiso* (2018). Inspired by a story I heard about Clare Venables, who, in her role as Artistic Director of the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield from 1981-1992, spent time working in all departments of the theatre and invited her colleagues to do the same and 'swap places' to gain practical understandings of one another's roles and responsibilities, I volunteered to work and assist in various roles within NYCP's company. I wanted to gain a multifaceted experience and insight into the different elements of NYCP's work, so my participation extended beyond observing and participating in rehearsals, to assistant-producing, helping write grant applications, building sets with the technical team, making and sourcing props, sweeping the stage, doing the costume laundry, and digitising archival footage. These experiences allowed me to observe how the company's artistic principles informed the daily conversations and decision-making processes that shaped the development, construction and mounting of a performance. From this position, I was immersed in the materials and modes of production: *I mix paint to obtain a specific shade of green, to paint a chair that will directly reference a photograph. I prepare a gift for an important donor. I learn how to use a table-saw. I stand at an ironing board and starch shirts in the dressing room underground, and listen to what's happening onstage through the speaker above my head. I hammer nails into wood. I stay late nights with Dirk, and Tavish and cut up 16 X 8 inch polystyrene tiles to form a 'cinderblock' wall. I distribute posters in specified locations in the city. I mix stale coffee with grey paint and apply it to the ceiling of the set to create the impression of damp. I speak with the people I encounter about the company and their work. I help unload flats from a broken-down van off the highway at night. I get coffee for the actors (half and half, no sugar, black, no sugar). I ask questions. I wheel a shopping trolley full of paint (Aqua Lock Plus Primer/Sealer in white) from a hardware store on Delancey Street to the theatre. I make mistakes. I get up early to take Rosemary's skirt to a tailor shop on Rivington to be altered at her*

[38] Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances,* Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp3-48.

request – she wants the waist taking in – and in the evening, I'm told off for doing this by Regina. I listen to the notes given to the actors and write them down. I listen to the questions the actors ask and write them down. I join in with the warm-up ("one smart fellar; he felt smart…", "unique New York, unique New York…") I watch how the actors are before they go onstage. I sit all the way up, at the top, at the back, in the dark. Each night, I watch the performances from here. I keep line notes for the actors, jotting down the words they skip, the lines they miss and the things they say which aren't in the script. At the end, when it's over, I help in taking it all apart.[39] There were moments of personal engagement that I especially treasured, for example: the conversations I had with Rosemary Allen as I fixed her hair every night – her sharp insights shared with generosity, warmth and wit continue to shape my thinking. Equally cherished, are the afternoons I spent with Bob Feldman in his apartment, transcribing his writing and looking through the shoebox of old photographs he shared with me, so many of which were of Rosemary.

This proximity to the company, whilst beneficial to my research in terms of the immersion it allowed, was also challenging – and even problematic . It was undeniably difficult to maintain a critical distance whilst being submerged within the processes of production. For a while I was lost. But distance, time and experience working in different creative contexts helped me to gain clarity in my perspective, and enabled me to more objectively view the processes at play within NYCP's work.

These experiences informed my role as director in two practice-as-research projects I led - *The Evening Part 2* (October 2017) and *standing; remember* (June 2018*)* - and my role as a performer-collaborator in *Queens Row* (2018). When the company were commissioned by the ICA to make *Queens Row* in London in 2018, I initially worked on the production as Assistant Director, before Maxwell asked me to switch, and participate instead as a performer-collaborator. I performed in *Queens Row* at the ICA, London (2018), The Kitchen, New York (2020), and The Triennale, Milan (2022).

Key Theorists

As the company's artwork traverses and draws upon multiple art forms and practices, it follows that the appropriate theoretical framework within which to investigate it must also draw on a range of disciplines. In this thesis I combine theories pertaining to sculpture – most notably those from the area of Minimalist art, with spatial theories put forth by philosopher and social theorist Henri Lefebvre, and social, cultural theory put forth by Sara Ahmed, to examine space as both a social and aesthetic material. For Lefebvre, space is always a social product and always exists in relation to power. The investigation

[39] Soraya Nabipour, Extracts taken from personal journals 2017-2018.

of space calls for analysis of the 'dialectical relationship between demand and command, along with its attendant questions: "Who?", "For whom?", "By whose agency?", "Why and how?"'[40]. Bearing this in mind, I observe the ways in which sculptural principles draw attention to the social relations embedded in, and created by space. In considering the productions through the lens of sculpture, it is above all, a *spatial* understanding of the productions that I attempt to establish.

In investigating the social relationality of the performer/spectator encounter that is established through space, I draw on Sara Ahmed's concept of an 'ethical encounter' proposed in *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (2000) and her conceptualisation of emotion in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2014). Ahmed asserts that we are 'produced through encounters, rather than preceding them,' and the asymmetrical power relations that shape the world, influence those encounters.[41] Ahmed also constructs a useful framework to validate, contextualize and re-examine emotions including: pain, hate, fear, disgust, shame, love, queer feelings, and feminist attachments in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2014). Asserting that, 'emotions involve bodily processes of affecting and being affected, […] emotions are a matter of how we come into contact with objects and others', Ahmed explores empathetic identification as making room for an extension of self.[42] In this extension, 'identification is the desire to take a place where one is not yet. As such, identification expands the space of the subject […]. Identification involves making likeness rather than being alike.'[43] For Ahmed, the emotion of being moved 'is not about "moving on" or about "using" emotions to move away, but moving and being moved as a form of labour or work, which opens up different kinds of attachments to others.'[44] The conceptualisation of emotion and empathy as an expansion of self, and the concept of an 'ethical encounter', inform how I view the relational formation of subjecthood in the performer/spectator encounter.

Significantly featured in Chapter Three is the work of Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero. I draw on her concept of 'the narratable self' who is 'at once the transcendental subject and the elusive object of all the autobiographical exercises of memory', to examine relationality and understanding of selfhood in the performer/spectator encounter.[45] In Cavarero's thinking, the relational self proposes a form of humanization through an altruistic ethics: any sense of a self is contingent on our exposure to others and the narratives they give back to us. Cavarero's theory that 'every human being, without even wanting to know it, is aware of being a narratable self—immersed in the spontaneous auto-narration of

[40] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space,,*trans.Donald Nicholson-Smith, London: Blackwell, 1991, p116.
[41] Sara, Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, New York; London: Routledge, 2000 p143-144.
[42] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004, p. 208.
[43] Ibid p.126.
[44] Ibid p. 201.
[45] Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, trans. by Paul A. Kottman, London; New York: Routledge, 2000, p34.

memory' provides a useful framework within which to examine the practical development and performance of the monologue in *The Evening Part 2.* [46] In *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood* (1997), Cavarero subverts the masculine, independent, individualized self of the dominant humanist tradition by putting forth a relational humanism through an ontological understanding of narrativity. For Cavarero, the self is unique and unrepeatable: we are not each the same, nor can we each take the place of another and feel what they feel. Yet this singularity of the self is transcended through narrativity, which uncovers us in the *shared* condition of singularity, of being a 'narratable self' with a unique story, and of harbouring the desire to hear our unique story narrated back to us by another.

The work of Martinican poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant also features in this thesis in my examination of the performer/spectator relationship. His theories of Relation and opacity provide an illuminating lens through which to scrutinise the encounter between performer and spectator. Glissant's Relation and opacity resonate with Ahmed's concepts of 'proximity' and 'distance', articulated in her 'ethical encounter': specifically, the importance of respecting difference and not insisting on transparency. Relation, in Glissant's terms, conceives of human reality and the natural world as a vibrant interconnected network of exchanges between perpetually changing communities and cultures, and asserts that any one entity is open and relatable to any other. It is founded on the belief that '[one] can change through exchanging with the other without losing or distorting [oneself]'[47]. Relation facilitates a multiplicity and fluidity not only between entities, but also within them. In this way, identity is not fixed or permanent, but is a process of creation formed through Relation, resonating strongly with Ahmed's assertion that the 'I' is created through encounters.[48]

Existing Scholarship

The most substantial piece of scholarship on New York City Players is the 2011 monograph *The Theatre of Richard Maxwell and the New York City Players* by Sarah Gorman – this is the only existing book-length study of the company to date. Before writing the monograph, Gorman published on NYCP's work in *Contemporary Theatre Review*, including the article 'New Theatre Making: Richard Maxwell' in 2005, and an interview with Richard Maxwell, 'Refusing Shorthand: Richard Maxwell' in 2007. In 2010, Gorman's book chapter 'Richard Maxwell and The New York City Players- The End of Reality (2006)- Exploring Acting' was published in *Making Contemporary Theatre: International Rehearsal*

[46] Ibid p33.
[47] Édouard. Glissant & Manthia Diawara: "One world in Relation: Édouard Glissant in Conversation with Manthia Diawara." *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, no. 28, (2011): pp. 4-19, (p.9).
[48] Sara, Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, New York; London: Routledge, 2000 p143-144.

Processes, edited by Jen Harvie and Andy Lavender. Outside of Gorman's studies, the company's work has been written about in academic articles including: 'The (Un)settled Space of Richard Maxwell's House' (2001) by Markus Wessendorf in *Modern Drama*; 'Richard Maxwell and the Paradox of Theatre' (2008) by Theron Schmidt, in *Platform*; 'Thinking Limping: Richard Maxwell's Neutral Hero and the Tragic Impediment Of Contemporary Theatre' (2012) by Adrian Kear in *Performance Research*; 'Performing the Accident: Through Richard Maxwell's *Ode to the Man who Kneels'* (2012) by Ioana Jucan in *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies*; and 'On the Theatrical Life of Pauses: Richard Maxwell's Neutral Hero'(2013) by Natalie Alvarez in *Performance Research*.

A recurrent thread pursued in these articles is the focus on the representational 'paradoxes' or contradictions that ensue from the company's juxtaposition of a playtext that draws on mainstream realist traditions of American drama, with a performance and directorial methodology informed by strategies of experimental performance. The combination of these diverse strategies results in a representational complexity that has perplexed academics, critics and audiences alike, who have been struck by 'the appeal of these curious stock figures who barely move and who deliver their mundane monologues in a flat monotone'[49], but who nevertheless evoke an intense emotional engagement from the audience as, 'the less demonstrative their behaviour, the deeper they seem'.[50] By invoking physical stillness, by not psychologically inhabiting 'character', and by maintaining consciousness of the reality of the performance event, a depth of expression is perceived.

In his analysis of the production *House* (1998) Markus Wessendorf identifies an 'unpsychological and anti-mimetic *mise en scene',* which he argues, harbours 'two highly contradictory effects: on the one hand, it relentlessly undermines and deconstructs the notion of the dramatic character as a unified and self-aware subject; on the other, paradoxically, it makes the protagonists seem more real in their inaccessibility, self-enclosure, and physical co-presence.[51] For Wessendorf, the inexpressive remoteness and unattainability of the characters represented in the production contribute to what appears to be an expression of authenticity. Wessendorf finds the characters' inarticulacy emancipating, and argues that it offers 'a highly effective critique of […] American media culture'.[52] For Wessendorf, the production *House* is not limited to 'a representation of characters in a particular situation' but is 'an alternate construction and deconstruction of such a representation in performance,' which suggests that one of the most significant aspects of NYCP's work lies in its exposure of the mechanics and processes of representation itself.[53]

[49] Phillipa Wehle, 'Rich Maxwell: Dramatizing the Mundane'. *Theatre Forum* 18 (Winter/Spring): (2001): 3-8
[50] Robin Pogrebin, 'A Playwright Who Creates People, Not Roles', *New York Times* 25th September, 2000.
[51] Markus Wessendorf 'The (Un)Settled Space of Richard Maxwell's *House' Modern Drama*, Volume 44, Number 4, Winter (2001), pp. 437-457 Published by University of Toronto Press.
[52] Ibid., p455.
[53] Ibid., p415.

Academic Theron Schmidt further addresses the contradictory enigma of the company's work, in his article 'Richard Maxwell and the Paradox of Theatre' (2008), in which he argues that 'there is an essential paradox at the essence of theatrical mimesis, and with Maxwell, it is that paradox itself which is staged. Maxwell's works are plays like any other plays – only more so.'[54] Schmidt describes his experience of the perplexity that the company's work can inspire, whilst watching *The End of Reality* (2006) at the Barbican:

> Despite the presence of all the traditional elements of a play – including a fixed playscript […], costumed actors portraying characters, an identified author and director of the work, and a single storyline presented in sequence […], I found it difficult to accept that I had seen a play. This discomfort with identifying the work as a play, its writer as a playwright, and its performers as actors, is perhaps allied with the impulses of some critics to want to see the work as more than a play, as something which is built out of the elements of a play but is somehow other than a play, somehow new. And yet, ultimately, I suggest that what is revealed in Maxwell's work is not something beyond theatre but is, simply, theatre itself, in an unresolved paradox of pretending to pretend.[55]

The oscillation of contradictions between Schmidt's initial spectatorial response – a rejection of the work's status as 'a play' – and his observation that it is 'not something beyond theatre but is, simply, theatre itself with his final conclusion that they are 'plays like any other plays - only more so', demonstrate that the representational processes in the company work wildly problematize and disturb issues of theatrical form, and the perception of pretence and 'truth'.[56] In his article, Schmidt carefully parses the interplay of artifice and authenticity in the company's work, and relates NYCP's enthusiastic embrace of pretence to Denis Diderot's *The Paradox of Acting* (1773) and the marionette theatre of both Henrich von Kleist and Edward Gordon Craig. Schmidt points out that 'rather than being confounded by the idea that there is a stage-truth that is artificial and that is completely at odds with any actual truth, Diderot embraces it', and goes on to connect this stance to one of the core principles of the NYCP's performance methodology: maintaining an awareness that 'the highest reality is that there is a play happening'.[57] Schmidt goes on to argue that the spectator at an NYCP production observes 'not just the actor pretending, which is inevitable, or the actor pretending not to be pretending, but the actor showing us via acting that he or she is pretending. That is, the actor knowingly takes on the pretence of pretending – and this […] is what actors should do.'[58] The rewarding function of this is approach, Schmidt distinguishes, is the increase in self-conscious, imaginative activity of the spectator:

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[54] Theron Schmidt 'Richard Maxwell and the Paradox of Theatre' *Platform,* Vol. 3, No. 1, 2008: 8-21.
[55] Ibid., pp8-9.
[56] Ibid., pp14-15.
[57] Ibid., p11.
[58] Ibid., p17.

> Giving life to the characters and their drama necessitates the active involvement of the audience. […] Yet this active engagement is not unique to Maxwell's plays; as Diderot argued, it is how all theatre works. Reality doesn't transmit itself through an artful illusion; instead, we lend illusion the strength of real feeling. The only difference in Maxwell's plays is that we are asked to watch ourselves doing it.[59]

For Schmidt, NYCP foreground the core representational paradox of theatre, and in doing so, heighten the spectator's *self-awareness* of their participation in contributing to, and completing theatrical representation through their personal, emotional response.

In her monograph *The Theatre of Richard Maxwell and the New York City Players* (2011), Sarah Gorman opens up a social reading of these contradictory issues of representation, by examining them through an anti-humanist lens. In Gorman's view, the company's use of a task-based, non-psychologically-driven performance method exposes the strain and labour of performance, and reveals a vulnerability that can be read as both part of characterisation and a comment upon representation itself, thus exposing how 'social forces come to bear upon the individual'.[60] For Gorman, 'the amateur actors' sign of strain provides an audience with the opportunity to witness a subject in process or formation.'[61] In NYCP's directorial and performance approach, Gorman perceives the company to be 'staging an intervention into traditional modes of performance and actor training as a way of instigating dialogue about subject formation, identity and language as they are performed both onstage and off.'[62] Stemming from a nine-year dialogue with the company, during which she attended performances, observed rehearsals, and conducted in-depth interviews with playwright and director Richard Maxwell and performers Jim Fletcher, Brian Mendes and Tory Vazquez, Gorman's thematically focused chapters include: an analysis of the company's performance methodology; an account of Cook County Theatre (the theatre company in which Maxwell, Mendes, Wilmes and others made work prior to forming New York City Players); a study of the representation of masculinity in the company's plays; and an analysis of the company's use of theatrical space as an 'anthropological place'. In her examination of masculinity, class, and the American Dream, Gorman argues that NYCP's methodology 'dramatize[s] the confusion caused by an illusion of freedom and autonomy, and allude[s] to the different ways that race, economic stability, geographical location and class impinge upon each character's sense of opportunity and freedom'.[63] Identifying that 'Maxwell does not write plays about influential, socially mobile decision-makers, but instead creates theatre about lower class, socially constrained characters

[59] Ibid., p18.
[60] Sarah Gorman *The Theatre of Richard Maxwell and the New York City Players,* London: Routledge, 2011, p29.
[61] Ibid., p72.
[62] Ibid., p33.
[63] Ibid., p.30.

affected by corporate and legislative decisions', Gorman demonstrates the ways NYCP's early productions present a subject shaped and defined by their immediate society. [64]

In what she what she terms a 'rehearsal aesthetic', Gorman identifies a Brechtian foregrounding of the activities of theatre-making in NYCP's work. Keeping the houselights up, the use of direct address, performer eye contact with audience members, the use of trained and non-trained performers employing a task-based approach to acting, rather than a psychosocially driven approach, are all for Gorman a 'a deliberate means of drawing attention to the contingency of the theatrical event, the social organisation of theatre-going and the "denegative" viewing conventions which suppress signs of labour in preparing for performance'[65]. Finding subversive potential in the combination of mainstream American playwriting and avant-garde experimental performance methodologies, Gorman argues that 'by citing the conventional in an unconventional way [Maxwell] opens an aperture for audiences to glimpse contradictions inherent within received bodies of knowledge about ontology and the role of the individual within Western capitalist society'.[66] Drawing on spatial theorisation of Gay McAuley and Marc Augé, Gorman recognizes the wider political potential of this method of theatre-making, and contends that 'the slippage between the hermeneutic world of the plays and the auditorium invites a reconceptualisation of the theatre as a place of 'socio-political commentary' [citing McAuley] and, in Augé's terms, an 'anthropological place'.[67] By identifying the way NYCP's work underlines theatre's continuity with the 'real' world outside, and by examining the interaction of form and content, between the individual and society, Gorman makes a persuasive case for the social, political dimension of company's work.

In a Heideggerian reading of the theatrical pause in the production *Neutral Hero* (2013), academic Natalie Alvarez situates the production 'in a genealogy of Minimalism within the avant-garde' and provides a compelling analysis of the pause as a site of a phenomenological encounter between the spectator and the work.[68] Drawing parallels between the function of silence in the work of Minimalist composer John Cage and the operation of the pause in the company's work, Alvarez argues that the silence in Cage's work and the pause in NYCP's work allow performance to exist by itself, to 'stand on its own terms' through minimal artistic interference.[69] In doing so, silence or the pause 'creates pockets in performance where spectators slip through the looking glass to face themselves in face of the work's emergence before them in space in and time.'[70] This, Alvarez astutely argues, paves the way

[64] Ibid., p102.
[65] Ibid., p100
[66] Ibid., p29.
[67] Ibid., 116
[68] Natalie, Alvarez, 'On the Theatrical Life of Pauses: Richard Maxwell's Neutral Hero' *Performance Research,* 18:4, (2013) 160-164, p163.
[69] Ibid., p162.
[70] Ibid., p160.

for the work of art's act of 'unconcealing'– referred to by Heidegger as the process of '*aletheia'* – and in turn, draws attention to the performance's emergence *as* performance. This observation resonates with Schmidt's reflection that the exposure of artifice in the company's work results in 'plays like any other plays - only more so' and invites a form of self-aware spectatorship. For Alvarez, it is the production's Minimalist propensity to draw attention to the materiality of performance through the pause, which emphasises the here and now of the performance event, and, like Cage's Minimalist compositions, makes the spectator's (or listener's) relationship with the artwork of central importance, by unveiling the moment-to-moment meaning-making processes taking place between the artwork and the spectator.

Alvarez analyses the company's use of the performance practice of 'neutrality', an artistic process that aspires to preclude bias and definitiveness. With its antecedents in the teachings of Jacques Lecoq, 'neutrality' is a practice used by the company in which the performer resists adopting a predetermined interpretation of the text, to allow their relationship to it to remain open, unfixed and specific to the material, temporal conditions of the present moment of performance. Alvarez argues that the 'materiality of the work – light, colour, costume, set, movement – when reduced to its most austere and minimal, reveals the ways in which each element is always already 'world disclosing' (rendering 'neutrality', in turn, an impossibility).[71] In the context of a theatrical production, the application of the principles of Minimalism – in this case the exposed materiality of stage elements, and a performance methodology that cultivates 'neutrality' – draws focus to the here and now of the performance event, and uncovers the nuances of the communicative exchange taking place between the performance and the spectator. In terms of representation, the intrinsic paradox at the heart of a Minimalist approach to theatre-making lies in the simple fact that the performers themselves are far from 'minimal'. Alvarez argues that:

> […] while the performers work under this greater labour of a search for neutrality, they themselves, as themselves, are what ultimately betray the impossibility of the task. When we meet the look of the performer in the pause under raised houselights, it's there that we encounter the brute fact of each performer's undeniable and irreducible specificity, which foils any appeals to neutrality.[72]

The indelible, expressive presence of the performer and their inherent 'irreducibility' will always hinder the pursuit of 'neutrality' and therefore never, itself, be Minimalist. But it is the application of this Minimalist principle *within theatre* that frames and draws a specific mode of attention to the very fact

[71] Ibid., p162.
[72] Ibid., p163.

of this impossibility, and to the performer's presence, and in doing so, opens up significant questions regarding form and representation in theatre.

My research develops and builds work by Schmidt, Alvarez and Gorman, in the examination of form and of the invitation of self-conscious spectatorship in the work of NYCP. Whereas Alvarez draws comparisons with Minimalist music to examine the performer/spectator encounter, my approach is to view this relationship explicitly through the lens of visual art and sculpture, and in doing so, to position spatial practices as a key element of performance. The originality of my research lies in its application of spatial theory and cultural theory to new work (*Ads, Dévoiler, The Evening* and *Queens Row*) and to work which involves participation of performers and communities beyond core company members, which I use to elucidate the production of space as both an aesthetic and social phenomenon.

Chapter Structure of Thesis

Chapter One addresses formal and spatial liminality in the work of NYCP. I address the following research questions:

- How can the work of NYCP be said to produce a formal and spatial liminality?
- In what ways does the work of NYCP model objecthood through the interaction of representation and abstraction, image and object, body and space, and what are implications of this for spectatorship?

I begin by discussing the artistic biographies of NYCP's core creators and reflect on the range of practices that inform the company's interdisciplinary, creative context and its situatedness at formal boundaries of theatre and sculpture. I then provide a brief outline of Minimalist sculpture and relate its processes of reduction, exposed materiality and its invocation of a phenomenological spectatorial encounter to the work of NYCP. Finally, I examine how these processes manifest in spatial deconstruction and architectural manipulation in *The Evening* (2015) and *Queens Row* (2018). I demonstrate that a sculptural approach to theatre invites an embodied, phenomenological spectatorial experience, in which the objecthood of a play brings the subjecthood of the spectator to prominence.
I show that an 'undoing' of form, creates potential for an 'undoing' of subjectivity, and that within this process, the spectator is able to look anew at their own social construction. Finally, I argue that the company's aesthetic principles produce a formal and spatial liminality that invite the spectators to collectively inhabit a space of indeterminacy and of unknowing, which opens new possibilities for the performer/spectator encounter.

In Chapter Two I provide a case study of two production *Ads* (2018) and *Dévoiler* (2019) and address the following research questions:

- How far can the manipulation and treatment of space be understood as both an aesthetic and social practice in the work of NYCP?
- How does the application of sculptural principles frame the representation of the relationship between the individual subject and space, the self and society, the individual and the collective?

In this chapter I use Lefebvre's spatial triad as a framework through which to examine NYCP's productions. By identifying the interrelations of *perceived, conceived and lived* space in *Ads* and *Dévoiler*, and by reading the body of the individual subject as a key site of spatial production, I demonstrate how the sculptural principles of the company's work contribute to socio-spatial processes of intervention and transformation. I argue that the sculptural principles implicitly embedded in NYCP's work contribute to spatial production and interventions which have social implications, including: offering alternative modes of an individual subject inhabiting/being represented in space; the functional transformation of space; representations of subjectivities that are fluid rather than fixed; and dissolved dichotomies of self/other, body/space, individual/community. By reading these productions through the lens of what Sara Ahmed terms an 'ethical encounter', and through Edouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation,* I demonstrate that the treatment of space in both *Ads* and *Dévoiler*, enables a politics of 'encountering', which exposes difference without erasing it; exposes failure, absences, gaps and blind spots in experience. Ahmed recognises that increasing proximity to that which one does not know or understand, opens the possibility for the differences inherent in the meeting to alter the meeting itself, to facilitate a form of exchange that does not erase the Other; or, in Glissant's terms, to facilitate Relation and opacity. From this position, I argue that the material, sculptural manipulation of space in both these productions work to reveal the 'gaps' rifts, fissures in the fabric of social dynamics and in doing so, allows a person to increase proximity to that which they do not understand, and in turn, to gain a heightened, embodied awareness of their own social positionality.

Chapter Three represents the second part of the thesis in that it centres on my practice-based research and presents an investigation of the monologue form, sustained across three separate practice-based research projects I engaged with from different creative positions. It addresses the following research questions:

- In applying Minimalist principles to the monologue form, how can presence and spectatorship be understood as 'materials' performance?

- How do the application of sculptural principles in theatre shape the role of the performer?

I situate the work in this chapter within the terrain of sculpture's theatricality and theatre's application of sculptural principles, and the privileged creativity and agency of the spectator. I analyse two monologues from my perspective as director in the two projects I led independently: *The Evening Part 2* (October 2017) and *standing; remember* (June 2018*).* The former was a performance I directed of a monologue written by Maxwell, whilst the latter was a solo performance of an improvised monologue that I conceptualised and directed. I then go on to examine my role as a performer, specifically my experience of devising and performing a monologue in the NYCP production of *Queens Row*, first staged at the ICA, London in 2018, and then at The Kitchen, New York in 2020 and at the Triennale, Milan in 2022. Here, I provide an experiential analysis from my position as performer/deviser of the ways in which meaning-making can manifest as a collaborative, creative act between performer and spectator. I also consider how the discoveries I made as a director of and spectator for *The Evening Part 2* and *standing; remember* influenced my activities as a performer/deviser in *Queens Row*.

Chapter One: Formal and Spatial Liminality in the work of NYCP

> For some time, all useful ideas in art have been extremely sophisticated. Like the idea that everything is what it is, and not another thing. A painting is a painting. Sculpture is sculpture. A poem is a poem, not prose. Etcetera. And the complementary idea: a painting can be 'literary' or sculptural, a poem can be prose, theatre can emulate and incorporate cinema, cinema can be theatrical. We need a new idea. It will probably be a very simple one. Will we be able to recognize it?[73]

> The traditional categories—painting, sculpture, stagecraft, etc.—no longer correspond to reality. Personally, I think this is due to the crisis in our psychic space and the borders that separate the object and the subject. In the same way that there is a breaking down of the boundaries between objects, there is an intrication of the roles of the artist and the spectator, erasing the borders between self and other.[74]

Introduction

In a 2016 lecture given at the New School, Maxwell described how limitations on time in the early stages of his work with NYCP led him to discover an aesthetic quality he terms 'resemblance', which developed out of applying 'sculptural' principles to theatre:

> Time was precious. As director and writer I had a lot on my mind and I found it helped me concentrate if performers didn't move around too much. And I was unable to plan ahead for rehearsals since all my spare time was spent writing. And then something interesting happened. All the effort of putting something together gave the effect of *resemblance.* So the *resembling* of a play I found very appealing and I felt like it was setting the play free by propping it up like this and then the job became about following the thing to see what it needed. I think in retrospect this put me on a course more in line with visual art to have the play treated as this unusual *object,* taking on more sculptural terms than character driven, psychological needs.[75]

The term 'resemblance' indicates a representational quality of bearing similarity or likeness. A play is, traditionally, a representational form. So the 'resemblance of a play' implies a representation of a representation: a play that *looks like a play.* There is something structural and multidimensional in the self-reflexivity of this effect: the play is both doing the job of being a play, and at the same time, drawing attention to its existence as a play. It is being representational in a non-representational way. Indeed, his description of 'setting the play free by propping it up like this' and treating it as 'an unusual object',

[73]Susan Sontag, Epigraphs: Susan Sontag, "Theatre and Film," TDR: The Drama Review 11, no. 1 (1966): 37; Reid Farrington, interview with the author, October 24, 2014.
[74] Julia Kristeva, "Robert Wilson," Art Press 191 (1994): 64–65, (p65). Quoted in Shevtsova, Robert Wilson, 3.
[75] Richard Maxwell, *ART WORK: An Evening With Richard Maxwell. The New School.* New York City. 29th Sept. 2016, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wYNphdpIUMg accessed 18/06/17.

suggests that this realisation represented the application of sculptural principles to theatre: the formal value of stillness, an attention to materiality, a methodology of construction, assembly and composition, combined to permit something uncontrolled and unanticipated to occur in the play's reception. Maxwell's notion of treating a play as an 'object', resonates significantly with the aesthetic values of a range of Minimalist artists 'who shared a philosophical commitment to the abstract […] material object in the 1960s.'[76] The blurring of boundaries between artistic mediums was characteristic of Minimalist artists, as the New York art critic and poet John Perreault explains:

> Paradoxically, the closer an artist gets to the mythological essence of his particular medium, the faster his medium becomes something else. Frank Stella's shaped-canvases become a kind of flat sculpture for the wall. Cage's 'music' becomes theatre. Concretist poems become graphic art. Prose becomes poetry or music. Film becomes a kind of projected painting. Architecture as it tries more and more to be simply architecture becomes sculpture. And sculpture as it strives for "sculptureness" becomes architecture.[77]

Perreault's account of boundary-crossing artworks suggests that the more the more an artist engages with and uncovers the core materiality of their chosen medium, the more unstable the formal parameters that define that medium become, and the more they are brought into question. What makes a painting a painting? What makes sculpture, sculpture? By making visible their deep and thorough engagement with the fundamental material properties of a given art form, the artist uncovers processes of exchange between the maker, the work and the viewer that enable the artwork to transmute across formal parameters and to expand the spectrum of its expressive potential. Moreover, making this interrogation part of the artwork itself implicitly invites the spectator to participate in these energetic and creative processes of perception and interpretation and, in turn, to examine and question accepted notions about form that shape their own act of meaning-making.

As I will show, the dynamic, unstable, elusive quality of the 1960s artworks described by Perreault resonates strongly with the work of NYCP. Form, in NYCP's work becomes transitional and liminal, through its application of sculptural principles. In what follows, I examine the ways in which the liminal form of NYCP's work and their use of liminal space contribute to troubling the boundaries between subjecthood and objecthood. I address the following research questions: How can the work of NYCP be said to produce a formal and spatial liminality? In what ways does the work of NYCP model objecthood through the interaction of representation and abstraction, image and object, body and space, and what are implications of this for spectatorship? In this chapter, I examine the company's

[76] Frances Colpitt, *Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective.* Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Research Press, 1990, p5.
[77] John Perreault, 'Minimal Abstracts' Excerpts reprinted from *Arts Magazine,* March 1967, *Art International* March 1967*, The Village Voice* January 12th 1967*,* in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* edited by Battcock, Gregory, 256-262. Berkley, University of California Press, 1968, p262.

productions *The Evening* (2015) and *Queens Row* (2018), representing both of these as 'sculpture made out of theatre'. I demonstrate that a sculptural approach to theatre invites a phenomenological spectatorial experience, in which the objecthood of a play brings the subjecthood of the spectator to prominence. I show how the exchange between the spectator, performer and the objecthood of the production becomes an embodied encounter, which, in its challenge of formal boundaries, manifests formal and spatial liminality, and subsequently draws attention to the construction of subjectivity.

In recognition that the work of any company is influenced by the diverse career trajectories of its members, I begin by discussing the artistic biographies of NYCP's core creators and reflect on the range of practices that inform the company's interdisciplinary, creative context. The multifaceted range of artistic collaboration contributes to the sense of the company's work as itself multidimensional and inherently challenging of formal boundaries. In the following section I provide a brief outline of Minimalist sculpture and relate its processes of reduction, exposed materiality and its invocation of a phenomenological spectatorial encounter to the work of NYCP. Finally, I examine how these processes manifest in spatial deconstruction and architectural manipulation in *The Evening* and *Queens Row* to produce formal and spatial liminality that re-defines and opens new possibilities for the performer/spectator encounter.

Company Biographies: Artists of NYCP

New York City Players comprises a network of artists with diverse, independent practices that intertwine, contrast, and cross-pollinate in ways that contribute to their work's situatedness across formal boundaries. This has cultivated a necessity to make connections and to find equivalences between forms in order to develop a common language in the rehearsal room. The varied backgrounds, training and experiences of the company members covers a wide spectrum of theatre, performance and fine art practices that span naturalistic acting, experimental performance-making, writing, dance, painting, music, scenography, photography, and design, all of which has contributed to the work's rigorous formalism.

Richard Maxwell is the founder and artistic director of New York City Players. His commitment to being a perpetual 'beginner' – foregrounded in the title of his 2015 book *Theatre for Beginners* – is deliberately practised through a systematic shedding of accumulated assumptions surrounding form, and an attempt to approach each new work from a place of unknowing, to ensure that each project is a

genuine experiment and enquiry.[78] The recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship (2010), the Doris Duke Award (2012) and the Spalding Gray Award (2014), Maxwell was invited to be artist in residence at the Whitney Biennial in 2012 and at the Chinati Foundation in 2018. He is the only artist whose work has been conventionally understood and written about as 'theatre' to be represented by Greene Naftali Gallery, which signals a new recognition of the formal liminality of NYCP's work, its relationship to visual art, and the art world's increasing interest in performance. Greene Naftali co-published with Weistreich-Wagner an edition of Maxwell's plays (described in the Introduction) entitled *Richard Maxwell and New York City Players: The Theater Years* (2017). Despite the growing number of visual artists incorporating performance into their artworks, it remains a relatively rare occurrence for an artist working in the medium of theatre to be represented by a gallery, with this again pointing to an engagement with form that aspires to transgress and redefine boundaries. In 2019 Maxwell taught a portrait-painting module at City College, New York, in which he applied his theatre-making methodology to the practice of painting. Students were invited to approach their practice from a formalist stance, to interrogate basic presuppositions about their chosen medium and to articulate their personal artistic commitment. In February 2021, Maxwell presented his first painting exhibition, *Hells Kitchen Paintings,* at Six Summit Gallery inside New York's Port Authority Bus Terminal. In September the same year his new history painting which depicts the events that took place on January 6, 2021 at the US Capitol was included in the group show *Welcome to L.A* presented by Overduin & Co, in Los Angeles, curated by John Burkhart.

Prior to founding NYCP, Maxwell undertook an artistic fellowship with Steppenwolf Theatre Company in Chicago and was co-founder of Cook County Theatre Department (1992) with fellow artists Roberto Argentina, Antony Alvarez, Lara Furniss, Elizabeth Gilliand, Kate Gleason, Jason Greenberg, Erica Heilman, Brain Mendes, Dave Pavkovic, Rebecca Rossen, Antonio Sacre, Chris Sullivan, Vicki Walden and Gary Wilmes. Maxwell attributes the development of his directorial methodology to the foundational explorations, discussions and arguments he participated in with this company.[79] Key principles of this early period that continue to inform his work today include: the exploration of what it means to say 'no' as a performer onstage; a deliberate challenge to the established improvisation pedagogy of always saying 'yes'; and the notion of 'anti-preconceptualism', which Maxwell describes as a 'resistance to predetermining the meaning of a production and an effort to embrace the present material circumstances of performance instead'.[80] The roots of postdramatic strategies, of applying an approach to theatre-making informed by conceptual art, are evident here. Maxwell continued to

[78] Richard Maxwell and Philip Bither, 'Richard Maxwell in Conversation with Philip Bither' *Walker Arts Centre,* January 7th. 2015b available at : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5pBnYSaWUIY accessed 12/03/15.
[79] Richard Maxwell, *ART WORK: An Evening with Richard Maxwell. The New School.* New York City. 29th Sept. 2016.
[80] Ibid.

collaborate and make work with Cook County Theatre Department till 1994. His desire to pursue his own artistic endeavours and interests led him eventually to become frustrated with the 'decision-making as consensus' process of the company.[81] In 1994 Maxwell made the decision to break with Cook County Theatre Department and move to New York. There, he undertook a 6-month internship for The Wooster Group, led by Elizabeth Le Compte, an artist he continues to cite as a significant influence in the development of his own practice.[82] Whilst in New York he began to write, direct and produce his own plays, and was granted a residency at Richard Foreman's Ontological Theatre where he staged his first self-authored play *Burlesque* (1994). His participation in the downtown New York experimental theatre scene led to invitations to present work at Williamstown Theatre Festival two years running (1996, 1997) and by 1999 he had officially founded the theatre company New York City Players with performer-collaborators Lakpa Bhutia, Bob Feldman, Jim Fletcher, Brian Mendes, Tory Vazquez and Gary Wilmes. These long-standing, core company members have played essential roles in shaping the artistic principles and developing the performance methodologies of New York City Players over the last twenty years. They have engaged in an ongoing, collective inquiry into the ontology of performance, within and outside of their work with NYCP, interrogating what it means in aesthetic, social and political terms, to stand and speak before an audience.

Writer, director, actor and teacher Tory Vazquez is the lead figure in developing NYCP's participation programme. Vazquez has worked prolifically as a performer in the downtown experimental theatre scene. As well as consistently performing in the work of NYCP, Vazquez has been a core company member of the theatre ensemble Elevator Repair Service since 1996, co-creating and performing *Cab Legs* (1997), *Total Fictional Lie* (1998), *Gatz* (2006), and *The Sound and the Fury* (2008). She has presented two original full-length dance theatre works both commissioned by Performance Space 122 in New York, *The Florida Project*, (2001) and *Wrestling Ladies* (2002), both of which received Jerome Foundation Fellowships. In 2005, Vazquez became the lead teaching artist for The Kitchen's education programme at Liberty High School for Newcomers, where she developed her theatre participation practice working with immigrant students to build language skills, develop arts literacy and provide them with creative tools for self-expression. Out of this work, and with collaboration from theatremaker Katiana Rangel and anthropologist Jasmine Pisapia, Vazquez established NYCP's Incoming Theatre Division in 2015, the company's education programme for immigrant New Yorkers, which now comprises an ever-expanding ensemble of recurring participants including Yasmin Sanchez (Dominican Republic), Bréhima Sangaré (Ivory Coast), Zarshed Djamaliddinov (Russia), Michael Rodriguez and Leury Polanco (Dominican Republic), Rosana Appleton (Panama), Sarah Camara (Ivory Coast), Fatim Kamara (Togo), and Amara Sidibe (Guinea).

[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.

The Incoming Theatre Division programme foregrounds the social practice of NYCP's work and provides time, space and artistic support for a growing community of new and returning participants to develop original writing exploring their experiences as immigrants living in the United States. The participants, most of whom have had little to no previous experiences of theatre-making or performance, are able to hone skills in collaborative theatre practice, playwriting, improvisation, stage design and production management. The programme culminates in the presentation of an ensemble production that combines the participants' writings. Productions thus far have included: *I Came from There, I am Here Now* (2016), presented at The Kitchen; *The Second Wedding of Yasmin Blessing to Jeff Jackman Jnr* (2017) and *Immigration Stories* (2018), both presented at The Performing Garage; the audio project *What This Stillness Brought Us* (2020), a series of one-to-one recorded interviews with ensemble members, developed within the social-distancing context of Covid-19, in place of what would have been a live performance; *The Vessel (2021);* and *Graceland* (2022).

The long-standing company members of NYCP constitute a mixture of trained and non-trained performers, a distinguishing aspect of the company that cultivates a working context in which suppositions about performance are challenged and in which the distinctions between what it might mean to behave as a 'person' onstage versus a 'performer' are purposefully explored. As trained performers and fellow co-founders of Cook County Theatre Department, Mendes and Wilmes bring to NYCP a significant amount of shared knowledge and understanding from their previous experiences of collaboration. Mendes and Wilmes both have diverse performance experience beyond their work with NYCP. Mendes has performed in a range of experimental theatre productions including Andrew Ondrejcak's *Elijah Green* (2016) and Tania Bruguera's *Endgame* (2017), has collaborated with Annie Baker, Adam Rapp, The Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment, and in 2009 directed NYCP's production *People Without History.* Wilmes has performed in a mixture of both Broadway and Off-Broadway productions, including The Wooster Group's *Cry, Trojans! (*2015) and *Brace Up!* (2003); Richard Foreman's *Paradise Hotel* (1998); Steppenwolf's production of Tracy Letts' *August Osage County* (2006); Elevator Repair Service's production *Gatz* (2010); *Chinglish* (2011); and Young Jean Lee's *Straight White Men* (2015).

Maxwell met Lakpa Bhutia whilst they were both working as kitchen staff at the Paradise Cafe on 43rd Street in Manhattan. Despite having no previous performance experience, Bhutia agreed to collaborate in the production *Flight Courier Service* (1997), and has since performed consistently throughout the company's history in productions including *Burger King* (1997), *Ute Mnos Vs Crazy Liqors* (1998), *Caveman* (1999), *Cowboys and Indians* (1999), *Boxing 2000* (2000), *Henry IV Part 1* (2003), *Neutral Hero* (2010) and *Police and Thieves* (2019). Bhutia also collaborates with Vazquez on the Incoming Theatre Division programme.

Bob Feldman (1938-2018) was a New York-based musician and regular customer of the Paradise Cafe where he met Bhutia and Maxwell. Feldman's life-long career playing the saxophone involved collaborations with artists including musicians Charles Mingus and Sonny Simmons; poets Allen Ginsberg and Jack Micheline; film director Francis Ford Coppola; and playwright Sam Shepherd. Maxwell wrote the monologue piece *Champions of Magic* (1996) specifically for Feldman, which the latter performed at the Ontological Theatre. Since this first performance, Feldman worked regularly as both a performer and musician in NYCP productions; his musical sensibility continues to inform the company's ensemble ethic and performance methodology which is founded on the principles of 'listening' and sharing time.

Jim Fletcher is a writer, and a member of the art collective Bernadette Corporation. He worked for several years as an art handler, as well as being involved in a number of political movements (including ACT UP -AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) before beginning to perform at the age of 35. In parallel with his consistent practice with NYCP, Fletcher has worked widely with other experimental theatre companies and artists including Elevator Repair Service, The Wooster Group, Forced Entertainment and choreographer Sarah Michelson.

Nicholas Elliott is an artist whose work spans writing, filmmaking, film criticism and translation. He was the U.S correspondent for the French Film magazine Cahiers du Cinéma from 2009 to 2020. His film *Icarus* (2015) premiered at MOMA and the Film Society of Lincoln Center's New Directors/New Films Festival. He spent several years working for NYCP as a company manager/ producer and in 2021 he participated as a performer-collaborator in NYCP productions *The Vessel* and *Field of Mars.*

Regina Vorria worked for several years as NYCP's producer. The responsibilities of this role were not limited to the office, but involved hands-on, practical participation in every aspect of the development, production and mounting of performance. Her thorough understanding and engagement with the company's aesthetic processes meant that Vorria regularly took on the roles of stage manager, lighting technician, and tour manager, as well as maintaining the daily, ongoing tasks of producing. She studied Theatre at the School of Fine Arts at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki before gaining an MFA in Theatre Producing at Columbia University. Vorria's producing work has centred on interdisciplinary art, and work that encourages cultural exchange. She worked with playwright/director Julia Jarcho, director Nadia Foskolou, and also for the annual performing arts festival 'Between the Seas', a festival that promotes contemporary Mediterranean performing arts in the US.

The visual dimension of NYCP productions develops from the enduring collaborations Maxwell has with scenographer Sascha Van Riel, costume designer Kaye Voyce, technical director Dirk Stevens and designer/photographer/videographer Michael Schmelling. Based in the Netherlands, Van Riel has

worked with a wide range of dance, theatre and musical theatre companies, including: Zuidelijk Toneel, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Silbersee, Jan Versweyveld, Wouter van Looy and Nicole Beutler Projects. Van Riel also teaches set design at the University of Arts Utrecht. In 2004 she received the Charlotte Köhler prize for young Dutch designers. She worked as a scenographer for NYCP on *The Frame*, *Das Maedchen* , *Neutral Hero* , *Open Rehearsal, Isolde*, *The Evening*, *Paradiso* and *Queens Row*.

Kaye Voyce has worked extensively on both off-Broadway and Broadway productions including *Significant Other* (2017) directed by Trip Cullman; *The Real Thing* (2014) and *Hamlet* (2017) both directed by Sam Gold; and *True West* (2019) directed by James Macdonald. In 2016, Voyce won an Obie Award presented by the American Theatre Wing for sustained excellence in costume design. Her longstanding collaboration with NYCP include the productions: *Open Rehearsal*, *The Frame*, *The End of Reality*, *Neutral Hero*, *Isolde*, *The Evening*, *Paradiso* and *Queens Row.*

Michael Schmelling has worked prolifically as a photographer in NYC and LA with his work presented in The Fader, W, Wired, Details, NY Magazine, The Wire and The NY Times Magazine. Michael's own books include *Land Line* (J+L Books), *Shut Up Truth* (J+L Books), *The Week of No Computer* (TV Books), *The Plan* (J+ L Books) and *Atlanta* (Chronicle Books).

As well as these core artists who have worked recurrently with the company since its formation, New York City Players' production history also includes a diverse range of production-specific collaborations, based on the company principle of consistently working with new people in order to challenge established concepts and introduce new propositions and perspectives that complicate and enrich their existing artistic methodologies. An important feature of these collaborations is that they include combinations of professionals and non-professionals, brought together to work from an equal place of unknowing. Discussing his perception of the impact of formal training, Maxwell states: 'A lot of what training does is allow you to cope with the fear of performing, to deal with this extraordinary thing […]. I think a lot of times training allows you to deny the anxiety, the fear. And I would much prefer to see people afraid and brave'[83]. Foregrounding the performer's moment–to-moment emotional and physical response to the demands of each production – as opposed to emphasising the creation of a 'show' steeped in virtuosity - draws attention to the reality of the live event, and to the personhood of the subject onstage and their unique navigation of the task of performing.

The ensembles that have formed for individual NYCP productions have included musicians, choreographers, dancers, writers, filmmakers, visual artists and those for whom an artistic collaboration

[83] Robin Pogrebin, 'A Playwright Who Creates People, Not Roles'*, New York Times* 25th September 2000.

of any kind is entirely new. The cast of *Good Samaritans*, for example, included trained actor and political activist Kevin Hurley, musician Bob Feldman, and Rosemary Allen, a nurse practitioner with no previous performing experience. Non-professionals are asked to commit to the challenge of performing; by contrast, those members of the ensemble who are already professional artists are asked to abandon their training and venture out of their comfort zone, for example by playing an instrument they are not familiar with, or by discarding learnt acting techniques. In this way, an NYCP ensemble often comprises a group of individuals grappling with the shared experience of being a 'beginner' in some way, and of approaching the project from a blank slate of deliberate naiveté and curiosity. These ensembles of beginners cultivate rich working environments within which to interrogate form, to ask both simple and complex questions about how one comes to understand what it is that is being made and why. The company's 'Why Are You Here' exercise (discussed in detail in Chapter 2) asks collaborators to articulate a personal commitment to the project. By making space for everyone in the room to have a high-stakes, meaningful investment in creation, a level of intimacy is established, in which the social dynamics of these ensembles give form to the work. In the next section, I provide a brief overview of the heterogenous field of Minimalism, which also saw a rigorous questioning of form in the range of its practices and critical polemics, and relate these aesthetic values to the work of NYCP.

Minimalism, Medium, Form

A useful definition of Minimalism by Edward Strickland describes it as 'a movement, primarily in postwar America, towards an art – visual, musical, literary or otherwise – that makes its statement with limited, if not the fewest possible, resources' and 'exposes the components of its medium in skeletal form'.[84] The experimentations within, and the writings about, the medium of sculpture, particularly during the 1960s, gave rise to a new language and a set of aesthetic and critical values that continue to inform art today. One of Minimalism's central considerations is of the art 'object' and its 'objecthood' or presence, revealed by the exposition of the materiality of the artwork and its components. Critics began to use words such as 'reduction', 'rejection', 'dematerialization', 'essentialisation', 'distillation', and 'exclusion' when describing the aesthetic approach of Minimalist artists in presenting this 'objecthood'. Key figures associated with Minimal sculpture include Donald Judd, Carl Andre, Anne Truitt, Dan Flavin and Robert Morris, artists whose tendencies were to 'present art things that are […] indistinguishable (or all but) from raw materials or found objects, that is, minimally differentiated from mere non-art stuff'.[85] The notion of context, therefore, became crucial to the notion of the 'object' in order to distinguish its status as 'art', and not just as an everyday object. Thus, the site of the art gallery

[84] Edward Strickland, *Minimalism-Origins.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000, p7, p13.
[85] Kenneth Baker, *Minimalism: Art of Circumstance,* New York: Abbeville Press, 1988, p66.

gives an essential contextual framework for Carl Andre's 'Equivalent VIII' (1966) – a rectangular arrangement of 120 firebricks – to be interacted with as 'art', and not merely as a quotidian pile of bricks. Strickland maintains that rather than 'anti-art', a more precise description of such practice would be 'anti-artifice', given the 'almost Brechtian element in its forthright exposure of means'.[86] This comparison is significant as it denotes a theatrical element to Minimalism, carrying the implication that its overt exposure of means is intended for a viewer, and moreover that its meaning and status as 'art' resides in that interaction. For example, Carl Andre's 'Equivalent VIII' gains its status as sculpture in the spectator's *engagement* with it as sculpture, and its meaning resides in their cultural, social, psychological and political perception of it. According to Garth Evans, 'the fact of [sculpture] being thought of as sculpture is more critical to its existence, its life, than any other facts about it. This is a fundamental distinction between objects and sculpture'.[87] From this perspective, the viewer of Minimal sculpture can therefore be regarded as an integral element of the work: they define its identity as sculpture and, by paying attention to the work's formal qualities, they unlock its complex social meanings by drawing on their individual, physical and psychological experience of it. For Vito Acconci, an artist who worked in and across the mediums of performance, video and installation, Minimalism:

> was the art that it made it necessary to recognize the space you were in. Up until that time I had probably assumed the notion of a frame, I would ignore the wall around it. Finally, then, with Minimal art, I had to recognize I was in a certain floor… I was in a certain condition. I headache for example. I had a certain history, I had a certain bias…what Minimal art did for me, was to confirm for myself the fact that art obviously had to be this relation between whatever it was that started off the art and the viewer.[88]

Minimalism, therefore, centered around the relation of the art to the viewer; it made the specificity of the viewer, a product of a particular social cultural context, an individual in a specific time and place, and their relation to the art, the art itself.

The art critic Michael Fried famously denounced Minimalist art (or Literalist art as he termed it) for what he perceived as its inherent 'theatricality': its reliance on the spectator's engagement with it, and their self-conscious awareness of being implicated in their perception of the work. He also perceived within Minimalist art a 'kind of latent or hidden naturalism, indeed anthropomorphism'.[89] Fried's anti-theatrical stance does not express an antagonism directly towards theatre, but, as he later clarified in a 1987 review of his 'Art and Objecthood' essay, it was 'the wrong sort of consciousness of an audience' that he contested. For Fried, the main problem with Minimal art was that it created a situation in which 'the beholder knows himself in a indeterminate open ended – and unexacting – relation *as subject* to

[86] Edward Strickland, p13.
[87] Garth Evans, 'Sculpture and Reality' *Studio International* February, 1969, p62.
[88] Vito Acconci, 1982 *Recorded documentation by Vito Acconici of the exhibition and commissioned for San Diego University* (audio cassette) San Diego, San Diego University.
[89] Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', in *Art and Objecthood.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, p157.

the impassive object on the wall or the floor'.[90] Fried goes on to equate the 'disquieting' experience of being distanced by the object, to the experience of being distanced by another person.[91] The self-conscious spectatorship that Fried denounced is viewed retrospectively by others to be a creative source of production and potential transformation. James Meyer sees more positive ramifications from the demands of the Minimal artwork on the viewer: 'the literal object not only heightened awareness of the work as a physical entity, […] it also made the spectator aware of herself as a perceiving subject'[92], this self –awareness making the viewer an active and conscious participant in the meaning-making process.

Art critic Rosalind Kraus saw potential in the dynamic, self-conscious participation of the spectator in relation to Minimal artwork, and asserted influentially in her 1973 essay 'Sense and Sensibility: Reflections on Post 60s Sculpture' that Minimalism had the ability to engender a phenomenological model of subjectivity in its reception. Krauss argued that 'the meaning of much Minimal sculpture issues from the way in which it becomes a metaphorical statement of the self, understood only in experience'.[93] For Krauss, this notion resonated with the phenomenological philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In reflecting in the late 1960s on the relationship between the artwork and the spectator, the artist Robert Morris considered that:

> the better new work takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light, and the viewer's field of vision. The object is but one of the terms in the newer aesthetic. It is in some way more reflexive because one's awareness of one-self existing in the same space as the work is stronger than in previous work, with its many internal relationships. One is more aware than before that he himself is establishing relationships as he apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context.[94]

Morris's account strongly suggests that Minimal art is not only theatrical but performative, as well as pointing to the blurring of the boundary between sculpture and performance art. Indeed, Morris's own sculptures such as '(Untitled) Passageway' (1961) and '(Untitled) Box for Standing' (1961) relied on the viewer not only spectating from afar but physically interacting with the work up close, through the body, in order to access its meaning.

The dancer, choreographer, filmmaker and co-founder of the Judson Dance Theatre, Yvonne Rainer, worked extensively to explore a bodily incarnation of Minimalism. Her deeply political, feminist work foregrounded 'a more matter-of-fact, more concrete, more banal quality of physical being in

[90] Ibid, p155.
[91] Ibid, p155.
[92] James Sampson Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties,* p153.
[93] Rosalind Krauss,'Sense and Sensibility: Reflections on Post 60s Sculpture'. *Artforum,* (1973): 42-53.
[94] Robert Morris, 'Notes on Sculpture, 1966' in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* edited by Battcock, Gregory, pp222-235. New York: E.P. Dutton& Co Inc, 1968.

performance […] in which skill is hard to locate.'[95] Working in the 1960s, Rainer developed a unique approach to choreography and made understated, strangely expressive dance. Her provocative 'No Manifesto' (1965), which rejected spectacle and illusion and which is considered to have significantly influenced the shift from modern to postmodern dance, laid out the following terms: 'No to spectacle… No to virtuosity… No to style… No to moving or being moved.'[96] Her application of modernist experimentalism to choreography, the use of everyday, task-based movements, game-based structures and the rejection of narrative, combined to give the body in performance a peculiar mass, made it look more object-like than human, and resulted in dance that thus teetered on the border between dance and sculpture. Elisa Archias notes that

> Rainer's dance shared with Morris's geometric objects an emphasis on the body as a dumb, heavy material object, situated in a particular space with other objects and viewers. Yet where Morris depended on viewers to make this observation of themselves, based on a comparison with his sculptures, Rainer conveyed the message using the body itself. It was as if she wanted to take the kind of body that minimalism encouraged its viewers to understand themselves to be, and put it on stage as the performing body.[97]

Rainer's application of Minimalist aesthetics to the human body itself thus revealed the body's material physicality and its spatial relationality to its environment.

Returning for a moment to Perreault's observation that 'the closer an artist gets to the mythological essence of his particular medium, the faster his medium becomes something else' illuminates Rainer's work as transmuting from dance to sculpture, and Morris' work as transmuting from sculpture to performance. Relating Perreault's statement to theatre necessitates close attention to his use of the term 'medium'. In writing about art, the term is commonly used in two key senses, referring to both the *material* of artistic expression and the *mode* of artistic expression. Perreault' s use of the term appears to refer to the *mode* of artistic expression, as he describes artworks which, in the process of their creation, demonstrate the capacity to shape-shift: for example, from painting to sculpture. It is however, also worth noting the *material* sense of the term in this instance, as Perreault argues that it is only through engaging with the fundamental properties of a certain medium, and thereby accessing its 'essence', that the transformation of 'medium' occurs. Indeed, the etymology of the term 'medium' is derived from the Latin word 'medius' meaning 'middle'. In relation to the *mode* of artistic expression, we might understand the 'middle' sense of the term 'medium' to describe the channel of communication

[95] Yvonne Rainer, 'A Quasi Survey of Some Minimalist Tendencies in the Quantitively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or An Analysis of Trio A' ed Gregory Battcock, New York, Dutton, 1968, p267.
[96] Yvonne Rainer, 'Some Retrospective Notes on a Dance for 10 People and 12 Mattresses Called "Parts of Some Sextets" Performed at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, and Judson Memorial Church, New York, in March 1965, *Tulane Drama Review* 10 (2): 168-178, p178.
[97] Elise Archias, *The Concrete Body : Yvonne Rainer, Carolee Schneemann, Vito Acconci*, Yale University Press, 2016.

between the artist and the spectator, in which ideas and expression are transferred: in other words, that medium is a conduit of transformation.

In *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (2004) Pamela M Lee draws out the transitional, intermediary nature of the term 'medium' in relation to Minimalist practice/artworks. Lee argues that 'the word medium foregrounds a liminal stance at its heart. The term underscores process or mediation. It is a vehicle of communication rather than the fact of communication itself'.[98] Lee also notes both the 'mode' and 'material' sense of the term 'medium', and makes a case for the 'mode' sense of it being more fundamental, arguing that this sense of the word acknowledges the temporal aspect of the relationship between artwork and spectator, and emphasises the incomplete, unfinished nature of this relation, as it is in process:

> [T]hough the word medium is most commonly understood as the physical basis of a work of art […] a more fundamental reading of the term emphasises its formative value as a communicative agent between two points. Medium is always already in between; becomes like a speech act, is performative in staging a dialogue between work of art and beholder. And in this sense medium always internalizes a singular engagement with time. For the act of mediation is a process, and that process (because in the middle of things) is necessarily partial.[99]

For Lee, the term 'medium' therefore emphasises the liminal, transitional nature of Minimalist artworks. They are not fixed entities, but are incomplete, shifting, unstable, elusive and unfolding in time: this recognition further illuminates Perreault's observation on the way in which Minimalist artworks appear to occupy a position at, or on both sides of, formal boundaries.

In order to relate the term 'medium' to the realm of performance and theatrical productions, which are an amalgam of various materials and modes, its perhaps most useful to think in terms of 'form'. According to Nicholas Ridout, 'form […] is a relationship, and in the theatre that relationship is social, historical and unfolding'; it is 'the relationship instantiated in the performance among actions, objects and images, the spectators, their "brains" and the institutional circumstances under which all these elements are brought together.'[100] For Ridout, form is an all-encompassing social relationship manifested from the spectators' interaction with the interconnected aesthetic practices, properties and modes of production, and 'it is when that relationship is instantiated, in the act of reading or viewing, that the form of the work is realized. Until that moment, form does not really exist.'[101] The proposal that form does not exist until the spectator's interaction with the artwork is an illuminating position

[98] Pamela M Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press 2004, p51.
[99] Ibid., p52.
[100] Nicholas Ridout, 'Media: Intermission' in Michael Shane Boyle, Matt Cornish & Brandon Wolf (eds.) *Postdramatic Theatre and Form* (London, Metheun Drama: 2019) p98, p96.
[101] Ibid., p96.

from which to examine the function and liminality of form in the work of NYCP as it implicitly suggests that the spectator might be regarded as the key figure in defining that form. As I will later demonstrate, the liminality of form in the company's work makes a demand on the spectator to make and re-make form in new and different ways.

As established, a key result of Minimalism's aesthetic reduction of the art object is to produce a greater focus on the relationship between the work and the spectator. In the work of NYCP, this aesthetic reduction is evident in exposed materiality, spatial, material manipulation of the performance environment, the formal value of stillness, and the use of monologue. NYCP's Minimalist reduction of stage action to the stillness of the individual speaking subject, coupled with the cultivation of a one-on-one relationship between the individual performer and the individual audience member, intensifies the subjective relationship between spectator and art 'object'. In this case, the art objects can be understood to be the performer, the text and the space. The company's treatment of the theatrical production as an autonomous, 'unusual object' [for the director and performers] to follow'[102], their commitment to 'an unpretentious economy'[103] and dedication to 'work in raw form'[104], all resonate significantly with the aesthetic values of a range of Minimalist artists 'who shared a philosophical commitment to the abstract […] material object in the 1960s.'[105] I argue that the company's commitment to sculptural sensibilities and form in performance – a focus on materiality, an attention to 'objecthood' of production, a non-hierarchal treatment of theatrical elements of space, text, light, performer, music – not only promotes creative and individual meaning-making processes on behalf of the spectator, but also instigates an embodied phenomenological spectatorial experience. When treated as an object, the play can become a site of collaborative creative production, and can in turn manifest spectatorship itself as a sculptural material. As I outline in the Introduction, while reviewers of NYCP's theatre have often identified its minimalism (with lower case 'm'), at least one other scholar, Natalie Alvarez, has connected the company's practice to Minimalism as an artistic movement. Whereas Alvarez's study focused on the theatrical 'pause' as a site of a phenomenological encounter, I examine the ways in which spatial, material and scenographic manipulation of the performance environment contributes to such an encounter.

[102] Richard Maxwell, 'ART WORK: An Evening With Richard Maxwell'. *The New School.* New York City. 29th Sept. 2016.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Frances Colpitt, 1990, p5.

The Evening (2015)

At once a eulogy to Maxwell's father, and the first part of a trilogy drawing loosely on Dante's *Inferno*, *The Evening* 'is a performance in three movements: a prologue, a play, and its dissolve.'[106] In an interview with Philip Bither, Maxwell explained that the passing of his father informed every moment of *The Evening*.[107] Indeed, in the prologue, the performer Cammissa Buerhaus reads an extract of the journal Maxwell kept during his father's last days. In a section of the text that reflects on the experience of keeping the journal, Maxwell describes a feeling of blurring: 'As I wrote I felt more and more like I was the one being written. Actually, the sensation was one of being unwritten, and without form'.[108] This concept of 'becoming unwritten' is enacted in *The Evening*'s form through a choreographed sequence of spatial and material deconstruction. The application of Minimalist/ sculptural principles contributes to the production's formal liminality, and the presentation of liminal space within the play. I read this act of dismantling as an act of formal deconstruction, in which the production transgresses boundaries between 'theatre', 'sculptural object' and 'image', and in doing so performs its own liminality.

As described in the thesis introduction, the final sequence of *The Evening* lasts approximately ten minutes and sees the total transformation of the theatre space through an intricate dismantling of a complicated set representing a dive bar. Presented in an end-on configuration, the structures supporting the flats, which represent the walls of the set, are deliberately conspicuous onstage, which creates the previously described effect of resemblance. The set is doing the job of being a set: it acts as a referent for another place, simultaneously drawing attention to its existence as a 'set'. Through a Minimalist lens, the set's exposed materiality thus foregrounds its own objecthood. It is a non-representational object of representation. From this perspective, it is a sculpture made out of the materials of theatre.
In the final section of the play, the set is pulled apart in a choreographed sequence. The stagehands neither rush nor meander, but move in and around the performers – who are representing 'characters' - with a measured sense of efficiency and purpose in the execution of their task. The pace of their movements mark out time, as they roll up a rug, carry walls, props and instruments offstage. Meanwhile, the performers stand still. This tension between motion and stillness, between the representational fiction of the play and the material reality of the auditorium, marks a break, schism or fissure in form. The 'play' is being dismantled, deconstructed, and the performers have stopped moving; they are

[106] Jennifer Krasinski, 'Death Becomes Her: Jennifer Krasinski on Richard Maxwell's The Evening' *Artforum,* March 25th 2015 available at: https://www.artforum.com/slant/id=51081 . accessed: 10/02/2018.
[107] Richard Maxwell, 'In conversation with Philip Bither'. Walker Arts Centre, January 7th. 2015 Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5pBnYSaWUIY accessed 12/03/18.
[108] Richard Maxwell, *Evening Plays,* New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2020, p3.

suspended; they are almost in a tableau. Discussing the application of visual art principles in performance art, writer and performance artist Anthony Howell argues convincingly for the value of stillness in its ability to invite a level of spectatorial agency more commonly afforded by painting:

> Stillness enables a reading of the performance piece which is more akin to the way we read a painting than the way we read a conventional play. When a still tableau is presented, the audience is not required to 'follow' the action. They read the scene at their own pace, and the eye travels as it wills, upwards, downwards, across in either direction. When we follow a drama on the other hand, we are given little time to develop our own thoughts. Instead we are the receivers of the piece. Our thoughts about it occur in its intervals or after the final curtain. In front of a painting, we develop our own thoughts, and this is an active form of contemplation which the canvas stimulates.[109]

Howells suggests that, in performance, stillness summons a form of engagement in which the image or art object is privileged over the drama or narrative, which thus increases spectatorial autonomy, and creates the potential for the spectator to have a more complex and highly personal engagement with the work in question. NYCP's application of the formal value of stillness in *The Evening* results in a representational complexity which operates to destabilise form. The performance, rather than just containing images and objects, in that stillness itself approaches the status of image or object. Stillness draws focus to material properties of the stage and the reality of the auditorium, and creates, in Maxwell's term, the effect of 'resemblance'.[110] In the example of the dismantling, the application of stillness contributes to a formal rupture which allows the production to approach the status of image or object. Spectating at this production becomes like watching a 'play' attempt to transcend its own form, trying to hatch out of its shell and become something else. Once all the materials of the set have been removed, Buerhaus stands alone as a white fog steadily fills the stage, creating an 'image' where there was once a 'play'.

In an interview, scenographer Van Riel informed me that her main sources of inspiration for this final sequence in *The Evening* were Gustav Doré's illustrations for Milton's *Paradise Lost* and James Turrell's 'Aten Reign' installation at the Guggenheim.[111] Van Riel described having an intense emotional experience as a spectator to Turrell's installation, of being moved to tears in what was an 'architecture of space made with light.'[112] The installation encourages a state of 'reflexive vision', which Turrell describes as 'seeing yourself seeing' and in which space is perceived to have a life of its own.[113]. Van Riel spoke about wanting to imbue the final scene of *The Evening* with a similar sense of vitality and possibility that would keep a wide avenue of perception and engagement open for the spectator, and to resist definition as much as possible, so that its discovery and meaning ultimately

[109] Anthony Howell, *An Analysis of Performance Art: A guide to its Theory and Practice,* London: Routledge. 1999, pp.9-10.
[110] Richard Maxwell, 'ART WORK: An Evening With Richard Maxwell'. *The New School.* New York City. 29th Sept. 2016.
[111] Sascha Van Riel, Personal Interview, 21st January 2021.
[112] James Turrell, 'Aten Reign', 2013 available at http://web.guggenheim.org/exhibitions/turrell/
[113] Ibid.

resided in the viewer. In composing the scenography for the final scene, Doré's illustration of Beatrice on a cloud was particularly influential for Van Riel, as looking at the drawing was like:

> trying to catch something you cannot catch, it's more like a feeling somehow. If you zoom in on this pen drawing what is behind the lines? What is behind the drawings of the pen? What is between the drawings of the pen? Where are we? And that was for me very inspiring, because I thought there is not nothing but something unknown.[114]

Van Riel's description of the 'not nothing but something unknown' that she perceived in Doré's illustration provided the inspiration for the grey/white space presented in the final scene, which demonstrates the interplay of presence and absence through Beurhaus's slowly dissolving figure. After the dismantling of the 'play' the spectator is not provided with any answers as to where Cammissa's 'character' now is, or indeed 'what' the artwork is. What is happening? Is it still 'a play'? Where have we gone? Are we somewhere else? Each spectator will engage with the image created from grey/white space in a different way. The simple act of perceiving this colour invites a unique emotional, physical response from the spectator, indeed it has been claimed that 'perception of colour in the theatre can be a powerful experience […] as coloured light has been shown to influence blood pressure, heartbeat, respiration, perspiration, eye movement and muscular tension'.[115] The end sequence therefore suspends itself in a formal liminality, a space of undefinition, and the phenomenological engagement that the Minimalist principles of the production invites, opens the possibility for the spectator to experience this formal liminality on an embodied level.

It has been suggested that in the theatre there is a primary level of meaning that is absorbed and constructed spatially through the body. For example, Bernard Beckermann states that 'we absorb the segmental pattern of presentation kinaesthetically rather than perceive it focally, that is, we absorb it through our muscles as well as our minds', and that 'perception includes subception, bodily response to stimuli before we are focally aware of the stimuli. […] [T]his means that our bodies are already reacting to the texture and structure of the action before we recognise that they are doing so'.[116] The spectator, therefore, absorbs meaning through the spatial awareness and perception of their body, even before they are focally aware of what is going on. Similarly, philosopher Michael Polanyi argues that in viewing an object, individuals incorporate 'it in our body – or extend our body to include it – so that we come to dwell in it'.[117] This concept of extending the body to dwell in the object is a useful position from which to examine the material dismantling of the objecthood of the production. In foregrounding

[114] Sascha Van Riel, Personal Interview, 21st January 2021.
[115] Joslin McKinney, and Philip Butterworth, *The Cambridge Introduction to Scenography*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2009, p180.
[116] Bernard Beckerman *Dynamics of Drama: Theory and Method of Analysis* (New York: Drama book specialist 1979, p75.
[117] Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension,* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967, p16.

its own objecthood and then deconstructing it, the production makes it possible for the spectator to experience something of this dismantling on an embodied level. The German philosopher Robert Vischer wrote about the empathy it is possible to feel in relation to an object, arguing in his 1873 dissertation 'On the Optical Sense of Form' that in interacting with an object the viewer 'unconsciously projects its own bodily form … into the form of the object'.[118] He conceptualises this experience as 'Einfühlung', which would be later translated as 'empathy' by psychologist Edward Titchener in 1909. In describing this interaction, Vischer states: 'I entrust my individual life to the lifeless form, just as … I do with another living person. Only ostensibly do I remain the same although the object remains an other. I seem merely to adapt and attach myself to it as one hand clasps another, and yet I am mysteriously transplanted and … transformed into this other.'[119] For Vischer, the 'Einfühlung' or empathy the viewer experiences with an object, involves relocation and transmutation of the viewer and their being into the object. It is both a deconstruction and a construction of the self, an un-doing and a becoming.[120] Drawing on this, I suggest that the objecthood of *The Evening*'s theatrical set and its deconstruction invites a phenomenological engagement from the spectator and makes it possible to experience 'Einfühlung' or empathy with this material deconstruction, which, in turn, mirrors Maxwell's description of 'becoming unwritten'. It is through an undoing that the potential is created for the spectator to gain a heightened awareness of their own subjectivity and its formation.

Queens Row (2018)

NYCP's engagement with visual art principles has led the company increasingly to experiment practically with space, place and architecture. The last decade has steadily seen the work escape the auditorium, to take place instead in galleries, in ice-plant buildings, upon historic fort foundations in the Chihuahuan desert, in bunkers, and hotel rooms. According to Joslin McKinney, 'architectural space shapes the fundamental proposition of theatre, that is, the space where someone watches and hears someone else performing. Spatial arrangements define acts of theatre because they establish the essential relationship between performer and audience.'[121] In this way, architecture delineates social dynamics.

Since the company are increasingly incorporating architectural choices of this kind into their work, it is perhaps not altogether surprising that, for Maxwell, their ideal venue in which to create work would

[118] Robert Vischer (1994 [1873]) 'On the optical sense of form: A contribution to aesthetics', in *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873–1893*, eds Harry Francis Mallgrace and Eleftherios Ikonomou, Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities.
[119] Juliet Koss (2006) 'On the limits of empathy', *Art Bulletin* 88(1), p139.
[120] Patrick Anderson (2018) To Be Undone, *Performance Research*, 23:6, 25-34, p26
[121] Joslin McKinney and Philip Butterworth, *The Cambridge Introduction to Scenography*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2009, p105.

be 'a gallery that's in transition'[122]. The liminal status of a space in flux is not only practically useful due to the greater artistic freedom granted by the relaxed regulations on what the company is permitted to transform, but metaphorically and conceptually significant. The latin for liminal is 'limen' which means threshold. Liminal therefore suggests a place of transition, an 'in-between' place; it is to be on a precipice of some kind, but to be not yet arrived. The anthropologist Arnold van Gennep first introduced the concept of liminality in his book examining the changes in life-stages, *Rites de Passage* (1908). For Van Gennep, a rite of passage has three phases: separation (pre-liminary rite), transition (liminal rite), and incorporation (post-liminal rite).[123] For Gennep then, liminality is a condition produced by a socially prescribed transition between states of life. In psychology 'liminal' refers to the threshold which is the beginning of perception – the *sub*liminal being the area in which sensation is not perceived. Liminal space therefore can be understood as that which is neither one thing nor the other; that which is fluid, elusive, and alive. It is a precipice of perception: the very beginning or periphery of awareness and consciousness. To make work in a liminal space places the production in a state of suspension, of living ambiguity, activity and possibility that, as I argue, can be ultimately completed by the bodies of performers and spectators who attend it.

Tim Etchells, artistic director of the British theatre company Forced Entertainment, describes unfinished, abandoned spaces that are at once deeply rooted in history, and also open to the possibility of an alternative uses, as nurturing a subversive creative energy:

> We always loved the incomplete – from the building site to the demolition site, from the building that once was and is no longer to the building that will be used […] The fascination of ruined places, of incomplete places […] the strange charge of building left to run down – they were always the best places to play – stinking of previous use, ready for transgression.[124]

Both Forced Entertainment and NYCP are thus sensitive to the creative potential of making work in incomplete buildings, to *inhabit* liminality in order to access a freedom in redefining space. But to inhabit liminality is literally a contradiction in terms, an impossibility, for liminality is elusive, escapes, cannot be pinned down. Therefore, to inhabit it is to be perpetually reaching for something that one can never obtain; it is to be dedicated to a hopeless act. In *La Presence et L'Absence* (1980) spatial theorist Henri Lefebvre proposes an understanding of 'spatial becoming' by interrogating the concept of reality from a metaphysical standpoint and examining the dialectal relationship between presence and absence. For Lefebvre, there can never be pure, fundamental presence because presence is something that, by its nature, is always partial, always sought somewhere else. From this perspective, presence is 'an act of

[122] Richard Maxwell, The Kitchen: 'In Conversation with Richard Maxwell', by Elizabeth Wiet. Jan 17th 2020 available at: https://thekitchen.org/blog/117 , accessed: 26/02/20.
[123] V.W Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982, p24.
[124] Tim Etchells, *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment*, London: Routledge, 1999, p78.

being, a momentum, a possibility of a plenitude which is never fixed. Similarly, absence is never absolute, it never stops to reveal itself as absence.'[125] When representations seek to present themselves as complete or whole, 'they reveal the absence of what they try to represent and therefore make presence escape'.[126] Working in liminal spaces can be viewed as a way of framing this dialectical interplay of presence and absence, and as framing the process of 'spatial becoming'. For Lefebvre:

> Space thus conceptualized is defined as the play of absences and presences, represented by the alternation of light and shade, the luminous and the nocturnal. 'Objects' in space simulate the appearance and disappearance of presences in the most profound way. Time is thus punctuated by presences. They give it rhythm, but it also contains things that are not what they seem, representations that simulate/dissimulate.[127]

Space is thus conceived by Lefebvre as a dynamic dialectic between presence and absence, which is always in a state of flux. This movement gives shape and rhythm to time, but also allows the emergence of representations that cannot be fully grasped, or easily comprehended. Liminal spaces then, are spaces that conceal as much as they reveal.

The concept of 'liminal space aesthetics' has been popularised by internet memes and Twitter-bots such as @Liminal_Spaces, which invoke 'the cultural memory of the Millennial/Z generations' by sharing images of 'hallways, waiting rooms, parking lots and rest stops' and 'roadside attractions, playgrounds, vacant houses or abandoned malls'.[128] The images 'relate to the unique feelings of eeriness, nostalgia and apprehension' people report when they encounter these spaces after hours, in the absence of other people, making them seem strange and other-worldly.[129] In this meme-driven aesthetic, liminal spaces foreground a nostalgia towards such spaces that lead many to 'reflect on the passage of time and yearn for times of innocence and optimism associated with childhood and coming-of-age periods.'[130] The yearning and nostalgia evoked by this specific aesthetic of liminal spaces resonate with the images in the company's monograph described in the thesis introduction – the screengrabs that frame absence through picturing empty stages and blurred figures. To work in liminal spaces therefore, arguably builds an element of nostalgic longing into the work.

The production *Queens Row* (2018) involved significant architectural transformations made to the institutions in which the production took place: at the ICA, London and the Kitchen, New York, respectively. In a review of the production, critic Tom Sellar notes that it revealed an aesthetic in which

[125] Elena Giovannoni Paolo Quattrone *The Materiality of Absence: Organizing and the case of the incomplete cathedral*, 2018, Vol. 39(7) 849–871, p853.
[126] Ibid, p854.
[127] Henri Lefebvre, *La présence et l'absence*. Paris: Casterman 1980, in Elden, Lebas, & Kofman, 2003, p56.
[128] Aesthetics Wiki 'Liminal Space' *Fandom* available at: https://aesthetics.fandom.com/wiki/Liminal_Space accessed 7/09/21.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.

normative components of theatrical form were radically stripped back. He goes on to suggest that this reduction of form contributed to the distinctive qualities of amplification and intensification in representation, and describes how the company:

> pares away nearly every layer of theatre - character, narrative, image and movement are minimised or submerged. The staging shows that less really can be more; in spite of the sparseness, these monologues acquire a mythic charge, making us wonder – just how human are these figures appearing before us on the pedestal?[131]

Sellar's use of the word 'pare' in this instance recalls the sculptor who carves away at stone in order to reveal the form embedded inside. That 'less can be more' in the 'sparseness' of staging implies that deconstructing the physical organisation of the performance environment may allow the communicative nuances of spatial relations, materiality and presence to emerge, resulting in increased expressivity, and accounting for the 'mythic charge' to which Sellar refers. There is a paradox in accessing the 'mythic' or that which is beyond human through an obdurate materiality, which is captured succinctly by writer and critic Phillipe Sollers when he states: 'there is nothing more metaphysical, as everyone knows, than a certain materialism'[132]. In other words, as demonstrated in the example of *The Evening*, the more a work of art foregrounds its own materiality, the more there is the possibility for an experience of transcendence beyond the material, in the reception of the art, for a transgression of form, and for the work to serve, as Sellar identifies, as an 'embodiment of heightened expressive consciousness'[133].

In both the London and New York run of the production, the company responded to the specific characteristics of the building of each institution, which ranged from aesthetic and sculptural considerations of space, to social, historical, considerations of the institution itself, and of its location. Based on these spatial, architectural, and social-historical investigations, the company initiated physical changes to the space of performance in each venue that would introduce a dialogue between the text, the performance, and the precise material, and social-historical reality of the space. At the ICA, these investigations resulted in a total excavation of the performance space, a stripping away and gutting out that allowed the company to access physical aspects of its history. As well as paring down theatrical components, this material uncovering and exposition of the architecture of a given space points to the treatment of space itself as both an aesthetic and social material. The company explain that in their work the process of 'knocking down walls […] drilling holes in the floor' is driven by 'this impulse[…] to find the "outside" inside the space' in order 'to escape the theatre, or at least find a means to escape, to make the space porous'[134]. The removal of the floor, which consequently created a foot-deep drop into the space, exposed an original wooden gymnasium floor complete with the scratches, markings,

[131] Tom Sellar 'Queens Row: In Richard's Maxwell's New Play, A Sparse Futurism' *4 Columns*, 17th January 2020.
[132] Phillip Sollers The Friendship of Roland Barthes, trans Andrew Brown, Polity Press: Cambridge, 2017, p43.
[133] Tom Sellar 'Queens Row: In Richard's Maxwell's New Play, A Sparse Futurism' *4 Columns*, 17th January 2020.
[134] Richard Maxwell, The Kitchen: 'In Conversation with Richard Maxwell', by Elizabeth Wiet. Jan 17th 2020.

abrasions – a palimpsest of the physical traces of the movement and intentions of bodies that had previously occupied the space. The drilling of a hole through an external wall of the space that led directly onto the Mall allowed a shaft of natural light to pierce the performance, making a connection between the interior reality of the production and the exterior reality of the city. As described by Maxwell, 'we opened up the space and it started to breathe'[135].

Gay McAuley writes compellingly about the tension between the offstage and onstage, the inside and the outside, in *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (2000). In discussing the boundaries of the offstage and on, and the physical structure of the theatre building which demarcates the space of the performance from and the outer city in which it is situated, McAuley asserts that 'the connection between the onstage and the off is the means of bringing into focus the reality status of the one in relation to the other, and indeed the relation of the dramatic fiction to the society in which it is being performed […]. The theatre space can be seen to be mapped onto the real space of the city.'[136] McAuley's claim suggests that it is at these boundaries that the art and its societal context mutually extend one another. By drilling holes in walls, and by exposing the material construction of the building, NYCP's architectural activities can be seen as an attempt to provide a direct channel between the performance space and its immediate social context, and to draw attention to the existence of the performance within this specific time and place. In an *Artforum* review of the New York performance of *Queens Row*, Jess Barbagallo describes a spectatorial experience of heightened awareness of space and location in the city, through the interaction of light and sound in the production:

> [E]xtended plays of light […] dance across the bare stage like the details an idiosyncratic painter attends to in the corner of a canvas; the revelation of a window […] looks out onto 19th Street; and the sweet sounds of a car passing the Kitchen, […] reminds us we are inside, and that there is a world outside. All is taut with intention.[137]

Barbagallo's words show that in keeping a direct channel open between the production and its location – in this case through the framing of a window – the spectator experiences the production with consciousness and awareness of where they are; they relate what they are watching to the society outside the auditorium.

NYCP's privileging of architectural considerations foregrounds space as a crucial component of the artwork and draws attention to the social processes inherent in space. Lefebvre's concept of space as a social product foregrounds these architectural transformations as processes of social construction.

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[135] Ibid.
[136] Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre*, 2000, p88.
[137] Jess Barbagallo, 'No Man's Lan' *Artforum,* January 29th 2020 available at: https://www.artforum.com/performance/jess-barbagallo-on-richard-maxwell-s-queens-row-82016 accessed 3/05/20.

Lefebvre states that 'space is neither a mere "frame" after the fashion of the frame of a painting, nor a form or container of a virtually neutral kind, designed simply to receive whatever is poured into it. Space is social morphology; it is to lived experience what form itself is to the living organism, and just as intimately bound up with function and structure.'[138] If space is social morphology, then the framing of liminal space implies a framing of a *liminal* social morphology, a formation of the social that is suspended in the moment of performance and open to be defined by the spectators who attend to it.

Conclusion

In their spatial and formal liminality, both *The Evening* and *Queens Row* as I have argued, invite the spectator to experience liminality on an embodied level, to be in a space of undefinition and indeterminacy, to be without certainty or answers: to be, as Van Riel described, in a place of 'not nothing, but something unknown'. In an 'undoing' of form, and a potential 'undoing' of subjectivity, the spectator is able to look anew at their own social construction. The deconstruction of form that the company present can be viewed as having a wider social significance. Scholar Caroline Levine's expanded understanding of form as not only pertaining to aesthetic realms, but as 'patterns of social, political experience', is especially pertinent here. For Levine, 'form always indicates an arrangement of elements, an ordering, patterning or shaping' and 'if the political is a matter of imposing and enforcing boundaries, temporal patterns, and hierarchies on experience, then there is no politics without form'[139]. If politics is a matter of imposing form on space and time as Levine argues, then space is a product subject to both social and aesthetic manipulation. A deconstruction of established aesthetics forms then, is not unconnected from a deconstruction of established social forms. And to collectively inhabit the space of the unknown as a spectator, in the wake of the deconstruction, to be in a space of indeterminacy, is to be collectively on the precipice of alternative social possibilities. In the next chapter, I provide close readings of two explicitly social productions *Ads* and *Dévoiler* through the lens of Lefebvre's spatial theory and examine the social processes of construction that these works make visible.

[138] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space,*Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, London: Blackwell, 1991, pp.93-94.
[139] Caroline Levine F*orms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network,* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015, p3.

Chapter Two
'The Self Onstage is Activism': The Subject in Space in the work of NYCP

Introduction

This chapter explores the construction of subjecthood in NYCP's work through the lens of sculpture, and in order to do so will establish a *spatial* and *material* understanding of two productions: *Ads* (2010, 2018) and *Dévoiler* (2019). In what follows I pay close attention to the company's manipulation of the physical organisation of the performance environment and their treatment of space as an aesthetic material. By attending to the ways in which sculptural principles adopted in these productions - including the foregrounding of space, scale, material, repetition, a sense of potentiality and architecture – frame the representation of the relationship between the individual subject and space, the individual and the collective, the self and society, I hope to illuminate the social processes of the company's work. For social theorist Henri Lefebvre, space is always socially produced, and always exists in relation to power. The investigation of space calls, he insists, for an analysis of the 'dialectical relationship between demand and command, along with its attendant questions: "Who?", "For whom?", "By whose agency?", "Why and how?"'[140] Following Lefebvre's prompt, this chapter addresses the ways in which sculptural principles draw attention to the social relations embedded in, and created by, space. Through close reading these two productions, I argue that NYCP's visual art-based methods, attitudes and values complicate, deconstruct, and reveal the representation of the performer onstage as both art 'object' and active 'subject', showing further that the manipulation and treatment of space can be understood as both an aesthetic and social practice.

I begin by discussing *Ads* (2010, 2018), a theatrical production that raises a series of socio-spatial provocations through the elimination of the live performer and deployment of the video-projected subject. I then move to examine *Dévoiler* (2019), a co-production between NYCP and a community of migrants in Aubervilliers, in which the transformation of the theatre space is instigated both through the choreographed movement of bodies in performance, and through the architectural, functional restructuring of the theatre building itself. In both cases, I show that the company's distinctive treatment of space as an aesthetic material enacts a dialogue between representation and abstraction, image and object, body and space, making visible the appearance and disappearance of presence, and troubling the boundaries between subjecthood and objecthood. As I argue, these performance strategies present the performer as both a subject defined by space and an active agent in the transformation of space, and by

[140] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space,* Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, London: Blackwell, 1991, p116.

extension draw attention to the restrictions on, and resistant capacities of, real world citizens. Ultimately the chapter argues that NYCP's application of visual art aesthetics exposes the social relations that construct space, and in consequence collapses the boundaries between artistic practice and social practice, demonstrating that a deliberate manipulation of form and material inevitably results in an engagement with processes of social construction.

The analysis of plays in this chapter is underpinned by Lefebvre's model of social space. By reading the productions through a Lefebvrian lens, I argue that the sculptural principles implicitly embedded in NYCP's work contribute to spatial production and interventions which have social implications, including: offering alternative modes of an individual subject inhabiting/being represented in space; the functional transformation of space; representations of subjectivities that are fluid rather than fixed; and dissolved dichotomies of self/other, body/space, individual/community. First published in 1974, Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* offered one of the first spatial analyses of societal construction. According to Lefebvre, space is not a simply a vacuum or a container; rather, it is simultaneously a product and a process of social activity formed inside societal structures and hierarchies developed under capitalism. By examining the relationship between materiality and sociality, Lefebvre theorises a social production of space in his 'spatial triad', which considers the creation of space through the interconnections of *perceived, conceived* and *lived space*.[141] These three standpoints are in perpetual, dynamic play, interrelating with and superimposing upon one another according to the specific social or historical context within which space is produced.[142] In this chapter I use Lefebvre's spatial triad as a framework through which to examine NYCP's productions. By identifying the interrelations of *perceived, conceived and lived* space in *Ads* and *Dévoiler*, and by examining the body of the individual subject as a key site of spatial production, I demonstrate how the sculptural principles of the company's work contribute to socio-spatial processes of intervention and transformation.

Lefebvre's Spatial Triad

Lefebvre's first category of *perceived space*, also known as 'spatial practices', is practised through experience: it is associated with the tangible dimension of space and derives from how people move in space in their everyday lives, the everyday routines and accepted social conventions that enable a person to participate in a spatial event. Lefebvre gives the example of 'the daily life of a tenant in a government-subsidized high-rise housing project', a life that is grounded in the physical materials and spaces of

[141] Ibid., pp 38-39.
[142] Ibid., p46.

their daily and urban reality.[143] In this way, spatial practice can be understood as reflecting a given society's ideology and reproducing its dominance. This category is the phenomenological ground for the production of space, as it derives from the physical activity of the body. Lefebvre's second category is that of *conceived space*, referred to by him as 'representations of space': this is space that is theoretically conceptualized by scientists, architects, designers, engineers and politicians. For Lefebvre, *conceived space* is the 'dominant space in any society', managed by and embodying the purposes and power of the state apparatus, and tending towards a system of knowledge, signs and codes.[144] These manifest representations of mental constructs are 'the logic and forms of knowledge, and the ideological content of codes, theories, and conceptual depictions of space'.[145] Finally, his third category of *lived space*, or 'representational space', I suggest is perhaps the most important facet of spatial experience in an analysis of theatrical representation as it combines practice and conception, and concerns the interrelations of the 'real' and the 'imaginary', 'overlay[ing] physical space, making symbolic use of its objects'[146]. Subjectively experienced by individuals and 'directly lived through its associated images and symbols'[147], *lived space* is a layer of abstract space that offers a means of imagining and mediating and is therefore especially pertinent to theatre and performance, which makes use of both 'real' and 'imagined' space. I use all three of these perpetually and mutually informing categories of the triad to augment my readings. Lefebvre's concepts have provided useful frameworks for considering power relations within space in theatre and performance, notably by Joanne Tomkins in *Unsettling Space* (2006) and Theron Schmidt in the article *Unsettling Representation: Monuments, Theatre, and Relational Space* (2010). In my reading, it is this third category of *lived* or 'representational space' - in which the lived practice of space and the imaginative mediation of space combine – that drives the analysis of the sculptural processes engaged in NYCP's productions.

The perception of *lived* or 'representational space' as potentially transformative is supported by the political geographer and urban theorist Edward Soja, who builds on Lefebvre's 'representational space' to propose the theory of 'Thirdspace'. Soja conceptualises 'Thirdspace' as a form of spatial imagination that has the capacity to alter social space. According to Soja, 'Thirdspace' is 'the most encompassing spatial perspective, comparable in form to the richest forms of historical and sociological imaginations'[148] as it collapses the barrier between the practice of perceived space and the theory of conceived space. It is 'simultaneously material-and metaphorical, real-and-imagined, concretely grounded in spatial practices yet also represented in literary, imaginative recombination,

[143] Ibid., p38.
[144] Ibid., p39.
[145] R. Shields, *Lefebvre, love and struggle: spatial dialectics,* London: Routledge, 1999, p163.
[146] Henri Lefebvre, 1991, p39.
[147] Ibid., p39.
[148] Edward Soja, ''Thirdspace: Expanding the scope of the geographical imagination', in Alan Read (ed.) *Architecturally Speaking,* London and New York: Routledge, 2000 pp. 13-30, p22.

epistemological insight, and so much more'[149]. Soja locates the possibility for social emancipation in 'Thirdspace', due to the 'multiplicitous representations' accessible through it, which render it 'a space of radical openness, a site of resistance and struggle'[150]. Soja argues that it is within the category of Lefebvre's 'representational space' and 'Thirdspace' that the potential for alternative forms of spatial production exists. As my analysis demonstrates, within the work of NYCP this potential arises from the dialectical spatial relationship between the spectators, performers, material properties and physical environment of the live performance. NYCP's concern with form, materiality, architecture and space foregrounds the reciprocal relationship between the body of the individual subject and space.

For Lefebvre, 'the whole of (social) space proceeds from the body' meaning that the body is a crucial instrument in the practice and production of space.[151] He argues that 'there is an immediate relationship between the body and its space, between the body's deployment in space and its occupation of space. […] [E]ach living body *is* space and *has* its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space.'[152] Lefebvre goes further to theorize that this relationship between the body and space is one that is essentially reciprocal as 'the body with its energies at its disposal, the living body, creates, produces its own space; conversely; the laws of space […] also govern the living body and the deployment of its energies.'[153] NYCP's visual art-informed strategies foreground the mutually informed relationship of the body and space, and in doing so, I argue, emphasise both the subjecthood and objecthood of the individual performer. As I show, viewing NYCP's work through the lens of Lefebvre brings to light the social relations embedded in space that influence the individual, but also the potential and agency of the individual to transform social relations and construct new alternative ways of being through spatial production. According to Soja:

> we are, and always have been, intrinsically spatial beings, active participants in the social construction of our embracing spatialities. Perhaps more than ever before, a strategic awareness of this collectively created spatiality and its social consequences has become a vital part of making both theoretical and practical sense of our contemporary life-worlds at all scales, from the most intimate to the most global.[154]

I argue that NYCP's sculptural approach to theatre-making foregrounds for both audience and performers Soja's communally constructed spatiality. The performance event draws attention to the interdependence and complicity of the bodies present and each performer/spectator contributes to the construction and definition of space in the performance. It is inside the mutuality of this

[149] Ibid., p24.
[150] Ibid., p28.
[151] Henri Lefebvre, p405.
[152] Ibid., p170.
[153] Ibid., p170.
[154] Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places,* Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, p1.

interrelationship that creative processes of social construction and reconstruction take place: bodies are both subject to exterior influence and capable of intervention.

At one point in *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre directly addresses 'theatrical space', and its relationship to 'representations of space' and 'representational space':

> To the question of whether such a space is a representation of space or a representational space, the answer must be neither - and both. Theatrical space certainly implies a representation of space - scenic space - corresponding to a particular conception of space (that of the classical drama, say - or the Elizabethan, or the Italian). The representational space, mediated yet directly experienced, which infuses the work and the moment, is established as such through the dramatic action itself.[155]

Theatrical space, therefore, with its implication of 'representation of space' through its scenic space, and the mediation of 'representational space' through dramatic action, combines practice and conception, the real and the imagined, the physical and the abstract. Lefebvre's deliberately equivocal description of the status of theatrical space as 'neither - and both' a 'representation of space' and a 'representational space' suggests that theatrical space is by its nature unstable, constantly in flux, constantly being produced and reproduced. These qualities of theatre allow representation itself to be in a perpetual state of becoming, of being made and re-made anew, of resisting fixed meaning. In Lefebvre's argument, space is defined as a complex web of relationships that 'becomes re-described not as a dead, inert thing or object, but as organic and fluid and alive; it has a pulse, it palpitates, it flows and collides with other spaces. And these interpenetrations—many with different temporalities—get superimposed upon one another to create a *present* space.'[156] The specificity of the singular performance event of NYCP's productions, therefore, constitutes a creative act of spatial production, constantly shifting in accordance to the social interrelationships of the bodies present and the physical, material environment.

Ads

First staged in in New York in 2010, *Ads* is a theatrical production that utilises a video-projected subject instead of live performer, and in doing so, questions dominant socio-spatial principles, and engages in a commonality that contains difference. The production has toured extensively, in numerous iterations

[155] Henri Lefebvre, 1991, p188.
[156] A. Merrifield, 'Henri Lefebvre: a Socialist in Space' in: M. Crang and N. Thrift (Eds) *Thinking Space,* London: Routledge, 2000, p171.

undertaken with different local, non-professional performers/participants, each of whom is invited to answer the question 'What do you believe?' by self-authoring their own three-minute monologue. As part of the rehearsal process, the participants are filmed stepping up onto a plinth, and delivering their speech. After being filmed reciting their speech, Maxwell asked each participant to do it again, this time, not reciting, but using their text as a guide/ inspiration to improvise with in the moment of being filmed. The participants' preferred version is presented. In the performance itself, each individual appears onstage as a 'ghost' or 'hologram' through the company's adaptation of the nineteenth-century stage 'trick' or optical illusion called 'Pepper's Ghost'. The original technique involved catching the reflection of a brightly lit live performer offstage onto a pane of glass onstage, thus creating the illusion of their presence. In *Ads,* NYCP replace the live performer with the video recording of the performer, which is projected onto a rear projection screen, with this in turn projected onto a human-scale pane of glass in front of a black curtain onstage. This process creates a life-size, three-dimensional projection of the performer that is simultaneously hyperrealist in its detail and other-worldly in its incorporeal materiality.

After its initial run in New York (2010), *Ads* toured to Salzburg and London in the same year (here the video recordings of the NYC participants were presented), and subsequently to Evry (2011), Marseille (2011), Toulouse (2011), Santarcangelo Festival, (2012), Bonn, (2012), Eferding (2013), Chicago (2015) and Marfa (2018), with local participation in every case. The collaboration of local residents results in the production not only providing a portrait of a series of individuals, but also of a specific location and community. All iterations took place in theatre venues, except that in Salzburg (which was presented in a museum style format, and played on a loop, with spectators free to enter and leave at their own will) and Marfa, which was commissioned by the visual art organisation Chinati Foundation, and took place outdoors in the remaining structure of a disused ice plant building. I am choosing to focus my analysis on the Marfa iteration as the outdoor setting gives the production a more direct relationship to the specificity of its location and correspondingly, I suggest, more immediate interaction with its wider social-spatial context.

All of the environmental factors of the production's site-specificity – for example, the history of the location, the temperature, weather, light and soundscape - situate the production in the spatial specificity of Marfa, becoming key material elements of the production's construction. The relationship of the participants to the location, in the Marfa production, is put into especially sharp relief, not least since several performances coincided with rainfall, thunderstorms and lightning; the light of the projection was picked up and reflected in droplets of rain on the glass, which for Maxwell 'compromised the illusion but brought the thing into the room in a more concrete way'. Here, his use of the term 'the thing' suggests that the revelation of the projection's artifice amplified its sense of presence, adding further to its sculptural properties: the natural elements of rain, thunder and lightning became part of

that sculpture.

The question 'What do you believe?' that serves to generate the content of *Ads* echoes a practical exercise fundamental to the company's performance methodology. Throughout two decades of NYCP's work, performers have recurrently been asked the 'Why are you here question'[157]. The question is posed to the performer to increase their consciousness of their intention and purpose in being onstage:

> The question is not metaphysical (Why are we on this planet?). The question has nothing to do with character. It is "Why are you here right now in this room?" Being in touch with the answer, removed from the role, brings a deeper focus and sense of understanding that extends beyond the arc of what is written. The "why" you cross downstage is answered by the larger "why" you decided to step on stage in the first place. What reasons have drawn you to perform? From that, determine what the primary reason is. Another way of phrasing the question for yourself is, "What really matters to me?" In any case, turn the question into a sentence with a verb that you choose. "I want to - ." Or: "I will - ." Answer the question for nobody but you. It doesn't matter if you divulge your answer or not. It should be personal, simple and sincere.[158]

The 'Why are you here?' question and the 'What do you believe?' question, posed to the participants in *Ads,* significantly interconnect. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a 'belief' as '1. an acceptance that something exists or is true, especially one without proof, something one accepts as true or real; a firmly held opinion, a religious conviction,' and '2. trust, faith, or confidence in someone or something'[159]. The definition of a belief as a strong 'conviction' that is not necessarily grounded in fact suggests that it may signal a highly personal, subjective truth, an idea given deliberate significance and meaning by the individual. Both questions require the performer to engage in an act of self-reflection, to consider, define and consciously connect to their core values, desires, and intentions as a person at a specific time and place. Answering either question can be understood, to some extent, as a creative act of declaration, of self-authorship or self-definition, that forces the performer to become more intensely aware of the personal, social, cultural and political forces that have shaped their experience of the world, and consequently, to view themselves as part of a wider societal structure.

In *Ads*, 'Why are you here?' is refined to 'What do you believe?' to drive the content of the production and put a spotlight on a series of individuals attempting to articulate an understanding of their own existence. In this way, the production primarily examines what it means to be human, to be a person. Reflecting on NYCP's work, company member Jim Fletcher describes their practice regularly as a form

[157] Richard Maxwell, *Theatre for Beginners*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2015c, p68.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Oxford Dictionary of English, Third Edition, Edited by Angus Stevenson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p151.

of 'portraiture' founded on the personhood of the performer.[160] This positioning of the performer as the ultimate 'material' of the performance is further complicated by the use of the hologram form, which straddles a number of conceptual and aesthetic dichotomies. In this production, the performer is both present and absent: although the projection is of a video recording that took place in the past, it is now playing in the present and is manifested three-dimensionally before the spectator. The projection is both subject and object: the participant has full agency to write and express whatever they want, and in many cases participants respond to the task by articulating deeply personal, highly subjective viewpoints; yet in the moment of performance, the participant is transformed into a recorded image, they are no longer 'live' and cannot react to the spectator, and therefore are essentially an 'object'. Situated between theatre and visual art, the production thus sets up a series of dichotomies in which the performer is both represented and abstracted; material and virtual; eternal and impermanent; human and post-human.

In its formal liminality, *Ads* in turn raises fundamental questions about the nature of existence. In a *New York Times* review of the premiere, Charles Isherwood remarks of NYCP's work:

> What is novel and perhaps provocative is the notion that theater can take place without the direct participation of live people. Artists have been incorporating video and taped performance into theatrical works for many years, in many different ways, but there is usually some live component. Here the only one is the audience. *Ads* resembles a video installation in a modern-art museum more than a traditional stage piece, but it suggests in its quiet way that you can create humane, affecting works of theater without the literal presence of human beings.[161]

Isherwood observes that the absence of the live performer emphasises the production's relationship to visual art, since the subject at the centre of the theatrical performance is not a live, sentient performer but a three-dimensional, animated image. The subject *represents* a living being, but in the moment of performance the subject's material status is that of an 'image' or, due to its three-dimensionality, arguably approaches the status of sculptural 'object'. The distance created through the absence of the performer's live sentience significantly changes the relationship of the spectator to the performer, and invites the spectator to observe the performer as a figure in a wider social and, potentially, political context. I propose that, in consequence, the spectator's sentience fills the space created by the absent sentience of the performer. Observing a performer who is not 'in fact' looking back at you necessarily puts greater emphasis on the spectator's own meaning-making process, which is brought to the fore in this engagement. The spectator is thus brought to confront their own consciousness, in the absence of the live performer's.

[160] Jim Fletcher, Personal Interview with Jim Fletcher on 19/12/2020.
[161] Charles Isherwood, 'Detailed Reflections, Verbal and Visual', *The New York Times,* Jan 13th 2010 available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/14/theater/reviews/14ads.html accessed: 1/01/21

Describing themselves as 'a theatre company creating original work about people, relationships, and above all feeling', NYCP 'celebrate [the spectator's] ability to feel more than the actor['s]' and believe that the spectator experience can be potentially transformative. Maxwell defines removal – manifest in *Ads* in the removal of the live performer - as an essential technique in enabling the audience to engage with the work in this deeply personal way: 'if your goal is to have the audience get something emotional out of it—to experience something that carries them to another place, then we have to get out of the way and let them decide what they should be feeling'.[162] Indeed, a longstanding principle of the company's work is their cultivation of a 'one-to-one relationship between the individual performer and the individual audience member'. Strategies used to encourage this individualised form of engagement include the use of monologues, the performer's heightened consciousness that they are speaking to individuals, and the use of one-to-one eye-contact with individual spectators.[163] In *Ads*, the strategy of the solo performer delivering a monologue is taken one step further through the removal of their liveness. It is the individual spectator that provides the hologram with live consciousness, feeling and emotion, in an undiluted and uninterrupted way. In engaging with the hologram, the spectator's mind automatically rushes to make meaning, to attempt to understand the person represented by the hologram before them. The spectator develops understanding based on the information gathered from the hologram's physical appearance and from their speech. The absence of the live performer allows the spectator a more direct path to encountering their *own* reaction to the performer, their *own* thoughts, beliefs, feelings and judgements rising in response to the performer's.

In essence, the objecthood of the performer brings the subjecthood of the spectator into prominence. The repeated action of the ritualised entry and exit of the different performers draws attention to the spectator's meaning-making process. The spectator may ask themselves: Who is this person before me? Why do I instantly take a liking/dislike to them? Do their perspectives, thoughts and values align with my own, or do they conflict with these? Whose beliefs are 'right'? Is it a 'good' thing to have strongly held beliefs? Or do they isolate people/cause conflict and violence? Am I able to recognise the limitations of my own rigidity of thinking and close-mindedness in my encounter with another? Do I confront my own prejudices, snap-judgments, dismissals, approvals? Through the absence of the live performer, the spectator's awareness of their own thinking allows spectatorship itself to emerge as an effective 'material' of the performance. In observing and analysing their own thinking, the spectator is simultaneously building – perhaps unconsciously - a private portrait of their own personhood in response to the portrait of the performer provided by the holograms. I propose that this creative spectatorial act can be viewed through the lens of Lefebvre's *lived space* or 'representational space',

[162] Naomi Skwarma,'Eating the Heart of Richard Maxwell', *Hazlitt,* April 25th 2014 available at: https://hazlitt.net/longreads/eating-heart-richard-maxwell Accessed 21/05/2015.
[163] Richard Maxwell, Personal interview with Richard Maxwell on 23/03/2017, 2017a.

and Soja's transformative 'Thirdspace' - the layer of abstract space subjectively and imaginatively experienced by the spectator. The real-life wooden block becomes a concrete site upon which the projection of the performer and the projection of the spectator's consciousness intermingle. In this realm of *lived space* and 'Thirdspace', spectatorship becomes the material that completes the 'sculpture' of the performer and which, I will argue, holds transformative potential for the viewer.

In his writing about holographic performances in popular music, Ken McLeod perceives a powerful experience of 'spirituality' inspired by the performances, in which the audience experience the 'spiritual co-presence of the non-present performer'[164], which 'rather than signalling a loss of human agency […] reinforce[s] collective human consciousness.'[165] McLeod argues that:

> by obscuring the division between the material and the virtual, the human and the post-human, the finite and the timeless — [holographic performances] embody and inspire a variety of spiritual experiences that, perhaps paradoxically, reinforce the experience of the human precisely by highlighting the apparent lack of human presence.[166]

By transforming and shaping reality through collapsing boundaries between the real and the virtual, the living and the dead, this spiritual reinforcement of collective human consciousness is evident in *Ads*, through the realm of *lived space* and Thirdspace. Although the spectators are invited to experience a highly individual form of engagement with the hologram, in which they are deconstructing and constructing ideas about both the performer's and their own subjecthood, they do so collectively; at some point they may also question whether other spectators are having a similar experience. McLeod notes the irony in which, as audience to a holographic performance, 'we find ourselves celebrating and reinforcing our collective humanity through the seemingly artificial—an ephemeral, intangible, and ultimately mechanical image of ourselves.'[167] In *Ads*, the hologram's immateriality, liminality and intangibility intensifies a shared, communal, interrogative experience of, and reflection on, humanity. The radical openness of the *lived space* or Thirdspace produced in *Ads* allows spectators to come together to engage with difference, and instigates a collective, individual deconstruction and reconstruction of personhood, opening up the possibility for preconceived ideas to be challenged.

The *conceived space* produced in *Ads* also contributes to a 'dismantling' of dominant ideologies. The placing of a wooden block on the stage, a 'plinth' or 'pedestal' upon which the subject is projected to

[164] Ken McLeod, 'Living in the Immaterial World: Holograms and Spirituality in Recent Popular Music', *Popular Music and Society*, 39:5, (2016): p502.
[165] Ibid., p502.
[166] Ibid., p510.
[167] Ibid., p509.

stand, references the traditional display practice of sculpture or monument. In this way, the production implicitly questions the function and spatial production of the monument in society. Examining the relationship of sculpture to monument, the art critic Rosalind Krauss considers the significance of the pedestal as mediator between the site of the monument and its representational sign:

> We know that [sculpture] is a historically bounded category and not a universal one. As is true of any other convention, sculpture has its own internal logic, its own set of rules, which, though they can be applied to a variety of situations, are not themselves open to very much change. The logic of sculpture, it would seem, is inseparable from the logic of the monument. By virtue of this logic a sculpture is a commemorative representation. It sits in a particular place and speaks in a symbolical tongue about the meaning or use of that place. […] Because they thus function in relation to the logic of representation and marking, sculptures are normally figurative and vertical, their pedestals an important part of the structure since they mediate between actual site and representational sign.[168]

By referencing monument through the use of a plinth, *Ads* both emphasises the traditional 'logic of sculpture' as a commemorative representation and simultaneously subverts this logic, by the deployment of a video-projected, speaking, animated subject in place of a mute 'statue'. By this strategy the production interrupts and destabilises the spatial production of the traditional monument. Historically, monuments serve the purpose of commemorating a person or event considered notable through a form of figurative representation that is singular in its viewpoint and aspires to be definitive and final in its meaning. According to Lefebvre:

> Monumentality, for instance, always embodies and imposes a clearly intelligible message. It says what it wishes to say - yet it hides a good deal more: being political, military, and ultimately fascist in character, monumental buildings mask the will to power and the arbitrariness of power beneath signs and surfaces which claim to express collective will and collective thought. In the process, such signs and surfaces also manage to conjure away both possibility and time.[169]

In light of Lefebvre's spatial triad, monuments fall into the category of 'representations of space' or *conceived* space as they embody and reinforce the ideology and power of the state. The formal referencing of the monument in *Ads* through the use of a plinth can be understood as a 'representation of space' which is subsequently subverted, both in form and content, through the 'spatial practice' or *perceived space* of its occupation. By inviting the represented subjects to self-author monologues describing their belief systems, the 'message' of the monument no longer embodies the dominant ideology of the state but embodies instead the multiple, individual, contradictory and diverse messages of those who inhabit the state. In this way, the spatial occupation of the plinth by a stream of members of a given community undermines the spatial production of the monument as a tool in reinforcing a

[168] Rosalind E. Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' in *The Originality of The Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, The MIT Press: Cambridge Massachusetts, 1985: p279.
[169] Henri Lefebvre, 1991, p143.

singular dominant message, thereby enacting a transferal of power. This spatial intervention explicitly resists singular meaning, as every production *of Ads* necessarily conveys contrasting and conflicting viewpoints on issues including religion, politics, and culture, from participants of varying age, gender, race, ethnicity, social economic background. The 'monument' presented in *Ads* thus commemorates a subject that perpetually shifts and changes, a fluidity made evident through the entrance and exit of participants. On each occasion, the individual – in the non-body of the hologram - steps onto the wooden block and occupies the plinth to deliver a speech of their own writing that gives an insight into their unique personhood and position in the world. Space is re-defined and produced anew each time, through the interrelating amalgam of the *conceived* space of the monument - produced through the use of a plinth; the *perceived* space of the hologram - produced through the specificity of each individual's physical and verbal occupation of the plinth, the ideology of their outlook; and the *lived* space of the spectatorial projection of the spectator. When the speech is finished, the speaker steps off the block. There is a brief transition moment between speakers, during which the wooden block is empty, before a new subject enters and redefines the monument, spatially reproducing it through their occupation. This cycle of repetition establishes the idea of a subject that *contains* difference.

In the Marfa production of *Ads* (2018), approximately 50 participant beliefs articulated from the plinth covered topics ranging from religion, politics, family, technology, nature and money, to reflections on the town of Marfa itself. The production presented a community of people with extremely diverse outlooks, including conservative and liberal perspectives, strongly held beliefs and expressions of uncertainties and unknowns. Participant Mona Garcia declares herself as 'a Christian conservative and an American patriot'.[170] Jane Bright-Crockett defines herself in relation to the 'pioneering agricultural spirit' of her ancestors who were 'disciplined, determined and guided by unwavering faith', which, she believes, resulted in their 'incredibly successful' and 'prosperous' achievement in 'realis[ing] God's gift in [their] stewardship of the land'.[171] Retired bar keeper Raymond Zubiate states: 'I do not believe in religion. I do believe in cold beer.'[172] Attorney Liz Rogers says that she always found herself 'drawn to those people who didn't comply with social mores and did daring and sometimes illegal things' and that whilst she is 'in awe of people who have a deep faith, [she] tremendously admire[s] people who challenge or question religious dogma.'[173] Rosario Halpern, the publisher of the Big Bend Sentinel newspaper, believes that a 'free press is necessary for a strong democracy' and expresses fear for the trajectory of the United States:

[170] New York City Players, *Ads, Marfa:* Mona Garcia, Chinati Foundation, 5th-7th October 2018.
[171] New York City Players, *Ads, Marfa:* Jane Bright-Crockett, Chinati Foundation, 5th-7th October 2018.
[172] New York City Players, *Ads, Marfa:* Raymond Zubiate, Chinati Foundation, 5th-7th October 2018.
[173] New York City Players, *Ads, Marfa:* Liz Rogers, Chinati Foundation, 5th-7th October 2018.

> it hurts to see our planet being destroyed environmentally through lack of regulations, the land raped by powerful business persons who keep enriching themselves, the open and aggressive racism, the lack of respect for human decency […] walls being built and trade wars, where will this all end? What kind of a country are we leaving for our children and their children?[174]

Mary Farley believes that humans are not superior to non-humans, and that the realisation of this is imperative to prevent further violence and destruction:

> At the end of the day what really matters are birds and nature. […] Right now, it feels like we're a dominant tribe of destruction, ass-raping our way to oblivion. Why can't we face the reality that we are not better? We are not superior to anything else, period. Why do we think other beings are there just for us to abuse and slaughter? The land is there for us to pillage and rip apart? To extract the cent of profit in our corroded value system of make-believe. Unless we realise that we are equitable to the other inhabitants of this world, we will destroy ourselves in a flurry of stupidity and greed. And for what? Seriously to what end?[175]

Treyvon Stigler explains his belief in the detrimental effects of technology on human connection, communication and privacy. He announces: 'the government controls everything, from the money we grieve for, to the climate we live in, to the cell phone we use everyday, and trust with our whole identity. Artificial Intelligence is the next step for the world. Everything is data documented. Technology has taken over the way humans interact with the world.'[176]

Esther Sanchez describes a meaningful religious experience in which she 'saw an image that appeared to resemble Our Lady of Guadalupe' in the tree trunk of the pecan tree in her yard.[177] She describes seeing 'her blue tunic and a rosary hanging on her side' and notes that 'as the days passed several people came to see the image.' Sanchez 'felt blessed and honoured to have had the image appear in [her] yard'.[178]

Firefighter Augustin Gonzalez attributes growing up in a large family and learning to help, and be there for others as shaping his core values:

> You learn happiness. You learn respect. You learn how to treat each other well, how to be good with one another. You learn how to respect your friends, how to respect your community. Growing up with my grandparents, we helped everybody and anybody, when they needed help. whether it was someone broken down on the side of the road or just a friend needing assistance with whatever it may be. That's part of one the reasons I got into firefighting. Started when I was 15, I've been doing it for 27 years now.[179]

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[174] New York City Players, *Ads, Marfa:* Rosario Halpern, Chinati Foundation, 5th-7th October 2018.
[175] New York City Players, *Ads, Marfa:* Mary Farley, Chinati Foundation, 5th-7th October 2018.
[176] New York City Players, *Ads, Marfa:* Treyvon Stigler, Chinati Foundation, 5th-7th October 2018.
[177] New York City Players, *Ads, Marfa:* Esther Sanchez, Chinati Foundation, 5th-7th October 2018.
[178] Ibid.
[179] New York City Players, *Ads, Marfa:* Augustin Gonzalez, Chinati Foundation, 5th-7th October 2018.

Susan Kirr describes love as her 'religion':

> When you are in a disagreement with someone, if you show them love, it disarms them. You can use compassion to see their perspective. When you show a glimmer of love to a stranger, and you look into their eyes you see a human being inside there. You notice them. You say I know you are here, and I know you are important. I know that. I see the potential in you to love and be loved.[180]

Kirr's words, in the context of the performance, implicitly draw attention to the act of spectatorship itself. The spectator is reminded that the act of engaging with a person who harbours beliefs and values different from their own is a valuable experience that holds the potential to enrich and deepen understandings of other people, themself, and their interrelation within a wider shared structure. I have shared this selection of quotations from *Ads*' participant-performers in Marfa to illustrate the range and multiplicity of outlooks represented. The diversity of voice echoed formally in the fluid, ever-changing, representation of subjectivity that is manifested through the incorporeal 'immaterial materiality' of the three-dimensional projection, which itself stands in stark contrast to the rigidity and fixity of the historic monument. In this light, *Ads* can be understood as offering an engagement with identity politics that avoids restrictive re-inscriptions of 'homogenising sameness or essentializing difference'.[181] The repetitive formula whereby each subject enters, occupies the plinth, delivers a speech and exits simultaneously heightens their unique specificity and frames their representation within a wider commonality, without erasing difference. Space is produced and reproduced in new and different ways by each participant. This results in a complex engagement with politics of identity as it brings issues of sameness and difference, of commonality and individualism, into simultaneous, direct contact.

In *Performance, Identity and the Neo-Political Subject* (2013), editors Fintan Walsh and Matthew Causey describe the rise of identity politics in the 1960s as a crucial political development that allowed marginalised groups to 'gain rights and recognition through cultural fortification and legal amendment'[182], but observe that in a 21st century context of global capitalism, asserting identity politics is not without its limiting risks:

> We are at a stage where neoliberal culture has virtually absorbed any agency that politicised identities were once presumed to have. Capitalism sees in the fracturing of identity a wonderfully lucrative commercial project, to the extent that it does not simply respond to identitarian distinctiveness, but actively cultivates it for its own purposes. We cannot continue to assume that a proliferation of identities simply protects the interests of minority groups, for to do so implicitly naturalises inequality and the socio-political system that reproduces it.[183]

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[180] New York City Players, *Ads, Marfa:* Susan Kirr, Chinati Foundation, 5th-7th October 2018.
[181] Fintan Walsh, and Matthew Causey (eds) *Performance, Identity, and the Neo-Political Subject*, Routledge, 2013, p.2.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid.

The splintering off of a profusion of distinct identities, without the sense of a cohesive whole or shared space that can unite these different identities and emphasise their interconnected responsibility to each other, thus risks feeding the oppressive and devastating structures of capitalism. In discussing contemporary forms of public resistance, Judith Butler stresses the importance of commonality above individualism:

> Outside of our local groups or identity-based communities, we are figuring out what is our obligation to the stranger. Our commonality, whether it is anti-racism or radical democratic ideals, insists that we have obligations to one another that are not based on shared language or religion or even beliefs about humanity. Views do not have to be the same to sense that something is profoundly unjust and have strong ties of solidarity.[184]

In order to overcome contemporary structures of oppression, Butler explains the importance of engaging a wider sense of commonality and shared responsibility beyond individual identity-based groups. Engaging in commonality means creating a space that *contains* difference and harbours opposing views and different social, political experiences. Commonality is a space in which individuals of different identity-based groups can come together to witness each other within their shared structure, to gain a better understanding of their own social constitution within this wider encompassing structure, and therefore gain an awareness of their own position in perpetuating imbalances of power, and their responsibility to transform these. The company's work seeks to engender a form of social activity that engages spectators on an individual basis, making room for distinct interpretations, and representing a plurality of identities *within* a wider all-encompassing commonality. By representing the specificity of the individual subject within a wider frame, NYCP's sculptural approach to representation – manifested in *Ads* through the shifting subjectivities of hologram performers - foregrounds both the singularity and the commonality of the individual and attempts to facilitate an expression of humanity that transcends the divisive limitations of identity politics.

This stance, which invites us to view multiplicity as a means of articulating commonality, echoes philosopher Jacques Rancière's notion of 'dissensus'. Rancière maintains that art does not gain its political power by teaching through overt representation, but by challenging the 'distribution of the sensible' and creating 'dissensus'. He insists: 'if there exists a connection between art and politics, it should be cast in terms of dissensus, the very kernel of the aesthetic regime: artworks can produce effects of dissensus precisely because they neither give lessons nor have any destination.'[185] The

[184] Judith Butler, 'Solidarity in the Streets: An Interview with Judith Butler.' Interview by Samanta Sarra. Rabble.ca ., 23 May 2012.
[185] Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steven Corcoran, London; New York: Continnum, 2010, p. 140.

'sensible' in Rancière's use of the term refers to the field of perception, to what is visible or invisible to the community. It defines the ever-shifting boundaries of what is perceptible and common to the community, as well as to the particular groups who stake claims on this space and its representation. At the crux of the distribution of the sensible, then, is the question of the groups that are integrated in or expelled from the body politic based on social status and the perceived validity or invalidity of their speech. According to Daniel Brant, in Rancière's work:

> art is a mode of production, a type of work, that 'unites the act of manufacturing with the act of bringing to light, the act of defining a new relationship between making and seeing' that is best understood not simply as the reflection of a political ideology, but as 'the transformation of sensible matter into the community's self-presentation'[186].

Rancière asserts that art must not merely 'reflect' a given political ideology but must instead, in its creation, work to uncover new perceptions and understandings of a given community. In doing so it contributes actively to the transformation of the structures that govern it, which resonates with issues of representation in theatre and performance. Maxwell explains that an important aspect of NYCP's artistic goal is to expose and challenge ingrained societal perspectives:

> There is a whole aesthetic, a consensus if you will, of what constitutes good performance. [Early in the company's work] I thought it was maybe trend-based and would diminish over time. I see now that the aesthetic sensibility has only grown more pronounced. I have come to the conclusion that there is entrenched in our society, an *aesthetic class* of audience that unconsciously or consciously protects their cultured point of view. So I feel as though I have this mission: to challenge the expectations of the aesthetic class, and thereby broaden the audience.[187]

The company's mission, to defy the anticipations of the 'aesthetic class' and expand the audience, can be read as endorsing Rancière's argument for the importance of 'dissensus'. Working with non-professional performers and using text authored by multiple voices communicating contrasting viewpoints are strategies by which the company resists perpetuating a recognisable aesthetic sensibility and so seeks to evade commodification.

Despite the effort to produce 'dissensus' and unearth new insights of a particular community, the extent to which *Ads* succeeded in achieving this is open to debate. In its production it became evident that the social dynamics in Marfa are inherently bound up in Texas' complex cultural history: most significantly the ethnoracial stratification, discrimination, and marginalisation of Mexican-descent people and African American people. Racialisation in Texas, as indeed throughout the US, has played a significant role in 'the marginalization experienced by local blacks and Mexicans, especially in such areas as the

[186] Daniel Brant in *Understanding Rancière, Understanding Modernism* ed Patrick M.Bray Bloomsbury, 2017, p235.
[187] Richard Maxwell, 'Dévoiler' Interview, Theatre de la Commune, Paris, Oct 2019.

use of public spaces and accommodations, housing, access to services, education, and employment.[188]According to Brian D Behnken, in Texas, 'Mexican Americans and African Americans sought to overcome a similar type of segregation. Texas had, in both effect and practice, a dual Jim Crow system. Blacks and Mexican Americans fought to destroy a rigid system of de jure racial separation as well as de facto segregation.'[189] David Montejano recognises that while ' "Jim Crow" may appear to be an odd description of the situation of Mexicans in Texas [as] '[t]here was no constitutionally sanctioned 'separate but equal' provision for Mexicans as there was for blacks, […] in political and sociological terms, blacks and Mexicans were basically seen as different aspects of the same race problem.'[190] In Marfa, this form of racial discrimination of Mexican-descent people manifested in segregation in stores, restaurants, cinemas and even in the land reserved for cemeteries.[191] Until school integration in 1965, the Hispanic children that attended the Blackwell School in Marfa were banned from speaking Spanish, and beaten if they did.[192]

The fact that the production contained monologues presented in Spanish without subtitles by Hispanic members of the community, arguably decentred - to some extent - the white, English-speaking subject both on the stage and in the audience. In a *Glasstire* review of this production, Brandon Zech recognises the significance of this decentralisation in the context of Marfa's social cultural history, noting the way:

> Maxwell brought forward the Hispanic and Latinx population of Marfa, which is a community that, even though it makes up 68.7% of the town according to the 2010 U.S. census, can often feel ignored by a white, touristy, art-seeking audience. […] In a town that is considered "made" by Donald Judd and the art elite and that features permanent installations by a number of older white men, *Ads* felt like a small but important step in showing outsiders the other talents, thoughts, and views Marfa has on offer.[193]

Zech's reading acknowledges the production's attempt at facilitating a form of inclusivity, yet it risks obscuring the more complex and perhaps concealed nuances regarding social dynamics in Marfa. Despite the intention to produce a 'complete' representation of Marfa's community, Maxwell said he felt that ultimately *Ads* failed in this regard.[194] For Maxwell, the production was in fact, 'incomplete', as there were still people within the community who were not represented. He attributes this failure to

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[188] Jason McDonald, *Racial Dynamics in Early Twentieth-Century Austin, Texas*, New York: Lexington Books, 2012, p8.
[189]Brian D Behnken, *Fighting Their Own Battles : Mexican Americans, African Americans, and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Texas*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2011, p5.
[190] David Montejano *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas,* 1836–1986, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010.
[191] Tom Michael, NPR, *Marfa's Mexican-Americans remember "Giant" and Southwest Segregation* April 24th 2015, available at: https://www.npr.org/2015/04/24/401967121/marfa-s-mexican-americans-remember-giant-and-southwest-segregation accessed 2/12/22.
[192] Travis Bubenik, NPR *Hispanic students were once Segregated at this School. Now it will be a Historic Site.* Oct 5th 2022, available at: https://www.npr.org/2022/10/05/1126059159/hispanic-students-segregated-school-historic-site accessed 2/12/22.
[193] Brandon Zech 'Whats up with Marfa?' *Glasstire,* 22/10/2018 available at: https://glasstire.com/2018/10/22/whats-up-with-marfa/ accessed 16/06/20.
[194] Richard Maxwell, Interview, 18th November 2022.

the limiting strategy of the scouting/ recruiting process. The company typically relies on one person to share the invitation for participants to take part, and with hindsight Maxwell reflects that this approach was restricting, and that to increase the potential for a more inclusive, wide-spread participation, it would have been more effective to have asked multiple people to reach out to their contacts. He also described a prevailing sense of a societal 'rift' between Mexicans, Mexican-Americans and Americans that still pervades and shapes social relations and dynamics in Marfa. From this perspective it is arguable that *Ads* failed in terms of providing a representation of a community that was 'whole'. Yet this very failure, and the 'incomplete' representation of Marfa that *Ads* reflected, communicates something of the complexity of entrenched social positionalities. In its construction, in the failure to be fully inclusive, *Ads* contained the rift within itself and in doing so, simultaneously exposed it.

Banned as recently as 2012 by the Tucson Unified Schools system in Arizona as part of a new law prohibiting Mexican American studies in its public schools, Gloria Anzaldúa's radical, multi-lingual, non-linear *Borderlands: La Frontera* (1987) examines and deconstructs the cultural, racial and linguistic apartheid created by the Texas-US Southwest/Mexican border, from a queer feminist perspective. She viscerally captures the brutality of borderland experiences and identities by describing the border as a wound, 'una herida abierta where the Third world grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it haemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country- a border culture.'[195] For Anzaldúa, a borderland is both a physical and metaphorical space, built out of the hybridity of countries, social systems, languages and cultures: it is 'a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and the forbidden are its inhabitants.'[196] Examining the failure of *Ads* through Anzaldúa's lens of borderlands reveals the gaps of the 'prohibited' and 'forbidden' that remained hidden.

For those that were represented in the work, and for the spectators that engaged with it, the shared space created by the sculptural form of the hologram - where the conceived space of the plinth, meets the perceived space of the hologram, meets the lived space of the spectator's projection - is a site in which there is a small opening. In this opening there exists the possibility that the viewer makes contact with another, and with themself, and that in observing their own spectatorship, they become more aware of the nature of this contact with another: aware of the societally constructed nature of social categories, of how this contact is shaped by their own social positionality, ideology, outlook; and how they see themselves in relation to people who are different and/or the same.

[195] Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) *Borderlands: La Frontera*, Aunt Lute Books, San Francisco, CA, p25.
[196] Ibid., p25.

Dévoiler

Where *Ads* exposes opens up questions about social dynamics in Marfa, Texas through the sculptural use of a hologram form, *Dévoiler* (2019) - a collaboration between NYCP and a community of migrants in Aubervilliers, Paris - exposes social positionality between migrants and non-migrants, this time through architectural transformation and choreography. Created and performed at Théâtre de la Commune, *Dévoiler* is partly a theatrical performance which tells a story of migration, and partly a physical and ideological transformation of the theatre space as a refuge, initiated through the installation of permanent emergency accommodation for migrants in the auditorium. In what follows I address the ways in which the application of visual art principles in this production draws attention to the social transformation of the theatre space as a place in which not to watch fiction, but, as the title suggests, to witness the 'unveiling' of hidden realities. Within the 'fortress'[197] of Europe, borders are frequently defined as instruments of segregation and control, 'tool[s] of exclusion' which aim to 'demarcate a coherent inside from a chaotic outside'[198] and to govern the movement of bodies of both migrants and non-migrants. According to Deanna Dadusc, Margherita Grazioli and Miguel A Martinez:

> borders are not only geographical demarcations of the institutional police-run checkpoints between Nation-states. […] [In a] broader sociological and political view, […] borders [are found] in everyday racist and xenophobic encounters: they are performed in the lack of access to health, housing, education, safety, work. Furthermore, they discipline everyday social interactions and the possibilities for acting, thinking and feeling outside of multiples forms of social control.[199]

In the following case study, I examine how spatial interventions initiated through both choreography and architectural transformation engage with the complexity of border dynamics by exposing and dismantling barriers between the stage and the auditorium, performers and spectators, migrants and non-migrants, body and space, the individual and community. Migration manifests significantly as a spatial phenomenon and through the sculptural treatment of space as a material, and as a social product, the production frames Aubervilliers in the process of being reconstituted, renegotiated and reconstructed by the bodies of the people who inhabit it. I revisit the important claim by Lefebvre that states: 'there is an immediate relationship between the body and its space, between the body's deployment in space and its occupation of space. […] [E]ach living body *is* space and *has* its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space.'[200] It is this reciprocal nature of the relationship

[197] A. Geddes, "Immigration and European Integration: Towards Fortress Europe?" Refugee Survey Quarterly 20 (1): (2001) pp229–229.
[198] P. K.Rajaram, and C. Grundy-Warr, eds. *Borderscapes: Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territory's Edge.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.
[199] Deanna Dadusc, Margherita Grazioli & Miguel A. Martínez 'Introduction: Citizenship as Inhabitance? Migrant Housing Squats Versus Institutional Accommodation' *Citizenship Studies,* 23:6, (2019) pp521-539.
[200] Henri Lefebvre, 1991, p170.

between the body of the individual performer/spectator and space that I argue is made evident in *Dévoiler* by the application of sculptural principles that draw attention to space as both a product created from the movement of bodies, and a generative force that influences the movement of bodies through its inherent 'laws of discrimination'. Arabella Stanger has written compellingly about Lefebvre's theory of spatial production in relation to dance choreography. In drawing out the Marxist foundation of Lefebvre's theory, his understanding of 'the human world as something constituted through the organization of social relationships'[201], Stanger argues that 'the choreographic production of space is always a social production of space'[202]. In this case study, I build on Stanger's argument that choreography or the movement of bodies is a practice that actively creates space, and propose that the movement sequence in *Dévoiler* activates a re-structuring of the bourgeois apparatus of theatre. In this sequence, the movement of the bodies of migrants and non-migrants opens the possibility of the production of new social space, specific to the community of audience and performers gathered, in which migrants can transcend the structural denial of their rights and of their existence in society.

I begin by setting out the context of the production, detailing the mission of Théâtre de la Commune that informed the collaboration, and providing a brief synopsis of the piece itself. I then move to examine the architectural transformation of the theatre space and the choreography of the movement sequence, in light of Lefebvre's spatial triad.

Context and Synopsis

In 2019, NYCP collaborated with a community of migrants in Aubervilliers, Paris, to devise and stage the production *Dévoiler* at Théâtre de la Commune. Since taking on the role of artistic director of Théâtre de la Commune in 2014, Marie-José Malis has worked to develop an active relationship with the community of Aubervilliers, a district whose population significantly numbers migrants and refugees from Sub-Saharan Africa and the Maghreb. Malis' central mission has been to question the role and responsibility of a theatre to its immediate neighbourhood. Based on her belief that 'L'étranger est celui qui permet à un pays de se comprendre'[203] (the stranger is the one who allows a country to understand itself), Malis has worked to ensure that the space and activities of Théâtre de la Commune are informed by the needs and desires of the people of Aubervilliers. In 2017 Malis established L 'École des Actes, an organisation that brings together artists, activists and migrants, adults and children, to

[201] Arabella Stanger, 'The Choreography of Space: towards a Socio-Aesthetics of Dance', New Theatre Quarterly, 30:1 (February 2014) pp72-90, p73.
[202] Ibid.
[203] Malis, Marie-José Marie-José Malis, L'étranger est celui qui permet à un pays de se comprendre" Radio France 15/07/2018, available at: https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/les-nuits-de-france-culture/marie-jose-malis-letranger-est-celui-qui-permet-a-un-pays-de-se-comprendre accessed 23/11/19 .

participate in a symbiotic learning experience in workshops covering three key areas: languages, philosophy, law and artistic practices. Through a rich programme of meetings, debates, and artistic skill-sharing workshops, L'École des Actes' provision includes language lessons, information about legal rights, and educational support, all designed to promote the social inclusion of migrants. The school has worked closely with 'Schaeffer Squat', a collective of approximately 150 male migrants, most of whom arrived in Paris from Sub-Saharan Africa. The collective has been housed in various unoccupied buildings in Aubervilliers including a garage, a warehouse and an abandoned supermarket. Despite being under perpetual threat of eviction, the collective has stayed together and lives by an internal constitution that helps regulate daily life in the squat and relations with the town hall and neighbourhood.

Striving to build on the mission of L'École des Actes to reimagine the role and purpose of a theatre, NYCP adopted a facilitatory role and invited the members of Schaeffer Squat to collaborate on a creative project. Just as the practice of posing a question functioned as a platform for participant voices in *Ads*, Maxwell similarly began the creative process in *Dévoiler* by posing a question to the members of Schaeffer Squat: 'If you had the keys to the theatre space, what would you do with it?' The openness of the question reflected NYCP's intention for the project to be led by the desires of the collaborative partners and accommodate a wide spectrum of creative possibility. There was no pre-determined specification of what shape or form the project might take, or even if there would be a 'performance'. When NYCP made the invitation, Schaeffer Squat was under the threat of yet another eviction. The nine people who expressed interest in participating – Boulaye Dembele, Abdramane Doucoure, Moussa Doukoure, Maxime Fofana, Kawou Marega, Abdel Kader, Moussa Boudjema, Abou Sylla, and Abubakary Tunkaba - discovered a collective desire to respond to the crisis of the looming closure of Schaeffer Squat through telling stories of the squat and transforming the theatre space into emergency housing. In an interview for the public broadcast service *France24* Aboubakar Doumbia, a representative for Schaeffer squat, explained that they wanted 'to talk about [their] struggle […] so that other people might feel less alone in suffering'.[204] With Maxwell as director, Nicholas Elliot as production manager and translator, Sascha Van Riel as scenographer, and Dirk Stevens as technical director, the NYCP team worked with their partners to collectively devise and write a play that would tell the stories of Schaeffer Squat, creating a platform for the voices and realities that reflect the community of Aubervilliers, and initiate an architectural and functional transformation of the theatre space itself by installing another 'Schaeffer Squat' inside Théâtre de La Commune.

[204] France 24, 'Revealing Reality: Richard Maxwell Stages "Dévoiler" in Aubervilliers' 27th September, 2019 available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tiw9iG9rIQ accessed 19/12/19.

Dévoiler uses storytelling as an explicit strategy to tell a tale of migration from war-torn Gao to Paris, following the journey of a central figure 'Boulaye', played by cast member Boulaye Dembele. The figure of Boulaye represents both the real Boulaye, and also a fictional character, as his tale is not only his own story of migration but a synthesis of the real-life experiences of all nine of the cast members who made migration journeys to Paris from Mali, Senegal, Niger, Gambia, Ivory Coast, and Algeria, co-authored together into a single, unifying text. While largely spoken in French, the text also includes English, Italian, Soninke and Arabic, reflecting the native languages of cast members. The creative team set up improvisational storytelling exercises to generate the text, and focussed on relating experiences in the most accurate way possible.[205] According to Doucoure, 'everything the show says is real, these are our words. It happened and it continues to happen. We have all lost friends and family in the Mediterranean Sea'[206]. The representation of 'Boulaye' transitions throughout the piece from an imaginary figure that the eight other performers address, the blank space serving as a piercing metaphor for the thousands of human lives that are lost every year in making migration journeys; to a two-dimensional shadow on the surface of a piece of cloth, a visual expression of the precarity within which undocumented, societally marginalised migrants are forced to exist, seeing 'a city that does not belong to [them]'[207], which they must 'travel in the shadow or in the camouflage of'[208]; to the 'real' Boulaye, standing before the audience and delivering the final monologue.

The climax of the production sees the performers leave the main stage and traverse the auditorium, climbing the steep rake of seats, over and through the audience, in a movement sequence representing a journey in a zodiac boat across the Mediterranean. By the end of the play, the audience are turned away from the 'main stage', and are looking up the steep bank of seats to where a new Schaeffer Squat, and a home inside the theatre itself, is unveiled.

Architectural transformation

Particularly since 2016, the year of the Brexit referendum and the election of Donald Trump, the global upsurge of extremist, right-wing cultural politics has seen an increase in the implementation of violent anti-immigration measures by white supremacist governing bodies worldwide. From Theresa May's

[205] Gwenael Bourdon "Aubervilliers : Les migrants jouent leur propre histoire au théâtre", *Le Parisien,* 1st Oct 2019 available at: https://www.leparisien.fr/seine-saint-denis-93/aubervilliers-les-migrants-jouent-leur-propre-histoire-au-theatre-01-10-2019-8163876.php accessed 22/12/19
[206] Ibid.
[207] Abdramane Doucoure, Moussa Doukoure, Maxime Fofana, Kawou Marega, Abdel Kader, Moussa Boudjema, Abou Sylla, Abubakary Tunkaba, Richard Maxwell, Sascha Van Riel, Nicholas Elliott, Dirk Stevens, *Dévoiler* , Theatre de La Commune, October 2019.
[208] Ibid.

'hostile environment' to Donald Trump's wall, to President Emmanuel Macron's plans to 'restrict migrants and refugees access to medical care'[209], to Viktor Orbán's razor wire fence, racist and xenophobic anti-immigration policies see the dehumanisation of some of the world's most vulnerable people, and an abhorrent abuse of basic human rights. It is apt to turn, therefore, to philosopher Walter Benjamin's well-known lecture on the *Author as Producer*, written in 1934 in response to the rise of Nazi-fascism. Benjamin argues that in order to resist fascism and procure social change, artists must make a distinction between 'merely supplying a production apparatus and changing it.'[210] He extols the transformative power of Brecht's Epic Theatre, particularly for its application of *Umfunktionierung*, the total 'functional transformation [of both the] forms and instruments of production'[211], the effect of which does not merely:

> reproduce conditions; rather, it discloses, it uncovers them. This uncovering of the conditions is effected by interrupting the dramatic processes; but such interruption does not act as a stimulant; it has an organizing function. It brings the action to a standstill in mid-course and thereby compels the spectator to take up a position towards the action, and the actor to take up a position towards his part.[212]

Benjamin argues that it is not enough for art to express revolutionary content, as its structures and forms are a product of the oppressive conditions of their societal context and their 'bourgeois apparatus' will propagate the same oppression.[213] His example of Brecht's Epic Theatre illustrates that by going one step further and working towards re-functioning the forms and structures of art it is possible to reveal the social conditions of its context, and in the case of theatre, stimulate performers and spectators alike to gain deeper awareness of their place within these conditions. I argue that the engagement with space in *Dévoiler* - which can be read through the lens of a Brechtian aesthetics of functionality - contributes to restructuring and therefore transcending the 'bourgeois apparatus' of a historic European theatre tradition and its Western representations of Africa, and turning on the present reality of the performance event: the gathering of migrants and non-migrants, performers and spectators, that reflects the community of Aubervilliers itself. The movement sequence, which sees the performers cross the boundary from the 'main stage' to the new Schaeffer Squat, activates a transition from dramatic representation to reality; from the 'bourgeois apparatus' of theatre that Benjamin denounces, to the functional Schaeffer Squat installed at the back of the auditorium to provide a literal refuge for the inhabitants of its community. Maxwell states:

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[209] 'Macron plans to bar refugees from accessing medical care.' *Independent*, Wednesday 6th November 2019. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/emmanuel-macron-migrants-refugee-access-medical-care-immigration-latest-a9188166.html accessed Friday 15th November, 2019.
[210] Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer' 1966 in *'Understanding Brecht',* London: Verso NLB, 1998, p100.
[211] Ibid., p93.
[212] Ibid., p100.
[213] Ibid., p94.

> Aubervilliers is a vibrant place and full of possibility - you can feel it changing and it wants to change. I want to help La Commune build an audience that is more representative of the community. […] There are stories to tell and I want to help tell these stories and I would very much like to see a wider array of stories and ideas on stage and in the audience.

It is through the manipulation of space and the restructuring of the theatre as a squat that a broader range of spatial and social relations is made possible for the community of Aubervilliers, opened up on an embodied, phenomenological level. First and foremost, the invitation to migrant members of the ensemble to decide what to do with the theatre space if they had the keys, subverts the societal, structural denial of their existence, as it gives migrants autonomy, the chance to transcend being the passive subjects of dehumanising migration policies, and a public platform upon which to assert their existence and their rights to *have* basic human rights. The ensemble's decision to build a squat inside the auditorium establishes a level of political agency, as it activates a reappropriation and claiming of space. Its occupation facilitates a collective mode of resistance to the unjust migration policies that continue to relegate migrants to a condition of illegality, invisibility and exploitation.

The new squat is a structure of three rooms built upon the seating space at the back of the auditorium. Handwritten onto the structure is 'SQUAT SCHAEFFER'. Inside the rooms are objects and furniture: tables, chairs, a sofa, a bed, lamps, pictures stuck on the walls, a deck of cards, a TV, papers, timetables, towels, personal grooming items such as scissors and mirrors. Viewed through Lefebvre's spatial triad, the squat subverts the *conceived space* of the theatre as a place to watch plays. Instead, the *perceived space* or 'spatial practice' of the squat re-writes the function of the theatre by producing new space through the daily physical inhabitation of it. The daily, physical practice of habitation - sleeping, socialising, preparing for the world outside - transforms the space of theatre by producing new social space and, by extension, brings into question the purpose of a theatre within its community. At the moment in the production where the squat is revealed, it was clear that the structure was not a 'set' and that its purpose was not representational but functional, designed to house members of the community. The array of objects further established it as personalised and lived-in: indeed, at the time of writing, the squat houses several performers in the show and will remain a permanent fixture of the theatre itself, serving as a place of emergency housing for migrants in Aubervilliers.

Occupied spaces nurture rich networks of solidarity in which migrants are not passive, marginal subjects, but 'central protagonists in the drama of composing the space, time, and materiality of the social itself'[214]. In their research into migrants' self-organized strategies in relation to housing, Deanna

[214] S. Mezzadra, and B. Neilson. 2013. *Border as Method, Or, the Multiplication of Labor*. Durham/ London: Duke University Press. p159.

Dadusc, Margherita Grazioli and Miguel A Martinez argue that the practice of squatting holds radical potential for migrants to transcend the oppression and violence of border regimes. I cite an extended passage from their book *Border As Method*, in which they consider the ways in which squatting can challenge and extend existing notions of 'citizenship':

> Migrants squats are an essential part of the 'corridors of solidarity' that are being created throughout Europe, where grassroots social movements engaged in anti-racist, anarchist and anti-authoritarian politics coalesce with migrants in devising non-institutional responses to the violence of border regimes. In these spaces contentious politics and everyday social reproduction uproot racist and xenophobic regimes. The struggles emerging in these spaces disrupt host-guest relations, which often perpetuate state-imposed hierarchies and humanitarian disciplining technologies. Moreover, the solidarities and collaborations between undocumented and documented activists challenge hitherto prevailing notions of citizenship and social movements, as well as current articulations of the common. These radical spaces enable possibilities for inhabitance beyond, against and within citizenship, which do not only reverse forms of exclusion and repression, but produce ungovernable resources, alliances and subjectivities that prefigure more livable spaces for all. Therefore, these struggles are interpreted here as forms of commoning, as they constitute autonomous socio-political infrastructures and networks of solidarity beyond and against the state and humanitarian provision.[215]

The self-organised architectural transformation of the theatre space as a squat through the daily physical inhabitation of it can be read as an autonomous practice of solidarity that sees a production of new *perceived space* and a practice of 'commoning' in Dadusc, Grazioli and Martinez's terms. The new Schaeffer Squat thereby becomes a radical space in which alternative forms of citizenship and the constitution of new political subjects are made possible[216]. The attendance of the audience to this newly made home, produces the *lived space* or Thirdspace of the production, in which possibilities for inhabitance are collectively re-conceived and re-constructed. New relations between migrants and non-migrants are forged through this socio-spatial intervention, forging new communities in which alternative possibilities for citizenship can be re-imagined. It is significant that migrants are witnessed in the squat that they built, as 'citizenship is about *being there,* legitimately, in public space, and *being seen* to be there'.[217] Confronting the audience with the revelation of the squat as a legitimate home produces *lived space* and Thirdspace: boundaries are collapsed between spectators/performers, migrants/non-migrants/, host/guests. The spectators are no longer merely audience to a theatrical production, but presences in the migrants' home-space, to some extent turning the tables on the audience, as they are now the outsiders. Drawing on Rancière, the unveiling of Schaeffer Squat is effective in 'making what was unseen visible, in getting what was only audible as noise to be heard as

[215] Deanna Dadusc, Margherita Grazioli & Miguel A. Martínez (2019) Introduction: citizenship as inhabitance? Migrant housing squats versus institutional accommodation, *Citizenship Studies*, 23:6, 521-539, p525.
[216] V, Squire, *The Exclusionary Politics of Asylum.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p14-15.
[217] McNevin, A. 2012. "Undocumented Citizens? Shifting Grounds of Citizenship in Los Angeles." In *Citizenship, Migrant Activism and the Politics of Movement,* edited by P. Nyers and K. Rygiel, pp165–183. Abingdon: Routledge, p167.

speech'[218]. By being there and being seen to be there, migrants transcend their status as outsiders, and instead assert their presence as active subjects using agency to perform an alternative form of citizenship , and to declare their presence as rightful inhabitants of Aubervilliers. The Schaeffer Squat also implicitly asserts Lefebvre's concept of 'the right to the city', a radically restructuring of the social relations of capitalism. 'The Right to the City' furthers the enfranchisement "of the whole of society and firstly of all those is for those who *inhabit* the city.[219] Lefebvre's concept empowers inhabitants of the city first and foremost, as it is earnt through the practice and production of space of daily life, and not based upon national citizenship. Boundaries between migrants and non-migrants are collapsed in the occupation and production of space of the Schaeffer Squat. According to Valeria Raimondi, squats allow for 'new subjective relations [to exist] between migrant and non-migrant activists. It is precisely this dynamic encounter of different activist subjectivities that opens up the analysis to other ways (other than citizenship) of being political, at the same time revealing the limitations of the dichotomous vision of citizens and non-citizens'[220].

Choreography

The final section of the production tells the story of Boulaye's journey across the Mediterranean in a zodiac boat in a storm, his arrival at Lampedusa, and his train journey to Paris, and includes a movement sequence that involves the bodies of both performers and spectators. The choreography of this sequence instigates a collaborative production and social redefinition of space, and uncovers the relationality of the participating bodies, their subjectivities and positionality. Academic Emma Cox has written extensively about the representation and participation of migrants in theatre, film and activism, arguing that performer-spectator relationships in theatre of migration will always contain the social, political disparities and inequalities that exist between migrants and non-migrants in wider society outside of the theatre. The way the spectator imagines their relationship to the artist who made the work is a significant, influential factor in how that audience member makes meaning from the work:

> In theatre of migration, this may be summed up, crudely, as 'Is it by/about *them* or is it by/about *us*?' […] An audience may comprise people for whom the representation of migration is a story of others or otherness, or it may mostly comprise people who perceive the work as about their own community […]. Artist and audience relationships instantiate the wider structural imbalances of power and status between migrants and those who enjoy the economic, historico-legal, social and linguistic benefits of being 'at home'. As such, theatre of migration is at its most basic level implicated with, and troubled by, power relations within the broader society.[221]

[218] J. Rancière, 2010. Dissensus on Politics and Aesthetics. London: Continuum, p38.
[219] Henri Lefebvre 1996: *Writings on Cities*. Blackwell: Cambridge, MA, p158.
[220] Valeria Raimondi, 'For common struggles of migrants and locals: Migrant activism and squatting in Athens', *Citizenship Studies,* 23:6, (2019): 559-576, p566.
[221] Emma Cox, *Theatre and Migration,* Hampshire: Red Globe Press, 2014, p27.

In what follows I examine the ways in which the disparity of migrant and non-migrant power relations are unveiled and brought under scrutiny through the embodied experience of the production of space by performers and spectators in the movement sequence. I draw on three main theorists to analyse the processes of social production and representation that take place between and through the relational movement of bodies: Arabella Stanger's insistence that 'the choreographic production of space is always a social production of space', Sara Ahmed's reading of the 'othering' and fetishization of strangers and her concept of 'ethical encounters', and Édouard Glissant's concept of Relation and opacity.

To represent the journey across the Mediterranean, the performers leave the main stage, and climb the rake where the audience are seated, to reach the rostrum installed at the back of the auditorium. In doing so, the bodies of the performers necessarily activate the bodies of the spectators to move, shifting left and right, turning and lifting out of their seats to follow the action. The spectatorial formality imposed by red velvet seats and a traditional end-on configuration is suddenly brought into disarray by twisted torsos, craning necks, and sprawling legs; some audience members abandon the notion of sitting altogether and stand up on their feet to watch the performance. Considering that, as Lefebvre states 'the whole of (social) space proceeds from the body'[222], the body in this sequence is a crucial instrument in the practice and production of space. I argue that the choreographed departure of the performer's bodies from the main stage activates a spatial intervention in which performers and spectators engage in a collaborative, creative act of spatial and social redefinition. For Stanger, the dynamic, dialogical relationship between the body and space is of utmost importance: space is not only produced by the action of bodies but also influences the action of bodies, with space 'not a fixed container impervious to the movement of bodies that occupy it, but a "set of relations", something that is produced only in the organization of relational action.'[223]. In this sequence, the production of *perceived space* by the spectators sitting formally in their seats to watch a play is interrupted, halted and transformed by the bodies of the performers who disrupt the 'rules' of a traditional Western theatrical event. As the performers leave the stage, the bodies of spectators, in following the action, relate and respond to the bodies of the performers, and collaborate in producing new *perceived space*. The corporeal co-presence of performers and spectators and the intimate physical proximity of bodies in this section collapses the boundaries between stage/audience, illusion/reality, performers/spectators, it creates and re-writes space, and in doing so activates a re-structuring of the bourgeois apparatus of theatre.

[222] Henri Lefebvre, 1991, p405.
[223] Arabella Stanger, p73.

In this spatial, phenomenological experience facilitated by the choreography, in which everyone's bodies are intermingled in close physical proximity, space is experienced as a palpable material that is shared and produced in relation to one another. Viewed through the lens of Lefebvre's 'representational space' and Soja's radical 'Thirdspace', this sequence combines practice and conception, the real and the imagined: it is both the 'real' seating rake, and the 'imagined' Mediterranean Sea. Journeying in a zodiac boat across the Mediterranean was a real-life experience for Moussa, Abou, Boulaye and Maxime. The following scene of the movement sequence is enacted in the seating rake, amongst the spectators:

Maxime:	What did he say?
Abou:	I mean. I think there's water coming in. Like there's a problem, if we are taking on water.
Backary:	Calm down.
Abou:	What do you mean "calm down" ? What are you saying there? We're the ones in danger.
Backary:	Calm Down! Calm down!
Maxime:	Hey it's our lives that are in danger. There's water.
Abou:	Empty the boat. Take your clothes off. If not we'll all die.
Kawou:	We're gonna drown. Get rid of the water. Get rid of it.
Abou:	The zodiac is going down. Help me.
Kawou:	Help me I don't know how to swim. Save me. I'm gonna drown.[224]

The knowledge that this 'story' was a true experience for several of the performers invites spectators to witness migrants not as faceless numbers, but individual subjects who experienced journeys such as these. The sense of horror and urgency generated by the text gives this sequence a powerful charge and brings to light the interconnected relations of performers and spectators, migrants and non-migrants. For non-migrants, the choreography and production of representational space establishes a form of spatial imagination that makes them acutely aware of that which they will never know or fully understand: the lived experience of the journey made by migrants. Physical *proximity* and participation in the represented event, ironically emphasises experiential *distance* for non-migrant spectators. The distance invites the non-migrant spectator to engage with the social, political forces that have shaped their subjectivity as a person whose life will never be exposed to lethal risk due to violent border regimes. In this way, the collaboration and co-produced space of the movement section unveils the disparity of the subject positions within it, and the reality of the racist illegalisation of the mobility of people from formerly colonized countries. Nicholas de Genova observes that 'the horrendous risk of

[224] Abdramane Doucoure, Moussa Doukoure, Maxime Fofana, Kawou Marega, Abdel Kader, Moussa Boudjema, Abou Sylla, Abubakary Tunkaba, Richard Maxwell, Sascha Van Riel, Nicholas Elliott, Dirk Stevens, *Dévoiler* , Theatre de La Commune, October 2019.

border-crossing death systematically generated by the European border regime is disproportionately inflicted upon migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa' and 'the brute racial fact' of this is rarely acknowledged as it confronts us with the reality of 'the cruel (post) coloniality of the "new" Europe'[225]. Non-migrant spectators can never know the reality of that journey, and the *lived space* and Thirdspace produced by the choreography of this sequence emphasises this fact, and allows non-migrants to be physically present in a representation of it *enacted by those for whom it was a lived reality*, and therefore to experience themselves in a shared, co-produced space as subjects *in relation* to people who have experienced it. The production of space in the movement sequence is, therefore, a production of migrant and non-migrant relationality and its inequality. In practice, the performers' journey through the auditorium not only draws the spectators' eyes towards those performers but also towards one another, registering each other as active participants in a spatial event. The audience can no longer remain passive, 'invisible' observers, but now play an embodied part of the real action taking place in the auditorium. The clambering bodies of the performers, their precarious journey to ascend the raked seats balancing on the edges of chairs with risk of falling, implicates the spectators physically and in so doing unmasks or 'unveils' the social, political relationalities in the theatre space. What is your position in this social structure of this event? What is your relationship and responsibility to the people around you? The reality that is brought to the fore is the relationality of the subjects in the shared space.

While a large proportion of the audience turned to follow the action of the performers' bodies, there were some spectators who chose not to engage with this moment. Rather than watching the end of the play on the "new" stage installed at the back of the auditorium, they continued to sit facing the original stage, with their backs to the performers. The performers did not verbally compel the spectators to turn, which allowed the possibility of choice not to follow the implied invitation of the choreography. The precise reasons/motives of the spectators who did not turn around cannot be known, but the nature of the performance and its collapsed boundary between stage/seating rake, performers/audience, meant that from that moment onwards, no body is exempt from participating in the performance. The physical response of the bodies of the non-turning spectators still contributed meaning to the shared moment, even indirectly - they were participating through not participating.

I am interested in questioning what it means *not* to turn round. In the context of what happens, what is the significance of *not turning around* for those who make that choice? And what is the significance for the rest of the audience, to be aware that not everyone is following the impulse to turn, even when nothing physically inhibits them from doing so? On both occasions that I was spectator to the

[225] Nicholas De Genova. 'The "migrant crisis" as racial crisis: do Black Lives Matter in Europe?', *Ethnic and Racial Studie*s, 41:10, (2018) pp1765-1782, p1766.

performance, I was aware that the spectators who did not turn were white. How could we read that moment? The decision of audience members not to follow the movement that would seem to support the migrants is readable as a resistance to, or refusal of, the solidarity that is invited in that moment. Additionally, where those spectators are white, it makes implicitly a more marked gesture of resistance/refusal.

I turn to Ahmed's *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* to illuminate potential meanings of this spectator resistance/refusal. In this study, Ahmed explores otherness and difference through a critique and deconstruction of the fetishization of strangers, placing an emphasis on historicity to de-ontologise and de-contextualise the figure of 'the stranger'. For Ahmed, historical relations are composed of racialised, gendered, and classed encounters which influence and shape present and future encounters. Ahmed asserts that a subject 'comes into existence as an entity only through encounters with others'[226] and 'bodies materialise in a complex set of temporal and spatial relations to other bodies, including bodies that are recognised as familiar, familial, and friendly, and those that are considered strange.' In this view, our subjectivities are perpetually formed and re-formed through the processes of encounters with others, which are 'ontologically prior to the question of ontology'[227]. This means that we are 'produced through encounters, rather than preceding them,'[228] and the asymmetrical power relations that shape the world, influence the encounters. The fetishization of strangers that Ahmed describes is rife in media representations of migrants, which, 'through strategies of stereotyping, […] entrench public perceptions of the boat migrants as alien bodies'[229]. Indeed, the Mediterranean Sea has become a space of invisibility where the people attempting these crossings in unseaworthy boats are dehumanised and '(de-)identified as mere bodies, masses, numbers.'[230]

It is difficult to not interpret the physical response of the white, non-migrant spectators who did not turn in their seats, as an othering of, and rejection of, the black and brown migrant performers. There is a violence in the act of refusing to acknowledge and witness the performers, and the rejection of the invitation to collectively re-discover a new way to produce and inhabit shared space. The refusal to witness and to collaborate, and the insistence to continue to stare at the traditional stage, to maintain the status quo in the context of the production is readable as fear of difference, a resistance or inability to be open to new forms of relationality, which in turn points to the racist othering of strangers and the pervasive, historical asymmetrical power relations Ahmed describes.

[226] Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, New York; London: Routledge, 2000, p7.
[227] Ibid., p7.
[228] Ibid., p143-144.
[229] Federica Mazzara (2015) 'Spaces of Visibility for the Migrants of Lampedusa: The Counter Narrative of the Aesthetic Discourse' *Italian Studies,* 70:4, pp449-464, p450.
[230] Ibid, p452.

There is hope, however, in the form of what Ahmed terms an 'ethical encounter' which entails 'a certain way of holding proximity and distance together: one gets close enough to others to be touched by that which cannot be simply got across.'[231] An ethical encounter challenges the assumption that 'communication is about expression, or about the transparency of meaning or pure exchange, […] (rather it) involves working with "that which fails to get across" or that which is necessarily secret.'[232] Through the movement of bodies, and the subsequent heightened consciousness of the relationality of bodies in shared and co-produced space, choreography in *Dévoiler* activates the interplay of *proximity* and *distance* described by Ahmed, creating the potential for an 'ethical encounter' to take place. By participating and collaborating in a re-enactment of the journey, non-migrant spectators increase proximity to something they have never experienced, and the embodied experience of this proximity underscores the essential *distance* of experience between migrants and non-migrants. As Ahmed states, 'it is through getting closer, rather than remaining at a distance, that the impossibility of pure proximity can be put to work or made to work.'[233] Faced with the impossibility of pure exchange, and with the impossibility of occupying the space of another, the non-migrant spectator is forced to reckon with the social, political forces that shape such asymmetrical positionalities. The spectators who reject the invitation to participate do not increase their proximity to that which they will never know, and remain instead at distance.

It is useful at this point to turn to the work of Martinican poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant, specifically his theories of Relation and opacity, which resonate with the concept of proximity and distance, articulated in Ahmed's 'ethical encounter', in particular the importance of respecting difference and not insisting on transparency. Relation in Glissant's terms conceives of human reality and the natural world as a vibrant interconnected network of exchanges between perpetually changing communities and cultures, within which any one entity is open and relatable to any other. It is founded on the belief that '[one] can change through exchanging with the other without losing or distorting [oneself]'[234]. Relation facilitates a multiplicity and fluidity not only between entities but also within them. In this way, identity is not fixed or permanent, but is a process of creation formed through relation, resonating strongly with Ahmed's assertion that the 'I' is created through encounters. Glissant defines Relation as 'la quantité réalisée de toutes les différences du monde, sans qu'on puisse en excepter une seule'[235] which can be translated as 'the realized quantity of all the differences of the world, without leaving out a single one'. For Glissant:

[231] Sara Ahmed, 2000, p157.
[232] Ibid., p155.
[233] Ibid., p157.
[234] Édouard Glissant & Manthia Diawara: 'One world in Relation: Édouard Glissant in Conversation with Manthia Diawara.' *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, no. 28, 2011, pp. 4-19, (p9).
[235] Édouard Glissant, *Philosophie de la Relation*. Gallimard, 2009, p42.

> Relation is the moment where we realize that there is a definite quantity of all the differences in the world. Just as scientists say that the universe consists of a finite quantity of atoms, and that it doesn't change—well, I say that Relation is made up of all the differences in the world and that we shouldn't forget a single one of them, even the smallest. If you forget the tiniest difference in the world, well, Relation is no longer Relation. Now, what do we do when we believe this? We call into question, in a formal manner, the idea of the universal. The universal is a sublimation, an abstraction that enables us to forget small differences; we drift upon the universal and forget these small differences, and Relation is wonderful because it doesn't allow us to do that. There is no such thing as a Relation made up of big differences. Relation is total; otherwise it's not Relation. So that's why I prefer the notion of Relation to the notion of the universal. [236]

Relation therefore presents a vision of totality or wholeness that does not eliminate or eradicate difference into a homogenising assimilation, in the way the notion of universality does for Glissant. Rather, it gains its meaning through the specificity of difference and particularities. This acceptance of difference and diversity is directly linked to Glissant's concept of opacity:

> In the meeting of all the world's cultures, we must have the imaginative strength to conceive of all the cultures as exerting an action of both liberating unity and liberating diversity. That is why I call for the right to opacity for everyone. I no longer have to 'understand' the other, that is, to reduce him to the model of my own transparency, in order to live with this other or to build something with him. Today, the right to opacity is the most obvious sign of non-barbarity.[237]

For Glissant, opacity means accepting that the Other cannot/need not become transparently knowable – we have to accept obscurity and unintelligibility. The respect for, and an acceptance of, the Other as different from oneself makes opacity non-hierarchical and non-reductive. It does not obliterate the particular qualities of an individual, society, or culture by enforcing a universal value system. In Glissant's view 'a person has the right to be opaque. That doesn't stop me from liking that person, it doesn't stop me from working with him, hanging out with him, […] . A racist is someone who refuses what he doesn't understand. I can accept what I don't understand. Opacity is a right we must have.'[238] We do not have to turn the Other into the same, or insist on full transparency or complete understanding in order to live in solidarity. Inspired by the Caribbean landscape, Glissant's 'pensée nouvelle des frontiers', or border thought, insists that we must rethink and transform borders from tools of violent and racist exclusion into permeable structures that cultivate and engender Relation:

> Borders must be permeable. They must not be weapons against migration or immigration processes. But having said this, […] borders are necessary because they enable the appreciation of the passage from the flavor of one country to the flavor of another. […]

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[236] Édouard Glissant & Manthia Diawara: "One world in Relation: Édouard Glissant in Conversation with Manthia Diawara." *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, no. 28, 2011, pp. 4-19. (p9).
[237] Édouard Glissant (2020) *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity*, trans Celia Britton, Liverpool University Press, p45.
[238] Édouard Glissant & Manthia Diawara: "One world in Relation: Édouard Glissant in Conversation with Manthia Diawara." *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, no. 28, 2011, pp. 4-19. (p14).

> Consequently what we need today is not to abolish borders but to provide them with another meaning, that of a passage, a communication—a Relation, in other words.[239]

By taking into account the dialectical relationship between the local and the global, Relation and opacity are a practice and a poetics that accept difference within totality, and in doing so dismantle hierarchies of power relations. This resonates with Ahmed's 'ethical encounter' which is 'not to hold the other in place, or to turn her into a theme, concept or thing'. The movement sequence in *Dévoiler* creates the potential for Relation to be practised. The embodied experience of the co-production of space, and the heightened awareness of difference of experience and positionality of the participants, together demonstrate a form of communication and collaborative creation that gains its significance through a respect for and acceptance of difference and opacity. As with Ahmed's 'ethical encounter', it is only through accepting opacity or distance that the impossibility of pure understanding or proximity is absorbed, which is the ultimate reality that is unveiled. The open, unspoken invitation of participation for non-migrant spectators results in a range of different physical responses. The range of these responses means that the encounter and Relation of the movement sequence recognises itself as 'implicated in broader relations and circuits of production and exchange.'[240]

Conclusion

It is evident that *Dévoiler* does a concrete act in relation to specific migrants. By no means does it provide a permanent solution, but it makes a specific material, spatial intervention, that also reaches beyond the production, beyond the individuals, to open up broader questions related to solidarity, and otherness. In its use of space, bodies, individuals and collectives, *Dévoiler* gives the spectator an embodied experience that is hard to forget, one that unsettles the spectator's complacency, stability and positions them in direct physical proximity to the problems faced by migrants. As Ahmed observes: 'one has a close encounter, where something happens that is surprising and where "we" establish an alliance through the very process of being unsettled by that which is not yet'.[241] In being stirred by a sharp awareness of 'that which is not yet': the 'gap' in experience between people, the understanding that does not exist, the spectator is forced into action. No longer can the spectator view this as a distant matter, unrelated to them. The structure of the piece leaves the spectator with a weight of experience that they carry in their body. The memory and visceral impact of that moment, its after-effects, stay with the spectator as they leave the audience, as they are putting the key in the front door of their home, with a heightened awareness of the differences and injustices of their positionality compared to that of the migrants. Ahmed recognises that increasing proximity to that which one does not know or

[239] Édouard.Glissant & Manthia Diawara: "One world in Relation: Édouard Glissant in Conversation with Manthia Diawara." *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, no. 28, 2011, pp. 4-19 (p16).
[240] Sara Ahmed, 2000, p145.
[241] Ibid., p180.

understand, opens the possibility for the differences inherent in the meeting to alter the meeting itself, to facilitate a form of exchange that does not erase the Other; or, in Glissant's terms, to facilitate Relation and opacity:

> A politics of encountering gets closer in order to allow the differences between us, as differences that involve power and antagonism, to make a difference to the very encounter itself. The differences between us necessitates the dialogue, rather than disallow it – a dialogue must take place, precisely *because* we don't speak the same language. It is the work that needs to be done to get closer to others in a way that does not appropriate their labour as "my labour", or take their talk as "my talk" that makes possible a different form of collective politics.[242]

As demonstrated in both *Ads* and *Dévoiler*, a politics of 'encountering' exposes difference without erasing it; it exposes failure, absences, gaps and blind spots. Only through making *Ads* and increasing proximity to the community of Marfa, did NYCP see the absences that made it 'incomplete'. Through observing one's spectatorship of the hologram form in *Ads*, one may begin to gain insight into the ways in which one's own social positionality shapes worldview and ideology. The material, sculptural manipulation of space in both these productions work to reveal the 'gaps', rifts, fissures in the fabric of social dynamics and in doing so, allows a person to increase proximity to that which they do not know.

[242] Ibid., p180.

Chapter 3

The Minimalist Monologue in *The Evening Part 2*, *standing; remember* and *Queens Row*

> Life experience involves multiple collisions with objects and others. It is through such collisions that I form a sense of myself as (more or less) apart from others, as well as a sense of the surfaces of my body.[243]

Introduction

This chapter presents an investigation of the monologue form, sustained across three separate practice-based research projects I engaged with from different creative positions. Through a Minimalist framing of the material components that comprise theatre – chiefly, performer, text, and space, I situate this work within the terrain of sculpture's theatricality and theatre's application of sculptural principles, and the privileged creativity and agency of the spectator. In what follows, I pay attention to the ways in which sculptural concerns in each of these performances, including spatiality, presence, materiality and temporality, shape representation, spectatorship and role of the performer. In stripping down the theatrical event to the simplicity of a single performer speaking before an audience, I aim to place a magnifying glass upon the encounter between performer and spectator as a social, spatial exchange. By engaging with silence, stillness, spatial proxemics, the relationality of voice, and performer presence, I examine what characterises the relationship between performer and spectator in the moment of performance, and the creative possibilities available in the collective consciousness of performer and spectators.

The first two monologues are analysed from my perspective as director in two practice-as-research projects I led: *The Evening Part 2* (October 2017) – a performance I directed of a monologue written by Maxwell, and *standing; remember* (June 2018*)* – a solo performance of an improvised monologue that I conceptualised and directed. The third monologue is investigated from my perspective as a performer-collaborator in the NYCP production of *Queens Row*, first staged at the ICA, London in 2018, then at The Kitchen, New York in 2020 and at the Triennale, Milan in 2022. *The Evening Part 2* is discussed at somewhat greater length as it establishes certain principles that are also used in the two that follow.

[243] Sara Ahmed, 2014, p26.

Both monologue projects I directed built on NYCP's practice of 'treating the play as a [sculptural] object'[244], but pursued this in a different direction dictated by the social, spatial concerns of the thesis. Inspired by Fletcher's assertion that, at its core, NYCP's work offers 'a portrait of a person onstage'[245] and that the performer's 'personhood is used as a material in the work'[246], I sought to investigate what it would mean to frame the performer as the raw 'material' of the performance. In both these projects I considered questions of how the application of sculptural values within a theatrical context could provide a framework for complicating, revealing and deconstructing the representation of subjecthood onstage. What representational and spectatorial processes would emerge if I was to treat a monologue as a form of sculpture and pay attention to spatiality, materiality, and presence? In applying Minimalist principles to the monologue form, how can presence and spectatorship be understood as 'materials' of performance? What would a conscious engagement with the *impossibility* of Minimalism in performance that involves human beings, yield? What meanings become visible and palpable in space when you reduce as much as you can? Is it the case that, however much a production aspires to be 'Minimal', adopting austere means and form, the presence of a human performer within that structure will always 'foil' this ambition? What meanings arise out of this failure?

The etymology of the word 'monologue' stems from the Greek term *mono-logos* and can be translated as 'solitary speech'. Deborah Geis describes monologue as a speech or dialogue with oneself, but goes on to explain that 'this sense of monologue is complicated by the presence in theatre of the audience. Since the status of a play presupposes that even a speech performed in the imagined solitude of a character will always include the audience as acknowledged or implicit witness, the inevitable status of the spectators as recipients foregrounds the "telling" or "narrating" function of the monologue'[247]. In the three projects I worked on, the audience were always positioned as acknowledged 'witnesses' through direct address, in order to center the relationality between performer and spectator as the key site of creative production. Lehmann identifies the dramatic monologue's potential for intensifying performer/spectator relationships in postdramatic theatre. He contends that:

> the monologue of figures onstage reinforces the certainty of our perception of the dramatic events as a reality in the now, authenticated through the implication of the audience. It is this *transgression of the border of the imaginary dramatic universe to the real theatrical situation* that leads to a specific interest in the text form of the monologue as well as in the specific theatricality attached to the monologue.[248]

[244] Richard Maxwell, 'ART WORK: An Evening With Richard Maxwell'. *The New School.* New York City. 29th Sept. 2016.
[245] Jim Fletcher, Personal Interview, 19th December 2020.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Deborah Geis, *Postmodern Theatricks: Monologue in Contemporary American Drama,* Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1993, 3.
[248] Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p127.

For Lehmann, the liminal status of the monologue, its ability to draw attention to and bolster the present reality of the auditorium by directly addressing spectators, whilst also referring to an imaginary, dramatic reality, accounts for the monologue's appeal to postdramatic artists. Lehmann goes on to suggest that any performance event acquires its political potency from its ability to create a 'situation' that triggers a 'concrete questioning of the self'.[249] The use of the word 'concrete' here suggests that there could be something palpable, tangible or material in the self-reflexive, self-interrogative spectatorship made possible by postdramatic theatre. As I go on to show in the next sections of this chapter, my direction of *The Evening Part 2* and *standing; remember* and my participation in *Queens Row* set out explicitly to test out the conditions of a relationality between performer and spectator that would facilitate a concrete questioning of the self.

I begin by discussing *The Evening Part 2* which was a result of a more exploratory, instinctive application of Minimalist principles. In this project, my analysis of subjecthood centred around the concept of a relational, 'narratable self', put forward by the Italian Feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero and questioned whether presence and/or personhood be made manifest as material in performance. I then move on to discuss *standing; remember*, which, by contrast, consciously embraced Minimalist principles and attempted to push their application to an extreme degree. My investigation in this project placed more emphasis on the consideration of spectatorship as a material experienced and formed during the process of performance. By eliminating the written text and thus creating the potential for an 'unspoken' monologue, and through foregrounding the materiality of time, space, and silence, I attempted to draw perception itself into question in this performance. Finally, I discuss the monologue I performed in *Queens Row* and provide an experiential examination from my position as performer/deviser of how meaning-making can manifest as a collaborative, creative act between performer and spectator and how the application of sculptural principles in theatre shapes the role of the performer. I consider how the discoveries I made as a director and spectator to *The Evening Part 2* and *standing; remember* influenced my activities as a performer/deviser in *Queens Row*.

My critical analysis of these performances is underpinned by theories of Minimal art including Rosalind Kraus' Passages in Modern Sculpture (1977); Sara Ahmed's reconceptualistaion of emotions in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004); Adriana Cavarero's concept of the 'narratable self'; and Pauline Oliveros' teachings of 'Deep Listening'.

[249] Hans Thies Lehmann, *Das Politische Schreiben,* Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2002, p16.

The Evening Part 2

> One always appears to someone. One cannot appear if there is no one else there.[250]

In the first two years of my PhD, I worked in New York with NYCP as an assistant/researcher. In this role I gained experiential knowledge of the directorial and performance methodologies of the company, by observing and directly participating in a full rehearsal schedule and production run of both *Good Samaritans* (2017) at Abrons Arts Centre and *Paradiso* (2018) at Greene Naftali. During an interview with Maxwell towards the end of that first research period in 2017, he shared with me a new text he was in the process of writing titled *The Evening Part 2,* and asked me to workshop it. At that point, the text took the form of a long monologue by a woman describing her relationship to her faith, specifically her identity as a Muslim. As I spoke the words of the monologue aloud, I was aware of a parallel text I was forming in my mind, a text of personal resonances, associations and memories emerging moment-to-moment in my relation to the written text. I thought about growing up in Iran and my own exposure to, and participation in practices of Islamic faith in a context in which religion is politicised; I thought about what it means to live between languages, cultures and religions; I thought about my mother, who had converted to Islam. These private reverberations, surfacing in the form of images and emotions, brought certain aspects of my selfhood into being through the act of speaking. I knew it would be a meaningful experience for my mother to say the words of the monologue, and likewise for me to receive the words from her, as a spectator; I was therefore grateful when Maxwell gave me permission to use the text in my first practice-based, independently directed research project.

Inspired by the company's method of working in ensembles that combine experienced and inexperienced performers, in Autumn of 2017 I directed this monologue from *The Evening Part 2* with two performers: my mother Jane, who had never acted before, and Anna Burnell, a theatre studies graduate with a substantial amount of experience. The three of us worked together over a two-month period to develop the piece. The decision to create a performance in which two people deliver the same speech was motivated by my desire to attend to and foreground the unique personhood and presence of the individual performer. Framing two people executing the same performance task, following the same 'blocking', saying the same words, was a way of bringing the differences between them into crisp focus. Here, I understood difference as encompassing not only their physical, bodily/vocal difference, but their difference in impulse and instinct, as well their different social, cultural histories and life experiences, all of which would interact with the written text in unique ways and elicit a different story from each.

[250] Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, trans. by Paul A. Kottman, London and New York: Routledge, 2000, p20.

In other words, the experiment would draw attention to the distinctions between their 'unintended emitting': the 'text' that is the personhood of the performer, their unique subjectivity.[251] As Gay McAuley states, 'the actor brings something to the playwright's language, but language also brings something to the actor'[252]. Accepting this principle, the project thus sought to explore how the subjectivity of the performer shapes language and how language defines the performer; it further aimed to frame personhood and presence, in this instance, as the main 'material' of the performance. I include the monologue in full in the Appendix.

When re-visiting the monologue from the position of director, I was drawn to the defiant self-declaration articulated within the speech, and its expression of the very human desire to tell one's story, to engage with the fundamental question of one's identity. The speaker describes being shaped by what she denies. This very first sentence introduces the idea of the tension between subjecthood and objecthood. The imagery of the word 'shaped' evokes the sense of the individual as a figure, or form, caught between living as a subject with agency and existing as an object under the control of exterior forces. In this instance, it is the speaker who shapes herself, and gains self-definition through the history that she actively rejects. Through narrating the certainties and ambiguities, knowns and unknowns of her personhood, and through both giving and withholding information, the speaker constructs a self. Yet the formation of a self from the story one tells, depends, crucially, on the presence of a listener. This drew my mind to the work of Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero and her concept of 'the narratable self' who is 'at once the transcendental subject and the elusive object of all the autobiographical exercises of memory'[253], and her theory that 'every human being, without even wanting to know it, is aware of being a narratable self—immersed in the spontaneous auto-narration of memory'.[254] By remembering certain aspects of experience and forgetting others, the self is engaged in an ongoing process of becoming, in which it perpetually discovers itself anew, and is therefore 'narratable' as opposed to 'narrated'. In *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood* (1997), Cavarero destabilises the masculine, independent, individualized self of the dominant humanist tradition by putting forth a relational humanism through an ontological understanding of narrativity. For Cavarero, the self is unique and unrepeatable: we are not each the same, nor can we each take the place of another and feel what they feel. Yet, at the same time this singularity of the self is transcended through narrativity, which uncovers us in the *shared* condition of singularity, of being a 'narratable self' with a unique story, and of harbouring the desire to hear our unique story narrated back to us by another.

[251] Richard Maxwell, *ART WORK: An Evening With Richard Maxwell. The New School.* New York City. 29th Sept. 2016.
[252] McAuley, p215.
[253] Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, trans. by Paul A. Kottman, London and New York: Routledge, 2000, p34.
[254] Ibid., p33.

In Cavarero's thinking, the relational self proposes a form of humanization through an altruistic ethics: any sense of a self is contingent on our exposure to others and the narratives they give back to us.

My aim in directing this performance, then, was to examine how subjectivation arises out of the shared process of relationality between performer, text and spectator, through deliberately, 'sculpturally' constructed 'gaps' in the performance, created through and building on, Minimalist principles of exposure of means, and a non-representational commitment to form and material. My instinct was to present the monologue in such a way that the 'narratable self' of the text ran parallel to the 'narratable self' of the performer's presence. In this way, the two 'materials' (performer and text) could intersect at certain points and diverge at others. Further, I wanted the spectator to be able to find their own 'narratable self' within this gap between text and performer, and to complete it with their imaginative, creative interaction.

Narratable Selves of the Performers

Before introducing the text to the performers, I opted to work with them in ways that would bring their consciousness of their own and each other's 'narratable selves', their unique personhood, to the fore. Although these were solo performances, they were part of a whole, and I wanted to create the sense that the two monologues in the performance 'spoke' to each other, through the relationality of the performers. To facilitate this, I developed an original exercise inspired by Cavarero's description of Italian feminist consciousness-raising groups in the 1970s, and their 'creation of a relational space of reciprocal exhibition, which is clearly perceived and affirmed as political.'[255] I asked the performers to sit in two chairs facing each other onstage, and to take it in turns to describe, in what might have felt like excruciating detail, a photograph they were familiar with in which they are present. After they each described their individual photographs and had witnessed each other's 'narratable self' through autobiography, they then took it in turns to describe each other's photograph *back* to each other, and took turns to witness their 'narratable self' through biography. I asked the performers to speak in the present tense in order to root the exercise in the present moment, and through this to allow relationality to emerge as an active force. I made it clear that they were under no obligation to share anything they did not want to, and that they should only speak about a photograph they desired to share. As well as facilitating an experience of Cavarero's relationality of sharing, listening and receiving one's story from another, this exercise aimed to put a spotlight on their individual desires as people– what stories *did* they want to share? What was important for them to communicate? The exercise also reflected the character's intention to self- declare and gave the performers narrative agency. Although none of this material about the photographs would be spoken verbally in the performance, its manifestation in the

[255] Ibid, p60.

rehearsal room meant that portraits of the performers that emerged out it - their selfhoods and personhoods - and the relationality it created between performers became unspoken components or 'materials' of the performance itself. Laurie E Naranch sees political potential in the revelatory exchange of the 'narratable self', arguing that it:

> enables us to be attuned to humanization in ordinary moments of exposure to others—those places of absolute locality, the exchange of "you" and "me" that, when affirming the uniqueness of the self, is an example of ethical and political success, even if only momentarily and as part of an ongoing process. It also asks us to be aware of these as political moments of shared humanity in our mutual dependency in a particular time and space.[256]

I started each rehearsal with the 'Describe a photograph' exercise, in the effort to make space for emergence of 'humanization in ordinary moments' that Naranch describes. Each rehearsal, Jane and Anna would describe a photograph to each other, and narrate each described photograph back to each other. Sometimes they used the same photograph, but described it in different ways on different days, sometimes they picked an entirely new photograph to describe. This repeated exercise allowed each performer to literally do what the speaker in text is doing: to self-declare, to engage with the stories and histories that comprise their own identities, and then to witness these stories from themselves and each other. Over time, these spoken descriptions accumulated a foundation of images and language, that existed in the rehearsal room and interacted with the written text in different ways. We viewed these interactions as political moments of exchange. Indeed, performance theorist Peggy Phelan argues that 'the face-to-face encounter is the most crucial arena in which the ethical bond we share becomes manifest'[257]. In sharing, receiving and giving their stories back to each other through this exercise, Anna and Jane practised ways of knowing and understanding how to be in ethical relation with one another. After the first three rehearsals, we decided as a group that I, too, should participate in this exercise. My silence in the room as a witness who was *not* also sharing, felt like an awkward contradiction to the relationality developing as the backbone to this piece. So, from the fourth rehearsal onwards, I took part in this exercise as well, which wove my personhood, presence and ethical relation as director in with Anna's and Jane's presences.

[256] Laurie E Narach, 'The Narratable Self: Adriana Cavarero with Sojourner Truth' *Hypatia*, 34 (3) (2019):pp424-440.
[257] Peggy Phelan, 2004. "Marina Ambramovic: Witnessing Shadows." Theatre Journal 56: 569–577, p577.

Exposure of means

I presented this staging of *The Evening: Part 2* self-consciously *as a performance,* in other words working to resist immersion – from actors or audience - in its fiction and drawing attention to the reality of the live moment and constructedness in the act of presentation. I chose to use the Theatre Workshop space at Sheffield University which has all the recognisable materials of a dedicated performance environment: a conspicuous, exposed lighting rig, a clearly defined playing area, heavy stage curtains, a raked seating bank. I left the house lights on, so the audience were visible to themselves and each other as spectators of a performance event, and so that eye contact was clear and direct between spectators and performers. I placed a small rostrum centre stage that would reference a podium/plinth. Aside from this one object, the rest of the performance area was startlingly bare. I wanted there to be as much emptiness around each performer as possible, to create literal space between performer and spectator - a chasm in which shared relationality could occur. This scenographic decision also achieved the effect of framing the performer against a blank canvas of sorts, which in turn helped me see how their body defined space and how the space defined their body. This first piece of presented practice also functioned as an exercise/training for myself in watching, in learning how to observe the body in performance. If I reduced as much as possible, what minutiae of expressive detail would I begin to see? And what discoveries might be made by the performers, and/or the spectators?

Task-based approach/Spectatorship

As a director, I made the choice not to extensively analyse the monologue with the performers from the psychological perspective of character, nor to generate a definitive interpretation of the text's meaning or message, nor even fix 'who' the speaker was. Instead, I worked with Anna and Jane to explore what it might mean in practice to resist interpretation of the text, to resist deciding on a reading that would close down meaning, but rather to keep a sense of possibility open in the moment of reading and speaking. We talked about what it would mean to discover significance in the moment, on each occasion of performance; we judged that one way to achieve for this would be through connecting with the audience. By maintaining consciousness that each spectator is an individual who will interpret the words in their own unique way, and by delivering the words to individual spectators, the performer is, as well as performing, also engaging in an act of spectatorship. From this position, the performer maintains curiosity about what meanings will occur out of language uttered in the present moment and received by a group of individuals.

Building on NYCP's principle of treating performance as a task-based activity, I chose to treat the text as a material or object for the actors to engage with, in rehearsal and in performance, and that in communicating with the spectator they would make no attempt to 'transform' themselves into the person they imagined the speaker to be. In my desire to amplify and experiment with NYCP's task-based approach, I decided to make it visibly evident that these words had been pre-scripted, so I asked the performers to read the text off a piece of paper instead of reciting the words from memory. This made the interaction of the text of the performer's personhood with the written text of the play literal and visual. It invited the spectator to view the activity taking place as a non-representational task: a performer reading a text written by someone else. Then, any notion of character that arises from the spectator's interpretation, manifests with the conscious knowledge that it is *their* creative, imaginative input as spectator, of relating the text to the person before them, *their* perception of consonance or dissonance between performer and text, that gives the spectator the impression of character. This self-conscious awareness of perception has the potential to expose to the spectator, the ways in which their own ways of receiving information and constructing meaning are societally and culturally influenced. The gap, therefore, between performer and text opens the possibility for the words to belong – or at least, refer equally - to the spectator as much as the performer. The gap between performer and utterance, emphasised visually by the visibility of the material text, means that there is no illusion that this act of speaking is spontaneous communication from the individual onstage. It is clear that the words come from another time and place. Again, this creates an intimacy between performer and spectator, as they are both, to some extent spectators, listeners, receivers, of the text, in real time. Anna described experiencing a sense of relief after embracing this approach. She said she no longer felt a pressure to 'do anything' with the text, to invent or impose anything onto it, but could instead 'listen' to it, knowing that it was enough for her to engage in the activity of paying attention the words as she spoke them, and that she and the spectator were sharing something in that activity.

Setting tasks in rehearsal and performance was a way to make sure each performer was always engaged in a live activity. I worked with simple practical exercises and tasks that seemed to ask for minimal activity, but which, in their execution, flooded out a wealth of information. This literal demonstration of ideas and language, and the elimination of excessive interpretation on behalf of the performer, privileges the role of the audience in the meaning-making process: if the performers do not settle on a definitive meaning, then the audience must work to seek one. I worked with the performers in treating the act of performance as a task, breaking down their activities into mini- tasks that sought to increase their consciousness of each step as it is executed:

1. *Enter the space.*
2. *Walk to the podium.*
3. *Stand on the podium.*

4. *Connect with everyone in the room. Listen to the room.*
5. *Connect with the text in front of you.*
6. *Share the text.*[258]

By imposing increasingly strict limitations on what performers could do, by invoking physical stillness, spatial emptiness, blankness, I endeavoured to put a magnifying glass on detail, to tune into the present moment in the room, the unique physical, vocal and energic particularities of each performer in the room. We dedicated much time to the simple task of 'blocking', which here primarily meant entering the stage and walking to take position on the podium. Spending whole rehearsals dedicated purely to this instruction revealed differences of posture, pace, physical tension in the body, facial expressions, what position their hands took. I then decided to choreograph this walk, marking an imaginary line in space that I wanted the performers to follow with their walk. If the angle, distance and standing position remained exactly the same for each performer, what differences would become visible then? What immaterial thing of their being would manifest?

Radical Presence

My focus on developing performer presence led me to explore ways in which the spectator could experience and be radically included in presence too. In researching concepts of presence, I was excited to discover Erika Fisher-Lichte's 'radical concept of presence', a heightened form of consciousness that sees the unification of mind and body, which enables the performer to transmit an energy that allows the spectator to become radically present also, and for both to experience a process of 'becoming'. For Fisher-Lichte presence is:

> a process of consciousness […] that is articulated through the body and sensed by the spectators through their bodies […]. Presence represents a phenomenon which cannot be grasped by such a dichotomy as body vs mind or consciousness. In fact, presence collapses such a dichotomy. When the actor brings forth their body as energetic and thus generates presence, they appear as *embodied mind*. The actor exemplifies that body and mind cannot be separated from each other. Each is always already implied in the other […] through the performer's presence the spectator experiences the performer and himself as embodied mind in a constant process of becoming - he perceives the circulating energy as a transformative and vital energy. I would like to call this the radical concept of presence.[259]

This shared exchange of energy between people, the perpetual process of "becoming" as described by Fisher-Lichte, resonates strongly with Cavarero's concept of relational humanism in which the self is constantly made and re-made anew. Striving to achieve radical presence seemed to me another way of

[258] Soraya Nabipour, Extract from Rehearsal Journals, 2017.
[259] Erika Fisher-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance,* London: Routledge, 2008, p98.

facilitating Cavarero's relationality between performer and spectator and making shared relationality a 'material' of performance. To explore this mode of radical presence in rehearsal, I thought of different ways the performers could practise becoming open to the present moment and expanding their consciousness. I decided to facilitate adapted versions of 'Deep Listening' exercises inspired by the electronic music pioneer and composer Pauline Oliveros, whose work I knew theoretically, but which I now used as a starting point to embody a 'radical concept of presence'.

'Deep Listening' is a form of meditation intended to facilitate creativity and 'heighten and expand consciousness of sound in as many dimensions of awareness and attentional dynamics as humanly possible'.[260] I applied Oliveros's exercises including energy work, bodywork, breathwork, and listening, and adapted them to include not only the sense of hearing, but seeing and feeling too. At the beginning of each rehearsal I led a 10-minute listening exercise in which the performers would, for that duration, practise bringing their attention and awareness to listening 'to the interplay of sounds in the whole space/time continuum.'[261] This exercise balances two different forms of attention: focal attention, which places attention on a detail or specific sound; and global attention, which is diffuse and ever-expanding to include the entire space/time continuum of sound. I adapted this exercise, sometimes asking the performers to start by listening for sounds, first, outside the room: sounds in the city of Sheffield, the construction sites, the engine of a bus, a car horn, the voices of passing students, birdsong, rain; then, to the sounds inside the room: the heating system, the clock, to the sounds inside their own body, their breath, their swallowing of saliva, the rumble of a stomach; and finally, to hold all the sounds at once. We practised oscillating from focal attention to global attention, from being aware of what occurred outside our bodies to what occurred inside them.

I adapted the 'Deep Listening' exercise into a 'Deep Looking' exercise, in which the performers would take it in turns to describe in painstaking detail everything they saw in the room. This training helped the performers develop a level of concentration that gave them discipline and control over their attention, a skill which carried through over to their work with the monologue. When speaking, I encouraged them to place full attention, the receptivity of their bodies and absolute focus of their minds, on the room of the performance - the architecture, the accidental sounds inside and outside, the people in the space - so that the act of speaking was self-consciously informed by the specificity of the moment. We practised what it meant to be simultaneously a *sender* and a *receiver.* Oliveros asks: 'are you receiving what you send and also receiving the whole space/time continuum of sound?' Applying this to the delivery of the monologue, I asked the performers not only to be conscious of themselves as senders of information, but at the same time to *listen* to the words they were sending and speaking, to

[260] Pauline Oliveros, *Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice,* Bloomington: Deep Listening Publications, 2005, xxiii
[261] Ibid, p12.

listen compassionately, impartially, non-judgementally. I invited them to approach listening with the faith that there will be something new to discover upon each instance of listening, and to balance this listening to their own speaking, with listening simultaneously to the spectators, to their breathing, the sounds of their movements, their presences responding also to the words of the text. The application of the 'Deep Listening' exercises in rehearsals became a spatial activity, by accepting the body as a sensitive, receptive instrument in space. This in turn constituted a practice of Fisher-Lichte's radical presence and embodied mind, designed to facilitate shared relationality, in Cavarero's terms.

Another favourite exercise we used repeatedly, also taken from 'Deep Listening' work, was the 'Extreme Slow Walk'. The purpose of this, according to Oliveros, is to 'challenge your normal pattern or rhythm of walking so that you can learn to reconnect with very subtle energies in the body'[262]. I asked the performers to walk from one end of the room to the other as slowly as was physically possible, gently placing one foot at a time on the floor, rolling from the heel of the foot to the blade to the ball of the foot to the toes. Anna and Jane spoke about the sense of peace they experienced during this exercise and the heightened alertness they felt of their own body in space. It was a wonderful exercise for me to observe them both as it revealed much valuable detail and information. Watching each performer's body move through space drew attention to differences in posture, pace, tension, energy. The walk could be read as a wordless version of Cavarero's 'narratable self': without language, by walking through space, the performers are narratable selves, exposing their physical stories, histories, identities. In one rehearsal we pushed the exercise to an extreme. I asked the performers to walk as slowly as physically possible from one end of the room to the other. They did it in 16 minutes. In this version their bodies became strange - almost object-like, almost non-human. Time became a palpable material of the performance - by the end it difficult to tell if had lasted five minutes or five hours. The physical strain of the task made limbs shake with tension, nerves in their faces twitched, and the whole time there was a sense of precariousness – that one or both of them might lose their balance and fall. I returned to explore the sense of temporal materiality that emerged from this exercise the following year in my next project: *standing;remember*.

As mentioned before, this exercise led me to build a walk (at a "normal" pace) into the performance itself to have a wordless section at the beginning in which each performer appears and spectators are given the opportunity to experience their personhood purely through the movement of the body in space, undertaking the most mundane and quotidian of tasks, walking from A to B, or from the wings to the podium onstage. Except of course, this task was not, and is never, mundane for a performer: it encapsulates the transition of moving from privacy, and solitude, to a public space with others, of moving from being unseen, to being seen and to some extent, from being a subject in privacy, to

[262] Ibid, p20.

suddenly becoming an object of the attention of others. I explored this transition extensively with Anna and Jane, having them take it in turns to walk from offstage to onstage, asking them to observe and record their physical experience of making this transition as well as details they perceived in watching the other execute this task. Both performers described a physical sensation of a 'shift' when crossing the threshold from being unseen to being seen, and described a self-consciousness and a sudden pressure to 'present' themselves as confident and open, which manifested in physical tension; Jane, for instance, described the feeling of needles all over her skin. Despite its subtlety, the exercise can thus produce a potentially violent experience: this in turn recalls a statement by the director Romeo Castellucci, in which he describes the way 'the actor is purposely put in place to receive like arrows, the gazes of the spectators'[263]. The idea that 'gazes' of spectators can be felt physically again exposes the aspects of this work that deal with making the immaterial material, framing the relationship between performer and spectators as the very substance of the performance. Reflecting on the feeling of needles as a sign of the energy that exists between performer and spectator, we worked on accepting the reality of the performance situation even in its discomfort. We repeated the exercise and I asked them this time to mindfully place their attention on accepting the physical experience of the situation, and to resist adapting their physicality to align with preconceived ideas of how they thought they should appear as performers.

Voice and Emotion

In the effort to present theatrical elements in a stripped backed form, I grew increasingly aware of the extent to which each component - presence, the walk onstage, the relationship with the spectator – could be hugely expressive. My attention turned to the materiality of voice as a single element and its potential for both verbal and bodily articulation. In a separate study on voice, Cavavero emphasises that 'the act of speaking is relational: what communicates, first and foremost, beyond the specific content that the words communicate, is the acoustic, empirical, material relationality of singular voices'.[264] The live moment of reading centres the voice as a key communicative material of the performance, a signifier that, beyond language, expresses physical, psychological and emotional states, life experience, background or class. For Roland Barthes, 'there is no other time than that of the utterance, and every text is eternally written here and now'.[265] The simplicity of the utterance of words before an audience opened up a plethora of meanings from each performer and multiple levels of sensory communication.

[263] Claudia Castellucci, Romeo Castellucci, Chiara Guidi, Joe Kelleher, Nicholas Ridout, The Theatre of Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio, Rooutledge, London, 2007, p211.
[264] Adriana Cavarero 2005, p13.
[265] Roland Barthes 1968 , p148.

In the following lines of the monologue that describe the relationship between speech and identity, my attention was drawn to differences between the performers' voices through the self-reflexivity of the text:

> It was difficult. The men in my life made it difficult, but I am happy to say that while they may have shaped me, they no longer control me. I am free. And I won't tell you any of those things, and this is what language has given me. If I speak for example in the vernacular that is indicative of where I was raised, in speech that is accented or idiomatic, in short, relinquish who and what I am – I think that's vulgar to share in this kind of way, because I don't want, nor should I expect anything from you, much less, your empathy.[266]

In this section, the voices of Jane and Anna shaped the meaning of these lines in distinct ways. Jane has a strong Sheffield accent, whereas Anna speaks in a softened form of received pronunciation. Jane's accent here conspicuously contradicted the content of the words, so that by speaking in her accent, she does the very thing the speaker in the monologue vows not to do and ends up exposing an aspect of her identity and 'giving herself away'. Depending on Jane's energy, it sometimes read as a defenceless exposure, and other times, a deliberate defiance. Anna's received pronunciation corroborated the lines, and read as a sense of control and withholding, concealing her 'true' voice and identity. In both cases, we recognised the emotional potency in the delivery of these lines, whether in the failure, defiance or success in concealing.

The emotional expression of the performers exposed the complexity of relational dynamics in the encounter between performer and spectator. In examining emotions within the social and political structures that contain them, Sara Ahmed constructs a useful framework to validate, contextualize and re-examine emotions including: pain, hate, fear, disgust, shame, love, queer feelings, and feminist attachments in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004). Asserting that, 'emotions involve bodily processes of affecting and being affected, […] emotions are a matter of how we come into contact with objects and others', Ahmed explores empathetic identification as making room for an extension of self.[267] In this extension, 'identification is the desire to take a place where one is not yet. As such, identification expands the space of the subject […]. Identification involves making likeness rather than being alike.'[268] For Ahmed, the emotion of being moved 'is not about "moving on" or about "using" emotions to move away, but moving and being moved as a form of labour or work, which opens up different kinds of attachments to others.'[269] The gap between the written text's refusal to 'share' or 'relinquish who or what' the subject is, and the materiality of Jane's voice which *did* relinquish her

[266] Richard Maxwell, *The Evening Part 2 Extract,* 2017.
[267] Sara Ahmed, 2014, p.208
[268] Ibid., p126.
[269] Ibid., p201.

personhood to the spectator, became a space in which the act of identification that Ahmed describes - the making of likeness - occurred. The sculpturally constructed gap between the performer's personhood and text, in this instance, facilitated empathy in the irreducibility of individual personhood, and the universality of this created relationality between performer, text and spectator.

Below I share brief notes from my rehearsal log, made when watching Jane perform the monologue at two rehearsals, that track my thinking about the contradictory levels of activity, communication and signification that became visible through the performance's Minimalist form:

> 10th August 2017
>
> - Jane is trying to do the task 'well'. She is precise and deliberate, placing emphasis and stress in her pronunciation of words. There is a tension in her voice, it's higher and 'posher' than how she normally speaks, and she's imposing an 'up and down' intonation, a 'story-time reading voice' upon the words as she reads. She is trying to be what she thinks a performer *should* be: accurate, correct, exact, well-spoken, engaging.
>
> 11th August 2017
>
> - Jane holds herself at a distance from the words. She speaks in a disjointed rhythm and pauses over some words, as if deciphering them. This leads me to imagine the words are about someone else. There is clear space between her and the words, and I am left to imagine the speaker of the text as some other person in a far-off place. In these moments I feel closer to Jane, like we're on the same side, and she becomes a co-spectator of the speaker/ character with me.
>
> 17th August 2017
>
> -Jane says the line 'I won't tell you any of those things' and her voice 'cracks' in the word 'any'. There is a pause between the two syllables of the word that make it sound strange, and it feels like time is suspended. In this pause, this opening, I don't know what will happen and it feels like neither does she. In the pause, I perceive her pain. It's as if the words are directly about her. When she continues the next lines, her voice is deeper, she's speaking in what I recognise, as her daughter, to be her 'own' voice. I can't see a gap between her and the words. For a few sentences it appears as if these are *her* words spoken with embodied presence. Her inner experience of thought and emotion seems to respond to the words spoken, and her physiological response to the spoken line, appears to be the impetus for the next unspoken next line.
>
> 3rd September 2017
>
> - At times it looks like Jane is in flux - listening to the words she speaks, receiving them, processing them through the bank of her experiences, memories. I can't see what images/thoughts/ideas are triggered but I see her change in breath, physical tension, posture, the texture of her voice, the pause, the pitch.
>
> - Is she transformed by the words? It appears as if her energy changes direction, her posture adjusts, she pulls a facial expression I've never seen her make before, she takes on an identity unknown to me, and it seems as if she becomes another person.

> - She looks at me and says a line and it appears as if the words are about me, as if she's spectating me. Those words are describing my life. I compare myself to her. She says 'I am a woman' and I think about what that means, for her, and what that means for me. [270]

The stillness, simplicity, and non-representational quality of the act of reading in performance, allowed me to witness different levels of communication, and emphasised to me how much activity was taking place. The abundance of information reminded me of a statement by Tim Etchells where he describes perceiving performance 'layers' and the effect of this:

> I think, for me, watching performance, I am aware of people on a number of levels, like I'm seeing past one layer of what they are doing to another layer and then may be to another. Perhaps there's something important about this experience that we have, of seeing layers of information, the feeling that we are seeing through, from one layer to another to another. As watchers, we aggregate all of that information and we make a kind of map that allows us to say: there's somebody there. None of those layers is quite enough on its own – presence is to do with the combination. [271]

The combination of Jane's desire to execute the task well, her live-processing of the words that she read, her emotional connection to them, her detachment from them, the changes in her physicality, vocality, and attention, and the existence of the text as a clearly separate entity written by another person, amalgamated in performance, as Etchells describes, to evoke presence. This presence is completed by the spectator's individual navigation of all these levels of information. His metaphor of the spectator constructing a 'map' from this information pertinently implies that there is a spatial quality to spectatorship, as if an aspect of perception is about charting proximities between objects, and experiencing movement. I enjoyed the changing proximities I experienced watching Jane: sometimes watching her at a distance, sometimes feeling she was a co-spectator *with* me, sometimes feeling she was an intimate spectator *of* me.

I was also struck by the moment Jane's voice cracked and by what I perceived to be an expression of pain. In that moment, I felt as if I had a more vivid awareness of myself as a body in relation to Jane's body. I am aware that this impression is influenced by the fact that she is my mother; perhaps I might not have had such a strong reaction if she had been a stranger. Nonetheless, I reflect on it now in light of Ahmed's concept of pain as 'something that "mediates" the relationship between internal or external, or inside and outside'[272], acknowledging my relationship as a daughter. Witnessing my mother's pain in the silence opened up by the "crack" inside her speech made me aware of the borders of her presence

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[270] Soraya Nabipour, Extracts from Rehearsal Journals 2017.
[271] Tim Etchells, In Conversation with Nick Kaye, *The Presence Project*, Exeter University, 15 February 2006, available at: http://spa.exeter.ac.uk/drama/presence/presence.stanford.edu_3455/Collaboratory/646.html accessed 20/03/20.
[272] Ahmed, 2014, p24

as well as my own. As Ahmed describes, 'it is through the recognition or interpretation of sensations, which are responses to the impressions of objects and others, that bodily surfaces take shape.'[273] We gain form and awareness of the boundaries of our form in the conscious acknowledgment of emotion. Ahmed goes on to describe the way emotions have the potential to both construct and deconstruct the borders that delineate us from each other:

> To say that feelings are crucial to the forming of surfaces and borders is to suggest that what "makes" those borders also "unmakes" them. In other words, what separates us from others also connects us to others. The paradox is clear if we think of the skin surface itself, as that which appears to contain us, but as where others impress upon us. This contradictory nature of skin begins to make sense if we unlearn the assumption that the skin is already there, and begin to think of the skin as a surface that is felt only the in event of being "impressed upon" in the encounters we have with others.[274]

Ahmed suggests that we get the sharpest consciousness of the borders of our own being in experiencing or witnessing feelings and emotions in relation to others. The moment of the encounter holds the paradox of experiencing both connection and separation from others: of being aware of ourselves as both separate and interconnected, relational beings. Ahmed observes that 'the impossibility of feeling the pain of others does not mean that the pain is simply theirs, or that their pain has nothing to do with [oneself]' but argues instead that 'an ethics of responding to pain involves being open to being affected by that which one cannot know or feel.'[275] To allow oneself to become exposed to, or moved by, the unknown is to experience the surfaces of one's being in direct relation with the other's, on the boundary of becoming 'unmade' or 'undone'. The Minimalist principles of the performance allowed me to experience a moment of contact with my mother's pain that both blurred and crystalized the outlines of my being in relation to hers.

standing; remember

standing; remember (June 2018) grew out of my work examining personhood, presence and relationality as materials from *The Evening Part 2*. For this second project I worked with one performer, Alfie Heffer, a theatremaker who was especially interested in using improvisation methodologies to generate text. Together, we worked to develop a monologue improvised in the moment of performance. I wanted to stage Cavarero's 'narratable self' by reducing even more components and to continue my analysis of presence as a material, but this time to remove the written text, remove blocking, remove all

[273] Ibid., p25.
[274] Ibid., p24-25.
[275] Ibid., p30

but one performer, and boil down the staged encounter to the presence of the individual and their desire. The parts of *The Evening Part 2* that had interested and affected me most from my perspective as spectator were the spaces between words, the absences, the silences that opened up in which it appeared that time stood still and the sense of exchange between spectator and performer became palpable. *standing; remember* was created as a way for me to go one step further in applying principles of Minimalist reduction and exposure of means. I wanted to frame the human form, creating a heightened awareness of spatial and temporal materiality by foregrounding stillness and silence, thereby drawing even more attention to the shared relationality between spectator and performer. Thinking of the performance as a sculpture meant exposing and framing the elements it is composed of as materials, in an effort to reveal the dynamics between those elements also as a form of material, treating all these non-hierarchically. The materials of this project I identified as the body, space, time and language.

The Concept: Monologue as Narratable Self

Building on the photograph exercise of the narratable self, I conceptualised a performance in which the performer would set a timer for an hour, and within that hour perform the task of remembering, by balancing their attention (in Oliveros' terms) both 'focally' and globally'; both outwards towards spectators, and inwards towards themselves; by opening their consciousness both to the present reality of the performance and the inner experience of themselves as a 'narratable self—immersed in the spontaneous auto-narration of memory'.[276]

If a memory surfaced that the performer *wanted* to share, their task would be to speak about a brief detail attached to it: for example, if the performer suddenly thought of a memory concerning a goodbye at an airport, they might choose just to describe the 'orange plastic seats in the departure lounge' and then let their mind move on. If they desired to share more about the memory, then they could add more detail so that it became a more substantial fragment. In rehearsals with Alfie, I discovered that it was more interesting if the performer resisted speaking in long anecdotes that were heavily narrative, and focused instead on details: nouns and verbs, that gave glimpses of events and situations, that the spectator could then complete.

I also set the rule that the performer must start each verbal expression with the third person phrase: 'They/She/He remembers when…etc'. The third person phrasing ensured that the monologue that

[276] Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, trans. by Paul A. Kottman, London and New York: Routledge, 2000, p33.

emerged from out of the performance was not limited to the 'I' of the performer but opened up an invitation for the spectator to find themselves and place themselves within the specifics of the performer's memories. In this way, the monologue had the potential to hold both the performer's and the spectator's memories. For example, a phrase such as 'He remembers his first kiss', when spoken in performance has the capacity to evoke the spectator's imagination not only of the performer's first kiss, but also their own. I strove to build on Cavarero's concept of shared relationality here: the recognition that what connects us is, paradoxically, our singularity and embodied uniqueness. Although the task necessitates the performer reflecting on the past, I wanted to draw attention to this action occurring in the present. I thus framed each utterance with the present tense 'remembers when', to emphasise that the process of becoming is happening moment to moment: a self is in the process of being constructed anew with each spoken fragment, for both performer and spectator.

In rehearsal, I added the rule that if, within that hour, there was nothing the performer wanted to share or speak about, then they did not have to speak at all. So, if an hour passed and they did not feel any desire to share, then that particular performance would be one of unspoken remembering; it would be an unspoken monologue. I was particularly excited by the possibility of this. In *Chronophobia: On time in the art of the 1960s* (2004), Pamela. M. Lee argues that 'it is in slowness and the capacity to parse one's own present that one gains ground on what's coming up next, perhaps restores to the everyday some degree of agency, perhaps some degree of resistance.'[277] In the performance's deconstruction of the present moment through the stretches of silence and stillness within the hour, through the 'nothingness' occurring, I aimed to create an aperture in which 'one refuses teleological end games. Instead, one rests with the immanence of being and the potential to act,' hereby alerting the spectator to their presence as part of that moment and their agency within it.[278]

In this project, in which I sought to reduce the components of presentation to the minimum, I wanted the opportunity to *see* thinking: to see thought; to reduce performance to moments of 'nothing'. However, it became clear that to maintain consciousness of 'remembering' for an hour, whilst maintaining consciousness of the spectators and the live event, is an extremely difficult task for the performer. Their mind would inevitability go 'blank' at times. I was interested in how blankness would manifest. Was it possible to make a performance about blankness, or nothing? Can 'nothing' ever exist in performance? As Jeremy Gilbert suggests, 'blankness signifies from the start the place of signification'.[279] On that basis, blankness is not absence of expression or communication, but the beginning of it. It was also a way for me to explore the compositional strategy that Donald Judd refers

[277] Pamela M. Lee (2004) Chronophobia; On Time in the Art of the 1960s, Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, p308
[278] Ibid.
[279] Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, "Blankness as Signifier", in Critical Inquiry, Vol. 24, No. 1, Autumn 1997, p. 160. 13

to of ‘one thing after another’, notions of order and continuity which, according to him, is ‘a way of finding out what the world’s like’, each fragment/memory standing simply as one thing after another.[280] This beginning framed the desire to share. When presenting the human as a material, as matter, formed and shaped by the world, we asked: what can we learn from these fragmented memories about how the world shaped them? What happens in the spaces between the memories? What is happening between performer and audience in these silent rememberings?

At the time of making the performance, I had been researching Quaker worship, which was one of the inspirations for this monologue. A Quaker friend of mine invited me to meetings to experience the hour of prayer, without a leader, in which a group of people sit in silence, and only speak if they feel moved to do so. Sometimes an hour went by and nobody spoke, but it felt like a collective consciousness developed in that time, not unlike the collective consciousness I had experienced as a spectator at times, to performance. I was fascinated by the moment of utterance. The moment the silence was punctured, and a person in the room opened their mouth and spoke, animated themself, came to life out of the room’s stillness and silence, and changed the dynamics. It reminded me of a conversation I had with Fletcher in which he described the live presence of the performer onstage as being ‘like an apocalypse, you see everything’. The silence of this form of worship, was like a performance with no performer, or an unspoken monologue. Eddie Paterson’s observes in *The Contemporary American Monologue* (2015) that ‘[h]istorically, many of the first monologues were prayers to God or Gods, in the hope of a reply. In many religions today, God continues to be the original and ultimate monologuist.’ In working on *standing; remember,* I hoped to create a performance that was silent, or had stretches of silence built in to it, in which perpetually, there could occur the moment of utterance, the breaking of silence, and the emergence of a new dynamic.

To illustrate the fragmentary nature of Alfie’s improvised monologue, I include an extract that I transcribed from a rehearsal at the University Theatre Workshop below:

> He remembers the.. this circle of light, that came through the window, and hit the floor
>
> He remembers the the feeling…like its gonna fall backwards
>
> He remembers the the the pictures of the letterheads on each page
>
> He remembers the the wallpaper that was still peeling even after he’d left

[280] Caitlin Murray, Flavin Judd, *Donald Judd Writings* New York: David Zwirner Books, 2016

He remembers that as a result there was buttons missing on their clothes

He remembers the shape of the rhododendron, inside of the rhododendron

He remembers that behind Matalan, after about 6, was a really good spot

He remembers the pile of burnt mattresses in that kind of closed-off bit, just down…just round…

He remembers the telephone box that would constantly have the window smashed on the front

He remembers the carpark that was thick with fog and orange light shining onto it

He remembers the just the edges of a swimming pool and then the middle was mud and concrete

He remembers the air… the difference of the air… walking in to the… walking out of the oak forest

He remembers a photo he took of her…with a long road in the background

He remembers seeing a stranger camping on the edge of the cliff

He remembers that he didn't speak to us for a few hours

He remembers the smell of coriander and sewage

He remembers the instrument that just crumbled when he was playing it [281]

Reading the list of utterances in one go, it is easier to impose narrative on the monologue. In performance, the above extract was spoke over the course of approximately 30 minutes, each fragment separated by varying amounts of silence. In this way, narrative emerged fleetingly, and then evaporated. Images appeared and then disappeared. References to places such as the budget clothes and homeware

[281] Soraya Nabipour and Alfie Heffer, Rehearsal Transcript- *standing; remember,* 2018, Theatre Workshop, University of Sheffield.

store ‘Matalan’, and ‘the car park’ created particularly vivid images that lingered in the blankness of the performance space, and introduced a tension between the reality of the performance space, and imaginative space of the memory, and rooted the monologue in a specific social, cultural context.

Monologue of Movement

Early on in rehearsals with Alfie, I realised that aside from the text he generated in performance, another significant aspect of this performance was the text of his physicality. In the stillness and silence of the performance, his body centre stage, Alfie’s conscious and unconscious physical gestures appeared to ‘speak’, to communicate meaning, especially in the absence of verbal language. His physicality contained both intentional and unintentional information: it appeared more intentional when speaking and unintentional, or at least less intentional, during the silences. The bodily language of this improvised movement score was a product of Alfie’s engagement with task of remembering, deciding whether or not to share, and then communicating verbally, or choosing not to speak. As a spectator, I had the palpable impression of *seeing* his instinct, *seeing* the changes in his energy, *seeing* thoughts dictating his movements, moment to moment. When the movements occurred in silence, it appeared, the spectator was given room to imagine what his thoughts might be. The slow lifting of an arm in the middle of a description of a memory, and its abrupt drop; the opening of the mouth as if to speak and its snapping silently shut; a half-smile twitching at the corner of his mouth; fingers through the hair; the closing and opening of eyes, a tongue being stuck out, tension in the right hand, the tilting of the head. These micro-movements and micro-expressions in the stillness and silence of the performance became strange and huge. They made the body seem both familiar and unfamiliar, everyday and abnormal. In the stretches of silence, these gestures became an improvised choreography, a monologue of movement, disjointed with stillness and silence and ‘gaps’, unexplained, that my mind as a spectator rushed to fill, to interpret, to decipher.

To illustrate this choreography of conscious and unconscious movement, I share a small section from my rehearsal log of a performance in which I recorded Alfie’s movements and noted underneath “poem of gestures”:

> tongue out/ tongue in
> left hand on gut
> right hand reaching to the right for words – (looks like fingers are playing an invisible, miniature piano, legato)
> both hands draw small fast circles in space
> left hand draws one large circle in space slowly,

tongue lips bottom lip slowly, carefully
right hand draws a horizontal line
eyes closed with flickering eyelids fast
mouth open (very slow)
hands cradled in front of crotch
eyes open
eyes on us [282]

Going over my notes at that time, and reflecting on the 'objectness' of Alfie's body, I was reminded of Rainer's work – in particular her film *Hand Movie* which isolates the hand as a single body part or object. In the late 1960s Rainer became severely ill and was hospitalised. It was after one surgery in 1965, hospitalised and bed-bound, that she made her first film: *Hand Movie*. The close up of this isolated body part, the flexing and curling of fingers, muscles, the stretching of skin, shows her hand doing what her body could no longer do. Rainer's curiosity in the body as an object rather than persona accentuates the 'thingness' of the body; the viewer never sees the person it is attached to. Reflecting on this, I was interested in the way Alfie's gestures emphasised the 'thingness' of his body, and created a gap between the unconscious communication of his gestures and the conscious communication of his words. Alfie was simultaneously subject and object; he flickered back and forth between each state. Frozen movements and gestures oscillated between looking mundane and everyday, to looking strange and other-worldly; gestures which combined stillness and movement seemed to demonstrate the transition from object to subject. Rosalind Krauss views 'sculpture as a medium located at the juncture between stillness and motion; between time arrested and time passing' and argues that '[f]rom this tension, which defines the very condition of sculpture, comes its enormous expressive power'.[283] In the Minimalist staging of the performance, of framing Alfie's body as a 'sculpture', of framing the materiality of time in the stretches of silence between utterances and of stillness between movement, in the seeming 'nothingness' or blankness that was occurring, the spectator was invited to draw perception itself into question and under examination. What am I seeing? Why am I seeing it that way? How is my perception functioning in this moment? Reflecting on gestures, Rosalind Krauss observes:

> We are not a set of private meanings that we can choose or not choose to make public to others. We are the sum of our visible gestures. We are as available to others as to ourselves. Our gestures are themselves transformed by the public world, by its conventions, its language, the repertory of its emotions, from which we learn our own.[284]

[282] Soraya Nabipour, Extract from Rehearsal Journals, 2018.
[283] Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture,* Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1977, p5.
[284] Ibid., p270.

Krauss notes that ultimately gestures are digested and metamorphosised by the public: we are a product of our social, cultural environment. The movements that Alfie made reflect his social formation as a material product of his society, of a particular time period, place, culture.

Performance at Theatre Deli, Sheffield / Spectator Response

I presented the performance of *standing; remember* in Rehearsal Room 2 at Theatre Deli in the centre of Sheffield. I chose this rehearsal room because it was the plainest, most mundane space in the building: plain white walls, a dull, beige, laminate floor with a smaller section of black flooring and exposed ceiling light fixtures. These artificial lights provided, in their bright coolness, a raw sense exposure that I wanted; they were a material relic from the space's history as a shut-down commercial building. Previously a Mothercare store before the company collapsed into administration, the former retail function of the space brought issues of time, value and exchange into the performance. What currencies of value do we normally attribute to a performance? What do spectators expect a performer to give them? The space somehow felt both public and private: an enclosed room, inside a public theatre, inside an old commercial store. The room's makeshift quality and the weak materials of its construction appealed to me. The walls that were installed were cheap and seemed to shake if you moved about too roughly, or shouted too loudly, which made you more aware of the presence of your body in the space. When the space moves with you, in response to you, it blurs the line between subject and object. From my experiences working in that space previously, I noticed that I always felt clumsy and loutish in there. You could not be graceful or beautiful in that space. It betrayed you as a human: both receptive to, and capable of impact. I knew that anything Alfie did, the subtlest of expressions or gestures would resound in that space. The fragility and insubstantiality of the room's structure gave a sense of it being provisional and impermanent, which reflected the precarity of the performance itself: an individual deciding in each moment whether to make what is private, public, making fleeting, fragile connections with the spectator. In short, it looked like a room where nothing of much interest would happen, and perversely, this effectively framed the question the work posed: 'Is what's happening *something* or *nothing?* And if it's *nothing,* what does *nothing* look like?' Returning briefly to Gilbert's concept of blankness as signifying the start of signification, my hope in this performance was that, in the nothingness, the spectator might become conscious of this beginning, physically and spatially, and might consciously view themselves as a material in this activation of meaning. This time, I used no plinth: instead, I directed the performance in an end-on configuration so everyone in the space was physically on the same level.

After the hour's performance, I provided feedback forms for the audience to share thoughts and perceptions if they wished. In an audience of about thirty, twelve forms were submitted. The comments received range from bewilderment, boredom, anger and curiosity, to reflections on shifts in the embodied experience of space and relational dynamics in the performer/spectator encounter. Some responses described a sense of frustration at what was perceived or experienced as an absence of activity: 'I understand the effort to reduce 'performance' or 'theatricality', but I think you need to have something in there. In this there was no event. It was withholding so much. It was like a flattening out. I felt infuriated by it.' Some responses described the experience of disconnection and boredom that manifested a sense of ambiguity in the exchange between performer and spectator: 'At points it felt a bit dead and tedious, in an awkward kind of way. The room became so loud in the silence and there was sometimes an uncertainty about why any of us were there.' A heightened awareness of the space and of the performer was noted by some: 'I liked the hum that the room made'; 'the room was loud, and felt like it was spinning'; and 'I looked closer at the performer's micro-expressions, sometimes having to look at the ground because the neutrality made tiny smiles or pulls at clothing seem much louder and more meaningful.' Responses referring to the 'loudness' of the room and its 'hum' showed me that for some spectators, the space itself gained presence in the performance, possibly overshadowing the presence of the performer. Several spectators described the performance as a meditative/reflective experience: 'the mundanity and the personal and calm nature of the performer's statements occasionally interjected my thoughts, filtering through as gentle and unpressured ideas or images that I could 'take or leave' as the show went along'; 'in a way it was like a guided meditation whereupon every new prompt brought you back to the reality of being at a performance. Back from childhood/youth memories that were evoked by the performer.' I was intrigued by responses that described reflections on processes of meaning-making and form:

> It was surprising to me how plain some of the memories were. 'Her on a bike'. It made me think of semiotics - how the signs, the gestures, and speech were very simple and understated, while the signified memories were obviously so rich. It felt like a stripped memory, quite like the way the performance was a stripping away (ostensibly?) of theatre conventions (e.g. drama, narrative, gratification).
>
> It made me think about the spectacle, and what this performance's relationship/embroilment was with it. Are we watching the spectacle take place in the room of this person? OR something else? Was it a reclaiming from the spectacle? And if so, was it the moon or the finger pointing at the moon?[285]

At times during the performance, it felt as if there were fleeting moments of a live energy between spectators and the performer: words were spoken that seemed to 'land', the room seemed to 'vibrate'

[285] Spectator Responses, *standing; remember* performance at Theatre Deli, 2018.

inside some of the silences; however, more often it felt like this energy became lost, and the performance appeared to turn inwards on itself or fall flat. The spectator responses that expressed disconnection, frustration, and a return to the self - 'I drifted off into my own thoughts' - emphasised the difficulty of being a spectator to a performance that withholds any clear form of narrative, and in which the performer alternates between connection and disconnection from the spectators. During the performance I found myself not only watching Alfie, but watching the spectators too, and observing what was happening between them and the performance, trying to track the ebb and flow of outward and inner directions of attention of people in the room. As well as connection between performer and spectator, there was, arguably more detachment, and alienation occurring.

I was struck by how differently the silences manifested. Sometimes, I would feel a sense of disappointment when Alfie opened his mouth to speak following a stretch of silence and stillness. It was as if he had 'broken' or punctured something that had developed between myself, him, the space and the other spectators. In those silences it felt as if he was connected to the spectators, and that there was a communication that was occurring beyond words, a communication that was spatial and energic. By contrast, uncomfortable silences also occurred in which there appeared to be disengagement or confusion from both sides. It was as if the terms of engagement had crumbled - is the performer still a performer if they're not 'doing anything'? It felt as if Alfie became a spectator - this was described in one of the spectator response forms which questioned: 'Is it possible that the spectators themselves were the show? I think it's a reality show for the performer- get 20 + people in one room, close the door and see what happens?' This response describes a complete structural reversal of the event. Sara Jane Bailes has written extensively on the ways indeterminacy and failure in performance have the potential to invite different qualities of attention, to re-structure the performer-spectator contract, and make us reconsider how we attribute value to art. Bailes argues that this kind of ambiguity can blur the distinction between performer and spectator, for when 'confusion infuses the event from both sides of the line, […] the experience solders performer and spectator together.'[286] In this 'soldering together' there is perhaps a negation, a cancelling out. Bailes acknowledges that:

> When a performer stalls onstage, for example, the spectator's expectations shift to accommodate the potential collapse of circumstances and the (agreed) system of disbelief. Perhaps it is precisely the *performlessness* of such moments that indexes a movement towards formal disintegration, towards the possibility that "nothing" rather than "something" is happening, so that a gradual process of diminution works to redefine the terms and conditions of the encounter and the way in which we perceive its value.[287]

[286] Sara Jane Bailes, *Performance Thetare and The Poetics of Failure: Forced Entertainment, Goat Island, Elevator Repair Service,* New York; London: Routledge, 2011, p157.
[287]Ibid., p158

The uncomfortable silences in *standing;remember* could be regarded as instances of indeterminacy of the kind described by Bailes, in which there was a dismantling of form, of the accepted contract between performer and spectator, but no establishment of a new one. The discomfort perhaps came from the sense of uncertainty and unknowing, which placed performer and spectator in a state of undefined 'formlessness'. Although uncomfortable, it was valuable to experience this state, and to experience the ways a contract emerges, the way 'something' emerges from 'nothing'. When Alfie broke the silence and spoke again, a new offer was made, and this would ignite a fleeting new dynamic, momentarily, before evaporating gain. The entire performance appeared to enact this appearance and disappearance of form, alternatively establishing, and erasing itself.

I was particularly interested in a spectator response that seemed to describe the embodied spatial experience this formlessness:

> Sometimes the entire performance space felt very strange and I felt I dissociated, seeing the performer as a central marker in a strange field of suspense, or tension or as if the familiarity and mundanity of the space had disintegrated and we could see the mechanical parts of everything 'behind the scenes'[288]

References to dissociation and disintegration seem to describe the spectator experiencing a detachment from the self, and with it, a degeneration of the ordinariness of the space, of what they knew the space to be, which gave them the impression of experiencing the space anew, and witnessing processes of construction in space that normally remain unseen. This description of an alternative experience of space, demonstrated that to a certain extent the application of Minimalist principles to performance hold the potential to change the nature of the encounter between performer and spectator in a spatial, embodied way.

Although I had set out to make 'spectatorship' a material, the arguable failure of the project, the ambiguity and uncertainty of the relation between performer and spectators appeared to manifest the state of formlessness as a material of performance. The project illuminated to me the different expectations spectators have from a performer. Those who had meditative experiences seemed to have relinquished the expectation of the performer to 'give' them anything. They appeared to have accepted a way of sharing time and space with the performer that was inclusive of both separateness and togetherness, moments of exchange, and moments of solitude. Spectators that expressed frustration seemed to have stronger, unrelinquished expectations of the performer to give them something. The stripping down of theatrical components drew the performance event itself into question: what is the transaction taking place here?

[288] Spectator Responses, *standing; remember* performance at Theatre Deli, 2018.

Queens Row

Where in Chapter One I discussed the architectural manipulation of space in the production *Queens Row*, in this chapter I focus specifically on the monologue form in the production from the viewpoint of my practice-based research. I examine how the company's process and the independent discoveries I made as a director in *The Evening Part 2* and *standing; remember* led me to engage with and experience the monologue in *Queens Row* as a palimpsestuous structure, or 'sculpture' created out of the spatialisation of language. I examine how the application of sculptural principles in theatre shape the role of the performer. For Gay McAuley, 'language in the theatre is made visible, displayed, located in space; […] the verbal is always situated in relation to the visual'.[289] I examine the experience of working on and performing in *Queens Row* through the lens of McAuley's spatial theory and Sara Ahmed's recontextualization of emotions.

As established previously, *Queens Row* is constructed around three monologues, spoken on a round pedestal in the centre of a stark, bare performance space, which describe the aftermath of an American civil war from the perspectives of three characters: 'Mother' (performed by Nazira Hanna), 'Lover' (performed by Antonia Summer) and 'Daughter' (performed by myself). Based on the understanding that actors experience text as a 'physical rather than mental reality, and their knowledge is acquired through their bodies'[290], for the experiential analysis of this chapter, I will focus on the 'Daughter' monologue that I performed, writing from the embodied position of performer/deviser. This monologue differed significantly from the 'Mother' and 'Lover' monologues, as it consists of deconstructed language, codes, and sentences made up entirely of punctuation, sentences that I was required to interpret nightly in performance and communicate solely through movement. I wrote in my diary on 4th October 2018, during the ICA run, that my experience of performing in *Queens Row* felt like 'scaling a climbing wall, with holds that you never find in the same place twice'. These textual qualities shaped my experience of the performance of the monologue as a spatial and physical act of communication as well as a verbal one. In performing the monologue, I made sense of this task by working on the principle that, through the relational experience of speaking and moving, I was creating a sculpture or structure, a piece of perpetually changing architecture or apparatus that I would navigate physically and spatially, and within which I would create and discover meaning collaboratively with the spectators.

I begin by outlining the collaborative development of the Daughter monologue, to establish the importance of its perpetual transformations and the experience of the relationality between this monologue and the other two, before moving on to examine the practical exercise that led to its

[289] Gay McAuley p214.
[290] Ibid., p217.

strikingly deconstructed form; through this I examine in detail the relational exchange that, I argue, was fostered between performer and spectator.

Monologue as Palimpsest: Collaboration/ Relationality

The text of *Queens Row* changed significantly throughout rehearsal, development, and performance. From my previous positions of researcher and assistant director for NYCP, I was familiar with the company's way of working in which Maxwell begins the rehearsal process 'with three quarters [of the script] done or half, and through rehearsals as [he] get[s] to know the performers and characters, [he] continue[s] writing and tailoring it to the people' involved, making edits, additions and transformations throughout rehearsals and performance.[291] The collaborative nature of the work in rehearsals sees the actor's voice, in some cases, written into the text to a significant extent, and sometimes even reflects fragments of autobiographical information. For example, references to Summer's family, such as 'Maureen', were woven in to the 'Lover' monologue that she performed, whilst the 'Daughter' monologue that I performed, for a period of time, contained references to Iran.[292] Experiencing these ongoing transformations from the position of performer, I gained insight in observing the text mutate out of, and in response to, the discussions and practical group work undertaken in rehearsals, the conversations and activities outside of the rehearsal room, the ideas shared on Google docs, in phone calls, texts, emails, via drawings and through playlists. As noted by Edith Cassiers, Timmy De Laet and Luk Van den Dries in their analysis of the intermedial nature of postdramatic working documents, 'next to the continued interest in the expressive possibilities of the written word, numerous other modes of representations (such as drawings, sketches, videos, lists, Dropbox files, scores, annotations, diagrams, etc.) have become, arguably more than ever, vital means of theatrical creation' as they 'contain the seeds of the formal aesthetics' for performances.[293] Similarly, Lehmann identifies 'palimpsestuous intertextuality and intratextuality' as a significant characteristic of postdramatic theatre.[294] As a performer collaborating with other performers and a writer/director during the development of a text, I came to recognise the final version of the monologue in performance as encapsulating layers of ideas, revisions and exchanges, beyond what was written on the page. In this way, the text emerged as tangibly palimpsestuous and structural.

[291] Richard Maxwell, "Evening Plays" Theatre Communications Group): An Interview With Richard Maxwell, Andy Boyd, March 16th 2021 available at: https://newbooksnetwork.com/evening-plays accessed 23/11/21.
[292] There used to be a line : 'And now. Snow on the ground. In the morning. Back in Iran. In Rasht. It's 1990' which referred to the year of my birth and the place I had spent the first part of my life growing up. Even though it was edited out of the performed version of the text, the time I spent speaking it in rehearsals left an imprint, so it still existed for me in performance in a palimpsestic sense, as a present absence, a faint tracing, all but erased but still visible to me. In addition, in its direct referral to information about my life, the line felt like it wove aspects of my personhood and history into the text.
[293] Edith Cassiers, Timmy De Laet, Luk Van den Dries, 'Text: The Director's Notebook', in Boyle, Michael Shane, Cornish, Matt & Wolf, Brandon (eds.) *Postdramatic Theatre and Form,* London, Metheun Drama: 2019 , pp33-34.
[294] Hans-Thies Lehmann, p44.

For example, in performance, I discovered that the old versions of the text remained present in my consciousness, and continued to influence my behaviour onstage. The act of memorising text left an imprint, so when performing the 'final' version during the run, I still had older sections of speech, images and ideas in my mind, even though I did not verbalise them. Sometimes these remained because they contained vivid images or ideas that were meaningful to me; sometimes I was purely remembering lines as things 'not' to say. In speaking the text, I embodied these additional, historic layers of material. An observation by Tim Etchells resonates with my experience in performance of becoming in myself a 'space' in which the stratified layers of material, process, and creative work combine:

> I think that idea of the performer as a space in which irreconcilable impulses or realities are in a state of present play and flux is really important. There's a connection to choreographer Meg Stuart there for me too: you see the same accumulation and layering of one source material and another, and the dancers becoming a kind of hybrid or "in between" of the sources. […] it's actually an attempt to think differently about what a human being is, psychologically, socially, politically.[295]

The collaborative nature of the work in *Queens Row* meant that each of the monologues and the performances of them became hybrid spaces in which different sources, ideas, intentions, accrue. In this way, the palimpsestuous, hybrid space of the monologue was fluid and living: it was informed by, and receptive to, the changing materials, intentions and relational dynamics of the people involved in making the performance, and with the spectators.

In Oliveros' terms, as a performer I felt I was both a 'sender' and a 'receiver', a subject and an object. When discussing the experience of performance with Nazira Hanna she explained that she, too, had experienced the performance of monologue in *Queens Row* as a space where 'subjectivity and objectivity merge and become something new'[296]. Hanna went on to describe her experiences of contending with emotion in performance as contributing to the merging of objectivity and subjectivity:

> When Richard asks us to consider performing without feeling the need to force any emotion, I know I personally often mistook/confused this direction as Do Not Ascribe Any Emotion to the words on the page. Grappling with feelings felt in the moment, certain lines sometimes eliciting visceral reactions was a challenge and one that differed in intensity, with each line-through, run-through and performance, depending on my mood and events of the day. In short I felt I was acting, playing a character, and being myself to varying degrees in each performance.[297]

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[295] Tim Etchells *Repetition and Transformation: Phil Collins and Tim Etchells on the Wooster Group,* May 31st, 2019 available at: https://walkerart.org/magazine/phil-collins-tim-etchells-discuss-the-wooster-group accessed 4/05/20
[296] Nazira Hanna, Personal Interview, May 6th 2022.
[297] Ibid.

Hanna's description suggests that navigating the variation of emotional intensity she experienced in relation to the text led her to engage with the monologue on multiple levels, oscillating on a spectrum between 'acting' and 'being herself'. This allowed her to differentiate between 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' versions of self, and perhaps created the 'something new' she describes: a hybridity of expression of self and not-self, of subject and object.

As well as the perpetual transformations of the text as contributing to the palimpsestuous nature of the monologue, I also experienced the relationality between collaborators as a 'material' that informed the performance. Despite the seemingly 'individual' task of performing a monologue, the relationality between myself, Hanna, Summer and Maxwell in this production was a significant element that I experienced as shaping my performance each night. Part of the nightly preparation process included a 'line-through' in which we would each speak our monologues to each other. Whilst on a surface level this was a technical task intended to practise precision and accuracy in our knowledge of the text, the act of witnessing each other facilitated a similar form of Cavarero's relationality of the 'narratable self', except in this instance, the words were scripted. As my monologue was last in performance, I got to listen again to both Hanna and Summer's monologues each night, which allowed me the opportunity, again, to tune into both the language in the text, and to each of their personhoods and energies, and gave me a heightened awareness of myself as a part in a wider structure. One of the most inspiring parts of the experience for me was standing silently in the liminal space between offstage and onstage, listening to Hanna and Summer, and allowing the materiality of their voices and the content of what they spoke to filter through to me. Here, I was both performer and spectator (or more accurately, listener). I wondered what the words meant to them. I wondered what the words meant to the writer, Maxwell. I wondered what Maxwell imagined the words to mean to each of us. Witnessing the unique emotional expression of Hanna and Summer each night reminded me of being a spectator to my mother Jane, in which I experienced emotions as producing the outlines that allow one to perceive the relationality between the individual and the collective. Returning to Ahmed:

> emotions create the very effect of surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place. So emotions are not simply something 'I' or 'we' have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others that surfaces or boundaries are made: the 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by, and take the shape of, contact with others.

From Ahmed's perspective, the self gains definition through the contact with others that emotions facilitate. Nightly differences in Hanna and Summer's emotional vocal expression, pauses that opened up in new places, brought me simultaneously closer to and further apart from them, and had the potential to change my mind regularly about what the words of the play meant to me. 'Sculpturally', I felt made

and re-made anew nightly by the words I listened to, and the words I spoke. In listening, I got glimpses of my collaborator's selfhoods, and through that, became more aware of the aspects of their selfhoods that I would never know and equally, the aspects of my selfhood that would never be known. Listening to my collaborators in performance placed me simultaneously in proximity and distance to them and myself; it heightened my awareness of us being both separate and interconnected, relational beings in the structure of the performance. Experiencing this position of spectator or listener within the performance, gave me an insight into the spectator experience and relational exchange of my monologue. To swap positions within the production in this way allowed me a multidimensional perspective.

Development of the Daughter Monologue: Deconstruction

The most significant change to the 'Daughter' monologue occurred in response to my participation in the 'Why are you here/ What do you believe' exercises, a fundamental practice of the company's methodology (discussed in detail in Chapter 2). When first developing *Queens Row* at the ICA, Maxwell worked with each performer individually on these exercises**.** He started the workshop by asking me the 'Why are you here?' question. When I replied that I was there because he had asked me to step into the role, he said that wasn't a strong enough reason. To help me discover a reason, he asked me to write a monologue in response to the 'What do you believe' question. I was given time to sit alone in a dressing room at the ICA and write. I committed to the task and reflected on my beliefs and values, and the specific events and social, cultural circumstances that I understood as having led to them.

In describing my belief in the importance of a person having freedom to speak, I found myself writing about an experience that had taken away my voice. Growing up, theatre became important to me, as it was the only space where I felt I *could* speak. In my attempt to articulate what I had written in the dressing room onstage in the rehearsal afterwards, I got upset. My speech came out in the form of blurted words, disjointed by stutters, stammers, involuntary repetitions and prolongations of vowels and syllables. I lost fluency and flow in my verbal articulation and gained a heightened awareness of speaking as a physical, corporeal, embodied and spatial act. The pauses in my speech opened up a relational encounter between performer and spectator.

After that workshop, Maxwell rewrote and restructured the 'Daughter' monologue, deconstructing the language, editing material, inserting new material, and interspersing 'punctuation sentences' throughout, that I was to interpret in the moment of performance, and communicate not verbally, but physically through movement. What had once been a fluent, articulate and coherent monologue was

now disjointed, anti-orthographic, repetitious, and formally mirrored the fragmented vocal expression I had produced in response to the process exercises described. Now, the Daughter monologue was *about* a person's attempt to communicate and reflected my answer to the 'Why are you here'/'What do you believe' questions. In the script, the direction 'Learn to speak' was written into the text before the Daughter monologue as a 'mission' I was to engage with in performance.

The form of this newly rewritten monologue opened up significantly different, and arguably much greater, potential for meaning-making. Below I share excerpts from reviews of *Queens Row* from *4Columns,* the *Observer* and the *New York Times* which give an insight into the spectator's experience of the performance:

> The final speaker appears—a third woman, a daughter remembering her parents among other things—but her speech breaks down. She finds sounds, but the words don't form. She keeps going—a post-Beckettian vision of disintegration and perseverance. Are we now witnessing, rather than just hearing about, the trauma unleashed by cataclysm? Eventually her sonic fragments coalesce: words, phrases, then sentences. Like her two predecessors on the plinth, she too testifies that she clings to faith, to hope. "While we may struggle / from time to time," she concludes, "we would never say that we suffer".[298]

> A thin, intense woman (Soraya Nabipour) makes strange hand gestures and babbles out a bizarrely decayed English to talk about her mother and father (the lovers from before?). Her speech is both babyish and like a failing AI experiment, all stutters and painfully mispronounced words, syllables stretching out into nonsense and pure sound. The script tells us this scene takes place in the New Mexico town of Las Cruces or, as the woman pronounces it, or "las cu lahssss kroo sess." She goes on to explain that "My fa -mouther myfamouther thought shed foowuund luv." By the end, this child of the revolution has achieved, after effort, verbal coherence. "while we may have miss -ed those who had fallen before us from time to time," she laboriously mouths, "we would not. honor them. or make them a nay different from you and me. An while we may struggle. from time to time. we would never say that we suffer." It's a beautiful, elegiac end that resembles closure, even if you're not quite sure what the hell happened.[299]

> We begin with Hanna's character, a longtime Muslim resident of the Massachusetts town that gives the play its title. She speaks of her life after the war and of the killing of her son, who had moved to Texas in search of work. The second woman (Antonia Summer) addresses a lover who, it gradually emerges, is now dead. Her monologue is more elliptical and more interior than that of the first speaker. The third woman (Soraya Nabipour, in an electrically stylized performance) talks in spasmodic shards that at first sound like some arcane code. […] The three speeches trace a path toward ever greater uprootedness, itineracy and

[298] Tom Sellar, 'Queens Row: In Richard's Maxwell's New Play, A Sparse Futurism' 4 Columns, 17th January 2020, Available at: https://4columns.org/sellar-tom/queens-row accessed 2/03/20.

[299] David Cote, Review:' In 'Queens Row,' *Richard Maxwell Imagines the Aftermath of a Class Revolution*', *Observer* 01/15/20 available at: https://observer.com/2020/01/queens-row-richard-maxwell-review-american-class-revolution/ accessed 5/05/2021.

> disconnection. The solid, if poisoned, social and economic order — and the historical consciousness behind it — of the first monologue has by the time we meet the third speaker evaporated into endless, obscuring night.[300]

As these reviews suggest, since meaning could not be straightforwardly grasped through coherent orthographic language, the spectators were placed in the position of active decipherers, looking to physicality for meaning, listening to language in a different way because the words that seemed familiar, now sounded strange. The performance placed emphasis on the body as a communicative material. Because there was no fluency, it became more about sounds, and because it was about sounds, it centred on the body. My body became the subject matter: I used it to shape space and, to some extent, made my body into an object with which to do this. My embodied experience was of being simultaneously 'subject' and 'object': a subject with agency to interpret the punctuation sentences nightly in an intuitive way through my relation to the spectator, and an object in the sense of standing on a pedestal, using my body, my hands, my limbs, my face as a 'prop' or object to communicate.

I share the beginning section of the monologue below:

Las Cruces, NM.

(" :;:;) :0)" :);))

What????!

);...

t 6 d 5 6 s 5 6 e r r t s……...

ient to fine a ja e, msrtik talking to ….

pl this is right mao i, r;lorm r p & u.p.i.

~~———*i*~~

[300]Brantley, Ben. Review: 'Queens Row Review: Richard Maxwell on Life After Doomsday', *The New York Times,* Jan 10th 2020, available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/10/theater/queens-row-review-richard-maxwell.html , accessed: 21/03/20.

I get electrified with excitement when the towers which dot the horizon light up and connect together aligning that curve that arcs into me blasting my insides with light I am the offspring orphaned by fate and fatality My

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all hig al these

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HIWAZW

hiwaze

waw∑ll theeeeze hiwaz

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I fffff ……!

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lahssss kroo sess

My fa

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-mouther

myfamouther thought shed foowuund luv.

lahhhve.

My f a t h

oh!

i caim t la s cruces e to see e wha t

mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm.

i

d

my n

muther

thought dhs shd

she said yes to my fahther.

WHUT???????!!!

It was awesome in thes early days.

also. for my h mother, when he asked her to dance. it was like *a-*

life . like s a ay. *flower*.

doen the highway. maybe . one time down the highway, maybe.

ra--ging? racing?.... heart.

*mew*sick.

doen. she. back down the highway. up the hgih way down h highway. one time???????????????!!

its dark.
scr

she screamed   doen the   up down th highways. *(to break free.)*

I herd the voyces. j g i 6 r h e7 e o]   l clpp /

(i loved the voyces!).

but I could not answer in time.

jtjt h t f k k

or. I said. th-ata a misses—take! or.

Sometimes.   I said this at.

a un apropiate times yknow?

they were like: that's *blurting*. [301]

As evidenced, the deconstructed quality of the language led me to engage with the text of the performance as a sculptural object and my embodied, phenomenological relation to what I discovered to be the monologue's spatial dimension directly shaped my role as a performer in *Queens Row*.

To analyse how the production took on 'sculptural' terms, I will break down the different levels of the operation of space by drawing on McAuley's theory of stage space, presentational space and fictional space. According to McAuley, 'stage space' denotes the basic stage itself, its particular width, height,

[301] Richard Maxwell, *Queens Row,* 2020.

and depth. 'Presentational space' refers to the use of the stage space by performers in performance. 'Fictional space' refers to the imagined space evoked by the playtext. Rather than presentational space being a platform for the evocation of an illusionistic fictional space, NYCP's strategies draw attention to artificiality, and to materiality, to the action taking place in the presentational space: the act of telling the story.

As discussed in Chapter One, the performance spaces in which we performed *Queens Row*, including the ICA in London and the The Kitchen in New York, were at that time in constructional transition or development. This liminality arguably increased their creative possibility in terms of spatial production. Viewed through Lefebvre's spatial triad, these liminal spaces disrupted the 'spatial practice' or 'perceived space' of the venues, as the missing and exposed walls and floors interrupted what might have been previously established ways of the body moving and creating space. By presenting these spaces in their stripped-back manner, exposing their construction and formal properties, I remember experiencing possibility in my body in terms of how to move within them. The liminality of the space translated as liminality in my body and in how I approached performing the monologue.

During the New York run, the 'Bloody November' Iran protests of 2019-2020 were taking place. In that social, political context, I found my monologue took on new meanings each night in response to these events. In my mind, I could not sever the references to riots, violence and revolution in the play, from the riots taking place in Iran. The paragraph in my monologue in which the Daughter directly addresses her father who is absent, was particularly potent for me during the context of that run, as I had been unable to reach my own father during the Iranian government's internet shutdown. This specific context shaped the interaction of my personhood with the text, in physical and spatial terms, not only for me as a performer, but also, as I later discovered, for the spectator. In an interview with Maxwell about *Queens Row,* Elizabeth Wiet referred directly to my Iranian heritage and Hanna's Egyptian heritage and stated that 'given the play's exploration of themes of class, security, and faith, its hard not to view the actresses' national origins as being significant'. In the context of the New York performances, I realised that it was not only my personal associations with the text and my life from the position of performer that shaped the monologue, but that from the outside, spectators were making connections between what they perceived about my cultural identity and the words of the text that I spoke, even despite any references to Iran being edited out of the final text.

Reflecting more on the melding of selfhood with text, I noticed a two-way movement of mutual influence taking place: my personhood informing and shaping the text, but equally, the text informing and shaping me. At times I was encouraged by Maxwell to draw the text closer to me, with directions such as 'just think everything that is written is true, and you're the only person in the world who can

say it'.[302] By contrast, there were equally instances when I recognised and articulated personal associations to particular lines, and was told the lines weren't about those things at all.[303] It felt like the text therefore was mine, and wasn't mine. It was about me, and it was also nothing to do with me. Speaking it, I felt in flux. It was as if I was abstracted: present and absent, subject and object. Fletcher spoke to me in an interview once about his sense, as a performer, of having both 'total agency and no agency' which began to make sense.[304] Sculpturally, in this way, my subjecthood felt shaped by the text during the rehearsals and in the moment of performance in my interaction with the spectators. And throughout there was the abiding sense that the monologue was built out of things I would never know, and existed through an absence.

Returning to McAuley then, the 'fictional space' of the play for me, was in the context of the New York run, a combination of 'Queens Row' and Iran. The imprint of my own personal commitment never left me during the performances of the monologue. Asking performers each to define their commitment to participating in the production, and then to connect to that declaration, and hold that in their consciousness during performance, means that there is a parallel text that exists in your mind as a performer, your own text, as you are speaking the written text, which shapes what happens in the present moment. As McAuley observes:

> The actor, working from a written text, must first transform that written material into speech, must internalize it, experience it corporeally…for actors the text is above all a written form of breathing.[305]

McAuley's description of experiencing text corporeally resonates with the performance approach I applied to the punctuation sentences of the text. Maxwell and I had developed a performance rule that I had to communicate everything on the page, but when it came to punctuation, symbols or changes in font or type, these were to be communicated solely through physical movement, not verbally. In interpreting these punctuation sentences, I used the exercises I had developed with Jane and Anna to practice 'Deep Listening', and 'global and focal' attention, to tune into the energy of the audience. Applying those principles, I shaped my own body to communicate. I used my body as an object in the punctuation sections and recognised myself as both subject and object. I resisted pre-planned movements. Initially at the ICA, the movements began as demonstrative. Maxwell's initial direction was for me to avoid lyricism, and to be 'brutally literal': so for a bracket I might bend my body into an arc so that it literally looked like a bracket. This approach yielded a wide array of movements, but after a while it became rote and mechanical, so then the methodology changed. Maxwell and I talked about

[302] Soraya Nabipour, Extract from rehearsal/ performance diary- Direction Notes, 16th Jan 2020.
[303] Soraya Nabipour, Extract from rehearsal/performance diary- Direction Notes, 13th Jan, 2020.
[304] Jim Fletcher, Personal Interview, December 2020.
[305] Gay McAuley, p215.

what it would mean to *embody* the symbols. I wondered what would happen if I allowed myself to communicate a 'bracket' more abstractly. I thought about what a bracket might mean or look like to myself and the spectators in the context of the present moment, and then allowed my body to move instinctively in response to the energy between myself and the spectators. In this way, it was an improvised choreography, produced in relation to the spectators and the text. In reflecting on the sculptures of Rodin, Rosalind Krauss notes that he abandons a sculptural language that involves a communication between surfaces and anatomical depths. Instead, he uses 'gestures that are unsupported by appeals to their own anatomical backgrounds, that cannot address themselves logically to a recognizable, prior experience.'[306] With this in mind, Krauss asks: 'What if meaning, instead of preceding experience, occurs *within* experience; what if my knowledge of a feeling, pain for example, does not depend on a set of sensory memories but is invented freshly and uniquely each time it occurs for me?'[307] In performing the punctuation sentences and codes, I kept this idea of meaning occurring *within* experience in mind, trying my best not to ascribe meaning to those lines beforehand but rather to discover their meaning in the moment of their physical execution, together with the spectators.

For Lefebvre, 'Space – my space – . . . is first of all my body, and then it is my body's counterpart or 'other', its mirror-image or shadow: it is the shifting intersection between that which touches, penetrates, threatens or benefits my body on the one hand, and all other bodies on the other.'[308] As argued in Chapter 2, space is produced through the body's relations with others. The punctuation sentences of the monologue facilitated my encounter of space as a relational 'practico-sensory totality'[309]. Lefebvre continues to emphasise that this relationality is manifest as inevitable as:

> every shape in space, every spatial plane, constitutes a mirror . . . ; that within each body the rest of the world is reflected, and referred back to, in an ever-renewed to-and-fro of reciprocal reflection...a mere change of position, or a change in a place's surroundings, is enough to precipitate an object's passage into the light.[310]

The body is therefore inescapably linked to what lies outside of it. The reciprocal nature of this relational production of space of bodies with other bodies, was pertinent in my experience of performing the monologue.

[306] Rosalind Krauss, 1977, p27.
[307] Ibid., p28.
[308] Henri Lefebvre, 1991, p184.
[309] Ibid., p62.
[310] Ibid, p183.

Conclusion

The three practical projects I undertook during my doctoral research, discussed in this chapter, together demonstrated that the application of sculptural principles within theatre foregrounds the relationality of the performer/spectator encounter as an embodied encounter that in turn sees a complex interplay of objectivity and subjectivity. The objecthood of performance brings the subjecthood to the spectator to prominence. A reconceptualistaion of 'presence' as a relational phenomenon is put forth by Maaike Bleeker who asserts that: ' "presence" results from a relationship between a body seeing and the image of a body seen, and both sides of this relationship as well as what connects them, are embedded in culture. Within this relationship, "presence" is an experience of confirmation of the body seeing rather than a quality observed or present in the body seen'[311] In this chapter, I have shown that the more theatre adopts sculptural values, the more possibility is created for embodied spectatorial experiences in which nuances of relational dynamics are manifest. In Bleeker's view, 'presence' is an affirmation of the spectator in the encounter, and this experience is embodied, as 'the eye of the beholder is embodied […] the beholder, as a body, is involved in how this beholder relates to bodies seen onstage.'[312]

In *The Evening Part 2,* the application of Minimalist principles exposed the emotion of each performer in a way that created an embodied spectatorial encounter, in which the spectator was able to experience the surfaces of their being in direct relation to the performer on stage. The Minimalist principles of this performance created a moment of contact between performer and spectator that both blurred and crystalized the outlines of being, constructed and deconstructed the borders that delineate performer from spectator. Building on this relationality, *standing;remember*, produced an indeterminacy in which there was a dismantling of form, and a deconstruction of the accepted contract between performer and spectator. This placed performer and spectator in a living ambiguity or experience of 'formlessness', that although uncomfortable, allowed the possibility for the shared discovery of a new form of connection. The sculptural approach to text in *Queens Row,* led me to use my body to physically to interpret and perform the punctuation sentences, rather than verbalise them, which also opened up a collaborative discovery of meaning between performer and spectator in the moment of the performance. Communication became a physical and spatial act. By participating in the 'Why Are you Here?' /'What do you believe?' exercises, I experienced my subjectivity and personhood framed as a 'sculptural' material of performance, and in performance oscillated between subject and object.

[311] Maaike Bleeker, Visuality in the Theatre: The Locus of Looking, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p128
[312] Ibid.

Conclusion

> One encounters, one has a close encounter, where something happens that is surprising, and where 'we' establish an alliance through the very process of being unsettled by that which is not yet.[313]

Throughout this thesis I have sought to evidence that an engagement with form is an engagement with structures of social dynamics. I have argued that the application of sculptural principles to theatre – specifically, an increased attention to and manipulation of space – invites an embodied, self-conscious spectatorial experience in which the spectator is brought into contact with the construct of their own subjecthood, in relation to wider society. In this way, I demonstrate that a sculptural approach to theatre, an approach that engages with, questions and transgresses form, has the potential to make 'material' and expose the complexities of social dynamics and positionalities. In the spectator's embodied navigation of, and reflection on, their own position within a wider social structure, they encounter the limitations of what they know and understand. They encounter gaps in experience and the impossibility of pure exchange, of taking the place of another. It is the exposition of what is missing in communication, of what is absent, in which potential exists for learning and discovering new ways of being.

In Chapter One, I asked how the work of NYCP could be said to produce a formal and spatial liminality, and what the implications for spectatorship were in modelling objecthood through the interaction of representation and abstraction, image and object, body and space. Through an analysis of formal, material, spatial deconstruction and architectural manipulation in *The Evening* and *Queens Row,* and by applying the theoretical perspectives of Minimalist sculpture, I argued that a sculptural approach to theatre invites an embodied, phenomenological spectatorial experience, in which the objecthood of a play brings the subjecthood of the spectator to prominence. I demonstrated that NYCP's architectural activities can be viewed as an attempt to provide a direct channel between the performance space and its immediate social context, and to draw attention to the existence of the performance within a specific time and place. Further, I argued that an 'undoing' of form, creates potential for an 'undoing' of subjectivity and that within this process, the spectator is able to look anew at their own social construction. I showed that the production of a formal and spatial liminality invites the spectator to experience liminality and indeterminacy on an embodied level and that the deconstruction of aesthetic forms, was also a deconstruction of social forms. I argued that to collectively inhabit a space of

[313] Sara Ahmed, 2000, p180.

undefinition and uncertainty, and to be without answers, holds social value, as it invites the imagination and creation of alternative possibilities.

In Chapter Two, I pursued the relationship between the aesthetic and the social, but here I focused on two productions *Ads* and *Dévoiler* in which the company worked with different communities: the inhabitants of Marfa, Texas, and a community of migrants in Aubervilliers, Paris. I asked how far the manipulation and treatment of space could be understood as both an aesthetic and social practice in the company's work, and how the application of sculptural principles could work to frame the representation of the relationship between the individual subject and space, the self and society, the individual and the collective. Here, through the framework of Lefebvre's spatial triad, by identifying the interrelations of *perceived, conceived and lived* space in *Ads* and *Dévoiler*, and by reading the body of the individual subject as a key site of spatial production, I demonstrated that sculptural principles of the company's work contribute to socio-spatial processes of intervention and transformation.

I argued that the sculptural principles implicitly embedded in NYCP's work contribute to spatial production and interventions which have social implications, including: offering alternative modes of an individual subject inhabiting/being represented in space; the functional transformation of space; representations of subjectivities that are fluid rather than fixed; and dissolved dichotomies of self/other, body/space, individual/community. By reading these two productions through the lens of what Sara Ahmed terms an 'ethical encounter', and through Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation,* I demonstrated that the treatment of space in both *Ads* and *Dévoiler*, enable a politics of 'encountering', which exposes difference without erasing it; exposes failure, absences, gaps and blind spots in experience. Ahmed recognises that increasing proximity to that which one does not know or understand, opens the possibility for the differences inherent in the meeting to alter the meeting itself, to facilitate a form of exchange that does not erase the Other; or, in Glissant's terms, to facilitate Relation and opacity. From this position, I showed that the material, sculptural manipulation of space in both these productions work to reveal the 'gaps', rifts, fissures in the fabric of social dynamics and in doing so, allows a person to increase proximity to that which they do not understand. Only through making *Ads* and increasing proximity to the community of Marfa, did NYCP see the absences that made it 'incomplete'. Through observing one's spectatorship of the hologram form in *Ads*, the spectator may begin to gain insight into the ways in which their own social positionality shapes worldview and ideology.

Similarly, I argued that the movement sequence in *Dévoiler* creates the potential for Glissant's concept of Relation to be practised. The embodied experience of the co-production of space, and the heightened awareness of difference of experience and positionality of the participants, together demonstrate a form

of communication and collaborative creation that gains its significance through a respect for and acceptance of difference and opacity. As with Ahmed's 'ethical encounter', it is only through accepting opacity or distance that the impossibility of pure understanding or proximity is absorbed, which is the ultimate reality that is unveiled. Finally, I showed that the open, unspoken invitation of participation for non-migrant spectators, results in a range of different physical responses. The range of these responses means that the encounter and Relation of the movement sequence recognises itself as 'implicated in broader relations and circuits of production and exchange.'[314].

In Chapter Three I turned to the practical dimension of the research. This chapter presented an investigation of the monologue form, sustained across three separate practice-based research projects I engaged with from different creative positions. Taking the application of Minimalist principles to the monologue form as a starting point, I asked how presence and spectatorship could be understood as 'materials' of performance, and how the application of sculptural principles in theatre shaped the role of the performer. This chapter analysed two monologues from my perspective as director in the two projects I led independently: *The Evening Part 2* (October 2017) and *standing; remember* (June 2018*),* as well as my experience devising and performing a monologue in the NYCP production of *Queens Row*. Here, I provided an experiential analysis from my embodied position as performer/deviser, of the ways in which meaning-making can manifest as a collaborative, creative act between performer and spectator.

In *The Evening Part 2,* I discovered that the application of Minimalist principles exposed the emotion of each performer in a way that created an embodied spectatorial encounter. Drawing on Sara Ahmed's social and political reconceptualisation of emotions, I showed that the sculptural principles of the performance facilitated an encounter that framed relationality between performer and spectator. In the response to the expression of the performer's emotion, the spectator was able to experience the surfaces of their being in direct relation to the performer on stage. The Minimalist principles of this performance created a moment of contact between performer and spectator that both blurred and crystalized the outlines of being, constructed and deconstructed the borders that delineate performer from spectator. Building on this exploration of the relationality of the performer/spectator encounter, my work on *standing;remember*, explicitly sought to test and challenge relationality by pushing Minimalist principles to their extreme, removing text, blocking, multiple performers and attempting to stage a performance that teetered on the edge between what could be described as 'something' or 'nothing'. This produced an indeterminacy in which there was a dismantling of form, and a deconstruction of the accepted contract between performer and spectator. I showed that this placed performer and spectator

[314] Sara Ahmed, 2000, p145.

in a living ambiguity or experience of 'formlessness', that although uncomfortable, allowed the possibility for the shared discovery of a new form of connection. In participating in Queens Row, I discovered that a sculptural approach to performance enabled me to use my body to physically interpret and communicate text rather than verbally, which also opened up a collaborative discovery of meaning between performer and spectator in the moment of the performance. In this approach, communication became a physical and spatial act. By participating in the 'Why Are you Here?' /'What do you believe?' exercises, I experienced my subjectivity and personhood framed as a 'sculptural' material of performance, and in performance oscillated between subject and object.

It is not a given that engaging with form is a social process as much an aesthetic one. Certainly, in the field of theatre and performance studies there has been strong suspicion of the explicit engagement with form – as Alan Ruiz explains: 'formalism is a dirty word – a bad object … plagued by universalist goals of purity, autonomy, self-reflexivity, and political indifference.'[315]. Indeed, the notion of 'art for arts sake', often attached to formalism, has connotations of apoliticism, elitism and superficiality. Seen in this light, form is divorced from the social; it neglects the political power and potential of art. According to Yve-Alain Bois, 'formalism' was 'an insult that [Georg] Lukács and [Bertolt] Brecht tossed at each other' in disputes over modernist literature, during the politicisation of aesthetics in the 1930s.[316] These criticisms, however, rely on a shallow definition of form that dichotomizes the aesthetic from the social. My doctoral project has argued that the aesthetic *is* the social. Scholar Caroline Levine's expanded understanding of form as not only pertaining to aesthetic realms, but as 'patterns of social, political experience', is especially pertinent here. For Levine, 'form always indicates an arrangement of elements, an ordering, patterning or shaping' and 'if the political is a matter of imposing and enforcing boundaries, temporal patterns, and hierarchies on experience, then there is no politics without form'[317]. I have used Levine's definition of politics as a matter of imposing form on space and time, to examine space as a product subject to both social and aesthetic manipulation.

The alignment of an absolute interest in formal composition, with the exclusion of the social conditions of art, has been challenged in scholarship by Michael Shane Boyle, Matt Cornish and Brandon Wolf who, in their edited book *Postdramatic Theatre and Form* (2019), call for a re-examination of the relationship between form and the social capacities of art, specifically in postdramatic theatre. The studies in this volume challenge the historical divides between 'form and the radically contextual,

[315] Alan Ruiz, 'Radical Formalism', *Women and Performance: a Journal of Feminist Theory* 26.2-3 (2016), pp 233-240, p.233
[316] Yve-Alain Bois, 'Formalism and Structuralism', in Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois and Benjamin H.D Buchloh (eds), *Art Since 1900:Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism,* New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004, pp32-39, p33.
[317] Caroline Levine F*orms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network,* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015, p3.

between the aesthetic and the social'[318] arguing that 'form is the simultaneous entwinement of the overlapping social mediations that give shape to theatre, and which theatre shapes in turn.'[319] In this light, theatrical form is essentially bound up with its social, political context:

> Form, in our definition, is integral rather than incidental to theatre, originating theatre rather than ornamenting it. Instead of sealing theatre off from society, form is what theatre and society share. Form names more than just practices of representation and meaning-making within the theatre; it also encompasses the modes of production, consumption and circulation that give shape to and are shaped by theatre. Paying attention to matters of form does not mean ignoring how theatre can be political…[320]

It is from this perspective of the aesthetic and the social as being crucially bound, not only within the properties of the artwork itself, but by the activities surrounding its production and reception, that I have examined the work of New York City Players, focusing on its formal liminality. The company's resistance to communicating a definitive meaning or singular message, and insistence instead on interrogating form, pulling it apart, disrupting accepted formal boundaries, can be read as a way of asking spectators to engage with new forms in a wider social, political sense. By migrating from the black box of the theatre to the white cube of the gallery, to what are essentially architectural shells or 'ruins' – liminal, stripped back spaces in the midst of construction and transformation – NYCP's engagement with space can be understood as an attempt to deconstruct and transgress form in order to reimagine alternative ways of being in relation to one another. This doctoral project has demonstrated that privileging architectural considerations in theatre, foregrounds space as a crucial component of the artwork, and draws attention to the social processes inherent in space. Moreover, Lefebvre's concept of space as a social product, centres these architectural transformations as processes of social construction. Lefebvre's understanding of space as 'social morphology' collapses therefore, the boundary between aesthetic practice and social practice. In this way, the exposed materiality of the artwork brings the fabric of social relationality and asymmetrical power relations to prominence. And when the form of the artwork is shifting from theatre to sculpture, when it is liminal, indeterminate, difficult to define, it creates a space of indeterminacy that performers and spectators can collectively inhabit. It is uncomfortable to be in a space of not-knowing, of not understanding, but this discomfort is necessary for change. As Shannon Jackson states: 'In the space of doubt, you create, you seek to fill, you seek'[321]. Indeterminacy motivates action and creativity. Not having straightforward answers energises the drive to learn.

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[318] Michael Shane Boyle, Matt Cornish & Brandon Wolf (eds.) *Postdramatic Theatre and Form*, London, Metheun Drama: 2019 pp.10.
[319] Ibid., p1.
[320] Ibid., p.15.
[321] Shannon Jackson, 'Disciplines in Pain' Panel Respondent, *Becoming Uncomfortable: Performance Studies International Conference No.11* Brown University March 30th April 3rd, 2005.

As well as stimulating a pursuit for new ways of understanding, artwork that exposes human limitations and failure in knowing also contributes to a reassessment of traditional hierarchies; for example, it puts in question the relation of the human to the posthuman and non-human. As stated by the *Ads* participant Mary Farley: 'Why can't we face the reality that we are not better? We are not superior to anything else, period'.[322] An embodied spectatorial encounter in which one inhabits a space of doubt, uncertainty and unknowing, in which one *sees* one's seeing, and further sees what one *does not* see, destabilises and undermines the human as the centre of all knowledge, and in doing so creates an opening. Within that opening, there lies the possibility for transformation. In their analysis of phenomenology within performance, Maaike Bleeker, Jon Foley Sherman and Eirini Nedelkopoulou see potential in the site of the body, for 'decentralizing the human subject and thinking beyond the differentiation of the body and the world, beyond the registers of human perception' and for gaining a heightened awareness of human failure and incapacity for knowing.[323] Bleeker, Sherman and Nedelkopoulou argue that:

> We- as in everyone- have bodies, and not simply one. Each of us has virtual and imagined and seen and seeing bodies, bodies in action and constrained and displaced and dominant and dominated. Experience arrives through, and as, these relationships with the world. And yet, those relationships are themselves part of systems beyond human perception, are indeed dependant on our inability to grasp them. It turns out that the advent of new technologies and new phenomenologies that take us beyond the human can be understood to re-articulate an ancient task at the heart of philosophy and performance: reaching for the invisible in order to learn from our failure to grasp it.[324]

Through the body, it is possible to become conscious of and in touch with, 'the systems beyond human perception', and therefore to become aware of the parameters and limits of human capabilities. It was within the practice-based aspects of this doctoral project that I had the embodied experience of being in the position of 'reaching for the invisible in order to learn from [the] failure to grasp it.'[325] The monologue I performed in *Queens Row* in many ways exemplified this task. In applying a 'sculptural' approach to theatre, and communicating the 'punctuation sentences' purely through the physicality of the body instead of linguistically, I sought to find a way of transmitting information across to the spectator that attempted to speak in ways beyond language. Where I failed to communicate the symbols written in the script with enough precision and accuracy in such a way that the spectators would be cognisant of exactly what was written, and equally, where the spectators failed to decipher the written script from my movements, created an encounter between performer and spectator shaped by human limitation and the breakdown of communication. The encounter occurred, in Adorno's words, 'in the

[322] New York City Players, *Ads, Marfa:* Mary Farley, Chinati Foundation, 5th-7th October 2018.
[323] Maaike Bleeker, Jon Foley Sherman and Eirini Nedelkopoulou *Performance and Phenomenology: Traditions and Transformations,* New York: Routledge, 2015, p15-16.
[324] Ibid.
[325] Ibid.

space between what is unintelligible and what wants to be understood.'[326] Within this encounter, the inability to know with any certainty what was being communicated or what was understood, opened up an intimate, shared and potentially radical space of not-knowing. To not-know draws into question what it is to know, and challenges the everyday, accepted structures that govern the world and facilitate particular ways of knowing. As Sara Jane Bailes argues: 'failure challenges [...] the fictions of continuity that bind the way we imagine and manufacture the world'[327] . By interrupting what is known, there is an opportunity to find new modes of being; there is 'the possibility to extend rather than reflect the world as it is, to try to make it go a little bit further, to illuminate rather than fill in some of the gaps, and more importantly to make evident even more gaps, holes, fissures, elisions.'[328] This thesis has argued that treating space as a sculptural material of performance helps to make visible what is missing in the communicative exchange between performer and spectator, and draws attention to that which does not yet exist within the encounter. I have proposed that this form of encounter can be read as what Sara Ahmed terms an 'ethical encounter'. This doctoral project allowed me to experience the complexity of ethical encounters, not only from the position of performer in *Queens Row*, but, as discussed, from the embodied position of spectator in *The Evening Part 2, standing; remember*, and *Dévoiler.* For Ahmed, ethical encounters are encounters that require effort and labour to reach towards that which is unknown, and in this action, there lies the potential to restructure community:

> The 'we' of such a collective politics is what must be worked for, rather than being the foundation of our collective work. In the very 'painstaking labour' of getting closer, of speaking to each other, and of working for each other, we also get closer to 'other others'. In such acts of alignment (rather than merger), we can reshape the very bodily form of the community, as a community that is yet to come. One encounters, one has a close encounter, where something happens that is surprising, and where 'we' establish an alliance through the very process of being unsettled by that which is not yet. This is not a community of strangers or friends. It is a community, rather, where we are surprised by those who are already assimilated as strangers in a globalised economy of difference (the spatialisation of labour). In other words, a close encounter is always a strange encounter, where something fails to be revealed.

In Ahmed's relational ontology, the 'I' is formed through perpetual, ongoing encounters with others, and crucially, from the recognition that these are shaped by asymmetrical power relations. The first step in reshaping 'the bodily form of the community' is to become conscious of, and to recognise such unbalanced power relations and positionalities. Ahmed's 'ethical encounter' forms collectivities which are not based on what people do or do not have in common, but on a way of increasing proximity, in

[326] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* trans. C Lenhardt. London: Routledge, 1970, p419.
[327]Bailes, p2.
[328] Balies, p200.

order to accept distance, and then put it to work.[329] I have argued that in *Dévoiler*, the invitation to inhabit the theatre space in a new way, to reimagine its function, purpose, and form, not solely as a place to watch fiction, but as a real-life home to members of the community of Aubervilliers, was a proposal of an 'ethical encounter'. The collaborative production of space by the bodies of spectators and performers created the possibility for an embodied experience of an 'ethical encounter', in which non-migrants increase proximity to that which they do not know, to the reality of the gap in experience between their lives and the lives of migrants, and in turn become more aware of the asymmetrical power relations that shape these lives and experiences. A sculptural approach to theatre, in which space is treated as both an aesthetic and social material of the artwork, puts a spotlight on the social exchange in the performer/spectator encounter, and 'involves imagining a different form of political community, one that moves beyond the opposition between common and uncommon, between friends and strangers, or between sameness and difference.'[330] Instead, it sparks consideration of how we might collectively and collaboratively find new ways of inhabiting the world together and new ways of being.

In its investigation of the work of New York City Players, this doctoral project fills a research gap by examining the company's work explicitly from the angle of visual art and by looking closely at the treatment and manipulation of space as both a social and aesthetic practice. Further, by choosing to examine the company's work outside of formal theatre spaces and those made with the participation of local communities, I reveal that the aesthetic developments of the company's work, the engagement with form, material, architecture and space, is also the development of a social practice. The research findings outlined in this thesis are not only pertinent to the work of NYCP but to other practices situated at formal boundaries. The 'sculptural' way of seeing theatre, of viewing space as both an aesthetic and social product, could unlock social meaning and potential in other theatre and artistic practice. Positioning spatial practices as a crucial element of aesthetic form, my research demonstrates that there is social value to the embodied spectatorial experience that an in-person encounter invites.

[329] Sara Ahmed, 2000, p180.
[330] Ibid.

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Appendix 1: *The Evening Part 2* Extract, written by Richard Maxwell.

I am shaped by what I deny. I deny a past and a way of thinking that is so massive, I have found only two loving pathways of escape: I am a woman and I am a Muslim.

I say I am a woman but that doesn't make me abstract. It goes without saying what I am, and is more than an object of worship or a whore for example. I am a regular person of flesh and blood but like I said, it goes without saying. I could tell you my name, job, party, nation of birth etc, but I won't reveal these facts or my true emotional core. Suffice to say, I declare, I venture out and my pathway is open.

It was difficult. The men in my life made it difficult, but I am happy to say that while they may have shaped me, they no longer control me. I am free. And I won't tell you any of those things, and this is what language has given me. If I speak for example in the vernacular that is indicative of where I was raised, in speech that is accented or idiomatic, in short, relinquish who and what I am – I think that's vulgar to share in this kind of way, because I don't want, nor should I expect anything from you, much less, your empathy.

Let what I tell you suffice. God willing, my way, my path is enough. I found myself in god and I feel blessed to walk in his light, praise him. I am shaped by what I deny and that has brought me freedom; hard wrought, I might add. I was at a place where I wanted to die. Forgive me if that seems histrionic. I was at a place where I was ready to do violence against myself, my means other people, in a hopeless and desperate act of…giving up. And then I discovered the guiding wisdom of Allah and how that could allow me to be a free and complete woman.

I should say, I am a free and complete woman separate from my faith, but I believe and choose not to make them separate. I was at my wits end, literally—let me back off…

(Pause.)

If I deny something as massive as what came before me-- I don't necessarily give credence to the present or the future, but certainly, for me and my life, this is the case. I suppose I could have remained neutral but that suffocates me even more, so opted for taking action in the opposite and thus getting my shape as I mentioned in this dialectic fashion. The future is me and God and I'm ready to embrace that. Also, there is no precedent for what or who I am. You won't find one and I couldn't care less if you claimed you did. I'm not interested in developing a relationship with any women in the past. They have no bearing.

(Pause.)

I want to tell you about the men before me who were in my life and what they sowed. Their dynasty is my dynasty. Our dynasty's problem is that we love people, but we don't like people. The men in my life brought forth a very strong, very valiant and vital clan, and I was a daughter in this clan, witness to how these middle-aged men developed what would ultimately become what I call a synthetic legacy. They had business and engineering dreams and it made for back-breaking work but eventually brought success. Then the successful enterprising dynasty became a bloated one and then started to lose fluid and, drying up, and started to disintegrate. Each time it was remade, more and more pharmacological interference was required, and fewer and fewer things remained intact or continued to be significant to other people's lives. These masterful means turned centuries old. As the numbers dropped the power got diseased and congealed around the remainders, who could only find strength enough to help themselves. Now I only have to remind myself now and then that it wasn't their fault. They were only trying to protect themselves to survive. But I need to survive to. And. It hurts me to say this but. I

don’t care. I care to a point, but I reached that point and now I’m here, standing, grateful before God, His beauty, His strength, His light. Now, the smallest details come alive around me in vibrant tones: an oak tree in full leaf bending in a summer wind. And now that I have made my choice I go to the top of a hill or the bottom of a valley with ease, without the burden of knowledge.

The less I know the closer I feel to God. I do not accept impossibility. I know the men-before-me claims that knowledge brings one closer to god, but that’s not what I believe. I believe those who seek knowledge yearn to play God, to come close to experience the pleasures. God isn’t pleased. I know less than the child. She knows nothing and this is the innocent state. The Qur’an contains everything that is knowable that isn’t learning. It is written and I unlock what is inside. I only open my heart to the stars.