Appropriating the 'real': ethical explorations in the creation of fictional verbatim performance.

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ABSTRACT

Appropriating the 'real' is a practice-led investigation that researches the extent to which verbatim theatre techniques can be appropriated to create a fictional performance. Criticisms of verbatim theatre's 'truth claims' – that it is a re-presentation of the 'real' – are both dramaturgical and ethical. Addressing these concerns, the practice presented here sets out to experiment with "indecidability" (Lehmann, 2006:101), heightening the audience's perception of the gap between 'truth' and 'fiction', chiefly by drawing attention to the role of the theatre maker. Located at the interface between contemporary performance and applied theatre, this research project explores conventions of both schools. On the one hand, it utilises compositional strategies of collage, autobiography and disruption employed by performance practitioners. On the other hand, it develops a collaborative practice that is empathetically and ethically rooted in the words of those it re-presents.

This practice-led research is made up of this supporting thesis alongside a trilogy of performances: *The Unsettling; Everybody Always Tells the Truth;* and *Is It Different Now?*. The practice focuses on three aspects: the participants who have contributed their stories, the role of the artist when making fictional verbatim theatre, and the development of an aesthetic of indecidability. The thesis engages with verbatim theatre from contemporary performance and applied theatre contexts and addresses a range of critical perspectives including representation and ethics.

By re-mixing verbatim testimony with self-consciously fictitious material, I draw the audiences' attention to the way verbatim material can be manipulated. The intention is to show an audience how 'truths' are constructed within theatrical forms that purport to authentically recreate the real. There is political efficacy in unmasking the strategies within documentary, but a new multi-perspective story may also communicate and be reflective of the ways we process and construct personal and shared narratives.

Documentation of Practice

The performance experiments of this practice-led research are presented within the written thesis. Some of the practice examined for the award of the thesis is available at this DOI https://doi.org/10.5518/1498. To honour participant consent, one video is openly available, one is available on application and one video cannot be supplied as consent for sharing was not given.

The links have been inserted into chapter 2 of the thesis and are located where they should be viewed. The accessible practice includes: *The Unsettling* (12mins 8seconds)*; and Is It Different Now?* (24mins 21seconds). It is recommended that the reader views each performance before reading the accompanying written commentary. For full Scripts see appendix A, B and C.

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INTRODUCTION

Beginnings...

My interest in verbatim theatre, used as a method to generate performance content began 18 years ago when conducting research for a show called *The Rehearsal* by Pigeon Theatre (2005). I joined Pigeon after graduating from MMU and we, both Anna and I, have been making work together since 1999. *The Rehearsal* used verbatim interviews to gather material on the "practice of imagining our own deaths and the deaths of others from a dual intention: to prevent it actually happening; and to prepare oneself for it happening" (Fenemore, 2012: 4). Verbatim interviews were recorded on how individuals 'rehearse' death and trauma. It is a method that Pigeon continues to use and although we seldom interview others, we often record ourselves, our natural conversations, and the retelling of specific/imagined personal stories. We transcribe, edit, and assemble the performance material together with any additional new writing. Our collaborative processes couple our imaginary/imagined selves with our everyday conversations, theatricalising them and re-presenting them in performance. So, in many ways reimagining, being playful with verbatim content has been part of my professional practice for some time.

The other influential strand in the development of this research is my role as a Lecturer in Applied Theatre and Community Drama at the Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts (LIPA), a position I have had for nearly 15 years. As an umbrella term that captures a wide range of practices conducted in varying contexts, applied theatre is often based in communities and is socially driven. Oral traditions of storytelling permeate through many of its practices and can be celebratory, instructive, or advocatory. Where it distinguishes itself from other forms of theatre is in its "commitment to a *process* of making relations rather than staking out a secure or fixed position" (Hughes and Nicholson, 2017: 9). Marked by a commitment to a reciprocal and explorative participatory process, verbatim in a community setting is often celebratory, championing local stories and its vernacular (Paget, 1987: 317).

In both settings I have experienced discomfort and a sense of failure when making verbatim theatre. For example, with Pigeon Theatre, a late-night discussion with an actor who had contributed his stories to a performance spoke about a feeling of loss when his heartfelt childhood experiences about those who were no longer alive were evoked in performance but then left behind. Reused and repeated for performance purposes, what had initially been a

happy and joyous recollection of the past for him became diluted and less vibrant. With my students, their commitment to participants' ownership of their testimonies and strict adherence to the original spoken word has led to occasions where there is little artistic framing or any thought given to the aesthetics, structure or beauty of the theatre work created. The resulting work has often neither elevated nor drawn attention to the testimony it is based on. My investigation begins at this juncture of imaginative artistry and ethical 'authenticity' and weaves across and through knowledge practices (artistic and theoretical) from my professional practice and teaching experience.

Territory of the Real

This practice-led investigation researches the extent to which documentary and verbatim techniques can be appropriated to assemble fictive or fictive-making verbatim. I create three practices which engage with the ethical and political discourses of verbatim theatre and develop a participative model of practice to work ethically and collaboratively with contributors in fictionalising personal stories. The thesis considers how a participative loop can increase the efficacy of fictional verbatim by collaborating with participants throughout and I argue that a collaborative process enriches and deepens the creative investigation. Fictional verbatim theatre uses interviewed material to create an imaginary narrative, one that deliberately deviates from the original text. The conscious blending of fictional and real stories disrupts the performance of the real, highlighting the instability of the testimonial subject in verbatim theatre. The practice mobilizes a range of disruptive strategies: hesitation; the unreliable narrator; an aesthetic of indecidability. I use the term indecidable, from Hans Ties Lehmann (2006), as the actioning or the experience of the *undecidable.* These disruptive strategies are used to illuminate how truth and fiction coexist in verbatim theatre. Through the thesis, I argue that memory inhabits the interface between real/imaginary and working with indecidabilty can help participants and theatre-makers safely explore a range of subjects. Fictionalising the stories of others offers up different ways of being, extending the possibility of how things might or could be. This practice offers participants the opportunity to rewrite, change and share stories from the past so we can understand them better in the present. The analysis of each practice differs because my methodology evolved over the course of the enquiry. As my understanding of the critical discourse deepened and the participative model changed, the research enquiry and analysis shifted to reflect the emerging ideas.

Documentary and verbatim techniques are well established as strategies for theatre

practitioners intending to present 'real life' situations. In her book, *Theatre of the Real,* Carol Martin extends her earlier arguments on documentary theatre to include a "wide range of theatre practices and styles that recycle reality, whether that reality is personal, social, political, or historical" (2013:5). I will use this definition of documentary theatre throughout this practice-led enquiry. Documentary theatre uses a range of artefacts to assemble the real on stage, these include: testimony, film, newsreels, autobiography, social media and headlines. Verbatim theatre "originates in interviews, and its scripts utilise in greater or lesser ways recordings of actual words real people have spoken" (Paget, 2008:130). It is a method used to poeticise or advocate those individuals or communities who have contributed to it, usually for political and social purposes. While verbatim methods are evident in documentary theatre, Janelle Reinelt states that the theatrical form of verbatim "as a category over-extends" due to its erroneous promise of "technical truth" (2011:14). Verbatim theatre, she claims, is suggestive of something that cannot be objectively realised on stage to an audience. Here, Reinelt pinpoints the inherent problem faced by all theatre of the real. How can any representation claim access to the truth? Most practitioners do not make such bold claims, with a majority engaged in retelling testimony and oral history or collating pre-recorded documents and reported material from the archive to highlight an injustice or shed light on an issue. It can be argued that the material used accesses the real and this material is then re-presented on stage. The authority of documentary 'is not in the object but in the relationship between the object, its mediators (artists, historians, authors) and its audiences' (Reinelt, 2011:7). Perhaps the 'real' in question ultimately relies upon how the work is framed and how the audience interprets it:

> In this case, audiences know that documents, facts, and evidence are always mediated when they are received; they know there is no raw truth apart from interpretation, but still, they want to experience the assertion of the materiality of events, of the indisputable character of the facts. (Reinelt, 2006:82)

Central to the interrogation of the 'Real' in this project are three separate 'frames': the documentary material itself, the mediator (the author or director), and the audience. Included in the audience is their understanding or experience of the material. As the audience experiences the documentary and assembles meaning from the facts presented to them, the role of the author (in their adaptation of the material), the director and the performer is problematised, being responsible, as they are, for the editing and subsequent editorialising

and interpreting of the documentary material and making significant choice over what to include and what to exclude, and how to present and re-present that material.. This is particularly pertinent when the subject examined is of a political nature as the editing process can easily misrepresent the events in question, as Martin argues: "Theatre of the real can make a generative and critical intervention in people's prejudices and the limitations of public understanding. Theatre of the real can also oversimplify, inflame prejudices, and support one-sided perspectives" (Martin, 2013:120). Verbatim theatre can slip between relying heavily on the subjectivities of a few (to the detriment of highlighting broader social implications) and retrofitting voices and testimonies to fit a particular political or social position.

Drawing attention to the role of the artist and their aims might be another way to critique the documentary form. Practice can be constructed by what the artist *wants to* reveal rather than what is evident within the documentary texts. The level of such interference in the representational process can exploit some broader ethical concerns as the historiographer Allan Megill highlights:

> If one is to claim to make the voices of the past speak, there needs to be adequate reason for thinking that the voices have been rightly constituted. Otherwise, they might be merely the product of the historian's own compelling desire - whether the practical desire for such and such a supposedly beneficial political or moral outcome in the present, or the aesthetic desire for representations that are dramatic or edifying or horrible. (2004:50)

Although Megill is referring to the ethical questions a historian might confront when retelling the past there are, I suggest, parallel concerns for the artist when making documentary or verbatim performance work. In considering the relationship between the past and the present Martin argues that "[d]ocumentary theatre can directly intervene in the creation of history by unsettling the present by staging a disquieting past" (2010:18). Consideration of what to include and what to exclude alongside transparency about that selection and editing process can assist audiences to interpret the reality claims made by the form. Documentary and verbatim theatre makers are responsible for selecting, constructing and re-presenting the words of others. How the dramatic text operates between an obligation to those contributing and any wish to propagate a particular aesthetic, dramatic or social position requires some

reflection. Theatre makers have responsibilities to the original testimony, but they also have a duty to take the voice beyond the everyday and frame it within a particular dramatic context. The priorities of makers shift in accordance with the contexts within which they work.

For the applied and community theatre practitioner there is an ethical duty of care afforded to the participants and a focus for theatre to serve a social purpose or "address something beyond the form itself" (Ackroyd, 2000). The responsibility of those applied practitioners is as much to the process as it is to the product. That is not to say it eschews an artistic or aesthetic obligation. Gareth White makes the argument that

> more recently the challenge that arises from commentators on applied theatre is to beware of over-instrumentalizing, and to develop a more nuanced understanding of the role that the special capabilities of art- particularly beauty – have to play in social change, or of art experience as something that people have a right to in itself. (White, 2015:4)

Artistic framing, aesthetics, technique and dramatic storytelling are considered by applied practitioners but, I suggest, it is the processes of the applied and community practices rather than the outcome that a majority focus their attention on. The artistic work, although a necessary output, cannot be the sole focus or the measurement on what makes an efficacious project. Rather than efficacy being driven by hitting institutional or stakeholder criteria, I use the term here to imply that the projects processes are affective and that the artistic output makes a difference to its participants – either socially or pedagogically.

A process driven approach as opposed to an artistic approach highlights the ideological schism between applied/community theatre and their mainstream counterparts. Many contemporary practitioners focus also on process, but this is an artistic iterative process that evolves through repetition and rehearsal, rather than the dialogical process between participants and facilitators utilised by community practitioners.

The Irreal Real

As outlined in the beginning, my practice works across and through concerns of both contemporary performance and applied theatre, examining how each field use verbatim content. The practice-led enquiry has one overarching research question:

1. In what ways does the ethical and political emphasis of the 'real' in theatre affect the creation and realisation of verbatim theatre?

With this in mind, my research focuses on three aspects: the participants who have contributed their stories, my role as the artist (author/performer) when making fictional verbatim theatre, and the development of an aesthetic of '*indecidability*' (Lehmann, 2006:101, original emphasis) or hesitation. It does so by adhering to the field of applied practices by ethically engaging with the original testimonies but also by encouraging audiences to consider the truth-making strategies employed by me as the artist, and presses for an active and critical engagement. By highlighting the role of the maker, the practice attempts to present the variety of perspectives involved when making theatre of the 'real'. By asking the audience to listen to the voice of the participants yet recognising the role of the artist within the work through the development of an aesthetic of indecidability, I argue that the audience are able to locate both within the work. By revealing the truth making strategies of the form the audience are better equipped to decipher between the testimony and the aesthetic elements employed by the artist in the document. By re-mixing verbatim testimony with self-consciously fictitious material, I draw the audiences' attention to the way verbatim material explores truth and fiction. There are lacunae in this exchange between the operations of truth and fiction. My practice-led research plays at the hinterlands of contemporary performance and applied theatre offering a creative dialogue between them. There is political efficacy in unmasking the strategies within verbatim, but a new multi-perspective story may also communicate and "reflect the complexities of contemporary experience and the variety of narratives that constantly intersect with, inform, and in very real ways, construct our lives" (Heddon and Milling, 2006:192). As the practice exposes the power dynamic or relationship between artist, participant and audience member, the practice uses technical strategies to highlight what is usually unseen. Such strategies are commonplace within post-dramatic theatre where tropes are used to disrupt the flow of the narrative action. It acts much like Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* and prevents the audiences' total immersion into the story. To illustrate its contemporary application Hans-Thies Lehmann uses an example from Fabre's *The Power of Theatrical Madness* (1984) where the house lights come on mid performance

and actors take a cigarette break: "The irruption of the real becomes an object not just of reflection (as in Romanticism) but of the theatrical design itself" (Lehmann, 2006:100). The 'real', a *staged* 'real', disrupts the action and jolts the audience causing them to reflect on what they have been studying thus far. It forces them to question the artistic intentions and reappraise their position on what they have understood. Lehmann goes on to suggest:

> Here we continue our reflection by considering that in the post dramatic theatre of the real the main point is not the assertion of the real as such [..] but the unsettling that occurs through the *indecidability* whether one is dealing with reality or fiction. The theatrical effect and the effect on consciousness both emanate from this ambiguity. (Lehmann, 2006:101, his emphasis)

It's unclear how the indecidable differentiates from the undecidable within the text. Lehmann's translator Karen Jürs-Munby has kindly clarified that in the original Lehmann uses *Unentscheidbarkeit* in both instances and so the original publication should be consistent. In an email correspondence with Karen Jürs-Munby she says that her preferred translation is indecidable rather than undecidable. She states, "my instinctive preference for *indecidability* has to do with this translation carrying traces of Derrida's use of the term in **indécidable**, which indicates a more active sense of experiencing the ontological impossibility to decide" (2023, her emphasis).

In *Irritational Aesthetics: Reality Friction and Indecidable Theatre,* Tony Perucci discusses a range of (Para) Fictional theatre which he argues engages in the indecidable. He notes that "Derrida's term '*indécidable*' is nearly always translated in English as *"undecidable""* (2018:478, his emphasis). Perucci turns to the philosopher Hugh Silverman to clarify semantic intentions of in/un. "The indecidable is not itself undecidable—not passively incapable of resolution, nor fully active in not working out resolution" (Silverman, 1994:67). Derrida argues that:

> There can be no moral or political responsibility without this trial and this passage by way of the undecidable. Even if a decision seems to take only a second and not to be preceded by any deliberation, it is structured by this *experience and experiment of the undecidable.* (Derrida, 1988:116)

Derrida points that things are not conceived as a series of binary oppositions good/evil, inside/outside (1981:103) but they are connected "by the inscription of the bar, slash, interface between each particular pair" (Silverman, 1994:64) and this is where the experience or experiment of the indécidable lies. My creative practice works across the interface between another binary, the 'real' and the fictional. It develops an aesthetic that is not undecidable but one that experiments with indecidabilty as a method to make theatre. It is for this reason that I prefer to use the term indecidable and echoing Karen Jürs-Munby's "active sense of experiencing" (2023) the indecidable, my practice actively experiments to create the indecidable. In doing so, it unsettles the audience's notion of the veracity of what is being viewed. I interpret indecidability as the doing, the actioning of, or the application of the undecidable. It forces hesitation and criticality about the decision-making process.

My trilogy of practice is an experiment of the indecidable, it is concerned in playing with and disrupting the truth and fictional narrative that exist within verbatim theatre. The practice encourages audiences to be critically alert, figure it out and come up with their own resolutions. As with all experiments, some work better than others but it is through experimentation, reflection and adaptation that reflexive praxis emerges.

I will go on to discuss my research methodology and questions later but first I will introduce the context of verbatim and documentary theatre, current practice and the theories it engages with in the academy.

CHAPTER 1

Theories of Theatre of the Real

The literature and practice explored in this chapter frames the development of my practice-led PhD. I will discuss where my practice converges and diverges from current work/ thinking. The chapter begins with a brief discussion on the origins of documentary and moves onto verbatim practices appearing in the UK in the eighties before examining its popular incarnations of the past thirty years. It discusses two distinct types of practice, moves onto contexts of performance and the reception within the academy and then ends by examining the ontological uncertainty of the postmodern paradigm.

Origins

My work is in dialogue with the tradition of verbatim theatre and in appraising verbatim theatre's mythologies and effects it is necessary to understand its origins and the contexts in which it arose. Verbatim is both a form and technique used by theatre makers to illuminate a specific event, or to create work drawing on the lived experiences of those who have contributed to the process. It is concerned with how its audience experience and engage with social and political issues, and is practiced collaboratively by community artists, or realised by specific playwrights and directors. The variety of contexts that the work explores by raising a national or local agenda, and the stages they are performed in, whether they be *in*, or *with* a specific community or performed *on* the national stages, affects the artistic framing and the reception of the work. My practice experiments with the operations of truth and fiction within verbatim theatre so by tracing backwards to its earliest forms, I seek to show how audiences have always been encouraged to seek out what rings true to their experience, their understanding of specific histories and to make meanings and decisions on those narratives.

Verbatim Theatre stems from documentary theatre, a form pioneered in Germany by Erwin Piscator in the 1920s. Ian Filewood states that Piscator:

> Provide[s] the common ground for all subsequent developments of documentary: it is a genre of performance that presents actuality on the stage and in the process authenticates that actuality, and it speaks to a specifically defined audience for whom it has special significance. (1987:16)

Filewood goes on to explain that it is the specificity of a defined audience that differentiates documentary theatre from other documentary forms such as film and news, which seek broader audiences.

Documentary theatre arose contemporaneously with wider worker's theatre in Russia, Europe, and the US. Drawing inspiration from Russian Blue Blouse troupes, Piscator expanded on their techniques to "teach straightforward lessons about socialism that emphasised that the working class could exercise power" (McConachie, 2010:426). As a theatre form, documentary theatre was inherently political, and sought to inform, persuade and radicalise its audience, often employing a synthesis of documentary materials including newspapers, film, live testimony, simultaneous staging, placards, and slides. Martin argues that "Piscator's use of new technology to make a socially engaged theatre stands at the beginning of theatre of the real as we have come to understand it today" (2012:16). Through dramaturgical layering Piscator communicated the complexities of modern life and was able to create a "political aesthetic by connecting events on stage to wider political realities" (Gale and Deeney, 2016:299). Paget asserts that the Piscatorian tradition presents "radical critiques of dominant ideologies into stage performance" (1990:41) and he sees echoes of such critique in the later work of Littlewood and Cheeseman. Stipulating that documentary theatre uses non-naturalistic 'Epic Techniques' Paget identifies five performance principles that underly its dramaturgy:

> i) Photographs and/or film may project actualities to which the stage action refers.
> ii) Placards and/or slides may project phrases/sentences which are quotations from source documents.
> iii) Actors and/or loudspeakers may utilise direct address of the audience as a means of imparting facts and information.
> iv) Voices, as well as faces, from actuality may be used on tape and film.
> v) Music, especially in the form of authentic song, may add its own critique of events.
> vi) Acting techniques may permit an attitude of quotation (as defined in Brecht's Verfremdungseffekt), which enables actors to become emblems of historical personalities (not, importantly, 'impersonations').
> (Paget, 1990:69)

These are principles that continue to feature in documentary and verbatim productions but in the 21st century digital screens including TVs, computers, laptops and phones are commonplace as well.

The documentary theatre alluded to so far is marked by a collaborative making process. Of *In Spite of Everything* (1925), Piscator notes:

> The show was a collective effort. The separate tasks of writer, director, musical director, designer and actor constantly overlapped. The scenery was built and the music composed as we wrote the script, and the script itself emerged gradually as the director worked with the group. (2014:272)

In Stuart Fisher's reappraisal of Piscator's work she suggests that the collaborative approach, with dramaturgical elements being created simultaneously, may have contributed to the non-linearity of the work (2020:36). Arguably, the collaborative approach suits the montage aesthetic of this practice. Were it to follow a specific narrative arc the dramaturgies employed would be different. In summarising Piscator's early work Stuart Fisher states:

> In his adoption of these kinds of montage techniques, Piscator used documents and other sources of evidence, not to authenticate the truth claims being asserted by the play, but to establish a direct connection with the actual lived experience of everyday life, encouraging audiences to seek out connections, incongruities and dissonances within the very different material placed together through the course of the play. (2020:37-38)

Encouraging the audience to seek connections and incongruities with everyday life demanded a degree of criticality from the spectator and Piscator wanted to extend and heighten this by encouraging discussion and debate, thus serving the theatre's educational and political purpose. Brecht commented that Piscator's "auditorium became a public meeting" (2015:136), a chamber where he actively sought his audiences to participate and to contribute on issues of social relevance. The theatre's potential to politicise and increase a collective purpose beyond the theatre mattered. As a political theatre, the desire (for Piscator and Brecht) was to create a theatre for the masses to propel a 'revolutionary culture' (Piscator, 2014) that could permeate through society.

Stuart Fisher distinguishes phases in Piscator's work, emphasising a shift from practice that wished to instigate revolt against a political and economic system, to later work that used documentary evidence to search for the truth behind specific events, and as such was more contemplative. Stuart Fisher argues that

> the authority of the play is not to be located within the social or political reality depicted, but instead is found in a search for truthfulness and a desire for theatre to excavate the truth of a profoundly traumatic historical event. (2020:45)

Piscator's later directorial work with Weiss' *The Investigation* (1968) and Hochhuth's *The Deputy* (1964) used documentary evidence to stage a trial where the audience members sat in moral judgement of the events of the past. Peter Weiss formulates documentary practices in 'Fourteen Propositions for a Documentary Theatre' (1968). Filewood usefully paraphrases these fourteen propositions: "in order to explain reality in minute detail, documentary theatre offers an analytical model of reality that places the audience in a tribunal. As such, it must be partisan and grounded in political formation, but must shun invention as it submits facts for appraisal" (2011:60). Where the earlier documentary work of Piscator focused on a collaborative process via design, scripting and dramaturgical developments, this later work centres on the assembling of information by the writer /director and focuses on 'truth telling' and personal judgement by an audience whose role it is to witness the information and judge that information on its veracity. Stuart Fisher suggests that this is a "prototype for subsequent verbatim plays" (2020:46). I would extend this argument by suggesting that rather than a prototype for *all* subsequent verbatim this example in fact excludes communal local practices where the emphasis is on *documenting experience* rather than *presenting facts to be scrutinised*. As exemplified in my practice as part of this research project, there's more room to be playful with work that is based on participants' experiences, than simply presenting facts to be scrutinised. If the participants are comfortable with the material because it's familiar to them and they feel that they have ownership in both the subject matter and the process this is likely to be more conducive to playfulness and experimentation. Ownership over the material frees up constraints on whether artists are rigidly sticking to the facts, it can also monitor whether they are deviating beyond what might be called ethically acceptable. I argue here that the experiential work can delve into imaginary spaces and can make fictional performances out of interviewed material.

Weiss' influence is evident in verbatim theatre, with arguably *The Investigation* (1968) being the most acclaimed example of the form, it also "clearly establishes a template for the Tricycle's [tribunal theatre] approach" (Megson, 2011:196). Pointing to the different methods employed by makers and to avoid confusion Paget is keen to observe the distinctiveness between verbatim and tribunal theatre. He states:

1. In tribunal theatre, the 'plays' are edited transcripts ('redactions') of trials, tribunals and public inquiries. These constitute the basis for theatrical representation.
2. In verbatim theatre, the 'plays' are edited interviews with individuals. Sometimes these interviews are taped and transcribed, sometimes actors work directly with the tapes themselves. Whatever the variants, aural testimony constitutes the basis for theatrical representation. (Paget: 2011:233)

It's clear from this categorisation that where tribunal theatre may be limited to certain representational modes, verbatim offers a greater degree of interpretation, which depends on the context it is employed in.

Derek Paget's seminal article ''Verbatim Theatre': Oral History and Documentary Techniques' (1987) charts the development of verbatim practices in the UK. Attributing much to Peter Cheesman's endeavours at the Victoria Theatre in Stoke on Trent from 1965 onwards, the article accredits its roots to documentary film, via the work of John Grierson's BBC radio documentaries produced by Philip Donellan and Charles Parker. Paget also asserts the influence of Charles Parker's work with Ewan MacColl in their *Radio Ballads,* and Joan Littlewood's *Oh, What a lovely War!* Paget goes on to collate a list of verbatim performances that were created in regional theatres and conducts interviews with writers and directors making the work. The writer Rony Robinson, in an interview with Paget explains that verbatim:

> is acted, usually by the performers who collected the material in the first place. As often as not, such plays are then fed back into the communities (which have, in a real sense, created them), via performance in those communities. (Robinson in Paget, 1987: 317)

Verbatim theatre relies on recording and transcribing interview material and this is then shown back to the contributing community, a specific audience for whom the material holds "special significance" (Filewood, 1987:16). Robinson emphasises the collective approach in gathering the texts. As the gathering phase collates many voices, I argue, there is room within the texts for differing or competing narratives. The transcribed verbatim texts are often "'collaged", so a speech in performance may be made-up of actuality fragments from several different sources" (Filewood, 1987:322). The collaborative approach shares some similarities with Piscator's early documentary work.

Although the work Paget charts in the article appears to be less didactic in its socialist teachings, it still connects lived experience to "wider political realities" (Gale and Deeney, 2016:299). This political frame can be seen in, for example, *The Enemies Within* (Thacker and Rose, 1984) and *The Fight for Shelton Bar* (Cheeseman, 1974), one documents experiences of participants in the miner's strike and the other follows steel workers fight to save their plant from closure. Both examples use interviewed material to show a social reality - featuring ordinary people - this was performed back to the community itself (a practice that can be seen elsewhere in Age Exchange, Claque Theatre and The Verbatim Formula).

Paget highlights two types of verbatim practice: "the celebratory style" (1987:333) and those that "deal with present controversy" (1987:334). In 'Get Real, documentary theatre past and present', Paget further extends this distinction between two practices of verbatim that are either

> mainly celebratory in tone and local in focus or harder edged and addressing a national issue, earlier productions followed a collective ethos, and were grounded in commitment (political and professional) - just like the documentary theatres of the 1930s and 1960s. (2011:232)

So, for Paget (1987, 2011), there are two types of verbatim theatre; the celebratory community-oriented practice that draws on oral history and relies on a collaborative writing process; and, on the other hand, a harder edged practice that addresses national issues yet maintains a collaborative approach to the writing. Thirty years later, Bettina Auerswald (2017) distinguishes between two types of practice: the communal and Political verbatim. Stuart Fisher (2020) extends this thinking by offering two branches, one that stems from a

collaborative devising process created and received in community settings, and another which is assembled and overseen by a single writer/director engaging in national issues and portrayed on the national stages within a new writing context. Both Paget and Stuart Fisher have highlighted that the multi-authored work showcases different voices, and Stuart Fisher also proposes that the single authored work is looking to excavate the truth on a particular issue and that personal narrative supplements a predetermined story (2020: 71). Arguably it is the single authored work (eg David Hare's *The Permanent Way* 2003*,* Richard Norton Taylor's *The Colour of Justice* 1999) that tackles events already in the public arena that receives the most critical scrutiny. The stakes are higher as it is usually made to expose a perceived injustice (such as the privatisation of the railways or the brutal murder of Stephen Lawrence).

Mapping out the contexts in which verbatim practice is created and performed is relevant as the performance practice undertaken as part of this enquiry creates a fictional narrative out of verbatim texts. Working collaboratively with participants on their lived experiences offers the opportunity to ethically play around with ideas of what is real or what is imaginary as the work is for those who have helped create it. Work that uses a variety of voices can incorporate contradictory narratives as we experience things differently. In this way my practice differs from the political model that seeks out facts and aims to pin down actuality.

In order to establish the conventions my work is playing *with/ against* (and a range of expectations which might be available to the critical audience) I will move on to outline a range of pioneering verbatim performances over the last thirty years and their reception within the academy. I have chosen to focus on this range of work to locate my research project within the existent body of practice and research. The work examined below is predominantly from the UK, Europe and the US.

Staging the Real

The last 30 years has seen a proliferation of documentary theatre in the US and verbatim theatre in the UK, Germany and wider Europe. During the late sixties, seventies and eighties verbatim theatre was practiced in the UK via regional theatres and in community settings, but the form's popularity grew when the work was seen and produced on larger stages. From the early 1990s with US artist Anna Deavere Smith's *Fires in the Mirro*r (1993) and German playwright Klaus Pohl's *Waiting Room Germany* (1994) there has been an accelerated

development and expansion of the form, with artists and directors expanding the scope of verbatim to include a wide range of media and dramaturgies, and different stages utilise a range of documentary and verbatim methods. Carol Martin expands her umbrella term of *Theatre of the Real* to include "documentary theatre, verbatim theatre, reality-based theatre, theatre of-fact, theatre of witness, tribunal theatre, nonfiction theatre, restored village performances, war and battle re-enactments, and autobiographical theatre" (2013:5). Given the breadth of this remit it will be useful to interrogate the contexts of the practice and how they are interpreted by the academy.

I will explore this approach through the two typologies of practice: the political and communal (as outlined earlier), which help this thesis examine how truth narratives are created in verbatim theatre. An examination of these two approaches can help us to understand why certain practitioners and critics place greater emphasis on different themes, methodologies, and performance outcomes in verbatim theatre. It should be noted that there is not always an exclusive dichotomy between the two approaches. Communal work can be (and often is) political and, within its political agenda, may seek to examine a specific event from a variety of perspectives. Likewise, a political approach may incorporate communal methodologies, via a forensic examination and assemblage of texts about interrelated events. I would argue that truth narratives operate differently in communal verbatim, instead diving into a subject that its participants and audiences are already intimate with. As communal verbatim is based on experiences, participants who are often the intended audience are invited to distinguish between what rings true to them and what does not.

Political Real

Many theatres of the real are rooted in the political, with an ideological agenda. The variety of contexts is worth noting; there is political documentary, verbatim and tribunal theatre, each critiquing specific contemporary events. Much of this work tries to expose the official story by tackling big national issues. The aim is to offer a counter narrative, to closely inspect and offer insight into public institutions/world events (for example, Norton-Taylor's *The Colour of Justice*, 1999; Hare's *The Permanent Way*, 2013*;* Wynne's *Who Cares*, 2015; Norton-Taylor's *Chilcot*, 2016)*.* Others work to highlight issues faced by those whose voices are marginalised. They may employ testimony and include verbatim scripts to force the prescience of the issue, bearing witness to the story and the people involved (for example

Emily Mann's *Annulla: An Autobiography*, 1997; Martin's *Rule 35,* 2015; Ice and Fire's *This is Who I am*, 2017; Blythe's *Our Generation,* 2022). Here, those involved actively participate in the creation of the work, the work is often self-reflexive seeking to illicit empathetic and affective responses. A growing corpus of experimental documentary-inspired work appears on national and international stages, (such as Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking*, 2008; Rimini Protokoll's *Cargo X*, 2006; Milo Rau's *Mitleid,* 2016 and *Reprise*, 2018).

Some practitioners have pushed conventions of documentary and verbatim by intentionally disrupting or puncturing the real and there are examples of performances intentionally introducing fictive material into verbatim work to expose the slipperiness of the form, such as *Aalst* by The National Theatre of Scotland (2007-2008). In *Aalst* about one third of the material is invented with the rest coming from interviews, TV footage and trial transcriptions. By exposing the reliability of the lead characters' testimony, the work aims to show how the documentary form can manipulate its audience to believe certain narratives. *Taking Care of Baby* by Dennis Kelly (2007) uses fictive material (purporting to be verbatim) to deconstruct the 'authentic' and to ask the audience to reflect on the way "reality and 'truth' are framed and mediated in such plays" (Young, 2009:81). Mimicking the political verbatim that seeks to excavate truth about a perceived injustice, the storyline centres around a woman who has been imprisoned over the death of her son. Given that there were high profile examples of actual cases around the time Kelly channels verbatim and documentary plays that try to shed light on real events. Kelly invents a narrative but structurally frames it within a recognised documentary format that leads the audience to believe in its authenticity. Kelly creates a fiction that *appears* to be a verbatim production to highlight how audiences might be too trusting in the strategies of the documentary.

Aspects of political verbatim that have influenced my practice are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2: Disrupting the Real, but I'll briefly identify some of the influential dramaturgies emerging from the work. Alecky Blythe's strict adherence to the spoken word and actors wearing in-ear monitors whilst performing are two methods that I have used. The participative and ethical processes embedded in testimonial theatre and verbatim practices are another influential factor, one which grew in importance when the subject matter explored in my practice became more political. Experimental practices as seen in the work of Rimini Protokoll, Ontroerend Goed were relevant when considering the dramaturgies and aesthetics of the work. The inclusion of autobiographical texts as seen in RashDash *Oh Mother,* helped

me to play around with ideas of forgetting and remembering. Performances of the real self and the performed self-onstage employed by the director Milo Rau have assisted the fictional elements of the work to spring forth.

Communal and Celebratory Real

There are verbatim texts that seek to examine and celebrate aspects of a community, such as Cheeseman's Stoke documentaries at the Victoria theatre (1964-1971), Schweitzer's reminiscence theatre with Age Exchange (1983-2005), Leeds Playhouse's *Searching for the Heart of Leeds* (2018), Alan Lyddiard's work with *The Performance Ensemble* (2017-ongoing). Commonly this work is created "for, with and by" (Prentki and Preston, 2009:10) members of a specific community. In these examples, the authenticity of the source material is venerated by the theatre practitioners and the work is performed to an audience who have either directly contributed to the play or are from the particular community that the performance is rooted in. With such work, community coalesces in different ways via shared interests in specific pursuits, shared characteristics, or an attachment to place. As I am aligning my practice-led research within this category it seems prudent to delve into this a little.

Victorious Victoria was a community play that took place on Victoria Road in New Brighton in May 2022. Artistic Director Sharon Nash was invited by residents and shopkeepers on Victoria Road to make a community play that charted its history up to the present day. Part of the reason for the invitation to create a public performance was to celebrate its past and future, but also drum up local support for small businesses who wished to keep out larger conglomerates that had expressed interest in the street. As with many applied theatre projects there were competing and related interests in the application of a community play that wished to resonate with the diversity of those contributing to the process. In this example place became the axis for numerous narratives encapsulating a past, present and imagined future that exist beside one another. Place attachment alludes to emotional or affective bonds which an individual feels to an area or place… attachment is generally seen as having positive impacts for both individuals and for neighbourhoods. (Bailey et al, 2011:2). *Victorious Victoria* aimed to reinvigorate such bonds for participants and spectators alike. Over the course of 8 weeks, students worked with 7 participant groups closely affiliated with New Brighton to create an episodic performance that would retell specific stories from New Brighton's history. Stories included the history of the Lifeboat station performed by local

primary school children, the successes and failures of the football team performed by the theatre company Company of Friends, a company for adults with learning difficulties. The performance also sought to reflect interests of the groups involved, such as the LGBTQIA+ who wanted to establish a New Brighton Pride.

Research into the history of New Brighton was conducted in several ways, a local historian shared their stories, photographs and contributed to the process throughout. Oral testimony and verbatim interviews were conducted to find out more details about specific moments in New Brighton's history that would feature in the performance. Interviews were conducted with greengrocers, the baker, various artists, pub patrons, local churches, schools, and Victoria Road newsagent. Verbatim texts served as foundations to a dramatic narrative that was configured by Nash and realised by students and community groups. Of her work Nash says:

> Rabelais's work on Carnival illustrates that stories premised on personal testimonies, experiences and anecdote play both a visceral and scholarly role in the redistribution of the 'telling of history'. His work is key to the way I work in capturing the essence of stories from the point of view of the individual, the community and society. From this point of view, we can engage with the vernacular, have cause for celebration and imaginatively re-present narratives in a more meaningful way. (2023)

The carnival aesthetic allowed a range of voices to gather, to be heard and allowed audiences and participants to consider what different community groups might want from their High Street. A mixture of invented narrative and testimony combined to create a public narrative about place. Carnival and celebratory protests invert everyday rules by "challenging the hierarchies of normality in a counterhegemonic, satirical and sartorial parody of power" (Kershaw, 2005:73). By engaging with young, old, queer, disabled, and religious voices there was a levelling out of habituated hierarchies providing groups with the space to explore what they would like from their public spaces.

On the day of *Victorious Victoria* over a hundred participants, their families, residents and local councillors came to watch the performance that took place on multiple sites along Victoria Road. It was a celebratory procession combining theatre, drumming, live music, life sized animal puppets and food. Blending authentic stories within a fictional frame the

performance managed to successfully weave a narrative of resistance addressing the challenges presented by neoliberalism and a threatened high street alongside an exuberant and joyful celebration of past, present and imagined future, as Nicholson argues: "Theatre making provides a powerful opportunity to ask questions about whose stories have been customarily told, whose have been accepted as truth, and to redress the balance by telling stories from alternative perspectives" (Nicholson, 2014: 65). In this way the performance created opportunities for different groups to speak and to listen to one another generating mutual respect. It encouraged dialogue between groups about the High Street's future fuelling energies to work together for a shared political purpose.

By championing the voices of ordinary people *Victorious Victoria* is an example of the communal community-oriented practice drawing on oral testimony and collaborative writing process outlined by Paget earlier in this thesis. The stories are performed back to the specific community that has contributed to the practice and this is how the work differentiates from the political contexts explored earlier. Whether performed by professionals, or by and for community groups, the works use verbatim methods to communicate another narrative - a counter-narrative - to their audience; by telling the stories of the people involved, they try to puncture the official story of those in power. As such, much of contemporary theatre of the real, documentary and verbatim retains its original political intent. It may not have the revolutionary zeal of Piscator but arguably there is something political about all theatres of the real whether that be implicit or explicit.

Critiques in the academy

In this section, I begin by sketching out verbatim theatre's reception within the academy. I trace two strands of commentary and identify the critical arguments from both. Documentary and verbatim theatre's incarnations have been subject to analysis and criticism from the field of applied theatre and contemporary performance. As these practices focus on ideological or political concerns, community contexts, or on disenfranchised groups, much of the ancillary theoretical work and critical commentary centres on representing the real, bearing witness to or exposing the real. Those critiquing community or participatory practices, testimonial, refugee and reminiscence theatre tend to focus on the efficacious and affective nature of the work and its ethical parameters (Jeffers, 2008, 2012; Stuart Fisher, 2020; Upton, 2011; Wake, 2020). Those examining contemporary performance, political theatre, new writing etc. address the purpose of verbatim practices and comment on the development of the form, its

relationship to the real, and the methodological techniques employed by the writer/directors and companies making work (Bottoms, 2006; Martin, 2006; Wake, 2013; Young, 2009, 2021).

Applied and Community Theatre Contexts

Academics and practitioners engaging with community plays, prison, testimonial, refugee, and reminiscence theatre etc. are broadly associated with the field of Applied Theatre. Helen Nicholson proposes Applied Theatre be viewed as a "discursive practice- as a way of conceptualising and interpreting theatrical and cultural practices that are motivated by a desire to make a difference to the world" (2014:20). James Thompson advocates that practitioners should not solely focus on the effects of the work by achieving specific social or educational outcomes but should also consider the affective aspects of theatre, the sensations of the body responding to the aesthetic experience (2009:7). He argues that "considering affects permits an awareness of how the best work stimulates in those who produce it, and those who are beside it, a 'shock to thought' that is a precondition for critical engagement with the world" (2009:135). Applied theatre has the potency to shift preconceived ideas, offer alternatives to what audience members know or think they know about specific groups or subjects, advocate specific causes, and develop new ways of seeing and understanding the other.

Storytelling and narrative can provide an imaginary space to explore how life is and how it could be. As verbatim theatre re-presents the experiences of 'real' people, it's important to think about whose experiences are being represented, what is the theatre maker's relationship to them and what is the purpose of the work? Within the practice a range of divergent concerns are applicable to verbatim theatre, and the emphasis varies to accommodate the contextual nature of any given project. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to outline all the arguments from this large and diverse field, so instead I have mapped out two arguments that resonate with my practice. I have grouped them under the headings of *representation* and *ethics*.

Representation

Any theatre that uses the testimony of 'real' people needs to think about the ethical and political consequences of their work. In *The Applied Theatre Reader*, Sheila Preston writes:

The reality that representations depict the real lives of individuals or groups who may be vulnerable and/or marginalised from the dominant hegemony is an ethical as well as a political concern. As cultural workers, whether we are researchers writing about individuals, theatre makers constructing narratives and stories, or facilitators enabling people to write or perform their own stories, we have a responsibility towards ensuring that the representations that are made are produced through a climate of sensitivity, dialogue, respect and willingness for reciprocity. (Preston, 2009:65)

These ethical responsibilities extend from the process to the performance. The observations of academics remind theatre makers of the precariousness of making work with participants as things can go awry even with the best of intentions (Snyder-Young, 2013). Helen Nicholson has warned of the associative risks of gift giving: "there is always a need to be vigilant about whether the practice is accepted as a generous exercise of care or whether, however well-intentioned, it is regarded as an invasive act or unwelcome intrusion" (2014:166). Practitioners can unwittingly make mistakes, what they wish to be an empowering endeavour might become exploitative in performance. Michael Balfour suggests that to avoid a victimhood narrative the stories shared in the theatre should not be bound to "a secure map of experience" (2013:146). When considering whether to speak for another Linda Alcoff argues that you should only do so after a "concrete analysis of the particular power relations and the discursive effects involved" (1991:21). In verbatim theatre, an artist is ultimately responsible for constructing the testimony of others so some reflection on how this could affect the person involved is necessary. In assembling a narrative how is the theatre maker framing the other? What do they include and exclude? Alcoff proposes four sets of interrogatory practices that should be taken into account when thinking about '*speaking for others*' (1991). Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger offer an overview which I've paraphrased:

1. We should analyse and perhaps resist the impulse to speak at all.
2. We should engage in a critical interrogation of the relevance of our autobiographies-and not simply as a disclaimer against ignorance or errors.
3. She suggests that we maintain an openness to criticism.
4. She asks us to analyse the actual *effects* of speaking on the discursive and material context. (2009:90)

When thinking about ways to make the theatre making process less imbalanced and more dialogical the four interrogatory practices offer a useful framework that theatre makers might adapt when considering the development of their practice.

Ethics

Ethics is a central tenet of theatre. Ethics is particularly important to applied practices as the work engages others and so a duty of care is required. Academics have looked to the work of Emmanuel Levinas to aid their theoretical explorations about ethics when discussing work that engages the 'Other' (Jeffers, 2012; Ridout, 2009; Salverson,1999; Stuart Fisher, 2009; O'Toole et al, 2017; Thompson, 2009). Nicholas Ridout draws on Levinas to encourage a responsibility on the part of audiences to engage with another's experience, critical thinkers from applied theatre do this too but also apply it to the participative process (Greenwood, 2015; Salverson 2008; Thompson, 2015). The 'other' in verbatim or testimonial theatre are the subjects who have engaged with the practice, either contributing to the process or performing in the plays. Ridout offers a clear summary of Levinas's ethics:

> Levinasian ethics seeks to replace an ethics based on the freedom of the individual (modern) or the realisation of individual potential (ancient) with an ethics oriented entirely towards the other. (Ridout, 2009:8)

In his philosophical works *Totality and Infinity (*1969), Levinas proposes that the enlightenment had placed the 'I' or 'being' at the centre of our understanding. The 'I' usurped 'God' as the centring locus of human concern. As the horrors of the second world war were fuelled by an ideology that promoted a specific identity by subjugating all other identities Levinas argues that philosophy should replace the 'I' with the 'other'. Levinas' ethics highlights my responsibility towards the face of the other insisting their concerns are prioritised before mine. And rather than being incorporated into my consciousness the other remains separate, unknowable and different to myself. James Thompson uses Levinas to carve an argument about the ethical call of the face. He argues that through a sensory or aesthetic encounter with others, we can become more aware of the demand the other makes (2009:176). But he highlights that the relationship established in the encounter with the other is not necessarily equal:

Within the moment, it has to be unbalanced or asymmetrical as you feel the infinite demand of the other constraining you. Our autonomy is challenged and limited as we are confronted with an individual ethical appeal that is transformed into a universal demand as it is made. The face of a homeless person not only asks that we respond, but makes a claim that people should not have to live on the street. (Thompson, 2009:164-165)

Thompson goes on to argue that the imbalance of this encounter can invigorate political action because of the inequitable structures inherent in such an encounter. The application of Levinas' theories can be used to analyse the relationship between the actor and the spectator in verbatim and testimonial theatre. Thompson's analysis suggests that an encounter with the other in performance might spur audiences to be affectively and politically engaged by the demands of the other (2009:176). He also argues that there are times in performance where the audience are sceptical or diagnose vulnerabilities and histories onto the face of the other and that "the call of the face in Levinasian terms is not necessarily experienced automatically" (2009:164). Extending the 'face to face' encounter Alison Jeffers suggests 'shoulder to shoulder' might be a more hopeful proxemic position to facilitate an ethical encounter: "In watching theatre about refugees I make that journey of discovery shoulder to shoulder with fellow audience members because the 'host of potential Others' is made up of fellow citizens" (Jeffers, 2012:161). 'Shoulder to shoulder' reflects the proxemics of the theatre space but also evokes a sense of being alongside, of being *with* rather than a confrontation *between* the audience and the refugee other.

For theatre makers engaged in verbatim theatre responsibility towards the other is important, particularly when working within the asymmetrical dynamic described above. As testimony recaptures fragmentary remembrances of those participating, theatre makers must consider their position in relation to their participants. They should be aware of the power dynamics involved and question what they are asking of their participants and to what effect.

Regarding her practice and research into refugee theatre Jeffers cautions theatre makers against recreating the 'Bureaucratic Performance' that is required by the state. Through a long process to determine leave to remain those seeking asylum must prove that there is legitimacy to their claim. Here, asylum seekers are forced to tell a story that highlights past abuses and suggest that the abuse would continue had they not fled and sought asylum:

Furthermore, they are compelled to re-tell and perform those stories not only in the moment of claiming asylum but also beyond that in the public arena where certain narratives are both explicitly and implicitly required. (2012:153)

Jeffers highlights that the state requires the "right kind of refugee story in which complexities are smoothed out to create a simple linear narrative" (2012:46). The risk of theatre makers repeating the smoothed out linear narrative can disempower the refugee "creating an image of a victim in the minds of the audience or even a victim mentality in the minds of refugees themselves" (Jeffers, 2011:46). Caroline Wake draws attention to the dramaturgical processes that artists employ asserting that artists might consider the efficacy of seeking testimony from refugee subjects. She highlights that an editorial process can merge stories to produce the "singular figure of the refugee or simply omit stories altogether producing a sort of 'double silencing', wherein an artist solicits a story from a silenced subject only to silence them once again" (2020:21). Both Jeffers and Wake point to examples where theatre makers might unintentionally misrepresent or de-voice participants when making theatre with refugees. Using personal stories to make performance work with marginalised voices can be problematic in that the fear of presenting someone in a bad light may lead to exoticizing the other: "Celebrating Others, as much as derogating them, may project onto those Others our own political agenda, appropriating them to our own 'cause'" (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2009:89). Accusations of appropriation resonate through critiques of verbatim from applied theatre and performance studies and it is something that facilitators and theatre makers are conscious to avoid.

Cognisant of these arguments, Clive Baim offers some practical guidance to theatre practitioners engaging with the staging of oral testimony. His model '*The Drama Spiral'*, sets out a safe and ethical framework: "In order to create a broader spectrum of ethical risk-taking where practitioners can negotiate blurred boundaries in safe and creative ways" (2020:1). Arguing that the distinction between dramatherapy and theatre of personal stories (his term) is blurred, as the terrain has been reconstituted and problematised by the proliferation of theatre of the real, Baim's *Drama Spiral* sets to provide a framework for practice. He states:

Where drama processes directly access or explicitly refer to the personal and collective stories of participants, the theatre practitioner is obligated to work within a

coherent ethical framework of practice which includes a structured, transparent approach at each stage of the process. (2018:178-179)

The Drama Spiral maps out best practice and acts as a guide to assist applied theatre makers to negotiate personal stories in a safe way. As a decision-making tool it integrates theory and practice from applied theatre and dramatherapy as well as principles from devised and collaborative practices.

In its representation of others, verbatim theatre has the ability to empower and represent those on the margins. For the most part, the political and ethical dilemma lies between "safeguarding and protecting people's right to speak or not speak in private or public with the urgent need to challenge society and its marginalising hegemonies" (Preston, 2009:68). As such, applied theatre academics focus on the participant, the ethical responsibility to those who are involved in the process and a political message. They are concerned about the care given to those who participate in verbatim theatre and the possibility of social change.

Critiques of political verbatim

Debates in truth, authenticity and representing the real in documentary and verbatim theatre texts are extensively covered by academics and practitioners engaged in documentary including Forsyth & Megson, 2011; Bottoms, 2006; Martin, 2013, 2010; Young, 2009; Wake, 2011; Reinelt, 2011; Stuart Fisher, 2011; Radosavljevic, 2013; Tomlin, 2013; Lavender, 2016; Stephenson, 2020. Books by Forsyth & Megson, Martin, Wake and Tomlin interrogate the form and analyse the variety of practices that feature as part of it. Articles by Bottoms, Stuart Fisher and Young have critiqued the truth claims made by playwrights of successful political verbatim productions. Whilst the latter have critiqued a few productions, they also argue for a more reflexive practice that acknowledges to a broader audience the authorial hand responsible in constructing the narrative. As mentioned previously in this chapter, works ascribing to the playwright-led political model aim to expose and narrate particular "*truth claims*" (Stuart Fisher, 2020:8), when the authors of such work appear to be ambiguous about their creative, editorial and dramaturgical involvement there is a pushback from academic quarters.

Early 21st Century commentary revolved around the form of verbatim and its relationship with the truth. In response to this an argument developed that "instead of reaching for a

wholly objective representation of 'truth' much documentary has functioned to complicate notions of authenticity with a more nuanced and challenging evocation of the 'real'" (Forsyth & Megson, 2011:2). In their book *Get Real: documentary theatre past and present*, Forsyth and Megson (2011) insist the documentary form's 'diversification' through the inclusion of the archive, testimony and reflexive performance techniques

> indicates a self-conscious acknowledgement of the complexity of 'reality' at the expense of propounding a mono-dimensional truth claim… documentary performance today is often as much concerned with its discursive limitations, with interrogating the reification of material evidence in performance, as it is with the real life-story event it is exploring. (2011:3)

Documentary, they claim, is self–aware of the *values* it places in the work and by working reflexively such awareness can be communicated through the practice. Liz Tomlin problematises this argument further by highlighting the tension between verbatim theatre's relationship to the truth and its subsequent reception by a sceptical audience:

> [O]n the one hand [there is] the drive for political change that necessitates both a relationship with the 'real' world and an ideological commitment to a particular political discourse, and, on the other, a philosophical scepticism of the 'real' world, and a consequent discrediting of truth claims and ethical imperatives that seek to distinguish any one narrative as authoritative. (2013:120)

Tomlin argues that there is a recognition for the need to engage with real world accounts for political purposes but postmodern audiences find narrative unities to be unconvincing. I would argue that the audience scepticism faced by political verbatim, particularly of the single authored plays addressing national issues of significance, is not atypical in communal verbatim practices as the audience are epistemologically engaged with the subject matter. As alluded to earlier in this chapter the audiences of communal verbatim are encouraged to "seek out connections, incongruities and dissonances within the very different material placed together through the course of the play" (Stuart Fisher 2020:37-38). In a similar vein the testimonial practices highlighted earlier ask the audience to sit next to, bear witness to and be responsible for the other. Alison Forsyth states:

> Testimonial theatre's potential to let us know about historical and/ or past personal events *differently* does not, therefore, necessarily equate with knowing about historical and/or past personal events definitively; On the contrary, this form of theatre can prompt an interrogation of our often all too easy acceptance of the supposed inviolable relationship between fact and truth. (2014:2)

Forsyth suggests that although testimonial theatre provides audiences access to a range of perspectives, it cannot capture the past definitively but via its dramaturgy it might allow audiences to understand the past and know it differently.

Critiquing the idea of a single authoritative voice, other academics question practitioners' insistence on authenticity. In *Putting the Document into Documentary: An Unwelcome Corrective* Bottoms questions the veracity of Hare and Soans's claims in the presentation of "truth" by highlighting the encoding, editorial and "selective manipulation" (2006:58) at play within documentary theatre. He states their verbatim work is "doubly illusory in presenting a 'realism' that purports to present us with the speech of 'actual' people involved in 'real' events, rather than merely fictional ones" (2006:59). He argues *Talking to Terrorists* and *The Permanent way* set out to represent real events (appropriating the actual words of key players) but then reframes this in a theatrical space for a specific audience, whilst underlining its own truth convictions. Bottoms goes onto suggest "that such performances need to foreground their own processes of representation in order to acknowledge the problem and encourage audiences to adopt an actively critical perspective on the events depicted" (2006:61). Highlighting the role of the artist's hand within the work is necessary and is especially important when the documentary seeks to expose falsehoods perpetuated by the media and those in power. Soans claims "the audience for a verbatim play will enter the theatre with the understanding that they're not going to be lied to" (2008:19). In his attempt to critique the status quo he does not acknowledge his editorial role within the work. Such work promotes a single dimensional truth claim that the academy (if not all audiences) is sceptical of.

Bettina Auerswald asserts that

> Margarete Rubik makes a fine point in arguing that, while it would indeed be possible to manipulate theatregoers, it is highly questionable to suppose that audiences are so

naïve that they expect to learn 'the truth' about sensitive political issues on a theatre stage. (2017:111-112)

Like Paget and Stuart Fisher, Bettina Auerswald argues that there are two strands in verbatim theatre, 'political verbatim' whose working methods are akin to investigative journalism and include the tribunal work of Richard Norton-Taylor etc. and 'communal' verbatim which she attributes to makers whose ideology and practices are reminiscent of the original practitioners, such as Moisés Kaufman *The Laramie Project* 2000. Of the 'political', she states that the authors "are very well trained in journalistic verification methods and interested in investigating the events at hand – and arguably not as much in re-defining their roles and responsibilities as artists or actors, or those of theatre itself" (2017:111). Auerswald argues persuasively that this aspect may be part of the reason why some performance academics critique 'political' verbatim. She states that both forms of verbatim, the 'communal' verbatim and 'political' act out of responsibility but that political verbatim is "eminently less reflexive, because its main concern is to inform its spectators about undisclosed information about a case… and to provoke political debate" (2017:111).

DV8's *John*.

Seeking to explore how the reception of political work differs from the communal work and the different techniques artists use to expose their authorial hand, I now move on to discuss an example of political verbatim that engaged broader audiences with specific social issues. As my practice-led research experiments with personal stories it's advisable to look to other practitioners being creative with verbatim material. Lloyd Newson's experiments with documentary material has led him to create Verbatim Dance -Theatre. *John* is the third performance in a trilogy of work experimenting with verbatim. *John* blends dance with verbatim testimony to chart the life story of its central protagonist. Newson had not intended the show to focus on a single narrative, he initially conducted a range of interviews in a gay sauna asking questions about sexuality and love, but he shifted tack after meeting and interviewing an individual named John.

The production has a very strong design aesthetic, Anna Fleiche's revolving stage allows the cast to capture a series of unsettling tableaux that are markers of key moments from John's past. The content is troubling, revealing an abusive and neglectful home: "The family home is a house of horrors, a place of dark rooms and narrow spaces where the family are constantly

glimpsed in poses like broken plastic dolls" (Gardner, 2014). The merging of movement and testimony is compelling, the choreography does not impede on the testimony, rather it sits beside it. The aural testimony is layered upon the visual tableaux and the revolving stage indicates the passing of time. The layering of the visual and the aural allows Newson to play with narrative. By foreshadowing certain scenes the audience are able to see an event before it is spoken about or hear about a specific event before seeing it: "The words give the movement purpose; the movement restrains the words from sentimentality or sententiousness" (Crompton, 2014). This approach makes the visual aesthetic theatrical whilst being sensitive to the voice.

John received mixed reviews; about two-thirds into John's story the narrative deviates and begins to focus on life at a gay sauna. These scenes are visually engaging, they involve more dancers increasing the choreographic potential and showing off the set, but John is absent, and the narrative and tone of the work shifts towards the more titillating aspects of sauna life. The results of this are confusing; the character led narrative is abstracted by newer voices. The presence of the director increases as John fades away. His story is incomplete and made absent in this new sauna space. Kinghorn argues "while Newson's repositioning of verbatim text has proved its potential for underpinning expressive movement with profound emphasis on capturing the meanings inherent in the text, the work lacks a persuasive, overarching meta-narrative to guide the spectator through politically complex discourses" (Kinghorn, 2017:108). I agree with Kinghorn, John is largely abandoned, and the issues raised by revealing his story are unresolved and consumed by a different narrative. As the biographical accounts of John's story presents a series of abandonments it's frustrating that the play in his namesake does so too.

There are several places in the work where the authorial hand is made present: "[Newson's] authorial signature emerges in choreography wrought from the spontaneous, improvisational interpretation of individual collaborators" (Kinghorn, 2017:108). The audience are also introduced to the voices from the original interviews on three occasions. This disrupts the viewing experience highlighting the veracity of the story and preventing our detachment from it. At one point John asks the audience, or Newson as it would have been in the original interview, whether they'd 'like some coffee'. On another occasion John states: "I wanted to have a normal life, or at least normal like you, middle class people." This line effectively works in two ways; it reminds those of us in the audience of the original interview and is

suggestive of the power dynamic and differences between the interviewer and interviewee, but here in the theatre as an audience member it is directed to us, and we are implicated in it. The role of the audience when witnessing such work is a prominent topic in Spectatorship Theory. Stuart Young comments that work that highlights actor -character as performer witness testifying their own or others experience "has led to substantial commentary on the concomitant concept of the spectator-as-witness, who is affected by, and is possibly implicated in, the representation of events onstage" (2021:224).

John draws attention to the theatre auditorium where a predominantly middle-class audience pay to watch contemporary dance theatre and perhaps until we are directly addressed by John via the line "I wanted to have a normal life, or at least normal like you, middle class people," we may have been perceiving John as an "object of spectacle" (Salverson, 1999:41) or pity by framing him as victim by a voyeuristic audience. It is at this point where John's voice directly addresses us (the audience), we have been caught looking, and in turn (via Newson's appropriation of the voice) he returns the gaze flipping the focus and asking us to rethink our role in the witnessing of his story.

Theories of the real - Hyperreal

Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and simulation (1988) resonates through academic work surrounding documentary and verbatim theatre. He asserts that, in postmodern culture, the real dissolves through the prevalence of the image, sign and representation, which are the dominating influences of our time. The role of the media as the most pervasive influence on our lives frames the way we think and experience the world. Referring to a Borges story where the map of the world replaces the real world, he states that:

> Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory - precession of simulacra - it is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive the fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map. (Baudrillard, 1988:166)

Baudrillard argues that the real no longer exists, through the reproduction of images and commodities the real becomes obsolete leaving only a simulated reality: the hyperreal, or

copies of reality. It might be useful to offer up an example to help illustrate how the hyperreal operates. During the EU referendum campaign Nigel Farage was pictured unveiling a poster that showed a vast queue of refugees under the heading 'Breaking Point'. This was an example where the constant repetition of and the mythologizing of migrants entering the UK resonated with the public. The image itself was immediately discredited; MPs, journalists, commentators and academics condemned it. Despite this, the image seeped into the public's consciousness. It was a visual indicator of what they'd been told repetitively since the previous summer when "swarms of migrants" (Cameron, 2015) were making their way to the UK. This exemplifies Baudrillard's hyperreal and the power of the image (the simulacra) to become a reality. The Farage example highlights the artifice of the image (or the document) and the political potency of repeated simulacra. Another aspect of the mediatised culture is that it has a distancing effect:

> Produced far from its reception and received far from its origin, it imprints indifference onto everything shown. We enter into a (mediated) contact with everything, and simultaneously experience ourselves as radically detached from the plethora of facts and fictions we are being informed about. (Lehmann, 2006:185)

To juxtapose this, in Milo Rau's production *Mitleid* (2016) the actress Lardi holds up a photograph of Aylan Kurdi. The image of Lardi displaying and looking at the photograph is shown in close up on a large screen that dominates the stage space. This image, the body of a little boy who drowned off Bodrum when his family were fleeing Syria is one that shocked viewers across the world. It is an example of what Rancière refers to as an intolerable image; "what it shows is deemed too real, too intolerably real to be offered in the form of an image" (2011:83). It is intolerable as the onlooker is forced to accept their responsibility in viewing such an image and not act upon it. Rancière continues "she must also be convinced that she is herself guilty of sharing in the prosperity rooted in imperialist exploitation of the world. And she must further feel guilty about being there and doing nothing" (2011:85). The photo of Aylan was taken at Europe's borders, in a persuasive article Stuart Young discusses the moment where Lardi holds up the image and she "accuses European Theatre of commonly being exploitative, making 'capital' out of the 'suffering of others and cultivating the audience's voyeurism" (2021:228). By bringing it to the stage Rau forces his audience to consider how theatre appropriates images as it constructs the 'real', but it also forces the audience to reflect on their role when witnessing such hypocrisy being acted out on stage.

Rau's political theatre is provocative, but it encourages critical engagement from its audiences and poses questions about ethics and representation.

Postmodernism and beyond

Andy Lavender suggests in Performance of the 21st Century that the personal and political subjects explored by theatre makers could be a result of:

> Three particular phenomena …: the rise of forms of 'truth-turning' after the erosion of settlements of the post-Second World War era and the cultural relativism of post-modernity; the incursions of digital technologies and their relation to technology; and the ingrained nature of performance in contemporary culture. (2016:10)

Postmodernism is an opaque term, appearing in Jean Francois Lyotard *The Post-modern Condition* where Lyotard defines the "postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives" (1984: xxiv). Other key thinkers in this field include the Post Structuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida who set out to debunk myths of the Enlightenment. Liz Tomlin writes of Derrida:

> Once the notion of originary truth of meaning had been exposed as a strategic myth, calculated to support whatever version of reality it benefitted those in power to propagate, all claims to meaning, truth or morality were rendered relative. (2013:2)

Postmodernism casts doubt on a unified reality by encouraging the observer to look at things from other angles and different perspectives. It questions grand narratives and argues that they are strategically positioned to prop up existing power blocks and hegemonies. Proponents of Postmodernist thinking highlight how it "constitutes a massive challenge to the privileges of gender, ethnicity, and knowing" (Matthewman & Hoey, 2006:536). Judith Butler and Joan Scott argue that it isn't "a position, but rather a critical interrogation of the exclusionary operations by which 'positions' are established" (Butler and Scott, 1992:xiv). By illuminating the hitherto unseen the postmodern can focus on what has been excluded and theorise on why such absences exist. Application of the postmodern can be found in a wide range of disciplines that advocate the inclusion of counter narratives including feminist studies, queer theory, post-colonial studies amongst others. Matthewman and Hoey argue that

postmodernism "should not be read as a move to 'anything goes' nihilism … but as a strategic shift from proscription to ethics within social theory" (2006:536).

Critics of postmodernism highlight an inevitable relativism when everything is questioned. If empirical knowledge, science, facts etc. are irrelevant, that truth is reduced to a binary where every problem is neutralised, and we are separated so much from one another that common purpose and collective action is less likely. In short, if you don't know what the truth of things are, how can you protest or challenge anything? The space for radical politics is neutralised by self-serving narratives and this results in apathy and inaction. In an interview Noam Chomsky criticises Postmodernism commenting that it "allows people to take a very radical stance, you know, "more radical than thou", but to be completely dissociated from anything that is happening" (Chomsky, 2017:np). For Chomsky, postmodernism muddies the ground of protest by its insistence that there is no such thing as truth and effectively gives credence to all sides of the argument thereby reducing the political impetus to act upon anything.

Hesitation, Insecurity, Indecidable.

What distinguishes 21st Century verbatim theatre from its earlier iterations is the instability and doubt experienced by its audiences. Hans-Thies Lehmann lists 'Irruption of the Real' as a component of post-dramatic theatre. He writes that traditional theatre was understood "as diegesis of a separated and 'framed' reality governed by its own laws" (2006:100), in other words a constructed fictional frame that is closed off to the outside and is structurally coherent:

> The postdramatic theatre is the first to turn the level of the real explicitly as a 'co-player'… The irruption of the real becomes an object not just of reflection (as in Romantisicsm) but of the theatrical design itself. This operates on a number of levels, but in an especially revealing way through a strategy and an *aesthetics of undecidability* concerning the basic means of theatre. (Lehmann, 2006:100)

Aspects of the real puncture the fictional world and it leaves the audience uncertain. Lehmann continues; "the main point is not the assertion of the real as such… but the unsettling that occurs through the *indecidability* whether one is dealing with reality or fiction. The theatrical effect and the effect on consciousness both emanate from this ambiguity"

(2006:101, his emphasis). The traditional theatres incorporated the real via asides, direct address etc into its fictional world, the post dramatic work upsets the theatricality by "putting the real on equal footing with the fictive" (2006:103) and this requires more from audiences as the aesthetic distance "is structurally shaken in a more or less noticeable and provocative way" (2006:104). The unsettling effect experienced at the theatre is akin to the unsettling aspects of everyday life. Drawing attention to the ways in which performance strategies affect our lives Janelle Reinelt states "Public life's theatricalization is no longer a contested issue" (2010: 28). Addressing this epistemological insecurity and its effects on theatre and performance Baz Kershaw states:

> So long as we accept the full force of the post-modern paradigm and allow that Barthes has finally done for the intentional fallacy by murdering the author, Foucault has incontrovertibly shown that power is everywhere, Derrida has uncoupled the signifier from the signified forever, Lyotard has raised incredulity about master narratives to a new order of intensity, Butler has demonstrated that even gender is a cultural construct, and Baudrillard has possibly capped it all by banishing the real, we will be plagued by an acute indecision about the politics of theatre and performance in the contemporary world. (Kershaw, 2013:16-17)

Kershaw goes on to argue that theatre makers should not shy away from the unsettling effects, but instead face the challenges presented head on and embrace a radical practice that can "encompass both the fundamental change and the uncertainty of outcome signalled by the post-modern and post-modernity" (Kershaw, 2013:17). Similarly, Tomlin writes that we need "an alternative mode of post structuralist resistance which seeks to reconfigure contemporary notions of reality rather than merely highlighting the simulated nature of all representation of the real" (2013:143-144). Garde and Mumford look towards engaging audiences with 'productive insecurity' (2013:164), Grehan views the space of "radical unsettlement within which spectators may hear the call of the other" (2009:20) and Stephenson argues that

> the affects of insecurity are not just something to be endured but to be embraced and fostered…Perhaps part of the response to post reality and the radical unmooring of reality from evidence and experience is to rebuild these social connections, using a relational sensibility, so that more people can agree together on what constitutes reality. (2020: 232)

Helen Nicholson argues for a relational ontology and pushing for an efficacious and radical practice Kershaw argues for a democratised performance. My practice begins by working with the uncertainty of the post-modern by applying hesitation, the unreliable narrator and developing an aesthetic of the indecidable. It seeks to illuminate for its audiences what is real and what is not.

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Context Conclusion

Carol Martin states "Refusing poststructural impossibility is important to theatre of the real. This does not mean it is without its own ontological insecurity. Agreeing to believe that what is onstage is real can be a dangerous endeavour" (2021:204). As post-modernism advocates a perspective that there's no such thing as universal/ objective truth just smaller subjective truths, the stage has been used to showcase individuals' stories to champion other narratives and to scrutinize political subjects. In many ways verbatim theatre can be seen as interlinked with post modernism as well as being a counter movement. By rejecting meta narratives theatre practitioners and their audiences are finding "pleasure, meaning and pertinence in scenarios of actuality, authenticity, encounter and experience" (Lavender, 2016:10). Obviously much verbatim theatre predates postmodernism, and certainly contemporary 'post truth' online culture but it establishes peripheral truths rather than governing narratives and has political agency (where postmodernism could be characterised as bourgeois and complacent). Reinelt argues that, "[t]he hyper theatricalization of contemporary culture can itself lead towards a valorisation and desire for fact, for the materiality of events, for a brute display of evidence as a reaction against the fear of total fiction when all else fails" (Reinelt, 2010:39). As such, some verbatim theatre (such as tribunal theatre) is arguably conservative and reactionary artistically in that it rejects the gains of postmodernism by recognising the mutability of truth and perhaps aiming to re-establish certainty.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

I have gone some way to address the over-arching research question in the introduction and the opening chapter of this thesis. The combined thesis, practice and analysis seeks to answer:

1. In what ways does the ethical and political emphasis of 'the real' in theatre affect the creation and realisation of fictional verbatim theatre?

Rippling through the critical commentary are two specific and reoccurring concerns about verbatim practice: there is scepticism about performances that re-present reality on stage; there are also ethical concerns on how people are represented on stage. To illuminate the specific context of the enquiry the thesis and practice addresses two additional sub-questions:

2. How can the unreliable narrator or 'indecidability' be utilized to expose the artist's strategies of communicating notions of the 'real'?

3. In what ways can the power dynamic between participant and artist be rebalanced by making fictive verbatim performance?

To answer these questions, I created a practice-led methodology. It involved an iterative process of experimentation, reflection and analysis of relevant theatrical and theoretical texts. My practice-led model echoes the "hermeneutic-interpretative spiral model where progress is not linear but circular; a spiral which constantly returns us to our original point of entry but with renewed understanding" (Trimingham, 2002:56). This spiral allows room for creative expansion, but prevents the investigation veering off in other directions. The cycle begins anew as each practice is developed within a refined research framework; the resulting work has the potential to dig deeper and reveal new insights.

I explored sub-questions 2 and 3 through the creation and development of my practice: question one, by creating a trilogy of performance experiments that apply an unsettling or indecidable strategy, appropriating methods that are typically employed to authenticate the assemblage of 'truth' in verbatim theatre, and incorporating impossible or fantastical elements. By making work that undermines its own (implied) claims to truthfulness, I draw

attention to the vulnerability of verbatim techniques to manipulation (consciously or unconsciously) by practitioners and expose my own processes as an artist.

The second sub question is also explored by the creation and development of practice, but the emphasis is on the creation of a process where participants contribute and collaborate in the fictionalisation of content. It should be noted that attempting to equalise the power dynamic between artist and participant is bound to fail, for the reasons offered in the first chapter: any process that involves an artist writing the other is intrinsically asymmetrical, however, makers can take steps to redress this imbalance.

My exploration of these questions through practice and writing, present a model of practice that can be adapted by theatre makers towards a more ethical mode of verbatim theatre, by using indecidability as a foil, or challenge, to truth claims. The performance experiments have been shown publicly, *The Unsettling* at a conference, and *Everybody Always Tells the Truth* at a contemporary performance festival.

METHODOLOGY

A practice-led methodology was necessary to answer my research questions, with the objective of giving my research a firm theoretical underpinning and identify lacunae. Brad Haseman and Daniel Mafe outline practice-led research as:

> a research strategy specifically designed to investigate the contingencies of practice by seeking to discipline, throughout the duration of the study, the ongoing emergence of problem formulation, methods selection, professional and critical contexts, expressive forms of knowledge representation and finally the benefit of the research to stakeholders. (2009:217)

Practice-led research is a methodology in which research questions and challenges emerge from the practice itself, a process that can be unpredictable and non-linear, where emerging knowledge repositions the parameters, mappings and directions of the enquiry. My broader research design takes inspiration from Robin Nelson's Modes of Knowing: a multi-mode

epistemological model for PAR that centres on praxis informed by "know-how, know-that and know-what" (Nelson, 2013: 37) and working in a similar way, my research depends upon a triangulation of research between the theoretical (know-that), the reflection on practice (know-what) and the developmental processes of practice (know-how). This model forms a symbiotic relationship where each method informs the other. My research took three laps around Nelson's triangle: each cycle re-examined my research questions, as the concerns and emphasis of my work shifted to accommodate new insights and critical perspectives. Each phase was informed by a period of theoretical research, the development of creative work and followed by a period of reflection and evaluation. The figure below shows my research project sketched onto Nelson's multi- mode epistemological model for PaR.

Know that- theoretical research

Phase 1	Primary research
Phase 2	Directional shift read new works
Phase 3	Refine read new works
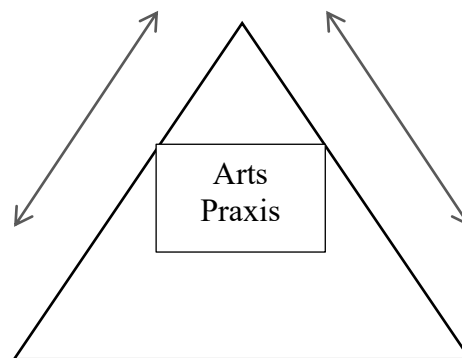
Know what – critical reflection   **Know how - performance practice**

Phase 1	Reflect on practice
Phase 2	Shift to participatory model
Phase 3	Reflect and refine method and model

Phase 1	The Unsettling
Phase 2	Everybody Always Tells the Truth
Phase 3	Is It Different Now?

FIGURE 1: My research project sketched onto Nelson's multi- mode epistemological model for PaR (Nelson: 2013,37).

The first phase involved researching relevant theories and practice. It then moved onto the development of my practice. The first performance experiment set to discover and investigate the following question:

1. In what ways does the ethical and political emphasis of 'the real' in theatre affect the creation and realisation of fictional verbatim theatre?

As I was primarily focused on developing disruptive methods, a 'safe' group of participants including friends and colleagues were interviewed. University of Leeds ethical approval was sought, and participants consented to the project. The interviews were transcribed, I assembled a narrative that utilised Todorov's concept of 'hesitation' and wrote a script out of the interviewed material. I asked Anna to perform and be the 'voice' of the script and I would be the face, miming the words of others.

Barbara Bolt stresses the importance of the practice and exegesis working within practice as research:

Praxical knowledge involves a reflexive knowing that imbricates and follows on from handling…The task of the creative exegesis is to extend on existing domains of knowledge through its reflection on those shocking realisations that occur in practice. (2016:34)

Equally, Graeme Sullivan highlights that "the shock of recognition that comes from new insight is mostly particular rather than general" (Sullivan, 2006). The "shock of recognition" can disrupt the enquiry and reframe the research. Associative research strategies are realigned by the emergent practice, and the generation of new knowledge is realised through the examination of practice and research. My practice-led research unfolded in this way. The performance installation '*The Unsettling'* was presented at a conference, and it went down well with audiences. I had experimented with numerous disruptive techniques, and feeling buoyed by its reception, I went on to show it to my participants. As I discuss in greater detail in the appraisal of the first practice, one participant, who had enjoyed the interview, and entrusted me with her stories, felt that the performance had mocked her. This was far from my intention, and this failure reframed the research parameters of this investigation. The "shocking realisation" (Bolt, 2016:34) prompted new research questions and kickstarted an

ethical enquiry. By "doing-reflecting-reading-articulating-doing" (Nelson 2013:32), emergent themes and ideas stemming from an analysis of practice can bring new and unexpected outcomes. It is only through doing, reflecting, reading, repeating, experiencing, disseminating participant responses that an environment for substantial new insights evolve.

The second and third phases of practice began by establishing an ethical participatory loop between my participants and me. A process was developed where participants would contribute to the fiction-making by performing their words and the words of others. Greater involvement throughout the process enabled an efficacious engagement with the fiction-making and aligned the practice with the communal verbatim practice outlined in chapter one. The research is undoubtedly political, but the truths relate to the way people have idiosyncratic personal responses to moments of great significance. As such, the participants' experiences are situated at the centre of the research and the events are relayed through the prism of those experiences.

For the second and third phase, I sought groups of participants with direct experience of a theme to be explored in the performance. In phase two, parents and care givers were approached. In phase three, a group from Northern Ireland and a group from England were enlisted. The interviews were transcribed, and I assembled a narrative and working script. The scripts were shown/edited and performed by the participant group. Anna and I rehearsed and staged the performance and this was then shown back to the participants.

The research travelled through three phases of disruption.

Hesitation ———— The unreliable narrator ———— Indecidablity

I incorporated autobiography and the unreliable narrator as a method to expose my position and role in the practice. I also used ideas of hesitation (Todorov) and indecidability (Lehmann) to encourage the audience to seek out the reality depicted alongside the fictional or imaginary elements of the performance narrative. The unsettling method disrupted the dramaturgy of the real, by revealing the fictional elements at play asking the audiences to seek out connections and contradictions to their lived experiences.

PRACTICE DOCUMENTATION 1.

The Unsettling
The video installation was presented as part of the Interactions with the Real conference at Royal Holloway on 21st November 2015

Please click on the link to access the video installation.
https://archive.researchdata.leeds.ac.uk/1261/1/the_unsettling.mp4

CHAPTER 2. Disrupting the Real: Critique of Practice

Practice 1. *The Unsettling*

The first performance experiment, *The Unsettling,* was created to address the second research question:

> How can the unreliable narrator or 'indecidability' be utilized to expose the
> artist's strategies of communicating notions of the 'real'?

The research aim for the practice was to experiment with techniques that would help develop an indecidable aesthetic. The research and development phase of the project was in July - August 2015 with a series of interviews taking place early September. I transcribed the interviews and the script was assembled in October. I began to create the film, record the soundtrack and edit the installation in November. The work was presented at Royal Holloway post-graduate conference *Interactions with the Real* late November.

The Unsettling

The Unsettling is a video installation with fictional content created from interviewed material. It followed a typical verbatim process that included a series of interviews and their transcription. It used compositional strategies to collate the script such as montage where "material, lifted from its 'original' context, is put to use in a new way, for new purposes, and though the materials are diverse, they nevertheless appear to belong" (Bottoms, 1998:432). The first disruptive phase of this research project was to experiment with a series of methods that could maintain or produce hesitancy. Three story threads were braided together to create a fictional story that incorporated an encounter with the uncanny. Nicholas Royle explains

> the uncanny is not simply an experience of strangeness or alienation. More
> specifically, it is a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar. It can take the
> form of something familiar unexpectedly arising in a strange and unfamiliar context,
> or of something strange and unfamiliar unexpectedly arising in a familiar context.
> (2003:1)

I set out to toy with the familiar context, the realist-interviewed material in this uncanny encounter becomes unreal as its narrative is recontextualised and a dramaturgical layering of the voice onto another body disrupts the unity presenting an unnatural encounter.

The Interview

Over a period of four weeks, I interviewed five women whose ages ranged from 28 – 68 years old and asked them about their life, childhood and encounters with the uncanny. It was made clear to the participants that their testimonies would be adapted and that their memories would be juxtaposed and mixed up as a method to create a fictive performance. Everyone consented and sections from three of the interviews made it into *The Unsettling* script, the interview content from the other interviews were used in later practice experiments.

One methodological consideration was the creation of a set of questions that would be appropriate for all the participants. As stated by the Oral History Association on Principles and Best Practices: "Interviewers should fully explore all appropriate areas of inquiry with interviewees and not be satisfied with superficial responses. At the same time, they should encourage narrators to respond to questions in their own style and language and to address issues that reflect their concerns" (2009). The questions had to encourage a full response and relax the participant into the discussion, but they also had to be the same in each interview so that I could thread together a story and yet be open enough to extrapolate something of the individual participants' lives and experiences. Pam Schweitzer elaborates that interviews provide a "detailed factual account and an in –depth exploration of feelings connected with the incident or period remembered" (Schweitzer, 2007:43). The questions I used touched upon childhood, the present, the uncanny and asked interviewees to reflect on life events. I tried to insert a range of questions of varying degrees of seriousness. All of my interviews touched upon themes of fear, loss, death and anxiety. I was relatively untroubled by the prospect of fictionalising this content. The third interview, however, discussed topics that I was unprepared for. Family violence, domestic abuse, rape, encounters with the law and alcoholism featured as parts of the interview. I was not sure how I could rework this content. Yet I also felt ethically bound and responsible as once the topics had been aired, I could not ignore them as the participant had expressively insisted that I hear them and use them as part of my practice.

I'll tell you something now, this might be useful but it's not something I go telling people, but I think it's important even when you're doing something like this because people don't tell the truth in terms of there's lots of big bits missed out. So I remember… (Participant 3, 2015)

Amanda Stuart Fisher argues: "The act of giving testimony is in effect an ethical demand: listen to me, hear my story, let me tell you what I have encountered. As a custodian and listener to this testimony, the playwright (and subsequently the audience) is called upon to open themselves to the testimony of the other" (2009:114). By asking participants to contribute, their stories must be utilised in some way otherwise that voice is silenced. The artistic endeavour risks conforming to a hegemonic discourse and rather than exploring a space for critical political awareness creates a site for the "culturally curious" (Kershaw, 1999:5). Participant 3's contribution was included in *The Unsettling* but a few of the issues raised were not focused on or referred to in the installation.

As the testimony was highly personal and traumatic, I had ethical reservations about working alone to adapt the content and reposition it within a fictionalised narrative frame. When working with difficult and unresolved stories Baim argues "It is crucial to develop and maintain an atmosphere of support, trust, good will and safety, in order to promote a positive, generative, developmental and healing atmosphere" (2018:161). I was at an early stage of developing my practice and did not appreciate the necessity of giving further time and attention to this and had only the interview itself as my touchpoint with contributors, this is something I learned from and addressed in subsequent performances. I felt it was inappropriate and unethical to continue to adapt specific personal stories without the involvement of the participant. Conscious that my actions could exacerbate or belittle the memories, I chose to include certain stories but omit others. I did not incorporate themes of sexual violence or domestic abuse as I am not a trained therapist and needed guidance to work safely with the material. As my fiction-making practice moved into its second cycle, I needed to effectively create a participative model that involves participants beyond the interview, establishing regular updates notifying participants on how their material was being adapted and checking that they were okay with the reshaping of their material. I argue that establishing such moments during the scripting phase would ensure that complex issues could be fictionalised as part of a participative process.

Disruptions

Indecidability is used as a creative device throughout this practice. Lehmann states that "the unsettling occurs through the indecidability whether one is dealing with reality or fiction" (2006:101). And so, this performance experiment is titled *The Unsettling.* The unreliable narrator was encouraged throughout the making process and utilised when collating the script and creating the film. Elements of the unreal were set against a normative narrative milieu-the background, staging, the positioning of the subject are a recognisable trope of the documentary form. The title itself acts as a literal description of how the installation has been constructed.

The Unsettling was created to answer research question 2:

2. How can the unreliable narrator or 'indecidability' be utilized to expose the artist's strategies of communicating notions of the 'real'?

To be able to do this, a range of strategies that artists use to authenticate a truth narrative were considered. Below is a list of those strategies with a corresponding disruptive method that I employed when creating *The Unsettling*.

Strategy 1: Restaging the interview (Mann, 1997, *Still Life;* Burke, 2006, *Black Watch;* Hare, 2009, *The Power of Yes;*) **and Direct address** (Thacker, 1980, *The Rose between Two Thorns;* Deveare Smith, 2015, *Notes from the Field: Doing Time in Education;* Ice and Fire, 2017**,** *This Is Who I Am***).**

A common method employed by verbatim theatre makers is to recreate or re-stage the original interview. Robin Soans asserts that the actor's attention is directed towards the audience in most verbatim theatre and that the audience become "a key, if silent, character in the performance" (Soans, 2008: 21). In *The Unsettling* an interview space was recreated but with an additional camera, there was a face-on camera and one at a 50-degree angle. Both camera views were presented in a split screen which disrupted the viewing experience.

FIGURE 2: *The Unsettling,* Restaging the Interview.

I wanted to employ certain aesthetic conventions of documentary filmmaking; Guido Bonsaver asserts that:

> The documentary attempts to dispose of fiction and instead represent reality 'as it is'. Regardless of the stylistics of the finished work, both director and audience of a documentary share the idea that the film engages with the world they live in. In other words, its content is expected to screen images and sounds directly recording real life. (Bonsaver, 2011:304)

It's important for a documentary to show reality '*as it is*', images and sounds should appear natural and dispense of fiction. Audiences are aware that artistry is at play in all documentary work. Representations cannot accurately depict the real. But how successful a documentary is, lies in the handling of the documentary material. How the documentary material or subjects are treated by directors/ artists and how audiences experience it, will ultimately guide whether it is believed as rooted in reality or not. The intention of *The Unsettling* was to create an illusionary real that disintegrated and exposed the artist or the maker. A simple aesthetic of a well-lit interviewee positioned in front of a curtain was chosen. The background did not distract from the subject and two cameras offered some variation to the visual mise-en-scene. The audience chose which image in the split screen to focus on. The

aesthetic gave the impression of reality 'as it is' but the split screen (with an actor viewed from two angles) disrupted the typical viewing experience and the perspectives disorientated the viewer. The idea was to shoot the visuals in one shot to give further weight to the construction of reality. In documentaries the audience can see that an editor has not cut and pasted the film, and this can add to its claims of authenticity. I initially attempted this, but it was not possible to screen it in this way as the installation was to be shown on a continuous loop at the conference. In order to mark the beginning and end of the piece it was necessary to make a cut after the titles were shown (1minute 27 seconds) and another cut at the end of the piece which looped the video and soundtrack back to the beginning.

Direct address is often adopted by verbatim theatre makers as a way to enact the 'real'. In *The Unsettling* the separation of the body from the voice is an attempt to disrupt the ability of the performer and artwork to directly address the audience. I argue that this disruptive strategy limits the opportunity for the actor to be confessional or to develop a closeness between the actor and those watching. The visuals do attempt to make eye contact between performer and spectator with a prolonged stare from the performer at 6 minutes 50 seconds that corresponds with the line:

> These are the stories you don't hear because people only tell you the types of stories they want to hear. (Appendix A:120)

FIGURE 3: *The Unsettling,* Direct Address.

The intention was to emphasise this line but on reflection I think the density of the script and the pace of the delivery prevents this line resonating further.

Strategy 2: Narrative unity. Can be episodic (Contreras, 2008, *Pajarito Nuevo La Lleva: The Sounds of the Coup*) but usually coalescing around a specific events or group experiences of specific event (Langsner, 2002, *Bystander 9/11;* Blythe, 2003, *Come Out Eli*).

Verbatim theatre often follows a linear narrative where component parts work together to create a logical unified text, but those unities are agitated in *The Unsettling* as the texts are repositioned within a new narrative structure. The narrative deliberately avoids structural conventions and the chronology of events, the characters involved, time and space are not fixed. Below is an extract of the script which shows how I merged two testimonies, they are highlighted in pink and yellow:

> My sister senses things and she used to record everything on reels to reels. She still has all of the reels to reels. And there's just hundreds and hundreds of tapes. We used to do everything together and we worked together for a while as well.
> (Appendix A:118)

Inserting the lines claiming that the character's sister records everything they do is an unusual addition to their relationship and might account for characters' behaviour in later scenes. It might also force the audience to doubt the reliability of the speaker, perhaps they are prone to exaggerate.

Strategy 3: Exploration of a personal narrative (Kaufman, 2000, *The Laramie Project***;** Bourne and Ravenhill, 2009, *A life in Three Acts*; Adebayo, 2017, *The Interrogation of Sandra Bland)*

In *The Unsettling,* three personal narratives are interspersed throughout the script. One of my interview questions was: "Have you or anyone you know ever had a mystical experience?" I was eager to draw my interviewees away from quotidian material – the well-trodden paths of common experience - and into a realm of thought that has been unscrutinised.

"she's got a little a bit better... She's got one of those coils now that omits emotion and that makes her a bit more pleasant." (Appendix A:119)

"I used to get terrible guilt about stuff and I used to get guilt about inanimate objects. I used to have weird guilt. But I think there's something in it, there's something there." (Appendix A:119)

Both moments fleetingly invite the interviewer/audience to believe in a supernatural power, whilst also rooted in the normative. I'm interested in what this tension can achieve, because it generates an indecidability about the character and their version of reality. In classifying the fantastic in literature, Tzvetan Todorov carves out a space for the fantastic between two other recognisable genres, the uncanny (a seemingly supernatural event occurs which, as the story progresses, has a rational explanation) and the marvellous (a seemingly supernatural event occurs which, as the story progresses, has a supernatural explanation). Todorov's fantastic story is one in which both interpretations are available to the reader. He observes that:

> The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighbouring genre, the uncanny or the marvellous. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event. (Todorov, 1975:25)

The script for *The Unsettling* was designed to engage with aspects of the fantastic:

> The fantastic is based essentially on a hesitation of the reader – a reader who identifies with the chief character – as to the nature of the uncanny event. This hesitation may be resolved so that the event is acknowledged as reality, or so that the event is identified as the fruit of imagination or the result of an illusion; in other words, we may decide that the event *is* or *is not.* (Todorov, 1975:157)

Here, Todorov is using reader hesitancy to analyse the literary genre of the fantastic (according to his definition of the term). However, the concept of hesitation can transpose into performance when an actor, or documentary narrator in this instance, relates a supernatural occurrence to an audience within the rubric of an ostensibly faithful performance

of verbatim material. The tension between two opposing interpretations available to the audience – essentially, *are we supposed to think the related events actually happened, or is this fantasy?* – may also be affected by the experience/naivety of audiences to the traditions of verbatim performance, which, as discussed elsewhere in this thesis, valorises authenticity and truth telling.

Strategy 4: Naturalistic mode (Blythe, 2008, *The Girlfriend Experience;* Fall, 2013, *Home*)

In *The Unsettling*, the layering of a visual and an aural track separates the unity of the voice and the body, thus agitating a naturalistic reading. The installation deliberately draws attention to the fact that the narrator's voice does not match the mouth movement of the actor on screen. Discussing the unreliability of the narrator in documentary, Fiona Otway states how "an unreliable- narrator construct can draw attention to how a story is being told and whose perspectives are represented, ultimately problematizing the assumption of "truth" in what is being told in a given documentary" (2015:22). *The Unsettling* toys with the way the story is told. It is the literalisation of verbatim practice as the voices of others seem to come from my mouth. The mise en scène is what you might expect from a documentary. Yet, as the video continues the audience are being asked to begin to question what is being relayed. The voice is not synchronised to the mouth. The aural precedes and follows on from the visual aesthetic, much in the same way as Connor argues that "[a] "pure" or unattributed sound is always marked by doubt and menace until it can be tracked to and synchronised with its source, which is usually to say, visualised" (1997:213). The voice and visual are not synchronised as a way of further disrupting the viewing experience, allowing the viewer to begin to question the video maker's proficiency. There are background noises that disrupt the aesthetic. The audience are encouraged to hesitate on the reliability of the narrator, but I hoped that they would also begin to cast doubt on the artist herself. The uncertainty around whether the artist is just not very accomplished, or whether the asynchrony between the visual and aural is intentional, forces the audience to pause and reconsider. Casting doubt on the proficiency of the artist is a strategy I employed to assist the creation of an indecidable aesthetic. It enables me as a theatre maker to experiment with mistakes that rupture what is otherwise a polished performance.

Research into audience reception was not a method that I employed across each practice, but I did gather a few responses from those that watched the installation at the *Interactions with the Real* conference. The audience from the conference watched the installation on a television screen but listened to it through headphones. I argue that the asynchrony experienced when watching and listening on a TV or a computer screen might be read differently when listening through the headphones. For example, if you are listening through wireless headphones you might initially wonder if there is a lag in the set up. One audience member commented:

> I found it really interesting that the sound was slightly out of sync. Not sure if that was deliberate or not but as an effect it really made me concentrate on what was being said. (2015)

The effect was deliberate but what was evident from this response was that the indecidable strategy did come into play. They weren't sure if it was the technical proficiency of the artist at fault, or whether it was a deliberate act.

Another audience member who spoke to me afterwards did not recognise that the narrated voice and the actor on screen were different. She suggested that being Canadian she did not recognise the difference between British dialects therefore the southern English dialect of the narrator and the mouth movements of the Northern Irish actor were not clear. She went onto suggest that for an international audience the disruptive methods of practice need to be less subtle. The outcome of the conference screening indicates that the subversive strategies could be more disruptive.

An Unsettling Summary

The task of the performance experiment *The Unsettling* was to create a theatrical framework that would become unstable as the video continued. The intention was to expose "the way in which the deceptions of 'authenticity' and 'truth' are set up" (McKechnie, 2010:78) in documentary practices and to encourage the audience to question what is real and what is not. One audience member commented:

> I think my brain quickly adapted to the jarring between the gaps it just became a sort of truth for me. We speak in meaningful language that doesn't really interpret what

we mean. I thought that I would connect with the stories on a more authentic level if I closed my eyes. But maybe authenticity is less exciting. I'm looking for my own story I guess. I believe that everybody is. (2015)

I'd argue that this audience member did see value in the fictionalised documentary. Similar to Stuart Fisher's appraisal of how audience's experience communal verbatim (2020:38), I argue that this audience member sought out connections and divergences to their experience. They recognised what is said is not necessarily what is meant. The audience member understood the jarring process but did not necessarily relate to the real voices within the text, rather looking for their own story rather than the 'object' or the participants' stories. Another audience member said: "I felt like I was looking at an actor speaking the memories of other people". Here, my intention to create an effective or satisfactory narrative is brought into question. The narrative appeared too fractious and did not appear as a unified whole. Perhaps the fantasy story was not as coherent as it might be. This response did however recognise the role of artist or actor involved in the transmitting of another's testimony.

Participant response.

"Would you like to see it?"

"Yeah, that would be perfect. I really enjoyed the interview. It brought up so many things I haven't thought about in ages"

"Okay…"

"Well what do you think?"

"It's great, it's very arty… I feel…I feel as though I was being mocked. That opening line… That's just something ridiculous I say and I knew it was me. I watched the rest of it looking out for the bits about me."

"Mmm, Maybe we should watch it again." (Conversation with Participant 2, 2015)

The video installation of *The Unsettling* has been watched by all the interviewed participants. Few had further suggestions for disruptive strategies and most could recognise their contribution. The initial response from participant 2 that opens this reflection surprised me. The first line in the script came from that interview and I felt it added a strong sense of characterisation and humour to the script:

Anna: Oh no you don't understand, this isn't … I don't actually have life problems. (laughs) I kind of, I worry about these things… um ...that aren't anything, um, yeah. No, my life is bliss…

Long Pause… (Appendix A:118)

After her polite beginning assertions, the participant, felt that the work was mocking her. Goffman's work on "Face-Work" (1967) is useful here. Goffman states "The term *face* may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (1967:5). The participant was initially excited about the installation as she had enjoyed the interview and had emotionally invested in it. She assumed that she was *in face*. The opening line of the installation rocked her confidence and she *lost face*:

> Should he sense that he is in the wrong face or out of face, he is likely to feel ashamed and inferior because of what has happened to the activity on his account and because of what may happen to his reputation as a participant. Further, he may feel bad because he had relied upon the encounter to support an image of self to which he has become emotionally attached and which he now finds threatened. (Goffman, 1967:8)

Participant 2 felt humiliated and she was unable to engage with the reworked story as she was looking out for her contributions whilst watching the installation. Likewise, I lost face as the researcher and artist of the work. The participant did not react in line with my expectation, and I felt ashamed that I had exposed her. The opening line put her on her guard, and she could not get beyond that. The recontextualised comment was placed in a prominent position and it was knowingly positioned and framed at the beginning to force the audience to think about the reliability of the narrator. The postmodern audience is sceptical of claims of a perfect or blissful life.

My aesthetic wishes for *The Unsettling* resulted in making one participant feel shamefaced, while another felt that the real-life political issues they raised were not examined. As discussed earlier, I argue that in order to justify the inclusion of such material, a collaborative process is necessary so that the fictionalisation process can be ethically sensitive to those participating and keep contributors updated with the script as it evolves. *The Unsettling* raised

questions about ethically representing those who have contributed to it, and the next performance experiment needed to redress this issue by equalising the power imbalance. This meant working hard to reflect the substantive intention of the participants and the material they supplied in the final work. It also meant making participants more aware of the nature of my practice and the indecidable intent. It was clear that although participants had agreed to take part in the artistic process, they were not clear on what I was aiming to achieve or what my methods were.

Practice 1. Conclusion.

I chose to begin the practical experiments with indecidability by engaging with the subject of the uncanny. By transposing Todorov's use of reader hesitancy "as to the nature of the uncanny event" (1975:157) into a performance framework, I set to destabilise notions of the real/imagined. Conflating contradictory stories together was successful in undermining the authority of the text, but the delivery and density of the script arguably hindered the indecidable intent as there was not enough space or time given to actively experience the indecidable. In *The Unsettling,* I experimented with encouraging "new and unstable modes of perceiving self, other, and representations" (Garde and Mumford, 2013:164) by accompanying the video with a lip-synched audio track of Anna's voice reading the script, which phased in and out of synchronisation with the Gillian represented in the video, producing an uncanny effect (at least, in my experience as a viewer of the piece as well as a performer, the brain wills the movement of my lips and the sound of my voice to align).

 I argue that the range of methods utilised to create an indecidable aesthetic was successful in disrupting a realist frame. Some of the methods such as the layering of contradictory stories and the misalignment of what is seen and what is heard offered possibilities to extend and experiment further.

The literature discussed in chapter one points to a range of practices that engage with the personal stories of others. They might be celebratory or political performances (Paget,1987; Stuart Fisher, 2020) but a strand of critical commentary orbits around ethics and representation (Jeffers, 2011; Preston, 2009). My first practice did not engage with contributors beyond the interview itself and this led to misunderstanding and dissatisfaction with the outcome. For the subsequent practice, it was necessary to establish an integrative model of participation so the practice can work ethically and responsively with others.

Practice Documentation 2.

Everybody Always Tells the Truth

The documented performance was part of the Emergency 2019 festival and presented by Word of Warning in association with NIAMOS, STUN + Z-arts on 21st September 2019. The video link is not available as consent for sharing was not given.

Disrupting the Real. Critique of Practice

Practice 2. *Everybody Always Tells the Truth.*

The second performance experiment *EATtT* was created to address the following research questions.

1. How can the unreliable narrator or indecidability be utilized to expose the artist's strategies of communicating notions of the 'real'?

2. In what ways can the power dynamic between participant and artist be rebalanced by making fictive verbatim performance?

The aim of the practice was to implement a participative model that kept those participating abreast of the creative process. The research and development phase of the project began in January 2019 with a series of interviews taking place between February-August. Interviews were transcribed and a script assembled in August. Participants were invited to attend a group workshop early September with rehearsals beginning around the same time. The performance was part of Emergency, presented by Word of Warning in Manchester on 21st September.

Everybody Always Tells the Truth

Analysis of the first creative project provided insight into the broader methodological process particularly regarding the generation of new knowledge or unexpected findings and their effects in repositioning the parameters of the investigation. This practice-led methodology advocates responsive methods that support the creative and ethical aims of the project by centring on a participatory approach to the interview, editing, staging and reflective processes involved. The practice aimed at redressing the power imbalance between me and my participants revealed in the analysis and reflections of *The Unsettling.* The participatory nature of this research encourages the use of reflexive and critical research methods to engage with the ethical discourse. The observations below aim to draw out some of the structured, creative and ethical knowledge practices that can be identified as part of the research process.

Everybody Always Tells the Truth
Everybody Always Tells the Truth (*EATtT)* is a 25 minute performance that discusses parenthood, created from recorded conversations between parents/carers and reassembled

into a fictionalised performance that gradually aims to destabilise the audience's sense of understanding as it slides from/between traditional truth telling structures of verbatim theatre to an imagined fictive narrative.

EATtT shares intimate (and often unspoken) aspects of parenting and the experience of parenthood. The performance centres on two women talking about aspects of motherhood, the structure is easy to follow at the beginning as the stories are complete and logical following the dramaturgies employed by verbatim theatre practitioners such as Alecky Blythe and Anna Deavere Smith. As the piece continues, the characters adapt stories, or they misremember sections and need clarification from one another and from their notes which are in a book in front of them. They occasionally seek clarification from the sound operator who has the completed script. The stories become more confusing and culminate in a hallucination. The performance ends by returning to some of the interviewed conversations with participants and finishes with an original interview recording.

Context for EATtT

In Childbirth Studies there is a dominant narrative of childbirth rooted in a medicalised (rather than embodied) perspective (see Pollock 1999, Martin 2003). At the same time the discourse surrounding childbirth in academia is dominated by medical language (see Massey 2005). Storytelling around childbirth, asserts Chadwick (2014), is determined by the "master narratives in which birth is told" (44). The alternative position to such a 'master narrative' in Childbirth Studies is the narrative and associated discourse of 'natural childbirth', which is positioned as some kind of counterpoint to 'medical childbirth' (see Davis-Floyd 2003). Such a counterpoint, feminist critics argue, positions itself against 'medical childbirth' thus reemphasising that medical discourse (see Mardorossian 2003). There are those that argue the only way to avoid the medical discourse of childbirth storytelling is to allow for "counter-stories" (Chadwick, 2014:47) to emerge (see McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance 2014). As Chadwick argues:

> When people tell stories they are not simply involved in reflecting the 'true facts' of
> their experiences. Instead, storytelling is a dialogical process involving a dialectical
> interplay between cultural master narratives, normative values and the lived bodily-
> emotional experiences of the storyteller (Ochs & Cappo 1996). It follows therefore
> that counter-stories are unlikely to emerge as fully fledged and coherent articulations.

It is more likely that counter-stories emerge 'between the lines' so to speak, furtively and in narrative moments of excess… 'Excessive' moments cannot be disciplined into a singular meaning and include, for example: different types of laughter; false starts; humor [sic]; incoherent vocalizations and narrative contradictions. (Chadwick, 2014:47)

I chose to work with stories of childbirth as the basis for this practice project as a way of extending the potential of counter-stories suggested by Chadwick. I wanted to challenge, unsettle, and problematise current dominant narratives and discourses of childbirth, and in so doing to provide both a reflection on ways in which storytelling (around childbirth) already plays with elements of indecidability, and a resistance to dominant narratives that render the experience of childbirth as monologic. Whilst I am not suggesting that I am contributing in any significant way to the literature of childbirth studies and the 'counter-stories' of Chadwick, the dialogic storytelling of embodied childbirth, as opposed to the monologic master narrative of medicalisation, is clearly suited strategically to the aims of my research enquiry, particularly given that such 'counter-stories', as demonstrated in my practice, are often 'excessive' in terms of laughter, false starts, humour, incoherency and narrative contradiction.

The Interviews

Between February and August 2019, a series of interviews were conducted with seven parents (six women and one man) in order to produce the documentary material for *EATtT*. The interviews took place in a variety of settings: digitally via Skype, one-on-one interviews, and a group interview. Qualitative methods were employed by way of structured and unstructured interviews followed up by a couple of focused interviews. These served a specific research purpose by examining different theatricalities that would be explored in the staging of the performance.

The Skype call introduced an unexpected technical aesthetic that was utilised in the final development of the script. Time delay, freezing, repetition, disjointed conversation, scrambled content, other actors entering the conversation, off screen distractions and an uncertainty about what was happening in both the interviewer and the interviewee's space interrupted the rhythm of the interview. Supplementary to the annotated content of the

interview was a range of disruptive elements that could be used in the performance and go some way to help to answer the second research question:

2. How can the unreliable narrator or indecidability be utilized to expose the artist's strategies of communicating notions of the 'real'?

As part of answering this question, I was concerned with how the interview method of gathering verbatim material could be used to contribute to the creation of an indecidable aesthetic and how those disruptive effects might be replicated in performance. The instability of the digital interview can break up the narration and the environmental factors affect the interviewee and interviewer's ability to effectively read one another, as Ingold writes:

> Speaking is not a discharge of representations in the mind but an achievement of the whole organism-person in an environment; it is closely attuned and continually responsive to the gestures of others, and speakers are forever improvising on the basis of past practice in their efforts to make themselves understood in a world which is never quite the same from one moment to the next. (Ingold 2011:401)

The online skype interviews I conducted did not accommodate the *'whole organism-person in an environment'* and I was unable to see or *'read the responsive gestures of others*.' We communicated via a fixed screen so many conversation cues that aided our understanding such as accompanying gestures, looks, eye contact, awareness of what is happening in the space, are lost. The constraints of the online interview were, perhaps, less restrictive in 2023 than in previous years, as we have become more practised in the online exchange and better at understanding one another online, but disruptive or awkward hiccups in conversation remain. Aspects of the Skype interview included in the final script were the struggle to maintain a secure internet connection, repetition, disjointed conversation, and other actors/characters entering the conversation.

Here's an example taken from the script where our computer screen kept freezing.

> **Gill:** I just managed...
> **Iris:** *Rings the Bell*
> **Anna:** oh.
> **Gill:** yes.

Anna: Shall we? How long do you think it? Shall we have a go? Shall we try it?
Gill: Yeah. Crack on and then we'll see.
Anna: Well, just the thing that struck me after the birth was all dignity is gone.

(Appendix B:122)

The original interview was disrupted by the sound of a crying infant, I inserted a ringing bell into the script as this had happened during the group interview. The group interview took place in a canteen of a Further Education college, it experienced natural disruptions with participants arriving late, other activities in the space impeding on the discussion and the fragmented /arbitrary nature of group conversation meant that questions were not explored in much depth. This interview served the development of the creative practices disruptive strategies but also highlighted that conversation or narratives of the everyday are not linear entities. Tim Ingold argues that "words gather their meanings from the relational properties of the world itself" (Ingold, 2011:409). Here is an extract from the original interview at the FE college.

LC: That she moves through the world is ace.
(*noise of chairs and table moving*)
GK: Lisi's in the top car park.
EB: I think this woman can't make any more noise if she tried!
GK: My thing's about disruption.
(*noise of phone ringing.*)
GK: Hi Lisi, we're just at the canteen…, yes.., yes. Do you want to come in for ten mins?
EB: Physically there's been a change… (Group Interview transcript,2019)

There are disruptive structural and relational elements at play associated with meeting in a public space coupled with social conventions that affect and shape our language. It is the context in which things are spoken, the body and facial gestures, the emphasis and tone of the voice, intonation etc. that conveys meaning.

The remaining 3 interviews were one-on-one and a contributor to the group interview was also interviewed face-to face. It was important to consider the third research question in the planning stages.

3. In what ways can the power dynamic between participant and artist be rebalanced when making fictive verbatim performance?

The reflective writing and participant response from the first practice *The Unsettling* largely shaped the approach to this project, starting with a set of interviews:

> An ethics of performance is an essential feature of any philosophy and practice of theatre. Without it a set of cultural practices which derive from a very specific arrangement of power relations between people are unhinged from responsibility to those people. (Read, 1995:6)

As the researcher, I was aware of the potentially asymmetrical dynamic between the questioner and the interviewee. This forced a refocusing of research methods and, more specifically how the interviews were conducted and how I used the material. Ann Gray highlights that "[q]uestions of methods, therefore cannot be settled and resolved in the early stages, but will recur throughout the research engendering questions, not only about the 'what' of the research, but also about the 'how' of it'"(Gray, 2007:5). The 'how' of the interview and the dual roles of the artist researcher needed some consideration before interviews took place. My role as researcher was to plan, reflect on and disseminate the stages of this practice and as an artist my role was to assemble/develop the script, collaborate with participants, and to perform. In practical terms this meant making participants more aware of the nature of the practice when interviewed by clearly drawing attention to my role as artist and emphasising that their words were to be reframed into a narrative that may not reflect our original conversations. They were invited to engage beyond the interview through a number of participative methods that sought to be inclusive and overcome problems that emerged in the first performance practice. Participants could:

1. Comment and reflect on the script as it developed.
2. Attend a workshop where they could read/edit and reflect on the near completed script.
3. Record and perform fragments of their stories to be used in final performance.
4. Record and perform fragments of the words of others to be used in final performance.
5. Watch the final performance and reflect on their contributions.

Shelia Preston argues that "The ethos of community – generated theatre circumvents the inescapable problem of representing or speaking for marginalised communities" (2009:67). I

recognise that my participants are not marginalised, but tensions remain between the artist and participants about the appropriation of the voice, I endeavoured to create a participative loop where we might collaborate to work ethically and creatively.

Another deviation from the methods used in *The Unsettling* was that I would actively contribute to the discussion. The inclusion of the researcher within the research features within the ethnographic method:

> Ethnography may be described as an approach to learning about the social and cultural life of individuals, communities and institutions through the researcher's personal immersion in investigative and empathetic participation and observation research. (Krüger, 2008:1)

It's useful to highlight "personal immersion in investigative and empathetic participation" in relation to this practice-led research. By immersing myself and actively participating in the interviews as another participant I, as researcher, shared my stories alongside the participants. Qualitative research from a social constructivist method "assumes that the researcher cannot be separated from the participant… the researcher plays a role in constructing the data as the data is a product of the interaction between the researcher and the participant" (Dempster, 2011:154). This, in itself, does not equalise the power balance as it is the researcher who leads the discussions, interprets the findings and as artist creates the practice, but steps were made to consciously address a knowledge imbalance by attempting to share stories in an exchange. By sharing stories, *EATtT* sought to even the playing field by highlighting that my contributions as maker would be treated in the same way as the participants' stories. The scripting process sought to uproot the researcher's contribution as much as the participants' contribution.

Hammersley and Atkinson argue that "[t]he ethnographer needs to be intellectually poised between familiarity and strangeness; and, in overt participant observation, socially he will be poised between stranger and friend" (1993:112). Gray encourages the researcher to consider reflexively the different identities they will inhabit in a project: "The person who dresses formally for an interview or 'hangs around' with musicians, is very different from the one who sits at her desk thinking about her material and writing an academic text" (2007:85). Similarly, the artist who collates performance materials is different to the researcher who

scrutinises the performance process and the power dynamic between these changes through the various stages of the practice.

My practice did not employ an ethnographic methodology but drew upon ethnographic methods to develop the creative work. Tami Spry argues that the fields of performance and ethnography "have informed, reformed, and coperformed one another in the historicity of their disciplinary dialogue" (2006:340). Ethnography informed my practice as I repositioned my role as researcher within the interview. I chose to immerse the role of the researcher within the interview as "extreme detachment results in acquisitiveness instead of genuine inquiry" (Conquergood, 1985:5). Conscious of "relationships of power produced in spaces, marked by differently positioned subjectivities" (Gallagher, 2006: 63), I sought to redress the imbalance, following Conquergood's by creating a genuine conversation. Sam McKay argues "The ethnographer must be aware of the implications of their own cultural contexts, asking how their own contexts and identities intersect with those of the participants" (2019:108). Utilising the ideas found within ethnographic research on how a researcher's involvement alters and reshapes the research, my creative practice explores through the lens of indecidability into how the performance maker explicitly reshapes narratives by layering stories across each other.

As ethnographic research has long contended with the position of the researcher in relation to the subjects of the research, Krüger's definition above highlights the need for empathetic participation. It is productive to engage with this idea and what it might mean in an interview process. Of chief concern in this project was how to approach eliciting stories in others asking in what ways questions were framed, in what ways questions were constructed with a view to elicit a sensationalist response, whether the researcher was pushy and whether 'the researcher' has concerns that are different to 'the artist'. Further I asked how and in what ways can a researcher recalibrate their interview techniques so that participants can freely engage with the process but not feel pressured to bare all? And, how does the researcher artist balance the obligation to the participants alongside the creative objectives of the investigation?

With an empathetic engagement in mind, there were a few examples in the one-to-one interview where the interviewer consciously diverted the conversation away from topics that may have exposed the participant unnecessarily.

A: I woke up and it was like, oh my god that is the most beautiful creature in the world. And he was just there and was the most amazing thing in the world. I'm finding it hard in my current depressed state to connect with the utter joy and love that I felt then but I know that I did. But it's not going to come across because I don't feel joy at the this? moment in my life.
B: When did you wake up?
A: I've no idea
B: And where was he? (Interview B, 2019)

The interviewer changed tack to ask establishing questions and returned to the original subject matter rather than directing their focus onto a health issue. It is important that sensitive information be offered freely and knowingly. In this case the existing relationship between the interviewer and the participant could have meant the participant divulge more than they might otherwise do so. We had, and have continued to have, discussions about their mental health, but it did not seem appropriate to record or delve into it. By the time this interview was conducted, I had a clear idea about how the narrative of *EATtT* would unfold. As a researcher and a participant in the interview it felt wrong to delve into the pain of another when the transcripts were going to be used for a performance. The subject matter divulged did not thematically link to *EATtT* and as the performance was not an issue-based drama it seemed unnecessary to probe any further. This was an ethical decision made on my part and choices made during the interview stages will have affected the dramaturgy and aesthetics of the performance. For this performance experiment I was driven to make the collaborative process as efficacious as it could be.

Foucault argues that power plays a part in all social relations: "power and knowledge directly imply one another…there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (Foucault, 1977:27). Foucault concentrates on how knowledge and power can be used to subjugate and oppress. Extending this, Haywood in Gaventa & Cornwall flips the limiting aspects of power to highlight positive attributes of power that has the potential to enable action: "In this sense power may have a synergistic element, such that action by some enables more action by others. Challenging the boundaries of the possible may in some cases mean that those with relatively less power working collaboratively with others have more" (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2020:5). Engaging with participants throughout the scripting process increased their knowledge and their investment in the creative process. They subsequently contributed more to the performance because they understood the scripting process and were

invested in it. This was evident by the agreement for their voices to be used in the final performance.

Scripting the Real.

When writing about the works of Rimini Protokoll Gerald Seigmund asserts:

> The frame of theatre also affords an undeniable distancing. It turns the trusted into something foreign: as "real" as something seems, as "real" as it might sound, it is here closely related to the possibility of fiction. Everything that it touches is made unreal and is lifted into a second type of reality.　　　　(Seigmund, 2017:190)

Seigmund highlights that theatrical framing makes the familiar strange. EATtT tries to utilise this destabilising effect by recreating a familiar space.

FIGURE 4. *Everybody Always Tells the Truth.* Set.

For EATtT I wanted to create an intimate environment where characters could discuss personal stories. Mc Kinney and Butterworth argue that working in site specific spaces "relationships between audience and performance can be explored and manipulated to create a more intense engagement with performance" (2009:120). I wanted to explore the relationship between performer and audience members by bringing the audience into the performance space. *EATtT* is set at a table where two actors share stories with an audience

who also sit around the table. The staging mimics the group interview arrangement employed by reminiscence theatre-maker Pam Schweitzer. The arrangement depicted below was part of Schweitzer's reminiscence process but I wanted to recreate the spatial arrangement in performance as it offers a level of intimacy which suited the subject matter.

FIGURE 5. Reminiscence group sharing (Schweitzer, 2007:55)

Schweitzer claims "the most successful group reminiscence sessions feel like a social event for the participants" (2007:42). I wanted *EATtT* to feel like a social event. By sharing tea and cake I hoped to create a convivial atmosphere where actors could share intimate stories with their audience. Notebooks on the table contained the script and a sound operator/ prompt interacts with the actors helping them to keep on track as they trace through misremembered or forgotten memories.

I chose to perform, as I had contributed throughout the process and wanted to highlight the role of the artist when making a performance using documentary material. The intention was to locate the artist at the centre of the work, to draw the audience's attention to my presence from the beginning and to remain there as the narrative unfolds. *EATtT* responds to the second research question (How can the unreliable narrator or indecidability be utilized to expose the artist's strategies of communicating notions of the 'real'?) with my on-stage

presence seeking to problematise the relationship between the verbatim performance texts (a strategy of communicating the real) and their use within the creation of a fictional narrative. Continuing with the strategy employed in *The Unsettling*, I - the author and Anna - the actor, are voicing the words of others. Where this experiment differentiates from *The Unsettling* is that it incorporates autobiographical content. I wanted to draw attention to the character 'Gill' by disrupting my contributions and hoped to increase the audience's scepticism about 'Gill' by creating an unreliable narrator in myself. Dee Heddon argues that "the binary between the fictional/real is notoriously unstable in all autobiographical performance… the decision of whether a work is considered to be autobiographical must lie with the spectator" (2008:10). I wanted the audience to recognise the impossibility of the enfolding narrative and to destabilize the reality effect of the testimony through the character 'Gill', I hoped they would question whether 'Gill's' experiences were hers or if they were manufactured for theatrical effect.

The script of *EATtT* begins with a stream of words contributed by and performed by participants answering the question 'what does motherhood mean to you?' The script then, as if to highlight its authenticity, intersperses the live actor who performs an extract of unedited text from the transcript interviews with the recorded voice of a participant being interviewed. This is a commonplace strategy employed by Documentary Theatre makers where the authentic voice is blended with the actor's voice. For example, *The Girlfriend Experience* written by Alecky Blythe opens with:

> **Alecky**(*voice-over.*)I feel like I should explain – what I'm doing with m-microphones an' stuff like that – / just so that you know –
> **Tessa** Mmm – We did sort of / – a bit.
> **Poppy** Yeah –
> *Beat.*
> **Alecky** (*voice-over.*)Um (*Beat.*)– I, um (*Beat.*)– I kindof make (*Beat.*)– um (*Beat.*)– they're sortof documentary plays. (*Pause.*) But – I don't – *film* anything (*Beat.*)– I just *record* – hours and hours of-of – audio. (*Pause.*)Um (*Beat.*)– and I – edit it (*Beat.*)– and then, um (*Beat.*)– those (*Beat.*)– so (*Beat.*)– people's *real* words your real words – then become the words that the actors speak in the play – and they, they – *hear* – your voice – speaking – through earphones – and then they *copy* – exactly

your intonation, accent – I'll describe – y'know – one was *sat* here, one was sat here, and whatever.

Poppy Yeah.

Alecky (*voice-over.*) And it's – it's a really weird, kindof? very true – obviously *so* so true to *life*, kindof? thing –

Tessa So you 'ave to be careful what you *say*– (Blythe, 2008:5)

Blythe uses this technique as a means of authenticating her edited performances and the actors speak, through copying, the exact words of those participating. The intention behind the opening sequence to *EATtT* was to, similarly, draw the audience into the original interviewed recordings as the voice of the actor layered onto the recording and continued to speak the exact words. The perceived authenticity of the documentary narrative is then undercut by stories that seem to contradict each other and failings of the character's memory.

> **Gill:** I was induced twice. I remember you coming in. My memory was that I went from not having anything to suddenly being in labour. I remember the pain went from nothing to intense pain.
>
> **Anna:** Didn't they give you something to make you dilate and then it overshot?
>
> **Gill:** Did they give me something to make me dilate and then give me the epidural? I was hysterical before that.
>
> **Anna:** You weren't hysterical, you were really brave, like a woman who was having contractions and in pain but considering the fuss you make if you stub your toe, you were actually very stoical about it.
>
> **Gill:** I remember a woman
>
> **Anna:** You were in pain. You were not writhing in agony screaming give me an epidural.
>
> **Gill:** Oh, I thought I was
>
> **Anna:** Unless I'm remembering it wrong, but I don't think I am. I think I'd remember that. I was not...I didn't have any drugs in me. (Appendix B:124)

The script draws attention to the misremembering of certain events and the performers then attempt to help one another piece together what is imagined to be the real sequence of the experiences being shared. By employing a destabilising tactic, the desire is to undermine the reliability of the text, the character and the actor. Through questioning the veracity of the

narrative, or the characters or the performers, the aim was to draw into question their relationship with what was being said. Forgetting onstage reminds the audience of the rules of performance (Lehmann, 2006:100). When an actor forgets their lines onstage it can be a very uncomfortable experience for everyone as we collectively will them to remember. It punctures the theatrical illusion, and, in its breakdown, reminds us of what theatre is (or can be): An actor performing prewritten lines in front of an audience. Characters forgetting or misremembering on stage can also remind the audience of the rules and contract of theatre. The tension is only alleviated when we become accustomed to the maker's strategies and are satisfied that the rules remain unbroken. In verbatim theatre the performer assumes the role of a contributor who they faithfully attempt to recreate. In this script the aim of the actors misremembering is to destabilise the theatrical conceit. It questions the actors' suitability and proficiency as performers. It highlights the limit of their knowledge and the confusing clarifications of '*what really happened'* raise the question of whether it is their story or a participant's story. Have they just made a mistake? Are they part of the documentary process? If not, whose story is this?

The script of *EATtT* continues to problematise its relationship with a realistic narrative as it creates an implausibly protracted horror-story birth that threads together several participants' stories. It includes a birth story in which a baby is losing oxygen to its brain, due to the position it is in. Another story recounts a visit to accident and emergency with a sick child. The final story is a memory from childhood in which the child wakes up and sees something or someone in their room. The narrative weaves specific fragments of the stories together and Gill recollects the memory as if it is her own memory of childbirth. The stories told so far have been graphic, and the dialogue makes clear that Gill is confused about the real version of events, seeking reassurance in Anna's account. As Gill continues, the inclusion of a memory featuring a talking baby that looks like sweetcorn encourages the audience to question the reliablity of the performer. By destabilising the texts, I hoped to cast the audience into a fictional world, unbound from normative rules of cause and effect, and yet with enough plausible 'real' testimony to engender a sense of jeopardy for the characters.

The final disruptive strategy in the creation of the fictional narrative culminates with an encounter with the impossible or the irreal. Inspired by the effects of sleep deprivation on memory, a state where the real seems unreal, I wanted to fuse the experience of parenthood

and motherhood with fantasy. The narrative text cuts and pastes together extracts from three separate interviews and seeks to expose its unreliability:

> If he had had brain damage and if he didn't, he didn't. And I was just waiting for the results back for them to say 'I'm really sorry he didn't have enough oxygen to the brain.' I thought it was somebody in white with golden-ish hair, and this golden hair could have been an alien but I definitely saw something. Standing right next to me. And I always like to think that I'd be the sort of person that wouldn't be scared. He was convulsing and the eyes were rolling it was just… and then I started screaming. He wouldn't let, he wouldn't let go of me. He was something that was yellow and green like a sweet corn. He didn't know where he was or anything. He kept saying to me "Are you daddy?" And I'd say "No, I'm Mummy, I'm Mummy". He was hallucinating. So yeah, it was a bit scary a bit scary. It was horrendous, totally horrendous and… and then they came in and said it was fine. So, then after that I was elated but still concerned. (Appendix B:125)

The collated extracts seek to subvert the impact of the script, and in their assemblage, the intention was to temporarily shift from the realist to the fantastic. This is the point in the performance where the stories do not add up and the devices used to assemble an illusion of reality deteriorate to expose the script and the performer. The performance hopes to reveal to its audience something of the making process as it shifts from a testimony into fictive drama and returns in the closing stages to verbatim again when the piece finishes with the overlapping of the unedited text alongside the original interview material. Writing about work that blends autobiography with fiction Jenn Stephenson argues that "Competing oscillating perceptions between knowledge that is fixed and unfixed, between representation and reality, relegate the audience to an experience of uncertainty caught up in ontological hybridity" (2019:56). She goes onto quote Garde and Mumford stating that this undecidability "is caused not only by the creation of phenomena that does not sit clearly within one or the other of these problematically binarized categories, but also by the representations whose very nature is uncertain" (Garde and Mumford in Stephenson, 2019:56). The three phases of the construction of *EATtT* aims to reveal how a reality effect is assembled. Utilising the unreliable narrator adds a disorientating effect as the spectator hesitates on whether they are experiencing a fiction or reality.

Presenting the script to participants.

Attempting to make the methodological process as ethically efficacious as possible and, aware of the performative potential of presenting a variety of voices during live performance, I collaborated with those who contributed to the script. Once a version of the script had been

assembled, I arranged to meet three participants that I had interviewed in one-to-one interviews as well as another from the group interview. A further participant who could not physically attend this session was kept informed and made suggestions through a FaceTime call a few days after the workshop exchange. Although this participants' performing voice was not able to be used in the performance itself (largely due to the quality of the recording), snippets of the original recording of our one-to-one interview were used. The working script was shown to another contributor and their suggestions were taken on board. I was unable to meet with one other participant who had originally contributed to a one-to-one interview.

The most dialogic and productive exchanges occurred with the group session. The script was read, participants made further suggestions and they were encouraged to act as dramaturgs to the creative process. The sharing of a script to aid its development and to keep participants informed is used by applied theatre practitioners where good practice focuses on:

> How to collaborate in a trustworthy and empowering way by securing participant permissions, pre-interviewing participants for mutual understanding, continually updating them as the work progresses through sharing drafts of play scripts and video recordings of rehearsals, and listening to their feedback on scripts and staging ideas. (Saldaña in Bishop, 2014:69)

The group workshop sought to act in this way as it can increase the significance of the participatory exchange as well as highlight any areas of contention or disagreement. The workshop was our only opportunity to exchange ideas on how the script was evolving but was effective in communicating how the interviews had been transcribed and then reworked to be representative of all of the voices involved.

A few participants saw how their words had been displaced from its original and spliced together with the words of another who was present in the room. Watching the initial recognition shift to a bemused/confused demeaner as they were able to see what I had done with their words by hybridising their experience/memories with another in the room effectively showed them what this performance project was and what my artistic intentions were. What had been explained prior to the initial interview was laid bare for them to see. How I was treating their contributions was revealed and we were able to "address upfront the possibility of any disagreements about the script to empower and actively engage participants

in the artistic process" (Saldaña in Bishop, 2014:69). The participants were able to pinpoint which words were their own, after a few "I didn't say that, did I?" (Lisi, 2019) moments, the group made connections between one another's contributions and how in the script their voices were merging "I said that, and I said that" (Laura and Lisi, 2019). The participants did not disagree with the outcome of the script and after the uneasiness of the first textual encounter they seemed to enjoy how the words were being played with. Tim Prentki highlights the significance of the theatre-based researcher being transparent about their intentions "to engage in self-reflection and inquiry in order to clarify their own positions and ensure that 'right choices' are made" (Prentki in Bishop, 2014:72). The participants gave me permission to continue working in this mode and also agreed to perform certain sections of the script. By working in a dialogical way with participants the process of adaptation was more experimental as the methods of disruption were agreed upon.

The latter part of the workshop involved participants recording some audio tracks to be used during the show. They read out the opening list of words about what motherhood means to them and performed parts of one another's original interviewed text. Asking the participants to retell other participants stories was another way to show them, in a safe environment, how the practice evolves. They witnessed their words being spoken by another and also performed texts. If they were uncertain or uncomfortable about it there was the opportunity to withdraw but this did not happen. If anything, it increased their investment in the show as they were contributing to each stage of the research, the original interviews, the development of, and appearing in the final performance. Some participants' original testimonies were included as well as their performance of other participants.

Finalising the script

The script evolved after the first reading between the actors. There was a recognition that aspects of the irreal needed more emphasis and I decided to include a child performer who would ring a bell when the content of the script became too graphic or gory. The inclusion of the child as performer served as another way to disrupt the narrative. A sound operator/ prompt was also written into the script, they sat at the table and followed the script. Their presence was useful as they were a reminder that although the performance appears to be disintegrating, the collapse of the narrative is scripted.

Ideas of the authentic and inauthentic were also utilised through the participants' voices. As the participants were not actors the recorded audio tracks of them reading the script quite clearly communicates to the listener that this is manufactured and inauthentic. They are acting in these moments whereas their real voices in the recorded interviews were also used and these are moments where the real and the fictional intertwine raising questions about the texts spoken by the performers on stage. On the irruption of the real in post-dramatic theatre Lehmann argues that: "The aesthetic cannot be understood by a determinisation of content (beauty, truth, sentiment, anthropomorphising, mirroring etc.) but solely – as the theatre of the real shows - by 'treading the borderline", by permanently switching, not between form and content, but between 'real' contiguity (connection with reality) and 'staged' construct" (2006:103). The inclusion of the real interviews and performed re-enactments of verbatim testimony is a reminder of the artificiality of theatre as a representational and constructed medium.

Participant response.

Participants contributed throughout the process, enjoyed performing fragments and commented on the development of the working script. They were unable to attend the live performance, but they have all watched the recording of *Everybody Always Tells the Truth.* Most enjoyed the performance with a few reflecting that the disruptions and confusing aspects were indicative of parenthood or reminiscent of their own birth stories. Others were searching for their own voice. As the recording of the live performance is not as clear as it could be, some participants were unable to hear their contributions. The quality of the recordings and the limitations of a mobile phone speaker meant that a few of the real testimonies were inaudible. This perhaps was inevitable; the festival organisers recorded the show and live performance is always tricky to capture but the quality of the aesthetic is something to address in the future practice as participants want to see and hear their contributions.

I made the decision to include the recordings of the original interviews quite late in the making process and although this did not affect all those contributing - some enjoyed listening back to this part - it did stimulate a conversation on how participants experience verbatim theatre they have contributed to:

"Because I was involved in it, and I was trying to pick out things that I remember hearing, or I remember speaking with Emma and Laura as well and… It was that kind of first splice when I couldn't hear the recording and it was something that I said about George, no it wasn't even about George, it was about children, or being looked after. But it felt like because it was spliced that I kind of went "Oh no! That's not what I meant. I didn't say that." So, I think once I was into it, it didn't feel like that at all. But it was that first one that made me prickly. I sort of let it go, but I was waiting for another one and never got it again." (Lisi, 2019)

This participant had participated in the group interview, a one-on-one interview, the workshop, had commented on the working script and performed the texts of others for the show. They had engaged throughout, yet the repositioning of texts still made them feel uneasy. Discussing the ethical philosophy of Løgstrup, Amanda Stuart Fisher argues that

it is the relationships of trust and responsibility that bind us to others and that determine the basis of our existence, requiring us to respond with care. Ethical experience emerges as a result of this relational existence and from an acknowledgment that such relationships are structured around an axis of power and trust. (2017)

I had not shown them the final script and used the original interviews as a means of authenticating the veracity of the work. The development of an ethical loop necessitates a level of care throughout the entire process and although Lisi stated "I sort of let it go," future performance experiments should be performed to the participants, giving them a chance to respond and edit before the work is performed in public.

Practice 2. Conclusion.

Utilising the ethical considerations outlined in chapter one, I set to establish a participative model incorporating specific touchpoints across the making stage, so participants could contribute to and be updated with the adaptation process. As Prendergast and Saxton state 'the intention of applied theatre is to give people a sense of agency and voice' (2015:282). Asking participants to contribute and perform, should they wish to, increased their agency in the creative process adding to a shared learning process. I shared my stories alongside others and argue that the dialogue established shifted the dynamic of the original interviews as we

listened, responded and were empathetic to one another. The interviews are the source material for the performance and the shift from a detached observer with set questions to a responsive contributor in conversation with others inevitably deepened the exchange. The participative model allows contributors to experiment with the fictionalisation of their words, as they performed and comment on the reworked script. Showing how the content is re-shaped, how the stories are blended helped participants understand the purpose of the enquiry.

Utilising autobiographical content enhanced the experiment with the indecidable as I was able to layer my experiences onto those of my participants. Stephenson notes "when encountering an autobiographical storyteller, there is a strong impression that we are meeting the person herself" (2017:27). By layering multiple and divergent narratives together, the persona of Gill appears fragmentary and incoherent. The contradictory narrative problematises the stability of Gill as an authentic autobiographical subject and as a reliable author-creator.

Practice Documentation 3.

Is It Different Now?
The digital performance was performed on the 12th May 2022.

Please click on the link to apply for access to the recording of the digital performance.
https://doi.org/10.5518/1498

Practice 3. *Is It Different Now?*

The third performance experiment *Is It Different Now?* was created to address the following research questions.

1. How can the unreliable narrator or indecidability be utilized to expose the artist's strategies of communicating notions of the 'real'?

2. In what ways can the power dynamic between participant and artist be rebalanced by making fictive verbatim performance?

The aim of the practice was to extend and develop the participative model established during the 2nd practice and to continue to experiment with an indecidable aesthetic. I began the research and development phase of the project in February 2022 conducting a series of interviews between March-April. I transcribed the interviews and assembled a working script in April. I began rehearsing with Anna and Jason (the digital operator) in late April with an online performance on 12th May 2022.

Is It Different Now?

The participatory methods that informed the second performance experiment *Everybody Always Tells the Truth* were refined for the final performance experiment. To address the imbalance of the power dynamic, participants were invited to contribute during the interview, editing phase, pre-performance rehearsals, the performance, and to reflect after the performance event. Working with informed consent across the development of the script, the practice sought to establish an ethical loop that encourages further participation and creative experimentation. Aware that my participants live across the UK, I made the decision to create a digital performance so all participants could experience the performance as it is meant to be. This reflection will discuss and analyse the final practice *Is It Different Now?* in relation to the research questions. The analysis looks at memory, the effects of the political on the person, the unreliable narrator as a strategic and disruptive narrative device, and the development of an indecidable aesthetic. It argues that verbatim theatricalities can be disrupted by a conscious blending of voices to show the real people behind the documentary content. I argue that through creative engagement a fictive verbatim emerges and that this can reveal new truth narratives. The voice of the participant remains, but the audience hears them

differently. This mix up of the imaginary and real is reflective of our inner lives and can be a productive vehicle to confront or face troubling material.

Is It Different Now? is a digital performance about memory, time, aging and mortality. The script interweaves participants' pasts with the present, covering a range of subjects from growing up during 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland, the act of forgetting, political figures and perceptions of their agency, great aunts, and parenthood. It explores participants' memories and juxtaposes and deliberately mixes up narratives. The work utilises the unreliable narrator and develops an indecidable aesthetic with the intention to show an audience how 'truths' are constructed within theatrical forms that seek to authentically recreate the real.

Six participants were interviewed over a 6-week period in March and April 2022. Five interviewees had contributed to my previous practice, *Everybody Always tells the Truth* and *The Unsettling,* one more was approached for the purposes of this investigation. Participant feedback on previous performances prompted a shift to the research design, so this experiment could test whether the shift to the collaborative model proved to be efficacious. It made sense to have the same participants, it meant the practice could be more experimental as we had attempted the creative process before.

FIGURE 6: *Is It Different Now?* Participants and cast.

Following the same creative process as *Everybody Always Tells the Truth*, I contributed to the interviews providing autobiographical content, and the sharing aimed to uproot my testimony along with the testimony of those who collaborate with me and starts to go some way to redress the power imbalance when making fictive verbatim. As the piece would have an autobiographical element, the rationale behind the selection of interviewees was to be able to elicit stories indicative of a specific place and time. Wanting to reveal pluralities of experience, I decided to interview three participants from Northern Ireland to collect stories from the Troubles, and three from England to juxtapose these stories, enabling me to upset the chronology and the narrative (and, sometimes, to find unlikely thematic connections). I had decided that the performers of the eventual performance would be Northern Irish and English, so it made sense for the stories to reflect this.

I used oral history questions from *Read, Write, Think www.readwritethink.org* (2005) as part of my interview methodology:

> Who is the oldest person you can remember in your family from when you were a child?

> How is the world different now from when you were a child?

> What was your first job? What kinds of jobs have you had?

Beginning with these questions served two purposes: it relaxed the interviewees, as it gave them permission to speak with authority on subjective matters that only they were familiar with as opposed to political questions, which they might think demanded an answer that was exposing, or that they felt was open to challenge. The questions also extended the scope of the documentary material, opening up new thematic strands that could be juxtaposed with other subject matter when I later edited the script to develop fictive elements. Participants spoke about their families, Great Aunts, the second world war, growing up in the eighties, living in Derry during the early 70s, and their present-day circumstances. Common themes emerged in both sets of interviews such as proximity to conflict/fear, women's experience of war, family, and home environment. These questions, inviting participants to recall their pasts, often drew out funny anecdotes, some of which seemed to have been shaped and refined over time, as though they had become part of family lore:

> **Lisi:** I was telling them a story about her the other day about her teeth. When she'd go to sleep, she used to take her teeth out and put them in the pillowcase.
> **Gill:** Oh right
> **Lisi:** So, when she was in hospital, taken, she went, so Jean and me mum who looked after quite a lot went back. She's come home without her teeth. Went back to the hospital and said 'look, we've lost Doris's teeth'. So, they took her to a cupboard, and they opened the cupboard and there was just all of these teeth and she just went 'take whatever you want'. (Appendix C:131)

In 'The Performance of Memory: Drama, Reminiscence and Autobiography', Helen Nicholson postulates that:

> Conceptually, as a tricksy devil, memory contests the boundaries between truth and invention, between honesty and imagination, public knowledge and private experiences, between facts and values. (2012:63)

Nicholson asserts that memory is in flux, shifting between the past and the present, the real and the imaginary by reframing the past in the present. I'm similarly fascinated by the way that the act of telling can itself shape a memory, especially when the teller of an anecdote assumes a responsibility to make a story optimally funny (as Lisi does in the previous example) or suspenseful for their audience, or omits aspects that are too painful or revealing. Such an editorial process is an iterative process of trial and error, emphasising this and de-emphasising that, sometimes over the course of many years. I'm drawn to the dream-like quality of memory, on its unreliability. I'm interested in how these editorial acts might affect the memory itself as it is re-remembered, and later retrieved, and further refined again, in a feedback loop. Fenemore notes how others might influence our personal memories reflecting that "these might be 'real' or simply imagined memories, ones we have created for ourselves from the stories of others" (2012:15). I'm interested in the degree to which people partake in this process internally, in the absence of an audience, valorising themselves to themselves. I'm also interested in the similarities between this phenomenon and the *modus operandi* of verbatim theatre, which is – inevitably - selective in the source material it uses, editing, refining and iterating to generate a more pointed truth.

I wanted to explore this phenomenon of memory head-on with participants, by asking them to reflect on the slippery nature of memory, on their own examples of misremembering (wilful or otherwise), and how they blend and refine family stories (which gave them some insight into my research concerns, and into how this project might develop). They were asked to reflect on the following questions:

Do you intentionally misremember bits about yourself, and have you rewritten aspects of your past because they're either painful or show you in a bad light?

In what way does your imagination take part in shaping your world view?

How does time shift the way you think about the past?

Do you think your memories have been manufactured? Or changed through retelling?

My interview methodology for *The Unsettling* and *Everybody Always Tells the Truth* had not asked participants to reflect on memory itself. Gathering this material for *Is It Different Now?* provided me with a framing device – essentially a metafictional element of the script, placing the adjacent material under doubt. Memory was discussed in a variety of ways, from the notion of forgetting, wanting to forget, the construction of memory, our understanding of chronology, and bodily responses to memory. The opening to the performance is taken directly from one interview:

> **AUDIO 1**. **Emma**: my memories are very isolated, very in my house. Where I went on holiday. They are pockets dotted around as opposed to a sequence of memories that I'm able to place. And because I'm not able to place them in a sequence, because there is no cultural or pop narrative to support that, I'm unsure whether they are stories that I have decided to retell or to keep.
> **Gill**: you don't know where they are or in what order they are?
> **Anna**: yeah
> **Gill**: there's no chronology?
> **Anna**: yeah absolutely, there's no way to place them. (Appendix C:127)

As a performance maker, this line of questioning opened up opportunities to play with time and space, and to explore memory from a non-linear perspective by blending experiences of youth, adolescence, adulthood, and older women's perspectives. Asking participants to reflect on how their imagination affects how they remember specific moments helped elucidate what the performance outcome might be, by repeating a performative intention of a creative engagement with reality. Furthermore, the questions intensified the participative exchange, as participants deliberated on their own memories, how they shift, their relationship with the present and how shared memories evolve through retelling. One participant commented:

I'm very aware that we construct our memories they're not, you know, I think there's definitely memories where perhaps you're aware of stuff that has happened, but they're never spoken of. But then why would we bring that up unless there's a reason to and perhaps, we let that go and, you obviously, unless there's a reason to bring something up, you're reminiscing the good stuff. You know, you're not going to be reminiscing about it unless there's a reason to, like you're intentionally setting out to right something that happened in the past or process some difficult experience. (Glenda, 2022)

Processing and retelling specific events of 'The Troubles' became central to the dramatic axis of *Is it Different Now?* and raised the stakes of the conversations. It is one thing to question an interviewee's cognitive process when they are recounting a trivial family anecdote, but quite another thing to do it when the subject matter is so freighted with sadness (which conventionally invites unquestioning reverence from the interlocutor) and arises from a context in which each side of a sectarian divide tends to hold a version of the truth as sacrosanct. Addressing difficult memories is vital "to recollect or to make sense of the past and to re-collect or create a space for the new identity formations and views of history that will be needed to move away from conflict" (Jeffers, 2016:148). But to do this – to make sense of the past and form these new views – we need to interrogate and understand how these memories are constructed.

The Troubles, a period in Northern Irish history generally understood as spanning the late 1960s to the signing of the Good Friday agreement in 1998, evokes a complex web of ethno-religious and political divisions that still permeate through society. As McKittrick and McVea (2002) argue: "The troubles can be seen as a more violent expression of existing animosities and unresolved issues of nationality, religion, power and territorial rivalry" (11). Despite the ongoing 'peace process', dissident paramilitary groups continue the violence, and sectarian conflict in other forms is a prominent feature of everyday life (Neins & Cairns, 2005:338). The Troubles are inscribed on those who lived/live through it. Discussing how the past affects the present, Paul Ricoeur argues:

how can we help but leap to the plane of collective memory and evoke the sort of hauntedness, described by historians of the present day, which stigmatizes this "past that does not pass". Hauntedness is to collective memory what hallucination is to private memory, a pathological modality of the incrustation of the past at the heart of the present. (Ricoeur, 2006:54)

I grew up during the Troubles and although its effects were often peripheral to my experience, it was nevertheless present as my friends and I navigated childhood into adolescence. Our parents shielded us from the worst of it with their generation bearing the brunt. The troubles continue to haunt communities, affecting the lives of those it touched.

The 1998 bombing of Omagh killed 29 people and maimed 220, making it the "worst single atrocity after almost 30 years of the Troubles in Northern Ireland" (BBC, 2022). I grew up in Omagh and was eighteen at the time of the bomb. I was very fortunate to be away, in Paris, on the day, and I found out what had happened by seeing a rolling news channel in a bar in the Gard Du Nord, which beamed back faces of the dead. The significance of this particular memory (Paris, the bar, the TV) was twofold: it personalised the terror, reopening my eyes to a conflict that I'd grown up in, that had become so much part of my everyday life that it was more or less contextual background. It also depersonalised the event, in a strange way; my perspective on it, and reaction to it, was disrupted, as it was a news phenomenon at an international scale. Even as I learned the news via the media, the mediatisation of what had happened began to imbue the events with another, further meaning. "We have no other choice but to see and re-see the same images of terror over and over again through their relentless circulation in the media" (Bharucha, 2014:16). Watching the rolling news shifted my understanding by emphasising its extra-ordinary nature. It shifted the frame of the event from something local/personal, happening to a specific community, to something international, and geopolitical - an act of world-wide terror. But immediately the event was cast into the churn of the 24-hour global news cycle, it was made mundane. Because there is always a bomb somewhere, or an earthquake, or a plane crash. That's what the news is, and this day was Omagh's turn. I saw other travellers glance up at the screen, then go back to what they were doing. The Troubles, for them, more or less contextual background.

I suppose I thought these things. Though perhaps the insight is retrospective, projected onto the past, to make significance and meaning from a memory of the day my hometown was bombed and 29 people were killed, and I was elsewhere. Because sometimes in Omagh conversation will turn to it and people will share their memories of the day, and as my memory of being in Paris doesn't really have the dramatic agency, the heft, of those who were in Omagh, I will out of deference listen in silence, until the moment comes when the heftier stories are finished, and I might cautiously add "how strange it was for me, being in

Paris, in the Gard du Nord, seeing it on the rolling TV news, and how that added other layers of meaning, you know?" The right moment for sharing this insight does not often arise, truth be told. I was lucky to be in Paris, but being there disenfranchised me from conversations about the most significant thing that happened to my community.

In her book *Insecurity*, Jenn Stephenson writes about theatre of the real's inability to document reality, as this is an impossibility Stephenson argues for a self-reflexive practice that mediates this uncertainty. Utilising Garde and Mumford's claim that "these states encourage new and unstable modes of perceiving self, other, and representations" (2013:164), Stephenson adopts their term "productive insecurity" applying it as her central concept as she analyses a range of verbatim, site specific and immersive performances. She discusses a range of theatre performances that oscillate between the actual and the fictional claiming that "these performances in the theatre of the real genre thematise that ontological indecidability, betraying our trust in the mechanisms of theatricality" (2017:4). *Is It Different Now?* develops an aesthetic of indecidability to highlight the co-existence of the real and the fictional within memory and within verbatim theatre. I argue that the interplay between the imaginary and reality can help groups relook at the real, it can assist how we process and come to terms with things whether they be troubling or joyful.

The compositional strategies employed for *Is It Different Now?* were designed to answer the following question:

> 2. How can the unreliable narrator or indecidability be utilized to expose the artist's strategies of communicating notions of the 'real'?

Is it Different Now? is a digital performance that allowed the actors to share an online space. The development of technology during the COVID19 pandemic created operationally easier and cheaper ways to make online performance. Anna and I had worked with Paul Sermon on his 'Telepresence stages' (2021) to create an online performance and this experience persuaded me to create another. Telepresence stage "identifies new and creative ways for actors, dancers and other performing arts professionals to rehearse and interact together in shared online spaces and to produce collaborative live performances from remote sites" (Sermon, 2021). Paul explained how he could layer designated performance spaces onto the screen and, likening it to a cardboard toy theatre, he was able to play with scale and create an

illusion of interaction.

FIGURE 7. Telepresence Stage. Pigeon Rehearsal.

The technology employed for *Is It Different Now?* was not as sophisticated as the Vmix programme that Paul uses. I chose to use Zoom as by 2022 its platform had developed ways to blend different performing spaces onto one screen and although the resolution is not as good as Vmix, it is easier to operate. *Is It Different Now?* has two stages within the same frame, one that Anna and I inhabit and another, the TV stage.

FIGURE 7: *Is It Different Now?* digital stage.

As another stage, the TV could play videos and show images. Walls and divides feature in the background along with a large desk. As the digital stage is a fictional space, a number of technologies are employed to give the impression that the words and stories used are authentic and from the real world. The performers wear in-ear monitors so they can repeat the words verbatim, this is a technique employed by verbatim practitioners Alecky Blythe and Roslyn Oades. *Is It Different Now?* starts by playing an extract from an original interview and finishes with another at (20 minutes 37 seconds). Both recordings convey that other people have contributed to the making process. There are two aural cues when a digital voice announces, 'Recording in progress' (1 minute 24 seconds) and 'Recording stopped' (21 minutes 54 seconds) which are designed to remind audiences of the original interview.

On two occasions the technical devices are used to aid the development of an indecidable aesthetic. Firstly, Anna receives a text (3 minutes 34 seconds), and secondly, the characters appear to break out of the script to check that the camera is working (12 min 30 seconds):

> Gill: I need to look and see, can I go back, that should be recording?
> Anna: is it?
> Gill: Yeah. (Appendices C:130)

Located in a performative context the restaging of original material can draw attention to the authentic claims made by the performance but can also add to the development of an indecidable aesthetic as it shifts between the fictional and the actual. Anna's text ping and protracted pause of 58 seconds that follows whilst she responds asks the audience to contemplate on its inclusion and significance to the performance. This pause was a real extract from an original interview but in performance it took on a layer of significance as it was deemed notable enough to be put on stage and thereby the text message was made strange by locating it within the theatrical construct. Similarly, by interrupting the testimony to double check on the camera reminds the audience of the illusory quality of the theatre and although the script seems realistic, in this moment they are reminded that what they were previously watching and listening to was part of a performance by actors. The episode might be read as a mishap in the performance, that the actors had failed to do part of their role, but again if it is shown on stage then the audience might easily assume that the disruption is intentional. Both examples were designed to create uncertainty.

Personal and the political

> Memory also blurs the boundaries between the public and collective and the private and autobiographical. It has performative qualities which enable us to shape, affirm or rewrite identity in relation to the past and the future. (Nicholson 2012:63)

I wanted '*Is It Different Now?*' to address these tensions and contradictions, and I made a dramaturgical decision to balance the personal verbatim interviews alongside broader political contexts. The script would re-present the memories of women, and a TV screen behind would show a combination of culturally popular, political images or story signifiers that were indicative of the seventies, eighties and nineties. I chose images that would counteract the tone of the narrative or illuminate what was to come as a way to add to the indecidable aesthetic. For example, stories relating to paramilitary activity were juxtaposed with a cartoon frame from the Aristocats. The recurring story about British soldiers, children, wenches, Bill Clintons and Great Aunts being invited in for tea was juxtaposed with images of Omagh taken before and after the bomb. As the scripted text 'is made strange' the audience are invited to relook at the image from different angles and to reflect on it, with the intention of asking the audience to consider how the political and the personal coalesce. The Brechtian distancing technique encourages audiences to criticality engage with the material in order to understand it better. By re-presenting a familiar image and narrating an incongruous text it forces the audience to see it anew. The incongruous texts are funny which makes the viewing an uncomfortable experience as if the audience has been unsettled or tricked into laughing inappropriately.

I also looked into ways to undermine the authority of the narrators through a variety of means. In coining the unreliable narrator Wayne Booth states a narrator is "reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), unreliable when he does not" (1961:158-159). Booth asserts that the unreliable narrator is a form of irony and that it follows four steps.

1. Reader has to reject the literal meaning, identifying a disagreement between what he reads and what he knows.
2. Reader has to try out alternative interpretations or explanations.
3. Reader makes a decision about the authors knowledge or beliefs.
4. Reader chooses a new meaning or cluster of meaning with which a reader can rest

secure. (1974:11-12)

This relates to the unreliable narrator in literature, but it can still be a useful framework to discuss performance work. *Is it Different now?* introduces uncertainty to the documentary form from the start by drawing attention to the chronology of the narrative and by using scattered signifiers that relate to different sections in the narrative. It is evoked when it becomes apparent that the two performers do not consistently align with two characters. It also appears when a fragment of the script is repeated but the subject of the text (the noun) has been removed and replaced with something else. This is a technique that, as far as I can ascertain, doesn't have an established terminology in theatre or literary studies, but is something I have come to think of in my own practice as 'splicing'. At 9mins 30 secs:

> **Gill:** If you were crossing the border or something, all these **children** would be peering into your car. You'd get pulled over and get asked questions about where you were going. I don't know sometimes there were just **children** kind of poking out in a hedge.
> **Anna:** Yes, that's right Gill, there were. (Appendix C:129)

Later at (13mins 30secs):

> **Gill:** If you were crossing the border or something, all these **wenches** would be peering into your car. You'd get pulled over and get asked questions about where you were going. I don't know sometimes there were just **wenches** kind of poking out in a hedge.
> **Anna**: Yes, that's right Gill, there were. (Appendix C:130)

Again at (15mins 50secs):

> **Gill:** If you were crossing the border or something, all these **Bill Clintons** would be peering into your car. You'd get pulled over and get asked questions about where you were going. I don't know sometimes there were just **Bill Clintons** kind of poking out in a hedge.
> **Anna:** Yes, that's right Gill, there were. (Appendix C:131)

And finally, (19mins 8 secs):

> **Anna:** If you were crossing the border or something, all these **great aunts** would be peering into your car. You'd get pulled over and get asked questions about where you were going. I don't know sometimes there were just **great aunts** kind of poking out in a hedge.
> **Gill:** Yes, that's right Gill, there were. (Appendix C:132)

I have edited the original subject of the documentary text by replacing the word 'soldiers' with 'children' etc. and, in doing so, disrupt the meaning of the text. Given the Northern Irish slant to the narrative the audience member is likely to reject the "*literal meaning of the text*" and be forced to consider *"alternative explanations"* (Booth, 1974:11-12). As the audience contemplate the uncanny image of children as soldiers, it might conjure up thoughts of child soldiers in Eastern DRC or, alternatively viewed from an absurdist perspective, they might be reminded of the film *Bugsy Malone* (1976). Using children may open up metaphorical possibilities of the soldiers being childlike, inexperienced, and with little understanding of the cultural context they have been parachuted into etc. There are a few possible explanations that the audience members could reach to when trying to rationalise why soldiers have been replaced by children. In the next version, the children have been replaced by wenches and the alternative interpretations open to the audience decreases. Booth's third step to unreliability asks the reader (or audience as in the case here) to consider the knowledge/belief of the author. The changes made to the text reveal the agency of the author/artist as responsible for the subjects chosen, and the framing and editing of the documentary text; this calls into question the veracity of the other verbatim material and to whether it has all been spliced and repurposed.

Fiona Otway analyses the unreliable narrator within the documentary genre, arguing that "an unreliable narrator construct can draw attention to *how* a story is being told and *whose* perspectives are represented, ultimately problematizing the assumption of "truth" in *what* is being told in a given documentary" (Ottway, 2015:22). I use the splicing to attempt to expose the uneven power dynamic between the author and participant in documentary performance. Previous participant feedback had raised concerns that they felt mocked in *The Unsettling*. It took great faith from the contributors to willingly let me do this, to splice their words in a way that might make a sincerely shared memory seem absurd, as though I was making light of their memory. It was an act of trust and complicity, in a framework of informed consent about the nature of the performance, my proposed methodology, and my concerns as an artist. The unreliable narrator exposes the artist helping to create an indecidable aesthetic, but the practice begins and ends with the voices of the participants.

Participant response.
Participant feedback for *The Unsettling* and *EATtT* pointed to moments where dramaturgical decisions made about recontextualising the voice had left participants feeling exposed, which

pointed back to the ethical concerns of the practice-led research. Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy claims the other demands "to call me to responsibility" (1969:213) to attend the face of the other. Explaining Levinas and the interpersonal relations we have with one another, Michael Morgan states "as socially engaged human beings, each of us is called upon to be for each and every other person, to be responsive and responsible, and to act therefore out of a sense of generosity" (2016:np). Performance makers engaged in making verbatim theatre are ethically bound to the people that contribute to the theatre making process. The ethical responsibility towards those who entrust me with their stories is particularly acute as the practice disrupts those stories to create fictional verbatim. The disruptions necessitate an enhanced participatory model that enables participants to contribute and reflect throughout the performance making process. For *Is It Different Now?* participants were invited to:

1. Comment and reflect on the evolving script.
2. Comment and reflect on the completed script.
3. Record and perform fragments of the script.
4. Watch and comment on the rehearsal of the digital performance.
5. Watch the final performance and reflect on their contributions.

Arguably, establishing a feedback loop allowed for a greater degree of creativity with the verbatim material as throughout the process assurances were given on how the texts were evolving. It also meant that the participants did not feel exposed or misused by the recontextualising of their verbatim transcripts. The "soldiers kind of poking out in a hedge" came from an online interview with Cath and after watching the performance she said "I loved it, the oddness of it, it made me unsure about what was going to happen. I nearly cracked up when wenches poking out of a hedge." She went on to say "it made me think about home". Lisi had commented on her feedback for *EATtT* that it "had made me prickly", but when discussing how her words had been repurposed for *Is It Different Now?* she said.

> It felt wonderfully removed from me, however I felt very much a part of it. I enjoyed knowing that some of it was my story, about my family and people I knew. But I know that nobody would recognise that apart from myself and you. I feel like my words were disguised and framed in a way that …I didn't have to, I was unconcerned and then handed a little gift, a glimpse of me and I felt part of something without it being about me. It never felt mine, it felt for me and related to me. (2022)

She didn't feel the visceral response - 'the prickling' – after *Is it Different Now?*, but rather she felt removed from the story and unconcerned about how her words had been reused, which was echoed in responses from Emma and Irene. Lisi's comment, "It never felt mine, it felt for me and related to me," is important when considering the effectiveness of the final practice. The digital performance was created for and with a specific group, the performance resonated with those it was for, and they approved - even enjoyed - how their words had been reassembled in performance.

For some, the disruptive practices and the development of an aesthetic of indecidablity reflected the way memory re-presents itself in our imaginations and in our dreams.

> The show felt to me like an enactment of the way I experience memories of my childhood growing up in Northern Ireland, in the sense that these memories - whether evoked consciously or in dreams – are always fragmented, impressionistic, interwoven with other memories that contain similar themes or feelings. In another related sense, the show seemed to enact the way me and my friends who grew up together in Northern Ireland, and who lived through the Omagh bomb, have attempted to cope with, or process these troubling experiences, by recollecting in a way which brings together the horror and the absurdity, the traumatic and the mundane. (Glenda, 2022)

The incongruous images and fragmented texts address troubling material, but the presentation is not realistic and the playful narrative reveals the confluence of coping mechanisms – from exaggeration and humour to forgetting – that people use when processing traumatic experiences and memories. Unlike Glenda, Irene, who lived throughout the Troubles, says she has "blocked it out completely" wanting to forget about the gun fire and explosions.

Is Nothing Sacred?

My performances drew an array of different experiences and elicited divergent responses (and in some cases, contradictory responses from individuals). This speaks to the fact that people experience and process events in different ways. Verbatim performances that aim to present a coherent or singular truth to an audience – or aim to elicit a coherent or singular audience response – miss an opportunity to give due consideration or space to the heterogeneous nature of the inputs and outputs of the performance process, wherein greater insight might be found. I argue that individuals experience and process traumatic events in

fractured and contradictory manners, including humour and playfulness, and validation might be found in seeing this represented in performance.

Practice 3. Conclusion.

A key insight gleaned from *Is It Different Now?* was the ability to work with and collaborate effectively as a group. By regularly involving, seeking advice from, and showing participants how their words were being adapted, the creative process evolved into a collaborative endeavour. The political nature of stories elicited from participants heightened the risk of the project and it was important to be ethically and empathetically responsive. Working 'with' participants led to a richer process but also one that enabled greater freedom to experiment with the indecidable as those decisions were made together. Examining the indecidable led the group to consider how we navigate the real and the imaginary when we recollect the past.

CONCLUSION: THE FICTIONAL REAL.

Verbatim theatre is fraught with problems; critics point to the post-modern truth paradox (Martin, 2012; Forsyth & Megson, 2011; Tomlin, 2013), the marginalisation of marginalised subjects (Salverson, 1997; Jeffers, 2008; Wake, 2013), others argue that it is overly earnest (Roseman, 2009; Beck, 2015), or it is presented in an arena where the privileged reanimate the other in the shape of itself (Salverson, 1999; Bottoms, 2006), or it is dramatically/aesthetically static (Wake, 2020) and can be a "hyper-real bore" (Reinelt, 2011:14). As a practitioner and educator of verbatim theatre it is incumbent upon me to engage with the voice of the other, but in my process I'm trying to expose (under the guise of verbatim) how indecidability about the form's relationship to truth and fiction affects our understanding and relationship to it. Helen Nicholoson argues "fiction and reality, self and otherness are not in opposition or isolated from each other but, as narrative constructions, they are interrelated and mutually embedded" (2014:66). Fictive elements are evident in all verbatim theatre, some authors make this explicit by adopting reflexive strategies highlighting their involvement in the form. Others develop fictional characters incorporating characteristics and words of those they've interviewed safeguarding the experiences of those who have contributed. There is: participative verbatim theatre (The Verbatim Formula, 2015-ongoing), verbatim musicals, (Blythe and Cork, 2011), dance verbatim (Newson, 2008 – 2014), verbatim films, (Satter, 2023), headphone verbatim (Blythe, 2003-ongoing; Oades, 2005-ongoing), verbatim audio theatre, (Adams, 2016), the capaciousness of the form has expanded, to this I offer fictional verbatim or fictive making verbatim. Through the use of multiple narratives, this research seeks to displace the idea of a unified narrative aiming to unveil a truth:

> In much contemporary devised performance, the appropriation, reworking or redeployment of sources result in the shaking loose of both familiar meaning and habituated meaning making strategies. The refusal to proffer any straightforward, 'given' meaning is intended and political. (Heddon &Milling, 2006:206)

So, by "shaking stuff around" (Quick, 2002) and disrupting the original testimony I am trying to expose the 'habituated meaning making strategies' of verbatim theatre to the audience. By experimenting with indecidability, this practice-led research can provide new critical insight into the ways truth and fiction operate within verbatim theatre.

To conclude, I will re-examine my research questions, summarise my findings and identify key insights from the research. The research investigated ways that verbatim texts could be appropriated to make fictional performance/verbatim. The research questions are:

1. In what ways does the ethical and political emphasis of the 'real' in theatre affects the creation and realisation of fictional verbatim theatre?

2. How can the unreliable narrator or indecidability be utilized to expose the artist's strategies of communicating notions of the 'real'?

3. In what ways can the power dynamic between participant and artist be rebalanced by making fictive verbatim performance?

The practice is conducted in order to answer the questions by providing critical insight into representations of truth and fiction in verbatim theatre. The following discussion and analysis draw across the trilogy of practical experiments highlighting insights gleaned and addressing the research questions.

The Participatory Model

One of the main contributions that emerges from this practice led research was a series of performance cycles in which the involvement of the participants increased with each iteration of practice. As the investment of participants within the process increased, so did the ability to disrupt the original texts, which enhanced the creative process as well as deepening the exploration of the subject matter that could be tackled. With each performance practice, the levels of participant engagement shifted:

The Unsettling	*EATtT*	*Is It Different Now?*
Informant ————	Participant ————	Collaborator

The movement between the shift in role was originally instigated in response to the shared dissatisfaction between participants and me on ethical issues relating to *The Unsettling*. The

corresponding adjustments made to the process sparked further opportunities to converse beyond the original ethical intention, propelling the development of a collaborative process.

First practice

The objective for the creation of *The Unsettling* was to experiment and disrupt texts, so interviews were organised with the view to elicit material. However, there was insufficient consideration in the design of the interview process to the potential effects such an encounter would have on the interviewee or the researcher. The interviews were arranged, and I worked alone with the material. While the installation succeeded in its formal experiments with indecidability, it arguably represented the participants in a cold and unguarded way that discouraged an empathetic response. The creative processes were not transparent to participants, and the intention of the work was not clearly communicated. Some of the stories aired in the interview were omitted, as I deemed the material too complex - and in some cases too troubling - to decontextualise. Participants were not invited to engage with the work until after its screening, so I wasn't able to act upon feedback as the piece developed. Prendergast and Saxton state "Applied theatre takes as its first principle, "Do no harm."" (2009:25), and, keen to avoid a repeat of the misunderstanding caused by *The Unsettling* making process, I sought to establish a model of practice that attended the relational processes between me and those participating.

Second Practice

Everybody Always Tells the Truth aimed to reframe the contributor's role from informant to participant. Participatory practice asks participants to engage with the making process. The creative process must be transparent and open for participation to happen. By inviting others to contribute and influence the direction of the work it becomes a collective learning process affecting the performance outcome. Salverson advocates that artists

> bring a more deliberate attention to the dynamics within the processes and performances we create and attempt to build structures within which attention can be paid, obligation traced but not required, and meanings touched but not pinned down. (Salverson, 2001: 125)

Baim extends this to offer practical guidance to facilitators and artists making work from personal stories. He highlights that "deliberate attention" should be paid to group processes

and power relations, that consideration of this throughout the creative process can promote ethical and aesthetic decision making (2018:85).

> Facilitators therefore need to build in constant checks and balances, where participants are encouraged to ask questions, offer suggestions and, most of all, say 'no' when they are unclear or when activities feel too risky for them, or not right in some way. This is ethics in action, and ethics as praxis—something enacted in a reflexive process. (2018:87)

Working in this manner encourages the facilitator to pause, reconnect with participants as the process develops, and work together creatively. In this vein, I implemented a series of checkpoints during the research and development period at which participants were invited to comment, contribute, and edit the work as it evolved, and engage in its performance. The participative methods reminded participants about the aims of the practice – with an invitation to adapt the material, and the opportunity to raise any concerns about how their testimony had been adapted during the rehearsal/writing phase. I argue that the creation of an ethical loop - demarcated points in the making process where work is shared, critiqued, and extended - increased the participants' understanding of the research enquiry and their investment in the creative process.

Third Practice

For the third practice *Is it Different Now?,* the participative model outlined above was refined, the level of engagement deepened, and we began to collaborate on aspects of the work together. As before, it was necessary to establish an ethical loop between maker/participants, but (owing to the political subjects discussed as part of the performance), I desired an even more collaborative process, with participants able to shape and steer the creative work beyond my original conception – as the performance maker I had to relinquish a greater degree of artistic control to participants. Heddon and Milling surmise that devising theatre in community settings means participants may assume a wide variety of roles in the devising process. They might be source and resource material, or as performers in pre-existing script evolved from community research, as co- devisors or as participants in a therapeutic process (2006:136-137). For the third practice, I argue that the participants assumed all the above roles at various stages of the creative and rehearsal process. They provided the original material, performed bits of the script, contributed to editorial

discussions on whether to include specific political material, offered direction on the performance script/scenographic elements, and made notes on the delivery of specific lines in the performance. Their reflections on the final performance highlight how events are processed in different ways and that recollecting such experiences can help, for some, to develop coping mechanisms when processing difficult experiences.

From informant to collaborator

The contribution my research enquiry makes to the field of applied theatre is the development of the participative model outlined above. The movement from informants, to participants, to collaborators has enriched the creative process and evolved my understanding on how participant engagement can shape every part of the creative process. A crucial aspect about the shift between participation to collaboration is in the ability to explore a subject matter from differing perspectives and rather than create work that seeks to answer or resolve the topics raised it encourages a relational sensibility to aesthetically interrogate the multiplicity of experience.

REAL DISCOURSE

1. In what ways does the ethical and political emphasis of the 'real' in theatre affects the creation and realisation of fictional verbatim theatre?

Chapter 1 of the thesis outlines a genealogy of documentary theatre and the development of verbatim practices appearing in the UK. Mindful of Alan Filewood's assertion that there is "neither a coherent narrative nor a genealogical through-line but an assembly of experiments and local practices that produce mutually-informing connectivities" (2011:63), I aimed to interrogate some of the practices. Drawing on Paget, Auerswald and Stuart Fisher I argue that there are two distinct categories of verbatim practices: 'the communal or celebratory' and the 'political'. Further I agree with Stuart Fisher's summation that communal verbatim practices showcase the lived experiences of its participants marking its collaborative, contradictory and social narratives. The political form groups specific documentary texts around an issue that a writer assembles into a coherent narrative utilising chosen testimonies that seek to frame a narrative that 'excavates truth'.

My practice works constructively across the celebratory and political models. Each experiment was limited by the verbatim accounts of its participants and was led by the lived experiences and memories of those contributing to it, or by their narrative reconstruction of these experiences. Similar to the political model, I (the author) assembled the verbatim accounts around specific themes and issues by creating a unified piece, but its purpose was not only to excavate truth. Grouped together the practice displaces the truth enquiry evoking hesitation, unreliability and ultimately indecidability about what is being said.

I note that critical thinkers (usually from an applied theatre backgrounds such as Nicholson, 2005, 2014; Jeffers, 2012; Wake, 2020) that are writing about verbatim theatre orbit their thoughts around notions of ethical participatory processes and affectivity. Those theorists engaging with the political (working across the field of applied theatre and performance) consider the ethical exchanges between participants and audience (Jeffers,2012; Stuart Fisher, 2020; Wake, 2020), truth claims (Bottoms, 2006; Heddon, 2008; Reinelt, 2011), scepticism of the post modernism era (Martin, 2010; Tomlin, 2013) and experimentation with form (Young, 2021; Perrucci, 2018). This thesis mediates constructively across concerns of applied theatre and performance studies, and by setting up a hierarchy of theorists' concerns, I am able to productively work alongside, across and within the ideas/ debates, directly utilising them throughout my research.

Paramount to verbatim is the ethical discourse that includes an ethical obligation to the other in regards to participatory practices as well as spectatorship. Criticism received by political practices is not as prevalent in communal or testimonial theatre as audiences are framed differently, either as witnesses or they are critically alert to the subject and the contradictions of the play.

Addressing the well-rehearsed arguments on truth claims of documentary theatre, this thesis wanted to move beyond the verbatim paradox of the impossibility of witnessing the truth on stage and explore ways of engaging with the 'real' in more nuanced terms. Garde and Mumford have suggested that insecurity arising about this impossibility can be productive. Stephenson suggests it should be "embraced and fostered" (2020:231). I have extended this argument by creating and developing a practice that develops an aesthetic of indecidability. Engaging with Lehmann's indecidability, I set out to use it as a disruptive method in my practice. My original contribution to knowledge is the development of a practice that

experiments with indecidabilty about verbatim theatre's relationship to the 'real' and the fictional.

REAL DISRUPTIONS

2. How can the unreliable narrator or indecidability be utilized to expose the artist's strategies of communicating notions of the 'real'?

For Lehmann, the indecidable experience is an unsettling one which the spectator has to make sense of "by resolving whether they are watching 'aesthetic intent (that is, as fictitious) or as a real event" (Lehman, 2016:441). My practice experiments to create an aesthetic of indecidability. Hesitation and the unreliable narrator were employed to assist in this process. I have grouped together three areas that aid the development and realisation of an indecidable aesthetic: appropriated texts, layered technologies and implausible autobiography.

Appropriated texts

The process of creating fiction-making verbatim theatre depends upon the original interview and the subsequent questions and answers transcribed. So, with each performance the spoken element of the script is limited by what was said in the original interviews. The fictional throughlines and disruptions already exist in the raw texts.

To disrupt the narrative, I used a range of methods: **splicing** – where a fragment of the script is repeated but the subject of the text (the noun) has been removed and replaced with something else; **the unreliable narrator** - the practice sets out to expose the credibility of the actor narrator and the real author by layering and grouping narrative threads to create an implausible narrative; **hesitation** - drawing on Todorov's analysis on the fantastic where something uncanny is inserted into the narrative and the audience have to decide whether in this fictional world the character inhabits the event discussed is reality or an illusion; **montage** - cutting and pasting that weaves together extracts from several interviews into one text. I've included an example from my practice that I believe usefully illustrates three of these methods:

Gill: And I was just waiting for the results back for them to say 'I'm really sorry he didn't have enough oxygen to the brain.' I thought it was somebody in white with golden-ish hair, and this golden hair could have been an alien but I definitely saw something. Standing right

next to me. And I always like to think that I'd be the sort of person that wouldn't be scared. He was convulsing and the eyes were rolling it was just…. and then I started screaming. He wouldn't let, he wouldn't let go of me. He was something that was yellow and green like a sweet corn. He didn't know where he was or anything. He kept saying to me "Are you Daddy?" And I'd say "No, I'm Mummy, I'm Mummy."   (Appendix B:125)

The fragment above from '*Everybody Always Tells the Truth'* demonstrates hesitation (about an uncanny encounter, highlighted in green) and montage (the of layering three participants testimonies highlighted in yellow, green and red) which assists the narrative in creating doubt about the character 'Gill'. The creation of an implausible narrative intends to characterise Gill as an 'unreliable narrator' or actor.

Layered Technologies

Integral to verbatim theatre is the recording of original interviews. Fragments of the original interviews often appear in verbatim theatre to demonstrate to audiences the authenticity and veracity of what is being said. Heddon asserts that the contexts of such interviews are seldom revealed: "speech is lifted out of context and used within a different context" (Heddon 2008:131). Seeking to make this explicit, I used a range of sound recordings whose aim was to reveal to audiences the distance between the original texts and the reconstructed scripts. The original recording of the interviews were used in the performance, participants also performed themselves by acting out a fragment of their original interview. They also performed the verbatim texts of other participants. This was designed to increase the efficacy of the participative model as it demonstrated to the participants the process of fictionalisation, but also increased their agency within the project overall, as we creatively collaborated in developing and fictionalising the performance material.

Digital performance and video installation offered further possibilities to uproot and disrupt the illusion of the 'real'. In verbatim theatre, an actor is a vehicle to reanimate the words of others. And so, to problematise a coherent embodiment, *The Unsettling* displaced the unity of voice with body, as it grafted an actor's voice onto the body of another. There are moments when the voice and body are misaligned and there are editing cuts that aim to show the author's hand and generate uncertainty in the representation. With *Is it Different Now?* there is an apparent disjuncture between the narrative spoken and the images presented on the tv, they act as scattered signifiers evocative of particular moments in history with the aim to upset the linearity of the narratives spoken.

Implausible Autobiography

The inclusion of autobiography allows for a re-presentation of self and the performance of self for others. Heddon argues that "the binary between fictional/real is notoriously unstable in all autobiographical performance" (2008:10) and so it is a useful strategy to utilize here. I use the re-writing and theatricalization of self as another way to explore the unreliable narrator. Drawing attention to the altered memory in *Is it Different Now*, the audience are reminded that it is *my* version of events that is distorted.

> **Gill:** if you were crossing the border or something, all these army people would be peering into your car. You'd get pulled over and get asked questions about where you were going. I don't know sometimes there were just people kind of poking out in a hedge.
> **Anna:** Yes, that's right Gill, there were. (Appendix C:128)

A spliced version of the memory:

> **Gill:** if you were crossing the border or something, all these Bill Clintons would be peering into your car. You'd get pulled over and get asked questions about where you were going. I don't know sometimes there were just Bill Clintons kind of poking out in a hedge.
> **Anna:** Yes, that's right Gill, there were. (Appendix C:131)

The repetition of 'Gill' draws attention to the reworking and retelling of a memory, Anna's response shows her complicity, so as each iteration becomes more unlikely it urges the audience "to reject the literal meaning" instead choosing "a new meaning or cluster of meaning" (Booth, 1974:11-12) that they can feel secure with.

Representation and Power

> 3. In what ways can the power dynamic between participant and artist be rebalanced by making fictive verbatim performance?

Verbatim theatre is a practice that involves a theatre maker recontextualising the words of others to create performance, it is a process that Amanda Stuart Fisher argues is "constitutively appropriative" (2011:194). Drawing on the work of Emmanuel Levinas, I am reminded of the obligation towards the other where their concerns are prioritised before mine. When discussing ethics of representation Shelia Preston insists that as a theatre maker

engaging in representing another "we have a responsibility towards ensuring that the representations that are produced are made through a climate of sensitivity, dialogue, respect, and willingness for reciprocity" (2009:65). Balancing the aesthetic authorial intentions of the practice alongside the ethical participative demands required was explored in chapter 2. Tipping the scales in favour of aestheticism over process *The Unsettling* did not meet its ethical requirements privileging the form over its responsibility to the other. In response the aesthetic development of subsequent practices *Everybody Always Tells the Truth* and *Is It Different Now?* led to the development of a participative model that worked dialogically with participants in establishing an ethical loop whereby participants collaborated throughout the process by contributing to the adaptive processes of the work.

Tomlin argues that "the perspective of the artist holds the ultimate authority, both over the political conclusions of the piece itself and over the representations of the individuals involved" (Tomlin 2013:123). This seems to hold true (insofar as artists are aware of the intentions of their work) and there are numerous examples of artists who employ a range of reflexive techniques to highlight their presence in the text. Drawing upon examples of Lloyd Newson and Milo Rau, I look into ways they effectively remind the audience in *John and Reprise* of their authorial presence in assembling the performance material on stage. Resonating with concerns from applied theatre quarters Thompson highlights the asymmetry of certain relationships and how it can be an activating force (2009:165). Although those involved in the development of my practice were not from marginalised groups they are, nevertheless, participants from a range of backgrounds who are not necessarily familiar with theatre. The power dynamic is not acutely asymmetrical but it still exists as it does in all participatory practice. So, the responsibility to the other is applicable. Another important aspect to note is Nicholson's reminder that no matter what an artist's intentions are, the theatrical outcome can be perceived as "an invasive act" (2014:166) whether you are involved in the communal or the political practice of verbatim theatre. The pursuit then is to try and find ways of working generously with participants, to try to develop collaborative ways of working that can affectively and aesthetically contribute towards the performance material.

I approached the power imbalance in two ways. The first strategy was to incorporate my experiences alongside those of others. By disrupting my autobiographical memories alongside others, I consciously sought to make my role as the author explicit to the audience

but to also direct the hesitancy or uncertainty manifested in the practice towards myself rather than the mnemonic competency of those collaborating with me. The second strategy was the creation of a participative loop where participants were involved beyond the original interview. The participants were asked to contribute their thoughts on the development of the script, to perform their words, to perform the words of others and to be a part of the process of adaptation that I argue allowed a greater degree of disruption/ creative freedom as the participants were complicit in the fictionalisation of their own words. For example, in the final practice the political aspects of the work inhibited my outlook on what material could be disrupted. I spent some time agonising over the ethics of the disruption, what is permissive, risky and what could be deemed in Alcoff's words as being "arrogant, vain, unethical and politically illegitimate" (1991:6). My reluctance to disrupt the testimony was problematised by a sense of belonging to a community that I left some 20 years ago. For *Everybody Always Tells the Truth* the stories of childbirth contained traumatic aspects but they happened to me, it was the story of my first son's birth and I had no ethical reservations about disrupting it or representing it onstage. In this case, I argue that the disruptions made to the narrative are akin to the dislocating, drug addled, fragmentary remembrances of childbirth from those experiencing it, and the grouping of multiple birth stories added to a sense that this could be any woman's story or a collective of stories rather a specific testimony from a single perspective.

For *Is it Different Now?* memories came from a number of participants, but some of those experiences contribute towards a collective memory shared by many in Northern Ireland. The performance narrative focuses on the effects of a bomb, Paul Ricoeur says that traumatic events

> situated at the limits of representation, stand in the name of all the events that have left their traumatic imprint on hearts and bodies: they protest that they were and as such they demand being said, recounted, understood. (Ricoeur, 2006:498)

To reconstruct a narrative whose present is still haunted by its past demanded a concentrated approach, or bravery about the efficacy of a fiction-making verbatim. Through a collaboration by showing, repeating, questioning content, discussing the effectiveness of the narrative disruptions, my participants and I worked together to create a political and subversive script one that upset preconceived expectations of the subject matter by toying

with the plot of a parallel story but also by allowing space to address the traumatic event as well.

Endings

My practice is, in essence, about how people process moments of great significance, and how the narrative of those moments is reshaped and reframed, in the telling. I am interested in how my participants and I came to terms with events that were beyond our control, and through my verbatim research, I've discovered that - rather than being certain, clear, rational – the memories of these events were hazy, inaccurate, comical, vibrant and imaginary. Memory is unfixed; throughout the research, participants and I recollected the same events differently and were reminded of the slipperiness of our accounts, seeking assurances from one another on our remembrances of the events discussed. Forgetting is a recurrent issue throughout the practice, Paul Ricoeur discusses how it is often looked upon as a failure of the reliability of memory "experienced as an attack" but he also stresses that "we shun the specter [sic] of a memory that would never forget anything" (Ricoeur, 2006:413). Processes of forgetting unsettle the truth enquiry, and force us to rest upon a version that we may collectively nominate to speak something of, or about, the truth.

I offer this investigation that uses indecidability to reveal how the 'real' and fictional operate within verbatim theatre to theoreticians of theatre and performance makers. My fictional verbatim draws on the traditions of performance and applied theatre, while developing new ways performance-makers can ethically collaborate to disrupt verbatim texts. I have made a trilogy of performances that require its audiences to assemble meaning, reflect on memories and consider how the 'real' and the imagined coalesce. During the preparation of this work, I have developed and refined three approaches that aid disruption, and help me produce indecidable performances: appropriated texts; layered technologies; implausible autobiography.

My work combines fantastical elements, with 'real' (and often sacrosanct) verbatim material, to engender an audience response of indecidability. Moving on, researchers might wish to examine the audience reception of work that uses indecidability as a structural method. This was beyond the scope of my thesis. Performance makers may want to explore and extend one or more of the three approaches (appropriated texts, layered technologies and implausible autobiography) as a way to generate practice or to theorise on their use. I am keen to continue

to blur the imaginary with the 'real' as I argue it can help participants process and reassess unsettling experiences. Providing the space to reframe one's experience may have potential for therapeutic interventions helping participants develop awareness of how we re-write the self to process trauma. I will also endeavour to examine the political currency such work offers by extending the participatory model to engage participants from a range of backgrounds and contexts.

Fictional verbatim theatre offers participants and theatre makers opportunities to illuminate lived experience and to play with the 'real' and the fictional. I hope that this investigation highlights some of the productive methods and concerns facing fictional verbatim theatre-makers and leads to the development of new areas of research and creative practice.

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APPENDIX A.

The Unsettling **script.**

Anna: Oh no you don't understand this isn't … I don't actually have life problems (laughs). I kind of, I worry about these things, um that aren't anything, um… yeah...
No, my life is bliss..

Long Pause.

<mark>**Music introduction and titles**</mark>.

My sister senses things and she used to record everything on reels to reels. She still has all of the reels to reels. And there's just hundreds and hundreds of tapes. We used to do everything together and we worked together for a while as well.

I was saying this to somebody recently and they said they found it… they thought I was saying something very, very strange. They couldn't quite get their head around what I was saying. So I don't quite know which came first, or…. but until, I seriously think, until my mid- 20's, I don't feel like I had anything about me. I can't even begin to imagine what I had to think about, like I can't even imagine my personality. I just can't. I don't know… I felt like I was a cloud until I got to maybe mid 20's and then I started having some proper issues and having, you know…

When people my age, or when people are older than me, or however much younger than me - when they say "Oh I still feel like a kid", or "I still feel like a teenager" I'm like, "you poor fucker!". I love being my age, you know? And I love having the issues of an adult and yeah. Just imagine, imagine feeling like a teenager. To me, that's a horror, that's awful!

You know it's the hardest job in the world, I think just being a parent and looking back on family, it's just so hard. I think people don't get a true reflection of a real family. We all say what it is that we want people to hear. So there was… I was 3, so there's 4 of us, my mum actually had 5 and lost one when we were in …, what am I on about, she lost one after me so that was... So, my sister, she was a year old when I was born, a year and 5 weeks. And because I came and we were so close.. And also, after she was born mum took mastitis, which meant she couldn't feed her, so there was never really a real bond. She was feed with a bottle and possibly handed over to Aunty because as soon as I was coming along she was handed over.

Pause.

My sister didn't like it when I got married, she didn't. It was an attention thing, because I had the family and because Aunty was making the wedding dress and my sister, she has good taste she was helping me pick. We were there to measure, to do the fitting and everything. And the reel to reel was whirring away in the corner and I always remember that the evening before I punched her. I've got this horrific guilt hanging over me because I've heard myself on tape saying horrible stuff. She wore glasses as well, but she was really getting on my nerves, she was just being so … so… and I really am not that kind of person, but she was just

…on and on and on. She was saying these things to me. She said I can see a baby in your arms and then Aunty piped up and said that it was just symbolic, so I just took off her glasses, I actually literally did. I just took off her glasses like that and punched her. It was just soo… Oh…. Actually that wasn't the night before that was that week and then she said to me the night before "You will fall under a bus".

Ah… she's got a little a bit better. She's got one of those coils now that omits emotion and that makes her a bit more pleasant. She had endometriosis. It's funny (laughs) but she doesn't have a sense of humour but then to be fair she did kind of have a miserable life when she got married. Before that she had been going with a lovely fellow Chris someone and ah … he was killed in a car crash and she was very, very fond of him and if that had gone ahead, she possibly would have married him and things would have been completely different, he was fond of painting and she has a painting of a boat and a sea kind of thing in her house. Anyway, I got married and she got married quite quickly the year after. He used to hit her. And she's moody and everything but no woman asks for that.

Pause.

We were, we were the best of friends, it always, it just got too much. We've always had intermittent fights (laughs) and disagreements. When I was really little. My sister once, my sister we were once in Superdrug and she, she got me to shop lift, do you remember those little toys that used to like clip onto things and when you squeezed their backs their arms opened like so they might, and there was this little koala and my sister said I should nick that. So, I nicked it and when I left the shop the things went off and they came round, and they got me. She ran away. We broke into a bingo hall once just through an open window and this policeman found me and it was a guy who knew me, and he said oh "What are you doing here?" and I said I was lost or running away. It was really serious, and it was kind of like someone shining a light in my eyes asking me what I was doing, because I did know what I was doing but I had to play along these are the stories you don't hear because people only tell you the type of stories they want to hear. So, I went home and I felt so awful, you know the guilt I was telling you about the guilt, so I got home and I told my mum, the policeman told me that I had to tell you and my mum said "Well how the fuck would I have known if you hadn't of told me!".

 Pause.

You know the things that go through your head its quite weird, it's a very strange but it's hard to vocalise it as well to explain what I mean. When I was really, really young I used to get terrible guilt about stuff, and I used to get guilt about inanimate objects. I used to have weird guilt. But I think there's something in it, there's something there, I think that we don't know enough of our brains whether it's reading minds. It's a brain thing it's not your actual thoughts and I find that helps me.

Pause

 I don't dismiss anything I think we've got to be quite open- minded. So yeah, I think that everything can be explained but at the time it's unsettling. It's just something that makes you feel a bit off. Laughs, ooh I've gone a bit goosepimply.

Ah, my dad believed in ghosts mm... and I've had a few mystical experiences. I was quite religious growing up, and I don't know if religion goes hand in hand if you believe in ghosts a bit more, but it probably does. Am, am, but I remember we were once in the middle room and there was a knock on the door, my dad went to answer the door and he came back into the living room maybe about three seconds later and said is there somebody called Mary here? Cos there was this old man at the door asking is there a Mary there? And the length of time that he was in our lounge was seriously seconds and he went back outside to tell this guy that there was nobody here by that name and there was no one there. And we lived on a long street, in the middle of a long street and he couldn't see anyone in any direction. The thing is it's worse when it's your dad. Fair enough if it's someone telling you just a stupid story but if your dad's spooked out it's serious.

Pause

I don't go telling people, but I think it's important even when you're doing something like this because people don't tell the truth in terms of there's lots of big bits missed out.

But I still don't know I'm very much like that. My sister is used to seeing stuff but we used to share a bed and one night we both saw something. Right okay, I'll tell you what we saw. What happened was, I was lying there, and it was round about Easter. And we'd been out at a restaurant that day. Came home played mind boggle on the sofa in our pyjamas, fell asleep in what felt like the middle of the night to me. I was a kid about 10, and I saw what I thought was somebody in white with golden-ish hair, and this golden hair could have been an alien but I definitely saw something and standing right next to my bed. And I always like to think that I'd be the sort of person that wouldn't be scared but I hid under the pillows and just thumped my sister and said "Did you see that?". And she woke up and said she saw something but something different to me she said she saw something that was yellow and green go under the bed. She described it like a sweet corn. There was a tape recorder going whilst we were sleeping, yeah, so in this recording you can hear a kind of rattling or a gurgling and then you can hear me squeak.

Also, at that time I was having dreams, you know where you have dreams that you are flying and that you can see things, it was weird. And I also had this dream about a lighthouse and I was walking down a spiral kind of stairs but I don't really ever remember dreams ever any more. I don't think I. I don't think I sleep heavy enough to get into a dream and my sleeping pattern is so bad nowadays. I used to dream I think and some of the dreams I had I used to feel that they came true. I was holding something over my stomach as though I'd had an operation. You know the gauze you get on meat And I was holding something like that and it was as though I'd it was all linked up as though I'd been stolen and had an operation (laughs) or . but that's a long long time ago since now, I can't remember them now, it would be so long. I just don't I know I don't sleep heavy enough now. I very seldom dream anymore, I don't really remember my dreams anymore but funny you know my sister was talking about one that she had very recently, I don't know what it was but she says she kept dreaming this and then someone else, Peter Tracey, came to visit and he was saying what his dream was and she said my dream is exactly the same does this happen! I can't remember what the dream was you'd need to ask her. *Laughs*.
==Exit music==

APPENDIX B

Everybody Always Tells the Truth **script.**

List Audio track 1: mmmm I don't know. That's horrendous… Christ. Responsibility. Joy. It means expectations. It means m and s magazines with pictures of daffodils, baking. It means perfect pictures, twin sets. Pride, exhaustion, surprise, winging it, discovery, exploration, tests, kisses, cuddles, patience, guilt, instilling morals, family, sneaky biscuits, road trips, day trips, laughs, milk, stuff, stuff and more stuff, nappies, coffee, memories, play dates, wipes, naps, bath book bed, routines, cosiness, dirty fingernails, milk, music, porridge, Ipads, fit bits, loss of control, loss of pelvic floor muscles.

Multiple voices: Juggling, snacks, milk, sandwiches, ouchies, pouches, Paw Patrol. Emotional vulnerability. Gunt. It's like having your own heart beating outside your body, rushing all the time, sympathetic smiles, taking it in turns, doing my best. Unconditional love. Adoration. Instinctive and intense protectiveness. Overwhelming responsibility. Loss of self and freedom. On the other hand, having this beautiful, slightly deranged little creature by your side who is totally in the moment and unrestrained by social convention or self-consciousness is totally joyous!

Laura: Responsibility. Love. Sacrifice. Joy. Sadness. Guilt. Mmm. Loss of dignity. Selflessness… mmm, sleep deprivation. Worry, anxiety. (*laughs*). I always have the mental image in my mind, of like a mother polar bear and her cub on their own and that's how I imagine it.

Gill: It's that feeling that it's you, it's your job to protect that person and that, you know, at the minute it's sort of overwhelming the thought. Just of where I am in my life.
Anna: I think it's the way you've been brought up. It's what you've been exposed to and then what you've gone on to do. Why do people turn into the people they turn into?
Gill: I feel very responsible.
Anna: I used to kind of meet people, and you kind of meet people, you get on with them or you don't. You kind of go 'why are they like that?' or, "why are they so awful?" Or, misled or *not like me* more than anything. Do you know what I mean? And then you think it's the way you've been brought up. It's what you've been exposed to and then what you've gone on to do and then ... Then now what I feel I do is I meet these children, that he plays with, or you see children being brought up and you think. Because we can't all be the same, well we could be but it would just be a nightmare wouldn't it? But why do people turn into the people they turn into and then I feel very responsible because I'm in control…

Iris: **Rings the bell.**

Gill: I can be quite an old school mum. I'm not bothered about being. There's some points around the edges of like, where there is danger and things like that I'm just like "No, No No! You will be removed. You will be told off." I feel like it's quite an unpopular form of parenting. My friend was saying that her son physically attacks them.

Audio 3 Lisi original: If he did that and I couldn't do what I've always done. Then he's removed. How could you like that person? How could you like that child?

Anna: How could you like your child? So, so part of me doesn't believe that that happens. However other people say to me, but I am and he did and it's like 'Really?' You look at that person and you think well of course you didn't ask for this and you know you do get a bit of your hand at cards. That's part of the motherhood thing that's a challenge. Cos it's really hard to have a conversation without feeling like you're judged or are being judgemental, you know what I mean?

Audio 4 Emma Original: Because at the end of the day we feel that the way that we're doing it is exactly right. We need to work on these bits sure but it can turn you into some tiger mum. I'm willing to admit that I'm vulnerable and these are my flaws but if you come at me, I'm going to rip your head off.

Gill: I just managed...

Iris: *Rings the Bell*

Anna: oh.
Gill: yes.
Anna: Shall we? How long do you think it? Shall we have a go? Shall we try it?
Gill: Yeah. Crack on and then we'll see.
Anna: Well, just the thing that struck me after the birth was all dignity is gone. Not in a bad way almost in quite a liberating way. It's like why would I care about trying to maintain some appearance to the world?
Gill: that first night, they left on these enormous pads and I remember waking up in the morning, pulled back the sheet and I was just covered, covered in blood and there was this full catheter bag. It hurts sometimes, you know, if you move the wrong way you still feel a ripping sensation. It took me months before I properly examined it.

Noise of chairs and table moving.

Lisi audio track 5: It's unworldly, like an awakening, like shit this is what it is to be human, this is it and you're only fucking seeing it now. Do you know what I mean? I'd never been in hospital before and I think it was partly that and these women, these nurses were coming in and there's a real sense that you're human, your human frailty and, I don't know, your humanness. These nurses come in to tend to you whilst you gush with blood 'here pet, let me change your pad' and I'm like 'uhhhh I'm gushing with blood, this has never happened before!!What's going on?'

Laura Audio Track 6: The worst thing about a caesarean is that you get a pouch, you get like a belly pouch because they cut your muscle your abdominal muscle so many times. So, I've got a proper kangaroo pouch, which is so rank, it's so rank. No ones, ever seeing me naked ever again.

Gill: auk shut up!! (*laughs*)
Anna: (*Laughing)* seriously it's so rank. Yeah, I suppose I have a lot of stuff around the birth that was life changing. I had to go into theatre and there was, it's sort of incredible because you've got like 10 medical staff all there, like doing.. it is kind of surreal, like you're in an episode of casualty. It's sort of amazing too, almost seeing the best of human nature. These people what are their lives like? Imagine if that was your job, fucking mopping up blood and shit.

Gill: You were covered in the surgical gown with your legs up and we all had hats on, the turquoise ones, and there was a big light overhead just like what it looks like on tv. And you tried pushing, and the consultant.

Anna: She was pretty young.

Gill: Yes she was,

Anna: She made a cut

Gill: it was so bizarre to see, I didn't see the knife go in, I wasn't that end but I got a better view than you. So, she had a scalpel, it looked like a raft knife and she just went like that (stabbing motion). So it wasn't, what I just did there was a couple of slashes, so it wasn't like that, she sort of flicked at it a couple of times as though you were trying to, I don't know, like imagine if you were, she'd obviously done it a hundred times before and she just went 'phiff, phiff phiff phiff phiff'. Every time she did it, I could see the blade raising up. She was just going like that.

Anna: Almost like a butcher.

Gill: hacking.

Iris: *Rings the Bell*

Anna: That's really weird because I thought it was a delicate you know sword fighting with the really pointy one? I thought it was really graceful with one "choow'
It was a tiny craft knife with a long handle. The blade was very small, it was about 2cm long just like a craft knife and she just did a couple of flicks down with it and as she rose it was like. Imagine if you were flicking some dust off your trousers, it was really odd. That image has stayed in my mind since then and they have a bowl on the floor to catch the blood and some of the birth stuff as well. There was just blood streaming down from you running into this bowl. Do you actually want to know this stuff?

Iris: Rings the bell

Anna: Yes

Iris: Rings the bell

Gill: When I went in I had actually been in labour all night.. I kept trying to time my contractions but losing it and I was "they're quite regular now" they're like "no your fine" and I was like "right, oh okay". all that night I was "do you want to just check? It's getting quite frequent, it's quite sore now". They're were like "no, no. you're fine" I was "aw okay.. mmm. They're getting a bit more sore now". "No, no. You're okay.'

Audio 7 Glenda original: Next morning they examined me, and then the sheer fucking mental-ness of it kicked in. Now we're going to come down and read you this stuff about how you might die or how you might lose some bowel function.

Gill: And I was (*large intake of breath)* "cool, that's cool". Yeah, okay and then, then we're going to give you an epidural. So, they had me in the operating theatre on this thing and they're like "Curve your spine." and I'm like "Okay", "No you really, really need to curve". I'm like "Okay" it's "Oh fuck, just make this stop". And then they lost his heart beat twice, so that was scary shit. And they're like we're going to have to give you a general anaesthetic and I'm like "fucking knock me out! Cos I can't deal with this shit anymore." and I just thought at that stage if that's it I'm going to wake up and find out that he's died. Please,

please do knock me out because I can't deal with this right now. But then I woke up and it was like, oh my god that is the most beautiful creature in the world. And he was just there and was the most amazing thing in the world. I'm finding it hard in my current depressed state to connect with the utter joy and love that I felt then. I don't feel joy at the moment in my life.

Anna: when did you wake up?

Gill: I've no idea. I smiled for hours.

Anna: Physically there's been a change. That's hard. That's hard. And energy wise. But I think's that's about being an older mum as well. That's an error in the planning. (laughs)

Gill: there's definite down stair changes going on.

Anna: Oh, pelvic floor right now.

Gill: Coughing

Anna: Well, he went out diagonal in the end.

Gill: diagonal?

Anna: yeah

Gill: Jez

Anna: Yeah they had to forcep him. He was in the right position and then he just wasn't and we got rushed into theatre. We had to sign that contract.

Gill: consent form

Anna: yep

Gill: and then he came out

Anna: uh huh.

Iris: Rings the Bell

Anna: I think this child can't make any more noise if she tried!

 Gill: I was induced twice. I remember you coming in. My memory was that I went from not having anything to suddenly being in labour. I remember the pain went from nothing to intense pain.

Anna: Didn't they give you something to make you dilate and then it overshot?

Gill: Did they give me something to make me dilate and then give me the epidural? I was hysterical before that.

Anna: You weren't hysterical, you were really brave, like a woman who was having contractions and in pain but considering the fuss you make if you stub your toe you were actually very stoical about it.

Gill: I remember a woman

Anna: You were in pain. You were not writhing in agony screaming give me an epidural.

Gill: Oh I thought I was

Anna: Unless I'm remembering it wrong, but I don't think I am. I think I'd remember that. I was not,.. I didn't have any drugs in me.

Gill: That's true.

Anna: You were pretty calm. Remember there was a heart monitor on.

Gill: He was diagonal.

Anna: Yes. He was. And the heart rate monitor was slowing. They were worried that his head was being squeezed.

Gill: Crushed

Anna: And that can stop the flow of oxygen getting to the brain. I think. So, and that was because he was crowning and that.

Gill: He was in this diagonal position.

Anna: Where he was stuck. That was my understanding. So, I was trying to understand and so were you.

Gill: But I was off my face

Anna: Yes, and it was really quite stressful.

Gill: I remember the woman going through the contract, she was lovely, but it was all a bit weird. Saying that they're not liable if I die. Or if anyone died.

Anna: I think that, our stories diverge a bit here because they wheeled you off to theatre and they kept me out. And just to talk about my own side of that path for a moment so I just had to sign the form and it is very scary because its saying don't sue the nhs because you die, or your baby dies and the consultant has said I'm worried for the baby, not so much for you, so they wheel you off into theatre and they'll put you here and you can put on your scrubs and also we've done a scratch test on the baby's head. We just want to see what the oxygen levels are like and if its likely to have, been, any brain damage. So, I was left in a room to put on scrubs.

Gill: So, I was sat in this tiny room, and I was praying. I think I was crying to be honest. I was certainly really upset and emotional. It was not as though things had gone wrong, but it was like a coin had been tossed and it was in the air spinning round and there was nothing I could do as I didn't know which way it was going to land. So, by that point I knew the damage had already been done if he had had brain damage and if he didn't he didn't. And I was just waiting for the results back for them to say "I'm really sorry he didn't have enough oxygen to the brain." I thought it was somebody in white with golden-ish hair, and this golden hair could have been an alien, but I definitely saw something. Standing right next to me. And I always like to think that I'd be the sort of person that wouldn't be scared. He was convulsing and the eyes were rolling it was just…. and then I started screaming. He wouldn't let, he wouldn't let go of me. He was something that was yellow and green like a sweet corn. He didn't know where he was or anything. He kept saying to me "Are you Daddy?" And I'd say "No, I'm Mummy, I'm Mummy". He was hallucinating. So yeah, it was a bit scary a bit scary. It was horrendous, totally horrendous. And then they came in and said it was fine. So, then after that I was elated but still concerned. But, thank fuck for that. I can't think of another moment like that in my life. Just relief, it wasn't elation, nothing good had happened but there had been a terrible fear that something terrible would happen and I was relieved.

Anna: Yeah...there's just no time. There's no time to do anything. There's no time to fit it all in and it's being on it all the time. Energised all-day and then at home I have to be energised again. And all I want to do is sit on my phone and scroll through twitter but I know that's, that's really bad parenting. That's all I want to do and they're like "Play with me". I just want to die.

Gill: Yeah, that's hard. Schools a whole other world. Her best friends just dumped her.

Anna: Oh no!

Gill: Oh my god it's a whole other.

Iris: Rings the bell

Gill: She just rings the bell. That's a whole other hell. Carry on?

Anna: Yeah

Gill: That's horrible.

Anna: So how're you dealing with that?

Gill: I'm not. Trying not to think about it and encouraging her to play with other children. Cos that's the bit that scares me the most if she's exposed like that to the world. But it's also great because you're seeing who they are. Which bits are yours and which bits you know. I

know him. I know every single thing about that boy. There is nothing that he can do that will surprise me, whereas I have no idea who she is. I have no idea. I love her because she is fascinating. I'm like who are you? I love him because he's my bones. It's a different, a totally different thing.

Anna: He's already rebelling, he's already stealing from nursery. He's blaming the kid who's got special needs. So, he's already lying and stealing. We were like you've taken these from nursery, you're not allowed to, it's stealing. And he said "it's not me, it's Ben". Just deadpan and I love it. Not that he's choosing a special needs person, do you know what I mean? I don't mean that but that he's,

Audio track 8 Emma Original: it's just the lie. I don't give a fuck. Do you know what I mean? I love it.

Anna: He's like 'oh my god! What do we do?' I'm like "Ah ah, he'll be all right".
Gill: Just keep feeding him the morals. They'll come.
Anna: I know, bless him.

Audio track 9 Glenda original: Who fucking knew that this is what it is really like. Reality. And like, that all makes it sound really dark it was obviously also amazing, totally amazing but that and actually it was also liberating to go "Fuck it, who gives a fuck about anything now when this is what it's really, this is actual life. This is real. All that other shit that you thought was real is not real.

APPENDIX C

Is It Different Now? **script.**

Scene 1. TV: Test card F image.
AUDIO 1. **Emma**: my memories are very isolated, very in my house. Where I went on holiday. They are pockets dotted around as opposed to a sequence of memories that I'm able to place and because I'm not able to place them in a sequence because there is no cultural or pop narrative to support that I'm unsure whether they are stories that I have decided to retell or to keep.

Gill: You don't know where they are or in what order they are?
Anna: Yeah
Gill: There's no chronology?
Anna: Yeah absolutely, there's no way to place them. I wasn't aware that that wasn't how other people were living their life.
Gill: Where are we?
Anna: Where are we facing? My memory's not great.
Gill: Is it different now?
Anna: I don't know if it is to be honest, it just reminds me of the 80's. I see the food banks and the poverty and I suppose that's my perspective of it I see the chaos on tv, it just feels like we've gone back to the eighties, but the films aren't as good.

Scene 2. TV: False Teeth

Gill: She was in the local leisure centre with her friends. I don't know what age she was, but she was young maybe 9 or 10 or 11 but she got into the lift with these other kids who were clearly protestants.
Anna: Because they looked different?
Gill: whatever those rules were, and they made her say the alphabet so they could see how she would say the word 'h'.
Anna: or 'r'.
Gill: Ah ha. And then the lift doors opened, and she sprinted and ran away. But she was properly scared.

AUDIO 2. Audio of child saying alphabet.

Anna: I think I've still got one.
Gill: Yes, we had.
Anna: An A to Z.
Gill: Yes, what happened to the A to Z?
Anna: You don't have them, do you? Well, that will, our brains will work really differently, and it will stop people being, what's that inbuilt thing? You know, you've got a good one and I've got a bad one.
Gill: A sense of direction. I suppose I have a very... I don't really, I grew up with police carrying guns but there was nothing very real that happened to me until the bomb, I suppose.
Anna: It wouldn't have made a difference to your life as such.

Scene 3. TV: Test card F
Audio 3. Text Ping.

Anna: Oh look. (Anna receives a text, sounds of her typing a reply for about a minute).

Scene 4. TV: Omagh pre (slow fade into)

Gill: If you were crossing the border or something, all these army people would be peering into your car. You'd get pulled over and get asked questions about where you were going. I don't know sometimes there were just people kind of poking out in a hedge.
Anna: Yes, that's right Gill, there were.
Gill: And the soldiers would have done patrols of all the estates, with us there weren't so many foot patrols, but they were coming in land rovers, mainly land rovers and things. And I remember my mother she used to bring them out tea! And then eventually they'd come into our house and have a cup of tea, the soldiers. *(laughs)*. I'd very often come up to the house and the land rover would be there. There'd always be one in the land rover, they wouldn't have left it. You see opposite our house there was a layby.

Scene 5. TV: Aristocats

Anna: And on a much more personal level, she lost her dad, from a very young age I remember always knowing that her dad had been killed. And I can never really get my head around that because she was just like you and me except, she didn't have her dad anymore.
Gill: I remember mum and dad would tell us stories of one night they were driving home from somewhere and the IRA stopped the car, and there were stories about my Uncle's parents they got held hostage by the IRA and they always tell these stories in quite a flippant way, as though the IRA they're just these eejits running around in balaclavas.
Anna: but were they taken hostage?
Gill: Yes! In their own home. You know they came in and tied them up or whatever. But I'm saying this now as if it's no big deal but to me when I was told these stories it wasn't a big deal.
Anna: How long were they held hostage for?
Gill: I don't know, I don't know. It just didn't seem, I suppose it's a bit like what's that play what's that play that we studied?
Anna: Juno and the Paycock?
Gill: Shadow of a gunman.

Scene 6. TV: Test Card F

Anna: Another nice one that I did was the local re-enactment society in Huntingdon, and I used to waitress at that but that was, you were in character so you had to dress up as a wench because it was in the pre, pre you know pre, when people could do this. So, I was a wench, men would have been fighting and they're like oo oo, and they'd smack your arse.
Gill: It was the 80's.
Anna: Yeah, and you'd give them ale in big tankards. It was fantastic and then you'd get to watch the re-enactments as well. It was all at the school I went to it was all civil war that kind of thing.

Audio 4. Glenda. I'm very aware that we construct our memories they're not, you know, I think there's definitely memories where perhaps you're aware of stuff that has happened, but they're never spoken of. But then why would we bring that up unless there's a reason to and perhaps, we let that go and, you obviously, unless there's a reason to bring something up

you're reminiscing the good stuff. You know, you're not going to be reminiscing about it unless there's a reason to, like you're intentionally setting out to right something that happened in the past or process some difficult experience.

Scene 7. TV: Bill Clinton

Anna: So, there's perceptions and memories. It's hard because I have certain memories, but my brother and sister don't remember them. When I'm saying the memories of the poverty and the bleh bleh bleh, they challenge that, but they weren't around if that makes sense. They were babies and kids at that point. So those are the memories I choose cos that suits my narrative.

Gill: Hopefully I'm getting a bit better, maybe cos I'm a bit older but I'm not going to go no, no, no I'm right and other people kind of go oh 'shut up'. Maybe I'm wrong but accepting that your memory might be very different to mine at the same point. You know and I think that when people have had an upset as well that, because the joyous ones when you go "No, no, no, no that didn't happen" but when it's not, when it's kind of engrained or when you've been in grief or upset people are like this is how I remember it so you're holding onto this in your body.

Anna: There is one story about the cat that Iris remembers completely different to me and it causes huge arguments even though I found a video of it and she still doesn't believe me about, it's just some stupid thing about the cat looking at her whilst she's in the paddling pool in the old house.

Audio 5: Iris And I say "Where's the cat?" and she say's "It's dead." and I say "It's not dead, it's sitting next to you and looking at you." and she looks at him and she goes "A bit dead". So anyway, she's convinced it happened when her cousins were there and "They said it, not me" and I've got this video that kind of to me, to my mind, proves but to her mind the video proves what she is saying. It's very disturbing.

Scene 8. TV: Omagh post

Gill: if you were crossing the border or something, all these children would be peering into your car. You'd get pulled over and get asked questions about where you were going. I don't know sometimes there were just children kind of poking out in a hedge.
Anna: Yes, that's right Gill, there were.
Gill: And the children would have done patrols of all the estates, with us there weren't so many foot patrols, but they were coming in land rovers, mainly land rovers and things. And I remember my mother she used to bring them out tea! And then eventually they'd come into our house and have a cup of tea, the children. *(laughs)*. I'd very often come up to the house and the land rover would be there. There'd always be a child in the land rover, they wouldn't have left it. You see opposite our house there was a layby.

Scene 9. Test card F

 AUDIO 6 Lisi: Do you remember the body on the beach of the young boy. I was about 6 months pregnant when that happened and it just really, it really drilled into my head, and I remember just doing all these collections for Syria and folding clothes and driving around the place and you know. I felt like so connected, on a human level to just giving birth on a

fucking boat or in a tent. I was just, the privilege I felt of being in that hospital and then he was sick afterwards as you know, so we were in and out and we just, people were like "Oh it must be awful" and we were just so privileged. If you're sick you've got Alder Hey, do you know what I mean?

Scene 10. Scott and Charlene

Anna: I remember bill Clinton coming. And we were trying to get home, and we couldn't because all the roads were shut off.
Gill: Everyone was complaining that they weren't allowed to take an umbrella into the town because in case somebody got Hillary Clinton.
Anna: Yes.
Gill: We were told we had to keep our curtains shut because the house was opposite the hospital.
Anna: So Bill Clinton couldn't see in?

Gill: In case there was a sniper. Well, yes! *(laughs)* in case there was a sniper. They said they were going to shoot to kill.
Anna: That sounds terrible.
Gill: If they seen, if they got the impression that anything. Sniper would be aimed to go at our windows, if there was any rustling or anything that they'd, yeah, shoot to kill.
Anna: Because of Bill Clinton.

Scene 11. Test Card F

Gill: Aunty Doris, she was a dottery old lady who'd, who'd crotchet as soon as she sat down. She'd just get her knitting needles out her pockets and she's have loads of different style clothes over and then she'd have her an overall over it just on a normal day. Couldn't see, her glasses were really thick and she would shout really loudly.

Gill: I need to look and see, can I go back, that should be recording?
Anna: is it?
Gill: Yeah.
Anna: Greenie who was somebodies aunt. They live forever in my family, they literally live until they're 97-98 on my mum's side. I remember she smoked and smoked, I mean she just smoked constantly, and she had this sort of big. What's the word quoff? Qu, Quiff, I can't say the word quiffed?
Smoke machine.
Gill: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, coiffured?
Anna: Coiffured hair? She was really thin and really wiry and laughed her head off and was really expressive and I remember loving her, I remember her being really tall and in this sort of cloud of cigarette smoke and blonde hair. She was quite glam to me, even though she was old and decrepit and wizened she was glamourous.

Scene 12. Omagh bomb slow fade in and out.

Gill: If you were crossing the border or something, all these wenches would be peering into your car. You'd get pulled over and get asked questions about where you were going. I don't know sometimes there were just wenches kind of poking out in a hedge.
Anna: Yes, that's right Gill, there were.

Gill: And the wenches would have done patrols of all the estates, with us there weren't so many foot patrols, but they were coming in land rovers, mainly land rovers and things. And I remember my mother she used to bring them out tea! And then eventually they'd come into our house and have a cup of tea, the wenches. *(laughs)*. I'd very often come up to the house and the land rover would be there. There'd always be a wench in the land rover, they wouldn't have left it. You see opposite our house there was a layby.

Scene 13 TV: Video file. Smoke filling a room.

Gill: So Aunty Doris, When she'd go to sleep, she used to take her teeth out and put them in the pillow case.
Anna: Oh right
Gill: So when she was in hospital…
Anna: *(laughs)* Oh God!
Gill: taken, she went, so Jean and me mum who looked after quite a lot went back. She come home without her teeth. Went back to the hospital and said 'look, we've lost Doris's teeth'. So, they took her to a cupboard, and they opened the cupboard and there was just all of these teeth and she just went "take whatever you want".
Anna: Which ones?
Gill: There's no names on any of them. You can just literally take it.
Anna: And put them in?
Gill: And they were like "We can't just put anyone's teeth in her", "No, no."

Anna: There is one story about the cat that my mum remembers completely different to me and it causes huge arguments even though I found a video of it and she still doesn't believe me about, it's just some stupid thing about the cat looking at her whilst she's in the paddling pool in the old house.
Audio 7 Kate: And she says "Where's the cat?" and she says "It's dead." and I say "It's not dead, it's sitting next to you and looking at you." and she looks at him, and she goes "A bit dead'. So anyway, she's convinced it happened when her cousins were there and "They said it, not me." and I've got this video that kind of to me, to my mind, proves but to her mind the video proves what she is saying. It's very disturbing.

Scene 14 TV: Omagh bomb Court house angle.

Gill: If you were crossing the border or something, all these Bill Clintons would be peering into your car. You'd get pulled over and get asked questions about where you were going. I don't know sometimes there were just Bill Clintons kind of poking out in a hedge.
Anna: Yes, that's right Gill, there were.
Gill: And the Bill Clintons would have done patrols of all the estates, with us there weren't so many foot patrols, but they were coming in land rovers, mainly land rovers and things. And I remember my mother she used to bring them out tea! And then eventually they'd come into our house and have a cup of tea, the Bill Clintons. *(laughs)*. I'd very often come up to the house and the land rover would be there. There'd always be a Bill Clinton in the land rover, they wouldn't have left it. You see opposite our house there was a layby.

Scene 15 TV: Test Card F

Anna: We saw it on the front page of a newspaper in the Gare du Nord.

Gill: Yeah, and it was also on in the Irish bar, and we tried to call and the phone lines were all down.

Anna: Oh yeah and I did hear harrowing stories of what people had seen. I think it was only then and the way that they did the warning which was deliberately designed to move people towards where the bomb was that then made you more like. It was very excessive; it was a deliberative act. I hadn't really, well there had been a bomb before out near our old house and that had been a bus load of soldiers. And I suppose I know it's wrong, but you sort of accepted in Northern Ireland that they were targets and I suppose because you sign up for the armed forces in the knowledge that, not that you'll be attacked by paramilitaries, but that you are at some level of risk. But the targeting of innocent civilians doing it in such a way that you will have maximum bloodshed was I suppose was that sense of a sinister calculated threat. It is actual terror. You saw the aftermath of the funeral parades day after day and then now you still see people who have been, who have had life changing injuries, mmm from the stories of people being traumatised by it so it brought it home as a real thing, but we were 18 then.

Scene 16. TV:

Audio pre- recorded Gill 8: A tester in a knicker factory. So I tested the elastic and the sowing and I was this young kid, it was when I was learning to drive so I must have been 17 and there was all these older ladies they were probably like in their 30s and 40s but I thought they were really middle aged and old and they had obviously been doing it for a very long time and they were very good but I had to tell them and send it back if they got it wrong and it was awful. I hated it but they were ever so nice, and it was M and S underwear and I got loads of freebies that hadn't been sewn very well.

Gill: Growing up in Belfast she had a totally different experience. So, like she said it was quite normal for people of her age of her generation to grow up and not meet a protestant. And the protestants she did meet when she played football, like they were the enemy.

Scene 17. TV: Omagh before.

Anna: if you were crossing the border or something, all these great aunts would be peering into your car. You'd get pulled over and get asked questions about where you were going. I don't know sometimes there were just great aunts kind of poking out in a hedge.

Gill: Yes, that's right Gill, there were.

Anna: And the great aunts would have done patrols of all the estates, with us there weren't so many foot patrols, but they were coming in land rovers, mainly land rovers and things. And I remember my mother she used to bring them out tea! And then eventually they'd come into our house and have a cup of tea, the great aunt. *(laughs)*. I'd very often come up to the house and the land rover would be there. There'd always be a great aunt in the land rover, they wouldn't have left it. You see opposite our house there was a layby.

Scene 18. TV: Participant collage

Audio 9 Gill. Anna mimes the words: Brick Walls were built, and big boulders were actually put down to stop you from going down to different parts of the town. The army would have done that so that if people had been putting a bomb, so that they wouldn't have been able to go back up. Bombs would have been put up in the main shops in the town if they could, so some of the escape routes up into the Bog Side up into Creggan some of those

would be blocked off. huge big boulders and when you were going into town, I'm not sure if this was only in Belfast but I think it was probably in derry too, but I can't remember, he said, he said that

Audio 10 Irene original: main memory was the gun fire and the bombs that were going off every night. I have no memory of that at all, I think I have just blanked it out completely, but I know that they were going off all the time. And I was talking recently to a friend, Rosemary, whose daughter was in Omagh at the time the bomb went off and she said she agrees with me, that it was such a horrific experience that she has blocked it out of her mind also.

Scene 19. TV: Test Card F

Gill: You don't know where they are or in what order they are?
Anna: Yeah.
Gill: There's no chronology?
Anna: yeah absolutely, there's no way to place them. I wasn't aware that that wasn't how other people were living their life.
Gill: Where are we?
Anna: Where are we facing? My memory's not great.
Gill: Is it different now?
Anna: I don't know if it is to be honest, it just reminds me of the 80's, but the films aren't as good.