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# **Playwriting and Participation: Textual Strategies Towards Audience Co-Authorship in Performance**

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**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

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## **Abstract**

To date, there has been a lack of critical attention on the role of the playwright in participatory performance. This thesis addresses this lacuna by exploring how textual strategies can be employed to facilitate audience co-authorship in performance. In so doing, this research investigates how playwriting can navigate both a “fixed” script and an “open” space for interaction in which the audience are placed and recognise themselves as co-authors. A key interest is exploring if, and how, a model of co-authorship that is crafted by the playwright can engender an awareness of relationality amongst the audience. By focusing on the intersection between new writing and participatory performance practices this thesis extends knowledge of the aesthetics, ethics, and politics of audience co-authorship, in addition to furthering our understanding of what a performance text can be and do.

The methodology is multi-modal, employing playwriting practice, analysis of existing scholarship on participatory performance, and a study of theoretical concepts that support my enquiry. In Part One, I explore how participation in performance has been understood, with a particular focus on practice in the UK and Europe. I introduce key theoretical concepts, namely relationality, vulnerability, and affect, to support my enquiry into the political and ethical effects of co-authoring in performance. Part Two comprises two new co-authored works, “The Universe in the Flat”, a work for young audiences, and “Being with Raven”, a work for adults. These original works are accompanied by Critical Reflections in which I detail the process of writing and sharing the plays. In Part Three, I explore how care ethics and an aesthetics of care can guide the process of creating a co-authored performance which draws attention to ontological relationality. I argue that co-authorship calls for an interplay between the social and the aesthetic, and that the principles of care can offer guidance on how to create a responsive creative framework in which the audience recognises their contributions as valued artistic material. I demonstrate how, in a co-authored model, a dramaturgy of care can draw attention to the reciprocal ways in which artist and audience share in the making of the world of the performance.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	5
Declaration of Originality .....	7
Introduction .....	8
 <b>Part One - Situating the Practice and Theory</b>	
Chapter One - The Participatory Landscape.....	25
Chapter Two - Co-Authorship: Relationality, Vulnerability, Affect .....	65
 <b>Part Two - Creative Practice</b>	
The Universe in the Flat - Version II	
Playtext .....	93
Critical Reflection .....	143
Being with Raven	
Playtext .....	170
Link to Film.....	225
Critical Reflection .....	226
 <b>Part Three - Consolidating Theory, Practice, and Findings</b>	
Chapter Three - Co-Authorship: Care, Craft, Relations.....	261

Conclusion .....	297
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## **Appendices**

Appendix One - The Universe in the Flat - Version I .....	305
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## **References**

Bibliography .....	356
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It is hard to pinpoint when the ideas for this project began to emerge, but I do know that it was following an introductory meeting with Professor Dee Heddon, who responded with encouragement and curiosity, that I began to understand how these initial thoughts could take shape as a research enquiry. I would like to thank Dee for her guidance from that very first meeting, which extended to supporting me in putting together the research proposal and then in her time as my supervisor. I would like to also thank my supervisor Professor Liz Tomlin for her always considered and thoughtful feedback, and for providing advice and inspiration throughout.

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performances. The contributions from each audience member have been essential to the formation of ideas in this thesis.

A thread that runs through this research is the assertion that “we are never writing alone”. While I wholeheartedly stand by this, there are certainly times when undertaking a PhD can feel quite solitary. I am very grateful, therefore, for my family, friends, and the various multispecies beings who have kept me company throughout this process. It is due to the support and care each of them have provided that I have been able to bring my ideas to these pages.

This work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council [grant number AH/L503915/1].

### **Declaration of Originality**

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this material presented is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degrees at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Helen Elizabeth Shutt, June 2022.

## **Introduction**

### **Thesis Aim and Enquiry**

Employing practice research, this thesis interrogates how text can be crafted to position the audience as co-authors in performance. That is, a written structure that creates space for the audience to make their own contribution to the work and for their responses to be layered within the performance and become part of the creative body of the piece. I explore how a playwright can negotiate crafting both a “fixed” script and an “open” space for interaction in which the audience are placed and recognise themselves as co-authors. This research will address a gap in existing analysis on playwriting, by focusing specifically on developing playwriting strategies towards audience participation in performance. Using practice research to demonstrate how techniques and tools within the playwright’s repertoire can be innovated to invite audience co-authorship this thesis aims to make an important contribution to the study and practice of playwriting, hitherto overlooked in discourse on participation in theatre. By focusing on the intersection between new writing and participatory performance practices, this thesis extends knowledge of the aesthetics, ethics, and politics of audience co-authorship, in addition to furthering our understanding of what a performance text can be and do. A key concern of this enquiry is exploring if particular co-authoring strategies can engender an awareness of ontological relationality amongst the audience. I propose that a cognitive and embodied experience of the self as interrelated can form the basis for understanding ethical obligations towards one another, and a co-authored performance model is one site in which this can be explored in practice.

### **Overview of Research Activity**

Building upon foundational research into the different ways in which participation in performance has been understood and practiced, I wrote two plays. The first, ‘The Universe in the Flat’, a work for children aged 9-10, was shared with audiences of primary school children at Platform Arts Centre, Easterhouse, in September 2019. The second, ‘Being with Raven’, a work for

adults, was shared with audiences at the Gilmorehill Theatre, University of Glasgow, in September 2021. The development of textual strategies to invite audience co-authorship in performance was underpinned by theories on relationality, vulnerability, and affect, as I set out in more detail below.

## **Context**

I am aware that in different cultural contexts, understandings of what it is to participate in a performance varies considerably, contingent as the notion of participation is on socially and culturally specific norms and conventions of theatre going. This thesis focuses primarily on UK and European practices. This is the context in which I have developed my own creative practice; therefore, this focus reflects the traditions in which my playwriting and theatre-going experiences are embedded. Refining the scope in this way allows for a more thorough and in-depth study of how participation and performance is understood in the context I inhabit and within which I share the work.

It was while studying for my Masters in Text and Performance at Birkbeck College (2011-2013) that I began to consider questions of spectatorship and participation in the theatre. A particular interest was how co-creation strategies might be deployed to draw attention to the “temporary community” performance inheres. Alongside, and following, my studies, I undertook a series of playwriting training programmes and began honing my craft as a writer. In 2011 I took part in the Young Writers programme at the Lyric Hammersmith, London. From 2013-2014, I was a writer on attachment with Edinburgh’s Traverse Theatre. In 2014 through Ideastap Inspires, I was selected to attend script development workshops with BBC Writersroom. Each of these programmes introduced me to the building blocks of playwriting craft, with a common thread being an emphasis on structuring plot, character motivation and dramatic action driven by conflict. The question of how a playwright might craft text to invite participation from the audience was rarely addressed, if at all. As an audience member, however, I was taking inspiration from artists such as Tim Crouch, Nassim Soleimanpour, and Hannah Jane Walker and Chris Thorpe, all of whom

experiment with text-based modalities to invite co-creation with the audience in performance. I experimented with using my playwriting craft to invite participation in works such as *Birdwatching* (shared at the RADA Festival, London, in 2016) and in a series of short plays produced during my time as a writer with Leith based collective Village Pub Theatre (2014-2017). I recognised that the development of participatory techniques was often overlooked in the practice of playwriting craft. This was evidenced in my experiences engaging in playwriting programmes in the industry but is an absence that can also be identified in scholarly discourse. Although there is extensive critical literature responding to a proliferation of participatory performance practices in a European and North American context from the twenty-first century onwards (White, 2013; Machon, 2013; Alston, 2016; Frieze, 2017; Harpin and Nicholson, 2017), there lacks a focused exploration of how playwriting techniques can be used as strategies to invite interaction. This research evolved from the desire to address this lacuna. Specifically, by employing practice research to demonstrate how tools within the playwright's repertoire might be developed with the aim of inviting participation, this research will make a significant contribution to playwriting craft. My positioning as both a playwright and a researcher means that I am able to share the learnings from this research enquiry with playwrights, through existing relationships with writing organisations including Playwright's Studio Scotland, Stellar Quines and the Traverse Theatre, as well as in academic scholarship.

By exploring how text can be used as the primary aesthetic tool to facilitate participation, this research situates the playwright centrally in the creation of work that has what Duska Radosavljevic and Cathy Turner have described as a 'porous dramaturgy', performance that 'has interactivity and/or co-creativity in its structure and seeks to create a community between audience and maker'.<sup>1</sup> To develop text-led strategies towards audience co-authorship in performance, I draw upon my experiences as a playwright and further these by applying ideas from existing scholarship on participation, including Gareth White's study of the

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<sup>1</sup> Radosavljevic, Duska. *Theatre-Making: Interplay Between Text and Performance in the 21st Century*. London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 191.

aesthetics of the invitation in audience participation and the lineage of applied theatre practices that have informed participatory performance more broadly.<sup>2</sup>

### **Theoretical Background**

Underpinning this study of co-authorship is an interest in exploring how experiences of co-authoring in performance may bring to consciousness to what, following on from Jean-Luc Nancy and Judith Butler, I describe as ontological relationality. Drawing upon Nancy's concept of 'Being Singular Plural', in which he proposes that 'being is being-with', it is only through relation to an other that one is able to formulate the singular I, I explore how a process of co-authoring can draw attention to the multiple relations at play within a performance structure and the fact that one's singular experience is always constituted of, and informed by, those with whom we co-exist.<sup>3</sup>

Nancy's relational subject has resonances with Butler's work on vulnerability and her call for radical equality which, she argues, may only be realized through the avowal of the self as an always inter-dependent being.<sup>4</sup> These theoretical frameworks provide a foundation for my exploration of how a process of making-with may draw attention to the experience of being-with and vice versa. I argue a co-authored performance model can offer a site in which new political imaginaries, which centre the always-already relational subject, can be experienced on both cognitive and embodied levels. I look to Sara Ahmed's work on emotionality and affect to explore how the circulation of feelings within a performance framework can heighten our awareness of the relations within which we co-exist.<sup>5</sup> Affect, after all, is relational - the emotional, embodied, and automatic sensations that occur in response to something or someone else. I explore how it is not just the case that emotions arise through, and in relation, but that in turn this process make us more aware of those relations. These ideas

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<sup>2</sup> White, Gareth. *Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation*. London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Being Singular Plural*. Translated by Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne, Stanford University Press, 2000, 30.

<sup>4</sup> Butler, Judith. *The Force of Non-Violence*. London, Verso, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh University Press, 2004.

support my arguments for the wider political potentialities of this project as I suggest that by heightening awareness of being-with and making-with, we may experience that we all share in the making of the world and therefore all share in the capacity to make it differently.

Over the course of this study, the values and practices of care ethics emerge as guiding principles on how to develop a performance framework with reciprocity embedded into the structure. Drawing upon James Thompson's proposal of an 'aesthetics of care' I consider the interplay between craft and relations at different phases of the process of developing a co-authored work, and consequently conclude that caring values such as attentiveness, sensitivity, and responsivity can crucially inform the extent to which audience members recognise themselves as co-authors in performance.<sup>6</sup> In this way I suggest that, making-with, being-with, and caring-with can work together in a mutually affirming triad.

## **Methodology**

### **An Interplay Between Theory and Practice**

My methodology is multi-modal, bringing together playwriting practice, analysis of existing scholarship on participatory performance, and a theoretical study of key concepts including relationality, vulnerability, and affect, in a dialogic process that aligns with Robin Nelson's definition of praxis, in which 'theory and practice are imbricated'.<sup>7</sup> The overarching questions in this enquiry emerged from my experience of writing for performance, and a desire to explore how text might be deployed in a manner that facilitates co-creation with the audience. This was something I had experimented with as a practitioner and playwright, yet, as Nelson argues, there is a significant shift between creating work as a practitioner and practice research. For me, like Nelson, a key

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<sup>6</sup> Thompson, James. 'Towards an Aesthetics of Care.' *Performing Care: New Perspectives on Socially Engaged Performance*, edited by Amanda Stuart Fisher and James Thompson, Manchester University Press, 2020, pp. 36-48.

<sup>7</sup> Nelson, Robin editor. *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 20.

distinction in that shift is the mutually generative interplay between theory and practice, which yields new insights. Nelson cites Barbara Bolt to support his conception of how we might understand the relationship between theory and practice in a practice research project as a 'double articulation between theory and practice, whereby theory emerges from a reflexive practice at the same time as practice is informed by theory'.<sup>8</sup>

In this thesis, then, theory and practice are embedded within one another. Theoretical concepts have informed and shaped the lines of enquiry that drive the practice, while, in turn, the tacit understandings gained through the process of "doing" creative practice leads to new insights which allow me to respond to, and develop, the critical framework with more nuance, affording a perspective on the theories I draw from that I would not otherwise have access to. The process is iterative and cyclical. In this way, the method allows for a symbiosis between what Nelson identifies as different types of knowledge. Developing creative practice, I draw in large part on 'experiential, haptic knowing', an embodied knowledge that has become instinctive through experience.<sup>9</sup> Through the study of conceptual frameworks, I gain 'cognitive, propositional knowledge'. Then, through documented critical reflection I weave the two together, allowing access to a third mode of understanding which sees the 'tacit made explicit' through a process of reflexivity and negotiating these different modes of knowing.<sup>10</sup> In this thesis, therefore, in addition to chapters grounded in theory, and performance texts, there are critical reflections on my practice which more explicitly address the negotiation between the two modalities and the knowledge this generates.

This mutually generative relationship between practice and theory not only informed the findings in this project but is also evident in the choices I made in the presentation of this thesis. From the early stages of developing the creative

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<sup>8</sup> Bolt, Barbara. 'A Performative Paradigm for the Creative Arts?' *Working Papers in Art and Design*, vol. 5, 2008, unpaginated.

[http://sitem.herts.ac.uk/artdes\\_research/papers/wpades/vol5/bbfull.html](http://sitem.herts.ac.uk/artdes_research/papers/wpades/vol5/bbfull.html), PG#.

<sup>9</sup> Nelson, 37.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

practice Ursula K Le Guin's essay 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction' inspired my approach to dramaturgical structure.<sup>11</sup> Le Guin proposes a move away from the 'hero story' of the hunter, which is predicated on conflict and follows a linear 'spear shaped' narrative. Instead, she calls for a 'container' shaped structure reflective of how the 'gatherer' situates 'seeds' beside one another 'in a particular, powerful relation.'<sup>12</sup> She invites a more cyclical approach to storytelling and structure, in contrast to one characterised by an 'arrow or spear, starting *here* and going straight *there* and THOK! hitting its mark'.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, when developing the plays, instead of thinking about plot and structure in terms of one hero's journey I explored a dramaturgical approach in which characters sit beside one another, entangled in each other's lives, and audience members are invited into a process of gathering, and sharing, their own ideas about them. In both form and content there is an emphasis on the cyclical and processual as characters, objects and motifs are revisited and reappraised through the duration of the performance. Whilst initially I drew upon Le Guin's ideas explicitly when developing the plays, in a way that supports Nelson's assertion that practice and theory become imbricated, this approach also informed choices I made when structuring the theoretical chapters. Instead of offering the 'spear driven' argumentative through-line more characteristic of discursive scholarly models, I situate the theories that I gather throughout the process of this enquiry beside one another, suggesting the resonances they have. Concepts introduced in the early chapters are revisited later on with the new insights gained from the process of doing practice. Le Guin writes 'it is a human thing to do to put something you want, because it's useful...into a bag, or a basket...and then take it home with you, later on you take it out ...share it or store it up for Winter'.<sup>14</sup> This, I would suggest, accurately reflects the manner in which ideas that are 'stored' early in the process are returned to at different junctures in the theoretical chapters. I reassess their use, and re-position their relevance to my enquiry, with the findings gained through the experience of creative practice. In this way the structuring choices made in these theoretical

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<sup>11</sup> Le Guin, Ursula K. 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction.' *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin, Grove Press, 1989, pp. 165-170.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

chapters reflect the iterative process I employed in the project. In the organisation and articulation of the thesis, I endeavour to offer a form which is representative of the methodology.

### **Foundational Reading and Introduction to Theoretical Concepts**

In the early phases of this project, I conducted research into existing practices and discourse on participation in performance. This supported the formulation of lines of enquiry that I then respond to with creative practice. In addition to locating my work in a genealogy of existing practices and influences, this phase of foundational reading led to the analysis of key terms and concepts in this thesis. For example, theories on relationality and vulnerability allowed for a refinement and clarification of instinctive ideas I had about communality or “togetherness” in participatory performance. In this way, this ‘cognitive and propositional’ knowledge acted as a mobilising force for the creative practice.<sup>15</sup> This methodological approach supports Nelson’s conviction that ‘creativity arises in the frisson of encounter between different approaches to research or knowledge paradigms’.<sup>16</sup> Time spent questioning, with more depth and rigour, what I understood by participation or co-creation, propelled the development of new creative strategies. A more considered understanding of these terms reconfigured how I used and experienced familiar playwriting and artistic devices, allowing me to explore them anew in the interests of furthering the central enquiries of this thesis.

### **‘The Universe in the Flat’ - A Co-Authored Work for Young Audiences**

The reasoning behind creating a work for young audiences was the recognition, supported by the foundational research I undertook in the project’s early stages, that many established participatory devices were initially developed in contexts for younger audiences, most notably within the British Theatre in Education movement. Consequently, it seemed to be a germane way to begin my own investigation into playwriting and participatory performance techniques. To

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<sup>15</sup> Nelson, 37.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

support the development of this work, I partnered with Matt Addicott, theatre director and the (then) Community Engagement Programmer for Platform Arts Centre, Easterhouse. Matt had extensive experience in making work for young audiences and in developing participatory arts, and, in his role at Platform, had strong relationships with primary schools and teachers in the area. In October 2018 we created a series of “story-making” workshops for primary school students. In each workshop we looked at different devices towards collective storytelling, offering the framework of a narrative that participants were then invited to “fill” and develop together. We delivered these at an Easterhouse primary school; eight workshops were conducted with 6-7 year olds and two with 9-10 year olds. This was an opportunity for me to work alongside an experienced practitioner, spend time with young students and to experiment with co-creating devices. The learnings from these workshops then informed my playwriting practice as I created ideas for a script and began to craft an “open” text to be co-authored with young audiences.

In May 2019, I spent a week with Matt practically exploring the textual strategies I had developed, experimenting with the dramaturgical structure of the work and with how the offers to co-author would be presented to the audience. By the end of this week, we had the framework of Version I of ‘The Universe in the Flat’, a work for 9-10-year-olds. In August 2019 we had a further week’s research and development, this time with two performers, Isabelle Joss and Ashley Smith, both with experience in performing participatory works for young audiences. Together we experimented with the participatory devices that Matt and I had developed and rehearsed the script. At the end of this week, we staged two rehearsed readings of ‘The Universe in the Flat - Version I’ at Platform to an invited audience of P6 (9-10-year-olds) primary school students from Easterhouse. In addition to the students, these performances were attended by their teachers and my supervisors Professor Dee Heddon and Professor Liz Tomlin, all of whom provided feedback and reflections on the performance.

Taking on board these reflections, my own observations from the performance, watching the video recordings, and returning to my over-arching research questions, I redrafted 'Version I' and produced 'Version II' of 'The Universe in the Flat'. This process of redrafting, embedding the learnings from the performances, in addition to referring back to the theoretical concepts that inform this enquiry, is documented in an accompanying 'Critical Reflection'. Here, reflecting on this process of developing and editing, I draw out questions and points of learning that I took with me into the development of the second co-authored work for adults.

### **'Being with Raven' - A Co-Authored Work for Adults**

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and legal lockdowns from March 2020 onwards, the development and sharing of this work with collaborators and audiences was effected and delayed. This script, unlike 'The Universe in the Flat', was developed largely independently - rather than in a rehearsal room with a director.

In developing this new work for adults, I was able to weave in learnings on participatory devices gleaned from creating 'The Universe in the Flat'. Yet, making work for a different demographic also invited divergent lines of enquiry. I explored the extent to which vulnerability might be understood differently between adults and children, for example. I considered how a class of primary school students with pre-established relationships would experience invitations to co-create with one another differently to a group of adults, with potentially no prior relation to one another, called together in a situation of being an audience. Where writing automatically and at speed perhaps presented challenges for the younger age group, I questioned how the act of writing in relation might feel for an adult demographic. These are some strands of thought that evolved from developing 'The Universe in the Flat' and consequently shaped the process of creating 'Being with Raven'.

Following feedback on early drafts of the script from my supervisors, in June 2021 I began collaborating with director Eve Nicol to prepare for a week of script development with actors, which would culminate in a sharing of the work to a small, invited audience. Ahead of this week, Eve and I spent three days together exploring the ideas in the play and the questions guiding the research. Although our conversations did not result in significant material changes in the script, we discussed, at length, our plans for working with actors and the process and preparation for the sharing. Central to these discussions was the quality of relations we aimed to establish between the performers and our audiences. Here the Covid-19 context informed choices we made; our planning also had to be shaped around government and university regulations at the time. These legal guidelines impacted how we planned to conduct the week, the activities we could undertake, and how the space would be configured, in addition to having implications on aesthetic elements of the work. The audience and performers had to be seated at a one metre distance from one another, which restricted opportunities for partnered work. Furthermore, care needed to be taken that any objects or props used were sanitised in advance and not shared around or touched by multiple people. I reflect on the specific devices and aesthetic strategies that were impacted by these regulations in more depth in 'Being with Raven - Critical Reflection'.

Another key difference between the development of this work and 'The Universe in the Flat' was the influence that the values and practices of care ethics and James Thompson's ideas on an 'aesthetics of care' had on my thinking and approach. This is where theoretical ideas that I engaged with during the process of writing 'Being with Raven' were put into practice. Consequently, I was more attuned to the design of the preparatory and execution phases of this research project and how acts of planning can become embedded with aesthetic strategies. Again, this is something that is reflected upon more substantially in the accompanying 'Critical Reflection'.

In September 2021, Eve and I spent a week with five actors (Rosalind Sydney, Julie Wilson Nimmo, Nalini Chetty, Alison Peebles, and Sita Pieraccini) working

on the text collaboratively. Lighting and technical support was provided by Tony Sweeten. At the end of the week, we shared two performances of 'Being with Raven' to an invited audience made up of peers from the University of Glasgow and members of the theatre industry in Scotland. During this week there were some edits made to the original text, which are reflected in the submitted playtext. This final draft of 'Being with Raven' also includes the audience contributions made in the second performance, which was filmed and edited by videographer Jassy Earl. This documentation is included in the body of the thesis. As with 'The Universe in the Flat', the accompanying 'Critical Reflection' details the process of developing the work, in addition to my observations from the performances.

### **Audience Contributions**

I made the decision not to conduct a formalised post-show discussion or questionnaire as a means of gathering data on the audience members' experiences in performance. I questioned the extent to which findings from a post-show discussion might be compromised due to the demographics with which I was working. Questions of relationality and vulnerability at the heart of this enquiry might be more readily explored through the observation of how 'The Universe in the Flat' audiences of 9-10-year-olds responded and behaved during the performance rather than in a post-show conversation, for example. The 'Being with Raven' audiences were, in large part due to the Covid-19 regulations, small (11 and 16 attendees in the respective performances) and made up of friends and colleagues, many of whom were familiar with the aims of my research project. I was aware that both their relationship to me and prior understanding of the work could shape any responses given in an invited post-show discussion. Studies from performance scholars including Janelle Reinelt, (2014), Astrid Breel, (2015), and the substantial body of work on audience engagement by Matthew Reason, all indicate that meaningful qualitative audience research needs to be designed and conducted with the rigour of a social science study, working with a "disinterested" public audience

with a far larger sample than I was able to engage with.<sup>17</sup> Further, both Reinelt and Breel's work points to the value of conducting a longitudinal study, engaging with audience members both immediately after the show and at intervals in the weeks and months following the performance.<sup>18</sup> Reason draws upon William Sauter, to discuss the limitations of 'talk based' audience reception studies, querying the potential gap between what may be expressed, and what may be felt, in addition to the possible skewering of research data that can arise when audience members describe what they perceive to be expected of them.<sup>19</sup> (A risk that is arguably enhanced when the audience are familiar with, and known to, the researcher). This is something he has endeavoured to mitigate through the development of various creative methodologies including post-performance drawing and creative writing workshops.<sup>20</sup> The design and application of a thorough audience feedback methodology of this scale was beyond the scope of this research, the primary focus of which is the crafting of the textual strategies within the performance playtexts. I do recognise the value to be had from collaborating with a researcher with expertise in qualitative audience research in future projects, however, particularly to allow for a more thorough analysis of audience members' affectual experience of co-authoring.

Within the parameters of this project, for both demographics, I focused on what I was able to observe in the performance framework, and how I saw audience members relating to the performers and to one another. I do not make any claims as to what audience members felt, but instead reflect upon how they responded to the invitations to co-author, the effect of any singular contributions to the work on the piece as a whole, and if, and how, audience

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<sup>17</sup> Reinelt, Janelle. "What UK Spectators Know: Understanding How We Come to Value Theatre." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 66, no. 3, 2014, pp. 337-61; Breel, Astrid. 'Audience agency in participatory performance: a methodology for examining aesthetic experience.' *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 12 (1), 2015. pp. 368-387; Matthew Reason has published extensively, but the following examples pertain particularly to the question of creative audience research methods, Reason, Matthew, "Asking the Audience: Audience Research and the Experience of Theatre," in *Audiencing: The Work of the Spectator in Live Performance* (About Performance, issue 10), ed. Laura Ginters and Gay McAuley (Sydney: Department of Performance Studies, University of Sydney, 2010); Reason, Matthew, 'Writing the Embodied Experience: Ekphrastic and Creative Writing as Audience Research', *Critical Stages* 7. n.p. 2012

<sup>18</sup> Reinelt; Breel.

<sup>19</sup> Reason, 'Asking the Audience'.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

members related, and responded to, one another. My own reflections and observations from the performance are further aided by the video documentation, which allowed me to revisit them after the event from a different viewpoint.

In both ‘The Universe in the Flat’ and ‘Being with Raven’ audiences are invited to write contributions over the course of the performance. In both performances, audiences were invited to take their notebooks home with them, or they could leave them behind and I would preserve them for documentation. Where audience members left behind their written contributions and ideas from the performance, I have reflected upon them, adding an extra layer to my analysis of the co-authoring that took place in different guises during the performance.

### **Consolidating Learnings**

Following this period of creative practice and critical reflection, a final phase on the methodology involved synthesising the theory and practice, revisiting the questions that initiated the project with new insights gained from the process of making and reflecting upon the work. In this instance, scholarship on performing care offers a framework through which I articulate my findings and position the contribution that this research has made in the context identified at the outset of the project. I explore how the values and practices of care can guide the process of developing and sharing a co-authored performance model that draws attention to ontological relationality. I consider how both aesthetic craft, making-with, and relations, being-with, can be shaped by the values of care in a way that mutually enhances the experience of both. This final, consolidatory phase brings the process full circle, as I return to the theories and conjectures explored in the foundational phase of research with the learnings gathered from the process of practice and reflection.

### **Reading the Thesis**

The structure of this thesis maps onto the chronology and process of the methodology, and consequently is divided into three parts.

### **Part One - Situating the Practice and Theory**

‘Part One - Situating the Practice and Theory’ comprises two chapters, whereby I conduct a study of existing practices that inform my understanding of participation and subsequently define key terms and theoretical concepts that I draw upon in the creative practice. ‘Chapter One - The Participatory Landscape’ is divided into three sections. In the first section, ‘Performance and Participation’, I review existing scholarship on participation in performance. I focus on how participation in theatre has been understood since the twentieth century, primarily in a European context with a particular bias towards the UK and use this to underpin my definition of two distinct modalities of participation: the first being an internalised interpretative mode of participating; the second being an externalised mode of participating in which material contributions are made in performance.

In the second section of this chapter, ‘Applied Theatre Practices’, I examine how applied theatre practices have influenced aesthetic innovations in participatory practices more broadly. I look at some of the key debates in applied theatre discourse and explore how these discussions and ideas could usefully inform the practice of all makers of participatory works.

In the third section, ‘Playwriting and Participation’, I look at playwriting and participation more specifically. I explore, historically, why text-based approaches might have been neglected in discourse on participation. I look at the work of artists who, I would argue, use playwriting as a means to invite co-creation with the audience, noting points of overlap and points of divergence with the aims of my practice. I use this contextual study to inform my own definition of co-authorship in the context of this thesis and outline my reasons for defining the mode of participation I develop in this way.

In 'Chapter Two - Co-Authorship: Relationality, Vulnerability, Affect' I introduce some of the theoretical concepts that have informed my thinking on relationality and the potential political and ethical effects of engaging in acts of co-creation in performance. I look to Jean-Luc Nancy's ideas on the self *as* relation, exploring the duality of being at once unique, singular, and simultaneously contingent on a plurality of relations, and explore how an awareness of this might be realised in practice through a performance model that invites different modes of co-authorship. I draw upon Judith Butler's ideas on vulnerability and the necessary cognitive and embodied understanding of the inter-dependent subject as the basis for a global radical equality, suggesting a co-authored performance model might be one site in which this can be explored in practice. These ideas on the body as both vulnerable and permeable are further illuminated by Sara Ahmed's work on affect. I draw upon Ahmed's exploration of the moveability of emotions to think about how feelings may move in and through a performance in a multi-way process that draws attention to, and makes tangible, the objects and subjects we are embedded amongst.

## **Part Two - Creative Practice**

'Part Two - Creative Practice' comprises the two co-authored works and accompanying 'Critical Reflections'. 'The Universe in the Flat - Version II', is the playtext that I produced based on the learnings from delivering 'The Universe in the Flat - Version I' to audiences of primary school children. In the 'Critical Reflection' I detail the insights from these performances and how these informed the process of editing and reshaping that led to the creation of 'Version II'. ('Version I' is included as an Appendix to this thesis for reference.)

'Being with Raven' is the work for adults, shared with audiences in September 2021. The playtext includes the contributions made by audience members in the second performance. I also include recorded footage of this work, filmed and edited by Jassy Earl. In the accompanying 'Critical Reflection', I discuss the process of writing 'Being with Raven', collaborating with performers and

directors, and observations from sharing the work with an audience. I explore how care ethics and Thompson's aesthetics of care shaped the approach taken with this play, marking an evolution in my thinking from 'The Universe in the Flat'.

### **Part Three - Consolidating Theory, Practice, and Findings**

In 'Part Three - Consolidating Theory, Practice, and Findings', I bring together the insights that emerged through the process of creative practice and employ these learnings as I revisit the questions and conjecture outlined in 'Part One'. In 'Chapter Three - Co-Authorship: Care, Craft, Relations', I return to the ideas of Nancy, Butler, and Ahmed, introduced in 'Chapter Two', and articulate the resonances these concepts have with care ethics and recent scholarship on performing care. Referring to care ethicists, including Joan Tronto, Virginia Held, and Marian Barnes, I explore how the values and practices of care can guide the process of developing and sharing a co-authored performance model and, in so doing, heighten an awareness of ontological relationality. I draw upon my experiences creating and sharing 'The Universe in the Flat' and 'Being with Raven' to articulate and evidence my propositions. I argue that the principles of care, and an aesthetics of care, can offer an ethical and practical framework to guide the process of playwriting towards participation. I also consider how the acts of care that the creator of a participatory performance may demonstrate towards collaborators and audiences can become part of the aesthetic material of the work. In this way, I suggest both the aesthetic and the relational are entwined.

In the 'Conclusion', I put outline the principles of playwriting and co-authorship that I have developed over the course of this research. I suggest that questions of care that are foregrounded in contemporary discourse on applied theatre processes could enrich participatory performance in other contexts also, arguing that caring values can guide the management of the social and aesthetic in a co-authored performance.

## **Part One - Situating the Practice and Theory**

### **Chapter One - The Participatory Landscape**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I examine key critical debates in the field of participatory performance and examples of artists and practitioners who are innovators of this form. In so doing, I draw out particular lines of enquiry and modes of artistic experimentation to which my own practice responds. This background and contextual work allows me to position the particular mode of participation I have been developing within these existing discourses and informs the definition of “co-authorship” that I then work with throughout this study.

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, ‘Performance and Participation’, I explore the different ways in which participation in performance can be understood. Drawing upon the work of Jacques Rancière and performance scholars including Gareth White and Shannon Jackson, I identify two distinct modes of participation in performance: participation through interpretation and participation through material contribution. The second section, ‘Applied Theatre Practices’, considers how contemporary participatory performances have been informed by practices emerging from the field of applied theatre and one of its primary precursors, Theatre in Education (TIE). Understanding this background elucidates my decision to develop a work for young audiences as one of the core outputs of this research. Thirdly, in ‘Playwriting and Participation’, I home in on one of the defining characteristics of the model of performance with which I experiment: the use of playwriting craft and textual strategies to facilitate participation. I focus on specific examples of playwrights who, in different ways, seek to collaborate with the audience in performance, noting how their ideas and creative devices have informed my work, as well as ways in which my practice can be seen to deviate from these existing models. I conclude by outlining my reasons for defining the mode of participation I develop in this project as co-authorship and my reasons for describing it in this way.

## **Section One: Performance and Participation**

### **Externalised and Internalised Participation**

Throughout this thesis I make the distinction between two modes of participating and distinguish two accordant modes of co-authorship. One follows on from Gareth White's definition of 'the participation of an audience, or an audience member, in the action of a performance'.<sup>21</sup> I conceive of this as a mode of participation which sees audience members contribute materially to the performance through actions, gestures, or offering props or ideas into the space; an externalised form of participation. The other I have identified as participation through interpretation. This follows Rancière's argument that an encounter with any artwork or performance always involves an act of participation, through cerebral engagement and meaning-making, what he defines as 'active interpretation'. He writes:

[The spectator] observes, selects, compares, interprets. She links what she sees to a host of other things that she has seen on other stages, in other kinds of place. She composes her own poem with the elements of the poem before her. She participates in the performance by refashioning it in her own way.<sup>22</sup>

Throughout my practice I endeavour to explore how these two modes of participation work in a mutually affirming relationship. By paying attention to the ways these two modalities can co-exist and symbiotically inform one another, I endeavour to move away from some of the binary thinking that has typified discussions on participatory performance.

Analysis of participatory performance has historically perpetuated an oppositional understanding of "participatory" and "non-participatory" works. Anna Harpin and Helen Nicholson characterise the dichotomies that have epitomised discussions on the merits of participatory performance over non-

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<sup>21</sup> White, *Audience Participation in Theatre*, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Rancière, Jacques. *The Emancipated Spectator*. Translated by Gregory Elliott, London, Verso, 2009, 13.

participatory works as ‘active/passive, liberated/constrained, democratic/hierarchical, mobile/fixed, empowered/oppressed’, divisions that they also contest.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, as I go on to explore, Rancière’s ideas on ‘active interpretation’ respond to the ways in which he argues spectatorship in theatre has been erroneously problematised by practitioners, such as Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud, and the emancipatory claims for participation that have been overstated. Yet my appreciation of Rancière’s conceptualisation of meaning-making and interpretation as a form of participation does not preclude an interest in more overt and externalised participatory strategies. Instead, by crafting devices which endeavour to invite and blend the two modalities, I explore how participation might be experienced on a spectrum, rather than conceived in binary terms as something that you are, or you are not, doing.

### **Problematising Spectatorship**

In *The Emancipated Spectator* Rancière satirises what he argues the ‘theatre reformers’ have positioned as the ‘paradox of the spectator’:

There is no theatre without a spectator but according to the accusers, being a spectator is a bad thing for two reasons. First, viewing is the opposite of knowing: the spectator is held before an appearance in a state of ignorance about the process of production of this appearance and about the reality it conceals. Second, it is the opposite of acting: the spectator remains immobile in her seat, passive. To be a spectator is to be separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act.<sup>24</sup>

He goes on to characterise the two solutions to this paradox that have informed approaches to participation in theatre from the twentieth century onwards. The first, the ‘Brechtian response’, seeks to distance the spectator from the action on stage, instead inviting critical engagement with the performance in the manner of ‘a scientific investigator or experimenter’.<sup>25</sup> In the second solution, the ‘Artaudian approach’, any distance between spectator and performance

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<sup>23</sup> Harpin, Anna, and Helen Nicholson, editors. *Performance and Participation*. London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Rancière, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 4.

must be abolished as they become enveloped within the ‘magic circle’ of theatre. Rancière argues that ‘modern attempts to reform theatre have constantly oscillated between these two poles of distanced investigation and vital participation’.<sup>26</sup>

One of Rancière’s critiques of the ‘theatre reformers’ and the ‘paradox of the spectator’ is that spectatorship is positioned as a ‘passive condition that we should transform into activity’.<sup>27</sup> He counters this presupposition:

Being a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into activity. It is our normal situation. We also learn and teach, act and know, as spectators who all the time link what we see to what we have seen and said, done and dreamed.<sup>28</sup>

Rancière draws parallels between theatre spectatorship and pedagogy, likening the theatre-maker who has a vision or knowledge to transmit to the spectator, thus transporting them from a place of ignorance to a position of knowledge, to the teacher who imparts wisdom upon the ‘ignoramus’ scholar. He challenges this conception, arguing that far from the spectator/scholar needing to be relieved from ignorance by a teacher, or theatre-maker, with more knowledge, they learn through having the distance to encounter signs, objects, performance, on their own terms.

The human animal learns everything in the same way as it initially learnt its mother tongue, as it learnt to venture into the forest of things and signs surrounding it [...]by observing and comparing one thing with another, a sign with a fact, a sign with another sign.<sup>29</sup>

For Rancière there is no cause and effect between the theatre-maker’s vision and the spectators’ experiences. Instead, spectatorship is always an active, interpretative act as the spectator ‘composes a poem from the poem before her’.<sup>30</sup> He argues that the collective power or democratic potential of theatre

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<sup>26</sup> Rancière, 5.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 13.

does not stem from the fact that it is inherently communitarian, or in the emancipatory effects of any participatory devices. Instead, what equalises all spectators is the shared capacity to encounter the work on their own terms and produce their own interpretation of it.<sup>31</sup>

I draw upon Rancière's ideas on interpretation and meaning-making as a form of participation. I share his conviction that each person encountering an artwork has the capacity to respond uniquely and to produce their own distinct reading of it. A significant aspect of my practice has been experimenting with how a model of performance can be crafted to allow singular interpretation to flourish and to offer opportunities for different readings - the different 'poems' composed by the spectators - to be shared and sit beside one another. This is one way in which the internalised and externalised forms of participation I describe above work in tandem with one another. Yet, as I explore in more detail in 'Chapter Two - Co-Authorship: Relationality, Vulnerability, Affect', my practice, underpinned by Jean-Luc Nancy's ontology of 'being singular plural', examines how the singular experience or encounter with an artwork is contingent on, and embedded within, a plurality of relations. I would suggest this is a significant point of deviation from Rancière's thinking. For me, his human being 'in the forest of things' cuts quite a solitary figure, as Rancière emphasises that the humans are 'separate from one another [...] plot[ting] their own path'.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, for him, the focus is on the relation the spectator has with the 'object' of art, which becomes a mediating third point of reference between the creator and the spectator. This allows for the distance that is necessary, in his view, to become an active interpreter or translator. Rather than conceiving of interpretation as an autonomous act, I pay attention to how encountering a performance is a relational experience. Through practice, I ask how the experience of being alongside fellow spectators, and awareness of ourselves in relation to others, informs the interpretation at work.

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<sup>31</sup> Rancière, 17.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 17.

While, like Rancière, I do not propose an ontological community to the theatre experience, I do seek to explore how the materialities of theatre might be worked with to engender an awareness of relationality which in turn affects the interpretative act. I argue that the capacity of the spectator to 'compose their own poem' or produce their own interpretation of a performance, is always contingent on multiple relations. These two phenomena occur simultaneously - the singular response to work occurring in, and through, relations with others. The relations we might identify within the performance, informing the interpretation created, are multiple: spectator to performer, spectator to writer, spectator to objects, but also spectator to spectator. How a mode of participation, in this research project posited as a model of co-authorship, might be crafted to draw attention to this relationality is a central enquiry.

### **Intellectual Equality, Material Inequality**

I share Rancière's conviction that each spectator in a performance creates their own unique response to it. I also support the idea that on an intellectual level at least, all spectators are equal in their capacity to do so. By this, I would agree that no prior knowledge or intelligence is necessary to be able to form an interpretation of a performance, there is no hidden meaning that some minds are more equipped to uncover, and no reading produced could be deemed as more correct than another. I would suggest, however, that there can be a danger of neglecting to acknowledge the very real material and structural inequalities that will impact each person's capacity to engage with a performance. Such inequities may only be heightened or perpetuated within the framework of the performance if the theatre-maker is not attuned or sensitive to them. This means thinking beyond the abstracted and theoretical stance that we are all able to encounter an artwork and produce unique and equally valid interpretations of it and considering the practical factors that will impinge upon the capacity of different individuals to do so. Structural inequalities that people live in, and amongst, in the day-to-day remain with them and will inform how they engage with the performance. In this way, you cannot separate the way in which one internally engages with a work and the physical, material conditions in which they do so. A belief in the equal and shared capacity to interpret a

performance also needs to be underpinned by a sensitive consideration of difference and a framework that is responsive enough to accommodate a variety of needs and experiences. For Shannon Jackson, these ‘supporting infrastructures’ can become a significant element of the artwork itself, rather than an organisational duty to fulfil.<sup>33</sup> This is a proposition that James Thompson also puts forward in his model of an ‘aesthetics of care’, in which he proposes a practice guided by the values of sensitivity, reciprocity, and attunement to difference in the preparation, execution, and exhibition of performance.<sup>34</sup> I revisit this in more detail in ‘Chapter Three- Co-Authorship: Care, Craft, Relations’.

### **Participation as Material Contribution**

Rancière’s ‘active interpretation’ is a mode of participation that takes place in a spectator’s encounter with any performance. Yet there are those models of performance that distinguish themselves from others and can be seen to invite participation in a way that is experienced as atypical. For White, what is distinct about the modes of performances that he defines as participatory is that they see the audience member transformed into artistic material:

There are procedures through which participation is invited, and there are processes through which the performances invited become meaningful in a way that is different to other performances. These processes make the audience member into material that is used to compose the performance: an artistic medium.<sup>35</sup>

He argues this transformation occurs as a consequence of procedures developed by the maker of a participatory performance. For White, the creators of participatory performance craft the gaps for the audience member to step into, but also plan and guide what happens in response to the contributions from the audience. Throughout this study, I draw upon the significance of responsivity and reciprocity in a model of participatory work and explore how these emerge as

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<sup>33</sup> Jackson, Shannon. *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*. London, Routledge, 2011, 39.

<sup>34</sup> Thompson, ‘Aesthetics of Care’, 36-48.

<sup>35</sup> White, *Audience Participation in Theatre*, 9.

defining qualities in the strategies towards co-authorship that I develop. Ultimately, drawing upon White's ideas, I argue that a significant aspect of crafting a participatory work is about facilitating relations between the artists and audience and that these relations may in turn become part of the aesthetic of the performance.

### **Sociality of Theatre**

Following on from White, we might consider that a participatory work, in addition to more typically expected elements of a performance such as text, voice, choreographed movement, and scenography, has within its media the perspective of, and contribution from, the audience. In this way the makers of participatory performance are drawing attention to a fundamental feature of theatre - the presence of an audience - and explore the ways in which this can be crafted as another artistic tool in their repertoire. As Helen Freshwater writes, 'the presence of an audience is central to the definition of theatre'.<sup>36</sup> Therefore those theatre-makers that consciously reimagine how they relate to the audience so that they become part of the aesthetic material of the piece are not, I would suggest, adding something, but rather are taking an essential quality of the theatre event and drawing attention to it. A participatory work is, then, heightening or emphasising this constitutive feature of a performance.

For Shannon Jackson, this is about unravelling the notion that one can clearly demarcate a hard boundary where the 'art' stops, and the 'real world' begins. There is, she writes, a symbiosis that always occurs between the unfolding of a performance and the social context in which it sits. Rather than attempting to disavow this interdependency, she asks how artists might draw upon it as a potent creative material for exploring experiences of relations and social systems.

What if, for instance, the formal parameters of the form include the audience relation, casting such inter-subjective exchange, not as the

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<sup>36</sup> Freshwater, Helen. *Theatre and Audience*. London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 1.

extraneous context that surrounds it, but as the material of performance itself?<sup>37</sup>

Performance both activates and depends upon a relational system, a contingency that makes it a prime venue for reflecting on the social and for exposing the dependencies of convivial and expressive spheres.<sup>38</sup>

What Jackson articulates here is something that I argue in ‘Chapter Two’, the web of relations inherent in performance makes it an apposite forum for exploring ideas on relationality. However, the decision to draw attention to relations through a participatory structure does not automatically result in a work that is either interested in or successfully explores ideas around social systems. There is, as I will go on to explore, a risk of making assumptions about the inherently positive experience of a performance that foregrounds sociality or relations, which is one of the reasons why attunement to difference and responsivity emerge as key values in the practice I develop.

## Relational Aesthetics

Nicolas Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics* is an often cited, though often contested, contribution to the field of participatory work. Bourriaud, a gallery curator, was writing in response to what he identified, at the turn of the century, as ‘an upsurge of convivial, user-friendly artistic projects, festive, collective and participatory, exploring the varied potential in the relationship to the other’.<sup>39</sup> He termed this body of work ‘relational aesthetics’, described as:

Art taking as its theoretical horizon, the realm of human interactions, and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space.<sup>40</sup>

Works that he cites as examples of relational aesthetics emerged from a visual arts context and very often took place in gallery spaces. These are artworks that seek to establish intersubjective encounters and mark a move away from forms

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<sup>37</sup> S. Jackson, 14.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>39</sup> Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. Translated by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods with the participation of Mathieu Copeland, Les Presses du Réel, 2002, 61.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 14.

in which the art is a portable object, instead developing an artistic model that is responsive to, and contingent upon, its environment and audiences. The relations and interactions that arise from the situation the artist creates become the artwork.

A central enquiry of my research project is how a model of co-authorship might result in an awareness of relationality amongst the audience. Although I share Bourriaud's interest in how the experience of relationality in a crafted art event or performance can be understood as aesthetic, there are some clear points of difference in how I am employing the term. My use of "relational" reflects my interest in Jean-Luc Nancy's ontology of 'being singular plural' in which he argues that the self is always contingent on an other, expressed as 'being is being-with'.<sup>41</sup> I explore how a model of creating together, making-with, may enhance our awareness of the given condition of being-with, or being in relation to others, and vice versa. Following on from Nancy, I do not consider the condition of being-with as something one can opt in or out of, but the always already plural condition through which one is able to formulate the singular. Therefore, I do not consider co-authoring as a model that "creates" relations, but rather draws attention to those which already exist. This marks a point of divergence from Bourriaud's relational aesthetics. He writes that, 'the artistic practice resides in the *invention* of relations between consciousness'<sup>42</sup> and that '[in relational works] the artist sets his sights more and more clearly on the relations that his work will *create* among his public and on the *invention* of models of sociability'<sup>43</sup> (emphasis mine).

This affirms that Bourriaud conceptualises the artist as a creator of relations rather than heightening awareness of what is already present. I would suggest this difference is perhaps also reflective of the fact that the artists Bourriaud discusses are primarily operating in the visual arts field where, as both Sruti Bala and Claire Bishop have argued, a move towards working with people, rather than

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<sup>41</sup> Nancy, 30.

<sup>42</sup> Bourriaud, 21.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 28

objects, and artworks which invite collaboration and relating to one another is more of an exception than in theatre where people relating to one another is arguably an essential quality of the form.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, the emphasis Bourriaud makes is creating relations, whereas I am interested in becoming more aware of the multiple relations already at play in the performance context.

Bourriaud's ideas have been met with criticism, perhaps most notably from Bishop, who argues that he fails to analyse the quality of relations that arise in a model of relational aesthetics:

The quality of the relationships in 'relational aesthetics' are never examined or called into question [...] If relational art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?<sup>45</sup>

She contends that Bourriaud suggests that the relations cultivated will be inherently democratic, that he focuses on a communal situation in which participants experience a sense of togetherness based on shared interest or experience. For Bishop, what these models fail to do, however, is acknowledge difference or allow space for tensions or dissensus to play out. She draws upon Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's ideas on democracy and antagonism to suggest a 'democratic society is one in which relations of conflict are sustained, not erased'.<sup>46</sup> For Bishop, Bourriaud falsely equates the social with the democratic and the model of relational aesthetics he describes is reliant on consensus, with participants joyfully complying rather than exploring the democratic potential of disruption and negotiating the tensions arising from difference.

In the works I craft, I endeavour to make space for, and draw attention to, the varying subjective responses that might arise within the relational experience of

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<sup>44</sup> Bala, Sruti. *The Gestures of Participatory Art*. Manchester University Press, 2018, 14.

<sup>44</sup> Bishop, Claire. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London, Verso, 2012, 2.

<sup>45</sup> Bishop, Claire. 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics.' *October*, vol. 110, 2004, pp. 51-79, 65.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

the co-authored performance. The audience are not addressed as one homogenous body. Instead, I craft strategies which invite singular readings of the work to be heard and sit alongside one another. By crafting a model that allows different interpretations of the work to co-exist, the aim is to invite a reflection on how the same written framework can elicit divergent responses. This is one way in which, rather than making assumptions about how co-authoring might feel for participants, I aim to allow for a plurality of experiences to be recognised.

### **Immersive Theatre**

There are some parallels with the claims, and subsequent critiques, made for relational aesthetics, and “immersive theatre”, a subset of participatory performance that came to critical attention in the early 2000s and has been the subject of works by Machon (2013), Alston (2016), and Frieze (2017). Artists whose work may fall under this banner range from Punchdrunk, Coney, Louise Ann Wilson, and Adrian Howells; creators of performances which look, and feel, very different, yet Machon argues all exhibit three central tenets:

These are, firstly, the involvement of the audience, ensuring that the function and experience of the audience evolves according to the methodologies of immersive practice. Secondly, within the experience, there is a prioritisation of the sensual world that is unique to each immersive event. Thirdly, the significance of space and place is a key concern of such practice.<sup>47</sup>

Machon describes immersive theatre as a practice in which audience participants find themselves inhabiting ‘the playing area’ with the performers, often situated in a ‘totally new environment’ that seems to exist outside of the everyday and may operate under its own rules.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Machon, Josephine. *Immersive Theatres*. London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p 70.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

Although Machon draws upon *Relational Aesthetics* to suggest that immersive theatre may ‘prove Bourriaud’s theory that relational artistic activity can become a democratic means for positive societal and communal interaction’,<sup>49</sup> this is an assertion that some critics have questioned. Adam Alston argues that, while many immersive performances may make claims for building connection or community, the experience in performance can be distinctly non-relational, instead rewarding what he has termed ‘productive participation’ at the expense of any inter-related co-creation.<sup>50</sup> Alston ‘recognises productive participation as a feature of immersive theatre aesthetics that stems from demands that are often made of audiences - demands to make more, do more, feel more, and to feel more intensely’.<sup>51</sup> He situates the emergence of the immersive form in the context of an expanding ‘experience economy’ in which the neoliberal consumer’s capacity to take risks and savvily negotiate the performance terrain is rewarded with an exhilarating ‘one of a kind’ experience. Here he builds upon work by Jen Harvie, who in *Fair Play* examines how audience participants are resourced in contemporary participatory performances.<sup>52</sup> Like Alston, James Frieze explores the imperative in many immersive works for the individual participant to generate a unique experience, the implication being that if the performance does not deliver as promised, responsibility falls to the audience for not having engaged correctly.<sup>53</sup>

I would not characterise the model of co-authoring I develop in this study as falling under the immersive moniker, nor would it fit within Machon’s definitions of the form. Indeed, this is a mode of theatre in which, she argues, ‘the writer is not the starting point’.<sup>54</sup> Given that, in recent years, much of the critical attention on participatory work has been focused on immersive forms, this might in some way illuminate my conviction (explored in more depth in section three

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<sup>49</sup> Machon, 121.

<sup>50</sup> Alston, Adam. ‘The Promise of Experience: Immersive Theatre in the Experience Economy.’ *Reframing Immersive Theatre: The Politics and Pragmatics of Participatory Performance*, edited by James Frieze, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 243-264.

<sup>51</sup> Adam Alston, *Beyond Immersive Theatre*. London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Harvie, Jen. *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism*. London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

<sup>53</sup> James Frieze, editor. *Reframing Immersive Theatre: The Politics and Pragmatics of Participatory Performance*. London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 1-27.

<sup>54</sup> Machon, 42.

of this chapter) that analysis of text has been somewhat absent from discourse on participatory practice. Nonetheless, I would argue that, as a maker of participatory performance, it is important to be attuned to some of the critiques that have been levied at the immersive form. Although, as I describe in my response to Bourriaud's relational aesthetics, I aim to make space for each audience member to pursue their singular response to the work I create, the model of co-authorship I craft is not one which prizes autonomy, but rather draws attention to the fact that each singular response is constituted in, and through, a web of multiple relations. Rather than focusing on the experience an audience member is able to create for themselves, I aim to use co-authorship to bring consciousness, in both form and content, to the ways in which the experience is being informed, and potentially enriched, by the situation of being in relation.

I do, however, recognise there will always be a negotiation of risk and vulnerability when inviting audience members to engage in a manner that feels exceptional to theatre-going conventions. How, as the creator of such a work, one approaches this negotiation is something I question throughout this project. This speaks to one of the central research questions and recurring themes of the study, balancing the fixed structure and stability afforded by clearly expressed terms of engagement, and the openness of a form which, as is the case with examples of the immersive form, makes an offer to 'roam', explore, and be creatively adventurous. As I discuss in the next section of this chapter, practices, and principles from applied theatre, can offer some guidance on developing strategies that foreground co-creativity and reciprocity with the audience, underpinned by the values of care ethics. This is one way, I suggest, that the creator of a participatory work may mitigate against presenting a model in which participants are left feeling confused, dislocated, or even exploited. Instead gesturing towards a performance experience which, sensitive to singular needs and preferences, invites different levels of engagement within a relational framework.

## **Section Two: Applied Theatre Practices**

## **Why Applied Theatre**

Many participatory practices can trace their lineage back to performance techniques that evolved in an applied theatre context. As I will go on to explore, a number of the creative devices that I would describe as falling under the mode of participation through material contribution emerged from innovations in this field. In the following section, I will examine how aesthetic innovations from the field of applied theatre, in addition to scholarship on the social and relational principles of applied theatre projects, have informed the development of co-authorship in this research project. Although my work is not applied theatre, there is much in my research that responds to ideas and discourse in this field.

There are three aspects that I explore. Firstly, the influence of the Theatre in Education (TIE) movement on the development of aesthetic techniques towards participation in performance. I explore how a number of participatory performance practices evolved from work initially developed for young audiences and, accordingly, I felt creating a work for children a fitting way to begin my own experimentation with developing participatory strategies. Secondly, my interest in models of co-creation is driven by a desire to explore experiences of ontological relationality. Consequently, I draw upon ideas on interdependency, affect, and, in the later stages of the project, care. These are all concepts that proliferate in recent discourse on applied theatre, and contributions made from practitioners such as James Thompson and Helen Nicholson have informed my thinking and understanding of how these terms might be understood when crafting a participatory performance. Thirdly, I consider how the skills associated with applied theatre facilitation - responsivity, attunement, attentiveness - informed the aesthetic of the plays I developed and became core components of the artistic body of the performance. In this way, I suggest that there are learnings from the field of applied theatre that can enrich the work of participatory performance more broadly.

## **Applied Theatre History and Influence**

Applied theatre is a term that, Nicholson writes, has come to denote ‘forms of dramatic activity that primarily exist outside conventional mainstream theatre institutions, and which are specifically intended to benefit individuals, communities and societies’.<sup>55</sup> It can encompass a broad range of practices, including, but not limited to, ‘drama education and theatre in education, theatre in health education, theatre for development, theatre in prisons, community theatre, heritage theatre and reminiscence theatre’.<sup>56</sup> Typically, applied theatre works will place an emphasis on shared involvement in the creative process, inviting all participants to engage physically and emotionally in theatre-making. In this way, contemporary applied theatre practices have been informed by twentieth-century pedagogies and theatrical movements that employed participatory methods as a means to affect social change. Nicholson writes:

Contemporary practitioners in applied drama are indebted to their radical predecessors in twentieth-century theatre, and to pioneering educationalists who aimed to democratise processes of learning.<sup>57</sup>

These participatory techniques emerged from left-leaning values and ideals and consequently were designed to be instrumental in effecting change. In the case of the TIE movement in twentieth-century Britain, this involved the use of ‘dramatic play, improvisation and role-play as a learning medium’ to contribute to more child-centred approaches to learning.<sup>58</sup>

Tony Jackson and Chris Vine describe TIE as having its roots in Brecht’s *Lehrstücke* and Workers’ Theatre, as well as progressive education movements such as John Dewey’s ideas on student-centred learning (and later the pedagogy of Paulo Freire, and Augusto Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed*). The movement pioneered interactive techniques that would uphold these educational approaches.<sup>59</sup> The innovators of this movement were well-versed in

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<sup>55</sup> Nicholson, Helen. *Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre*. London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 2.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>59</sup> Jackson, Anthony, and Chris Vine, editors. *Learning Through Theatre: The Changing Face of Theatre in Education*. Oxon, Routledge, 2013, 4.

dramaturgical elements of performance such as script, costume, and scenography, but were experimenting with how these could be used to create a form that supports specific political and pedagogical aims.<sup>60</sup>

Today many of the devices employed by applied theatre practitioners bear resemblance to the interactive devices seen to be characteristic of earlier models of TIE. However, it does not necessarily follow that they are being utilized to achieve the same political aims that they were originally conceived to realise. As Nicholson notes: ‘applied theatre does not announce its political allegiances or educational intent as explicitly as some of its precursor forms’.<sup>61</sup> In fact, as Nicola Abraham writes, far from the radical, revolutionary spirit that drove the aims of precursors to the form, today it may be that applied theatre initiatives are employed to serve or perpetuate the political status quo.<sup>62</sup>

Although the devices might be being utilized for more ideologically diverse uses, many of the participatory techniques delivered by contemporary applied theatre artists can be traced back to this lineage. Furthermore, the influence of aesthetic developments in TIE is not limited to an applied theatre context. Liz Tomlin suggests that many participatory methods pioneered within the TIE movement were adapted by makers of theatre for young audiences who were not operating under this moniker. She details how, in the latter part of the twentieth century, when precarious funding, emphasis on subject-specific learning heralded by the introduction of the National Curriculum (1988), and the neoliberal rhetoric of post-Thatcher Britain saw a decline in the viability and popularity of TIE organisations, at the same time, there was a surge in theatre companies that created work for children, placing an emphasis on art form rather than a specific educational remit. Often distancing themselves from the socialist politics that were core to the original ethos of TIE, companies such as Catherine Wheels, Visible Fictions, and Wee Stories in Scotland would instead

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<sup>60</sup> Jackson and Vine, 6.

<sup>61</sup> Nicholson, ‘Applied Drama’, 10.

<sup>62</sup> Abraham, Nicola. ‘Applied Theatre: An Introduction.’ *The Applied Theatre Reader*, edited by Tim Prentki and Nicola Abraham, Milton, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020, pp.1-16, 5.

focus on innovations in art form and aesthetic excellence.<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, companies making works for young audiences would frequently employ participatory techniques. Although these interactive devices were not being utilized to serve the same political or pedagogical impulses of the TIE movement, they arguably were shaped by innovations in participatory techniques that the movement pioneered.

Relatedly, Tomlin argues that many techniques that were later employed by artists experimenting with participatory performance for adults were derived from contexts for young audiences initially. Participatory strategies developed in the work of companies such as Shunt, dreamthinkspeak, and Coney are, she suggests, ‘reflected, if not sometimes prefigured, in the work of the leading theatre companies for children and young people’.<sup>64</sup> Consequently, to support this project’s aim in examining how the creative tools I have developed as a playwright could be adapted and crafted to invite participation, it was my conviction that creating work with young audiences was a fitting context to begin my experimentation.

### **Applied Theatre, Affect, and Relationality**

A subject of critical debate in the field of applied theatre is the extent to which a focus on the evidenced impact on the communities that engage in participatory arts (largely in response to the requirement of funding bodies on whom such projects are reliant) has resulted in diminishing artistic quality, and less attention paid to the more experiential, and unanticipated, aspects of engaging in arts processes. A key contribution to this discussion is James Thompson’s *Performance Affects: The End of Effect* in which he argues:

Participatory theatre should focus on affect rather than effect [...]  
Working with affect awakens individuals to possibilities beyond

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<sup>63</sup> Tomlin, Liz, editor. *British Theatre Companies: 1995-2014*. London, Bloomsbury, 2015, 78-80.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

themselves without an insistence on what the experience is - what meanings should be attached.<sup>65</sup>

He argues that failure to be attuned to affect in performance, ‘bodily responses, sensations and aesthetic pleasure’, overlooks the particular potency that arises from creative engagement and play.<sup>66</sup> The irony being, he suggests, that it is often the elements that participants and practitioners alike both enjoy and feel most energised and motivated by - joy, playfulness, pleasure - that are rarely expressed as intentions of the project or acknowledged as significant consequences of the process in evaluation reports. Rather than being considered a pleasant element of the process, albeit one secondary to the “real work”, Thompson argues that these aspects of arts engagement are in fact the ‘vital affective register of participatory work’ and should be central to the purpose of applied theatre projects.<sup>67</sup> By focusing solely on the communicative and cognitive aspects of applied theatre - conveying messages, problem solving, and decision-making within a dramatic frame, we lose sight of the fact that the ‘stimulation of affect is what compels the participant to thought and to be engaged at every level’.<sup>68</sup>

For Thompson, models of applied theatre that are primarily focused on ‘interpretation, or finding meaning, [are] too often aligned with forms of extraction, exploitation and ownership’<sup>69</sup>. Consequently, there is a danger of the establishment of a ‘vertical’ relationship between facilitator and practitioner, as the former assists the latter in uncovering messages and digging for some core truth or revelation about their personal situation. Drawing upon the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Thompson suggests attention to the affective, non-hermeneutic experience of participatory performance allows for a horizontal ‘beside-ness’ to emerge which foregrounds a space for working-with participants, rather than crafting a situation about them.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Thompson, James. *Performance Affects: Applied Theatre and the End of Effect*. London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 111.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 182

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

Thompson's proposal for a methodology that centralises affect and sensory response also aligns with the aims of this project. As I explore more extensively in 'Chapter Two', I am interested in how a process of creating together may heighten an awareness of ontological relationality. I pay particular attention to the role that experiences of emotion may have in this, drawing upon Sara Ahmed's work on emotionality and affect to explore how the circulation of feelings within a performance framework may serve to heighten our awareness of the relations with which we co-exist. I explore how it is not just the case that emotions arise through, and in relation, but that in turn this process makes us more aware of those relations. This, I suggest, has implications for understanding both our ontological interdependency and subsequent ethical obligations towards one another.

Thompson's work has been influential and subsequently referenced by other practitioners in the field, notably Gareth White in his re-examination of the aesthetic in applied theatre contexts,<sup>71</sup> Katherine Low in her exploration of the glimpses or 'apertures' of possibility that might emerge in processes of co-creating,<sup>72</sup> and Paul Dwyer's call for a 'slower' model of applied theatre in which space is made to 'dwell' more deeply in the context of the project.<sup>73</sup> Each of these contributions follows a shift away from making bold claims about the effects of applied theatre and instead pay attention to the more subtle, fleeting, and sensory qualities of participatory art-making.

Helen Nicholson also calls for a move away from the emphasis on efficacy and outcome in her proposal for a 'new ontology of applied theatre as practice of

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<sup>71</sup> White, Gareth, editor. *Applied Theatre: Aesthetics*. London, Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015.

<sup>72</sup> Low, Katherine E. *Applied Theatre and Sexual Health Communication: Apertures of Possibility*. London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

<sup>73</sup> Dwyer, Paul. 'Peacebuilding performances in the aftermath of war: lessons from Bougainville.' *Critical Perspectives on Applied Theatre*, edited by Jenny Hughes and Helen Nicholson, Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 127-149.

relation'.<sup>74</sup> This marks a turn away from the social constructivist ideals which underpinned the work of Brecht and Boal, whose participatory performance models were predicated on the causal effect between theatre and social change. In this paradigm, the world is viewed as something 'out there', that one can take a step back from, critically assess, and endeavour to change, whereas Nicholson considers how we are 'embedded in a constant state of modification and reciprocity with [our] environment and one another'.<sup>75</sup> For Nicholson, the emphasis is not so much on actions taken after engaging in applied theatre projects but instead on paying attention to the potential for new and heightened experiences of relationality in the encounter itself. Similar to Thompson's call for attention to affect, this is about moving away from prioritising frameworks of cognition and understanding towards embodied and ephemeral experiences of being embedded in networks of reciprocity. Nicholson writes that this 'expansive understanding of the social might include both human and non-human inter-activity and recognise their inter-dependence'.<sup>76</sup> There is, then, an ecological element to this ontology of relationality in applied theatre with an emphasis on togetherness that does not assert the primacy of the human experience or epistemological understanding.

Like Nicholson, I am interested in drawing attention to the sociality inherent in performance to experientially explore the ontological position of being embedded in a shifting network of relations, both human and non-human. Although formally the performances I create in this study are human-centred, I address ideas of co-existence and ethical obligations to one another being inclusive of the more-than-human in the content of plays. Indeed, the call to open our eyes and imagination to the multispecies beings we may exist alongside, but which can go unnoticed, is employed as a playful gesture to inspire co-creation, particularly in the work for young audiences.

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<sup>74</sup> Nicholson, Helen. 'A Good Day Out, Applied Theatre, Relationality and Participation.' *Critical Perspectives on Applied Theatre*, edited by Jenny Hughes and Helen Nicholson, Cambridge University Press, 2016, 250.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 254.

The creative practice in this research project is informed by questions around relationality and interdependency. So, while the process through which I have created my practice perhaps does not adhere to commonly received definitions of applied theatre, there is undoubtedly an overlapping interest, and many of the developments in the field align with and have shaped the evolution of my practice. Perhaps what this points to is that models of co-creation, both within and beyond applied theatre, are potent artistic mediums for exploring these ideas. This is something I argue more extensively in ‘Chapter Two’.

### **The Art of Facilitation**

Earlier in this chapter I discuss the inherent sociality of theatre and how makers of participatory performance choose to draw attention to this constituent feature of theatre - the relationship with the audience. I argue that artists who choose to create participatory works have another aesthetic tool within their repertoire: the point of view or contribution of the audience. Following on from this, then, we might conceive that bringing this additional aesthetic component into the dramaturgy of the work subsequently calls for a different and particular set of skills to be employed. In this section, I explore how the facilitation skills employed by applied theatre artists could also be applicable to, and enhance, the practice of makers of participatory works in non-applied contexts.

In *The Applied Theatre Artist* Kay Hepplewhite focuses on the particular skills and expertise called for in applied theatre projects.<sup>77</sup> What becomes evident in her study, and from contributions from others in the field such as Michael Balfour, is that as well as expertise in the artform, the work of applied theatre calls for inter-personal attributes that see applied theatre artists able to read and respond to the specific relational dynamics at play within the community with which they are working. Balfour describes this as the ‘living interplay

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<sup>77</sup> Hepplewhite, Kay. *The Applied Theatre Artist: Responsivity and Expertise in Practice*. Newcastle, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

between the social and aesthetic instincts'.<sup>78</sup> He argues that for the applied theatre facilitator 'social impulses are entwined with the aesthetic instinct in which decisions about forms and approaches co-exist with the social climate of the group'.<sup>79</sup> In addition to drawing upon tools of their artistic craft, the applied theatre artist will be aware of, and sensitive to, the shifting dynamics within the group and, in the moment, will actively reshape the aesthetic programme of the work accordingly. Relatedly, Hepplewhite writes:

Seasoned artists tailor sophisticated experiences of performance activity and manage interpersonal exchange in the moment. We see how anticipation of activity is balanced with an ability to improvise creatively, and how aesthetic judgements are negotiated alongside awareness of ethical and political issues that underpin the social or institutional contexts.<sup>80</sup>

Both Balfour and Hepplewhite articulate the requirements for applied theatre artists to balance preparing the creative framework for the project - a structure to invite participants to engage with - while at the same time exhibiting the reflexivity and openness to adapt that framework in response to the particular needs of the specific context and to individuals involved in the project. Indeed, responsivity is the core value that underpins Hepplewhite's analysis of the craft of the applied theatre artist. This echoes Balfour's assertion that a programme of applied theatre work is a 'living interplay' that involves 'switching, aligning, integrating'.<sup>81</sup>

We might suggest that "responsivity" in live performances exists on a continuum, as even performers of non-applied and non-participatory works could argue that their performances will be shaped by the perceived audience response. Yet in both applied and other participatory models it is the 'switching' and, perhaps even more crucially, the 'integrating' of the

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<sup>78</sup> Balfour, Michael. 'The Art of Facilitation: "It's Not What You Do (It's The Way That You Do It)".' *Applied Theatre: Facilitation: Pedagogies, Practices, Resilience*, edited by Sheila Preston, London, Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2016, pp. 151-164, 161.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Hepplewhite, 4.

<sup>81</sup> Balfour, 161.

audience/participant's responses and suggestions which call for the in-the-moment skills of sensitivity and attunement that Balfour and Hepplewhite describe. What their analysis of this work reveals is how, rather than the interpersonal skills of facilitation being a supportive framework, distinct from the aesthetic elements, the two are very much enmeshed. The artistic devices presented will inform and suggest group dynamics, but in turn the particular social interactions in each project will then shape the artistic work. Negotiating this interplay is a craft in itself, which is why Balfour makes the case for conceiving of it as the '*art of facilitation*'<sup>82</sup> (emphasis mine).

There are resonances here with James Thompson's proposal of an 'aesthetics of care', in which he considers the artistry in acts of caring, in both performance and non-performance settings. He looks to the field of care ethics to offer an analysis of an aesthetics of care which, similarly to Hepplewhite's emphasis on responsiveness, is guided by values of reciprocity and attentiveness.<sup>83</sup> Although Thompson, like Hepplewhite and Balfour, is focused on applied theatre models in his study of an aesthetics of care, I would suggest that attending to 'the art of facilitation' or 'the aesthetics of care' is a valuable approach for makers of all participatory performance. A proposition that emerged through my practice, and that is explored more fully in 'Chapter Three', is that the audience members' experiences of participation, how meaningful they felt their creative contributions were to the overall body of work, is contingent on how the relationship is managed. I would suggest this is where the 'art of facilitation' comes into play. This speaks to what Gareth White describes as 'procedural authorship': the particular craft involved as creators of a participatory work design a framework that is responsive to the audience's contributions, a process of establishing and maintaining relations.<sup>84</sup> Hepplewhite, Balfour, and Thompson's works add an additional layer of detail by specifying the specific qualities and attributes that support the management of the social and aesthetic in performance.

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<sup>82</sup> Balfour, 161.

<sup>83</sup> Thompson, 'Towards an Aesthetics of Care'.

<sup>84</sup> White, *Audience Participation in Theatre*, 59.

Something I explore in more detail in further sections is the notion that it is not simply that these values support the delivery of the aesthetic material in participatory performance, but that these can actually shape the creative content of the work. For example, in 'Being with Raven: Critical Reflection', I examine how qualities of care informed the development of characters and the ways in which they interact with the audience. This was a conscious process, yet I am also able to reflect upon how applied theatre practices, and my experiences of these as both a practitioner and participant, may have subconsciously shaped the models of participatory performance I developed. One of the most infamous prototypes of an applied theatre facilitator is Boal's Joker, also sometimes referred to as a 'difficultator'.<sup>85</sup> The Joker can be seen as a guide for audience participants as they navigate two worlds: that of the fictional frame and that of their own reality.<sup>86</sup> In Boal's Forum Theatre, this would have been employed to realise specific political objectives. Yet, having a character who can bridge two worlds, speak directly to the audience, and then invite them to step into or reflect upon the fictional scenarios they have been presented with, is arguably a common trope in participatory performance beyond that which might be termed applied theatre. Certainly, both works I created in this project feature a character who, similar to Boal's Joker, supports the audience as they find themselves transitioning between different dramaturgical frames.<sup>87</sup> Although I was not consciously drawing upon the figure of the Joker when developing these characters, with hindsight I am able to identify how they bear resemblance to this figure. This is one example of the way in which facilitation devices have informed aesthetic developments in participatory models and evidences how attention to the 'art of facilitation' can simultaneously support the development of the aesthetic and the social in works both in and outside applied theatre contexts.

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<sup>85</sup> Boal, Augusto. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Pluto Press, 1979.

<sup>86</sup> Hepplewhite, 25.

<sup>87</sup> In 'The Universe in the Flat', the Mouse Detective Longtail speaks directly to the audience, guiding them in interactive activities and facilitating discussion on the fictional scenes occurring in the flat. In 'Being with Raven', Raven is a seemingly omniscient character who is able to address the audience directly and offer insight into the lives of the women they invite the audience to observe and to "be with".

### **Section Three: Playwriting and Participation**

#### **Writing-with**

This research project is particularly focused on the role of the playwright in facilitating audience participation in performance. I consider how text can be employed, not just as the primary aesthetic medium in building the framework I craft and share with audiences, but also as one of the central ways in which the audience are invited to contribute. Although there are examples of contemporary playwrights who experiment with a written framework to invite audience interaction and co-creation in performance (examples of which I explore below), it is my contention that this has not received as much attention in critical discourse. The focus is typically on the effects in performance rather than a study of how text specifically has been employed to elicit such an experience. In the following section, I will explore why the role of text in the evolution of participatory forms might have been overlooked. I consider how Hans-Thies Lehmann's influential *Postdramatic Theatre* aligns text with the dramatic: a theatrical form that, in offering a realist representation of what Lehmann describes as a closed 'fictive cosmos', does not typically invite audience interaction.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, the dramatic is positioned as a single-authored form, which arguably contributed to the perception that text-driven models exist in a binary relationship with collaborative modes of working. I explore the conjecture that Lehmann's ideas, which posit the postdramatic as a reaction to the perceived dominance of the written word in the dramatic, influenced the common association of non-text-led forms with innovation and experimentation. Drawing upon contributions from Liz Tomlin and Duska Radosavljevic I explore how, far from existing in an oppositional relationship with one another, there are notable examples of innovative new writing created in collaborative processes, including models that invite participation from the audience.

#### **New Writing versus Innovation**

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<sup>88</sup> Lehmann, Hans-Thies. *Postdramatic Theatre*. Translated by Karen Jürs-Munby, Oxon, Routledge, 2006.

In *Postdramatic Theatre* (English translation published in 2006), Lehmann declares that, historically in Europe:

Dramatic theatre is subordinated to the primacy of the text. In the theatre of modern times, the staging largely consisted of the declamation and illustration of written drama.<sup>89</sup>

In conceptualising the postdramatic, Lehmann puts forward a theatre-specific vocabulary for the works he identifies, which were challenging ‘dramatic form’ and, in so doing, decentralizing the primacy of text, logos, and meaning-making in performance. One effect of this, Tomlin argues, was to ‘exacerbate the growing binary between a playwright’s theatre, then declared politically ineffective, and a devising practice in which the role of text was not primary, and the political efficacy was said to be enhanced’.<sup>90</sup>

Although Lehmann’s thesis may have further intensified perceptions of this binary, as Tomlin notes, it was one that already existed. She examines how presuppositions about inherent differences between new writing and devised forms were revealed in the allocation of financial support from funding bodies such as the Arts Council. She notes how, in the late nineties and early 2000s, Arts Council England prioritised companies which could, on the one hand, be seen to promote access and inclusion in their programme of work, or alternatively were recognised as ‘innovators’ of aesthetic form. Tomlin observes that the new writing companies that became first-time recipients of portfolio funding in this period were typically those that were seen to fulfil an ‘additional constituency remit, such as such as women; black, Asian and ethnic minorities; or children and young people’:<sup>91</sup>

For emergent new-writing companies, the constituency audiences needed to be ‘new’, since the aesthetic model was less so, while emergent devising companies were valued for as long as their experimentation

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<sup>89</sup> Lehmann, 21.

<sup>90</sup> Tomlin, *British Theatre Companies*, 96.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

remained 'innovative' and were replaced by other companies once the form they had pioneered became overfamiliar.<sup>92</sup>

The biases revealed in funding choices such as these, in addition to the impact of Lehmann's work, resulted, Tomlin writes, in 'a growing conflation of innovation and non-text-based practice'.<sup>93</sup> I would suggest understanding this background is relevant to this study as, typically, participatory practices might be understood to have existed on the 'innovative' side of this binary, which is consistently anything that is seen to deviate from dramatic conventions. Arguably, this accounts in some way for why the roles of text and scripted devices have not typically been foregrounded in discussions on participation.

As I will go on to explore, it is not that text has been absent from more experimental performance models, including those that invite participation; rather, it may be that it has emerged from a different creative process than what has been traditional mode of developing plays in playwright-centred organisations in the UK. Indeed, Tomlin identifies a number of playwrights working in collaborative or ensemble artistic processes who use text in performance in innovative ways; for example, David Greig with *Suspect Culture* and Clare Duffy and Chris Thorpe with *Unlimited Theatre*.<sup>94</sup> The fact that a collaborative working model can be seen to foster experimentation and innovation with text is pertinent to this study, both in the fact that it points to a process that centres a more relational and reciprocal mode of creating, rather than individualising and separating specific roles, and also because, in a number of these models, the collaborative process is opened up to include the audience.

### **Collaboration and Experimentation with Text**

Characteristics of works that can be seen to fall within the postdramatic paradigm often see performers acknowledging and drawing attention to the construct of performance, rather than employing dramatic conventions to

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<sup>92</sup> Tomlin, *British Theatre Companies*, 95.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

present what Lehmann describes as a 'fictive cosmos'.<sup>95</sup> In this way, Tomlin suggests, it is perhaps more accurate to say that it is dramatic realism that was being challenged or subverted rather than the use of text in performance altogether. She cites the work of Forced Entertainment, a company listed by Lehmann as creators of postdramatic works,<sup>96</sup> who are rarely discussed in the framework of new writing, despite 'Tim Etchells' distinctive and innovative crafting of text being every bit as vital to the company's aesthetic as the ensemble-authored theatrical vocabularies that are more commonly seen to characterize the work'.<sup>97</sup> This is one example of how innovative modes of writing for performance can emerge from collaborative processes. Tomlin argues that collaborative modes of working can be seen to result in aesthetic innovation with text:

The conjunction of devising methodologies and experimentation with text also leads to the creation of writing that might be defined as 'multimodal', in that it finds ways to move swiftly between distinctly different aesthetic models within the same piece of work, while seeking to maintain a level of aesthetic coherence.<sup>98</sup>

Elsewhere, Tomlin makes the case for supporting the development of written texts through a collaborative process in pedagogical contexts, arguing that doing so will allow the writing to:

Respond to those elements of the theatre event which are more commonly added to the finished text (modes of performance, conceptual staging, soundscape, visual design) or excluded from its concerns altogether (audience).<sup>99</sup>

What Tomlin points to is that a collaborative process allows text to be generated in a dialogue with other aesthetic elements inherent to performance, rather than evolving from a more literary model where key components of 'the stage'

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<sup>95</sup> Lehmann, 31.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>97</sup> Tomlin, *British Theatre Companies*, 120.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Tomlin, Liz. 'Make a map not a tracing: From Pedagogy to Dramaturgy.' *Contemporary Theatre Review*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2013, pp. 120-127.

‘enter the equation as a reality well after the written text is already likely to have consolidated its proposed dramaturgical form’.<sup>100</sup>

The ‘multimodality’, Tomlin identifies, is evident in the works I examine in more detail below, each of which, in different ways, are driven by questions of relationality and co-creation. Again, this points to a recurring argument in this study, introduced earlier in this chapter, which is the intersection of the social and the aesthetic. I have discussed the inherent sociality of theatre, and a collaborative working practice is one in which the social ontology of performance is embedded from the outset. As Tomlin writes, a social context is the ‘ultimate destination’ of a performance text, and so generating it in a relational, collaborative manner is arguably one way it can fully realise the potential characteristics particular to the form.<sup>101</sup> It is perhaps no surprise then that a feature identified in a number of these works arising from a collaborative process is an altered relationship with the audience. Relatedly, Radosavljevic notes how, in the more collaborative process of ‘theatre-making’, ‘the work’s relationship with the audience seems to be more important than any previously pursued hierarchies between text and performance’<sup>102</sup> and very often works developed in this way seek to ‘draw the audience into the inner workings of the theatre experience’.<sup>103</sup> She argues that there are those works which ‘in some way depend on the audience’s authorial input for their full meaning to be realized’<sup>104</sup>: a model of performance she and Cathy Turner have described as having a ‘porous dramaturgy’.<sup>105</sup>

### **Porous Dramaturgies**

In her study of theatre-making, Radosavljevic examines a trend of performances from the twenty-first century which ‘inscribe the spectator into the work’.<sup>106</sup> In

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<sup>100</sup> Tomlin, Liz. ‘Make a map not a tracing: From Pedagogy to Dramaturgy.’

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Radosavljevic, 23.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 150.

many ways, these practices can be seen to exist on a continuum with those forms of work, identified above, which place an emphasis on collaboration. Although not all performances arising from a collaborative way of working necessarily invite audience participation, there are, Radosavljevic argues, works in which the relationship with the audience, and the audience's role in co-creation, are central to their dramaturgy. In this way the dramaturgy might be understood as 'porous'; there is an openness in the structure in which the audience is invited to contribute. Radosavljevic and Turner define these porous dramaturgies as 'artwork which has interactivity and/or co-creativity in its structure and which seeks to produce a community between the audience and the makers'.<sup>107</sup> This has been a definition that I have found instructive to refer back to throughout this study, and one to which my own practice adheres. The notion of 'porosity' has influenced this research enquiry; a central question I have endeavoured to address through practice is how porous a work needs to be for an audience member to experience themselves as meaningfully contributing to the performance. Porosity speaks to the balance between the open space for the audience to fill with their contributions, and the fixed, crafted framework that supports them in doing so. The negotiation between the two is something I address throughout this research project.

The fact that Radosavljevic describes 'co-creativity' is also pertinent to my study. There are a variety of ways that an audience member might participate in a work that do not necessarily invite co-creation. This is a further way of defining the mode of participation that I have developed in this project: it is one that positions the audience as co-creators, or co-authors. I endeavour to craft a model in which the audience recognise themselves as contributing creatively to the performance and explore how this links to the final aspect of Radosavljevic's definition, which is the artist's intention to 'produce a community between the audience and makers'.<sup>108</sup> Although I frame this in terms of experiencing an awareness of the relational as opposed to producing a community, both address a desire to draw attention to the social and shared experience of performance,

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<sup>107</sup> Radosavljevic, 23.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

and the conviction that a process of co-creation may in fact be conducive to cultivating an experience of relationality, interdependence, or communality.

In the following section, I examine performances by Tim Crouch, Nassim Soleimanpour, and Hannah Jane Walker and Chris Thorpe, artists whose works I would argue exhibit a porous dramaturgy, following Radosavljevic's recognition (indeed, Crouch is one of the artists she refers to in her study of porous dramaturgies). As an added point of focus, I argue that each of these artists uses text as the primary aesthetic tool through which they craft their porous dramaturgy. I explore how specific aspects of each of these works have informed my understanding of how text might be used to structure a model of participation in performance, indicating points of overlap between these works and my practice, in addition to points of divergence.

### **Tim Crouch and Interpretative Participation**

Tim Crouch is a playwright, performer, and theatre-maker who, with his collaborators Karl James and Andy Smith, has produced works including *My Arm*, *An Oak Tree*, *ENGLAND*, and *I, Cinna*, all of which experiment with dramaturgical form to interrogate ideas around representation in the theatre and the role of the spectator as co-creator of meaning. For example, in *My Arm*, the audience are called upon to provide objects which then stand in for different characters in the play.<sup>109</sup> *An Oak Tree* is a two hander in which Crouch is joined by a different guest actor each performance. This second actor takes on the role of a bereaved father, with no prior knowledge of the script. The dissonance between the Father described in the text, and the performer, male or female, of varying ages, representing them, draws the audience's attention to the imaginative engagement they undertake as they form their own vision of the character.<sup>110</sup> In *I, Cinna*, the audience are provided with notebooks and are guided through writing a poem over the course of the play.<sup>111</sup> In the 'Critical Reflections' I discuss how some of the participatory devices I have employed in

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<sup>109</sup> Crouch, Tim. 'My Arm' *Tim Crouch: Plays One*. Oberon, 2011, pp. 24-47

<sup>110</sup> Crouch, Tim. 'An Oak Tree.' *Tim Crouch: Plays One*. Oberon, 2011, pp. 57-106.

<sup>111</sup> Crouch, Tim. *I, Cinna. (The Poet)*. Oberon, 2012.

my practice have been inspired by the techniques seen in these works. Here, however, I focus specifically on *The Author*, a work which, I suggest, has been crafted to bring the audience's awareness to the mode of internalized participation that I identify earlier in this chapter.

In *The Author*, a fictional playwright called Tim Crouch has written and directed a violent play that recounts the abusive relationship between a father and daughter in an unspecified conflict zone.<sup>112</sup> It is performed without any set or props, the audience sit facing one another in two raked seating banks, the performers deliver their interweaving accounts sat amongst the audience. Although nothing is acted out there are descriptions of extreme violence including beheading, rape, and, in the final scenes, child abuse. By removing any physical representation in the work, Crouch is drawing attention to the internal interpretation and meaning-making that each audience member will undertake. By placing the audience in full view of one another, they effectively observe each other undergoing this individual act of co-creation. As the textual content presented in *The Author* is particularly provocative and disturbing, the audience are invited to reflect on their own complicity in creating these violent, exploitative images by staying present to their unfolding. As Radosavljevic argues, the reason why this work, in which nothing is performed but all delivered verbally by the performers, is not a radio play, is 'precisely because the audience reaction is integral to the dramaturgy of the piece, be it a walkout, an affective response or quiet contemplation'.<sup>113</sup>

In *The Author*, elements associated with drama - language, character, and plot - are deployed alongside conceptual strategies to make the audience more aware of the role they play, and therefore the responsibility they share, in authoring during performance. This is relevant to my project as I too work with the building blocks of playwriting practice, developing character, a fictional world, and narrative, alongside devices that explicitly draw attention to the process of theatre-making and the audience's role in that process. Indeed, something I

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<sup>112</sup> Crouch, Tim. 'The Author.' *Tim Crouch: Plays One*. Oberon, 2011, pp. 164-203.

<sup>113</sup> Radosavljevic, 153.

interrogate throughout this project is whether the audience's recognition of themselves as co-authors of the narrative may make them care more. What emerges through this research, for me, is that the extent to which an audience member might be induced to care through acts of participation and co-creation is contingent on the responsiveness of the structure and the care shown to them as contributors. Are the audience contributions heard, acknowledged, and responded to?

Crouch describes how, throughout the run of this show, audience members would frequently ask questions of the performers, challenging them on the material, or seeking clarification about the content. Although any remark from the audience was given space to be spoken, it was not responded to; the performers would pause and then continue with the script as rehearsed.<sup>114</sup> This affirms Crouch's interest- in this work- in drawing attention to internalised forms of engagement rather than facilitating a conversation or dialogue that might be seen as characteristic of the mode of externalised participation I describe. Conversely, what has emerged as a key value in the model of performance I have developed is that all contributions from audience members are responded to, and this response signals to the audience that they have indeed been heard. I am interested in how a playwright might craft space for an audience member to contribute to a work, for those contributions to be acknowledged and then embedded into the material of the whole piece, with this third step signalling to the audience that their contributions are valued. In this way, it is my intention to explore how both internalised and externalised forms of participation are connected in a model of on-going circularity.

### **Nassim Soleimanpour and Collaborative Writing**

Nassim Soleimanpour is a playwright, who, like Crouch, crafts models of performance that draw attention to the collaboration inherent in performance. He crafts devices that can be seen to invite audience participation through

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<sup>114</sup> Crouch, Tim. 'Death of The Author: how did my play fare in LA?' *The Guardian: Stage*, 7 March 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/mar/07/tim-crouch-the-author-la-tour>. Accessed 21 May 2022.

material contribution, as in his works audience members are variously invited to enter the stage to participate in activities, represent characters, and offer ideas out loud. Soleimanpour wrote *White Rabbit, Red Rabbit* when under house arrest in Iran, deciding to create a play that could travel freely on his behalf. Taking inspiration from Crouch and employing a similar device to that seen in *An Oak Tree*, this is a play that is designed to be performed by a different performer each time as a “cold read” and has been translated in over thirty languages and performed all around the world.<sup>115</sup> (Crouch has performed in both *Rabbit*, and Soleimanpour’s later work *BLANK*.)<sup>116</sup> In addition to the device of having an actor perform the script unseen, audience members are invited to assist with certain scenes by going onstage to represent characters, offering props, taking notes, timing scenes, and, in the final moments of the play, reading the text on behalf of the playwright. He also extends the invitation to interact beyond the parameters of the performance itself: through his proxy, the actor in the performance, he speaks out to the audience, explaining his story and giving out his email, asking the audience to get in touch.<sup>117</sup>

Soleimanpour has gone on to describe how after each performance, he would wake up to emails from audiences from all around the world, sharing their stories with him.<sup>118</sup> It was this experience that inspired *BLANK*, a ‘collaborative writing’ performance in which Soleimanpour invites the audience to collectively create a story by filling in the ‘blanks’ in the written structure he has crafted. As a playwright he uses the tools of his craft to present to the audience what he describes as a ‘story-telling machine’ in the hope that it ‘can be used every time in a room to help this hive-mind share their stories with each other’.<sup>119</sup> He offers the mechanisms and tools for the audience to develop their own creative

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<sup>115</sup> Soleimanpour, Nassim. ‘Artistic Director.’ *Nassim Soleimanpour Productions*, <https://www.nassimsoleimanpour.com/artisticdirector>. Accessed 10 April 2021.

<sup>116</sup> Bush Theatre. ‘Q&A with Nassim Soleimanpour.’ *Bush Theatre: Bush Green*. 20 October 2015, <https://www.bushtheatre.co.uk/bushgreen/radar-2015-qa-with-nassim-soleimanpour/>. Accessed 31 Jan 2023.

<sup>117</sup> Soleimanpour, Nassim. *Two Plays: White Rabbit, Red Rabbit, BLANK*. Oberon, 2017, 23.

<sup>118</sup> Sulamain, Yasmin. ‘Interview: Nassim Soleimanpour - “I receive thousands of personal stories from people, so I thought I owed them a story machine”.’ *The List* 19 July 2016, <https://edinburghfestival.list.co.uk/article/82366-interview-nassim-soleimanpour-i-receive-thousands-of-personal-stories-from-people-so-i-thought-i-owed-them-a-story-machine/>. Accessed 22 April 2021.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

framework, guiding them from the page to collectively develop a character, and their story, by filling in the blanks in sentences he has crafted for them. I would suggest this desire to encourage the sharing of stories, and to give all audience members the space to do so, highlights the relational experience of the performance and the feeling of temporary community that might emerge through this act of co-creation. He emphasises to the audience that together they will produce a story that is unique and particular to them:

Remember this story will ONLY happen ONCE, and we're the only people who will have the privilege to write and hear it.<sup>120</sup>

The combination of this very porous framework and the fact that it is delivered by a performer who is reading the script for the first time in performance, arguably calls for instinctive and immediate forms of participation - from both the performer and audience alike. The fact that the performer is asked to fill in a 'blank' in each sentence, for example, calls for quick-thinking, a rapid response. Likewise, when the audience are invited to contribute, they too are invited to call out answers immediately. This points to the performance's emphasis on modes of externalised participation. The audience will be engaging in internalised participation also; however, the frequent invitations to engage physically or externalise these ideas mean that, arguably, less attention is paid to this latter mode of participation. Soleimanpour's model is interested in the material contributions the audience might share with one another through verbal suggestions, physicalised representations, or written ideas. By contrast, in the framework I develop, I endeavour to blend the two participatory modalities. While there are similar invitations to fill in gaps or share ideas out loud, these are interspersed with longer moments of silent reflection when audiences are given space to think quietly. My intention is that oscillating between the two modes of participation may result in an awareness of how one's singular experience and interpretation of a performance is being inflected by those they are in relation with.

### **Hannah Jane Walker, Chris Thorpe, and Performing Care**

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<sup>120</sup> Soleimanpour, *Two Plays*, 80.

Poet Hannah Jane Walker and writer and performer Chris Thorpe collaborate with one another to create work that they describe as ‘part performance, part poetry gig and part interactive experience’.<sup>121</sup> Text is central to their work, as the witty, descriptive poems introduce the key thematic concepts of the performance, and the autobiographical anecdotes they share invite a personal relationship between the audience members and the performers.

In *The Oh Fuck Moment*, Walker and Thorpe craft interactions that shape a social dynamic which then underpins their invitations to the audience to contribute creatively. Set in an in-use office, the performance begins with Thorpe meeting the audience outside the room, assuring them, ‘don’t worry. I’m not acting. We haven’t started yet’, before inviting them into the room to get a cup of tea, where they are greeted by Walker.<sup>122</sup> This interaction, although presented as ‘pre-performance’, is scripted and prepared for with careful consideration to put the audience at ease, providing an opportunity to interact with the performers outside of the central theatrical framework.

Following this opening, Walker and Thorpe sit around a table with the audience and, taking alternate lines, deliver a poem comprising of concise but affecting ‘oh fuck moments’.<sup>123</sup> Walker then delivers a story from personal experience, with amusing reflections and details about the office in which she used to work. The combined strategies of a relaxed welcome, invitation to have a cup of tea, a space that communicates collaborative working, followed by an entertaining and engaging poetic interlude, are designed to carefully work together to put the audience at ease. Following this phase, Walker directly tells the audience that ‘we are going to ask you to write something down. We might ask you to read something out’ but assures them ‘it’s not going to be anything more strenuous than that’ and that if they do not want to do anything, ‘that isn’t a problem’.<sup>124</sup> This direct explanation to the audience is strategically positioned to come after

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<sup>121</sup> Walker, Hannah Jane, and Chris Thorpe. *The Oh Fuck Moment, I Wish I Was Lonely*. Oberon, 2013, 3.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 17-18.

the initial “warm up” phase described above, in which relations are established and the theme and mood of the piece is introduced, but early enough in the process that the audience members are clear about what might be asked of them.

The audience are then invited to write down one of their own ‘oh fuck moments’.<sup>125</sup> Time is made for the audience to reflect and think about what they want to write; nobody is put on the spot to answer immediately or to share out loud. Over the course of the performance these contributions from the audience are used in different ways; some form a basis of discussion on irrevocable “fuck ups”, others are woven together to form a final poem. Each contribution is heard and given space within the framework, which is elastic enough in its structure to accommodate the offers from all audience members who wish to contribute. I would suggest that in this way we see the intersection of both internalised and externalised participation, as space is made for individual thought and reflection, which then feeds into verbalising ideas and materially contributing to the work.

Care emerges as a central aesthetic component of Walker and Thorpe’s work. Just as the poems and extended moments of storytelling they deliver form the creative content of the performance, so too are the friendly conversational asides and instructions to the audience part of the aesthetic material. These moments have been considered and rehearsed and are a vital part of the dramaturgy in creating the welcoming collaborative atmosphere but also demonstrating sensitivity to the experience of the audience members. A proposition that has emerged for me over the course of this research is how the crafted framework for audience participation in performance can be designed to perform care towards the audience as a strategy to encourage them to accept the invitation to interact, and to characterise that relationship if the invitation is accepted. The relations that arise as a result of these crafted acts of care

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<sup>125</sup> Walker and Thorpe, 19.

both become part of the artistic body of the piece and provide the supportive infrastructure to facilitate the creative contributions from the audience.

### **Why Co-Authorship?**

I choose to specify my practice as a mode of co-authorship over the broader and more encompassing “participation”, as this expresses my intention to invite the audience to contribute creatively to the dramatic framework I craft. There are modes of participation, being present to a performance or verbalised and emotional reactions, for example, which, although undeniably are forms of participating, do not, I would argue, involve contributing creative material to the performance. In the works I develop, a significant aim is to position the audience as co-creators and invite them to contribute artistic material to the existing framework. I craft an open, or porous, written framework which the audience are then invited to fill.

I use co-authorship over co-creation, as for me this points to the significance of text and writing in this research project. On the one hand that speaks to my role as a playwright and my interest in using primarily textual strategies to invite participation, but also to the fact that one of the ways the audience might be invited to contribute is through writing.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly the “co” in co-authorship, with its etymology in the Latin, “together, with”, centralises the significance of relationality in this research study. At the heart of this project is the desire to explore how a process of making-with may heighten the experience of being-with, ontological relationality, and indeed how the converse may be true, how awareness of being in relation may shape the acts of co-authoring, in their different forms, that are undertaken in performance. These ideas are explored more substantially in the next chapter. My understanding and use of “co” does not necessitate equity. By this, I mean that how much of the performance could be seen to have been authored by the playwright and that which is authored by

the audience may not necessarily be evenly balanced. What I argue is more significant is how the audience contributions are treated and valued within the performance. This is where the values and practices of care become instructive. In this way, it is the quality of relations that emerge that becomes significant and gives rise to the awareness of the “co” in co-authorship in this project.

## Chapter Two - Co-Authorship: Relationality, Vulnerability, Affect

### **Introduction**

In this chapter I introduce some of the key theoretical concepts that have informed the practice of co-authorship that I experiment with in this research project. I draw upon Jean-Luc Nancy's ideas on the self as an always uniquely singular, yet simultaneously always entangled relational subject, to elucidate my thinking on co-authorship as a model that brings to the fore the experience of being-with through making-with, and vice versa. I look to Judith Butler's recent work on vulnerability and her call for 'global radical equality' which may only be realised through the reconceptualisation of the self as a relational, interdependent being. Drawing upon her ideas I suggest that co-authoring in performance may offer a site in which new imaginaries can be explored in practice, in process, and experienced at a cognitive and embodied level. Finally, I turn to Sara Ahmed's work on emotionality and affect to look at how the circulation of feelings may serve to heighten our awareness of the relations we co-exist with. I also explore my focus on the role of text as the primary artistic material to facilitate co-authorship and how the movement of emotions in performance may bring to the fore the fluidity and impressability of, not only ourselves in relation, but also words and language, and vice versa. I conclude, in what can be read as a gesture of hope, that feelings of wonder may be generated, as a process of co-authorship can make the ordinary visible once again as extra-ordinary. Ultimately, I suggest that by heightening awareness of being-with and making-with, we may experience that we all share in the making of the world and therefore all share in the capacity to make it differently.

### **Being is Being-With**

In *Being Singular Plural* Jean-Luc Nancy argues that 'being is being-with', stating that: 'it is not the case that the "with" is an addition to some prior Being,

instead the “with” is at the heart of Being’.<sup>126</sup> He puts forward an ontology that begins with the ‘with’, arguing that ‘no-one has radically thematized the “with” as the essential trait of Being and as its proper plural singular coessence’.<sup>127</sup> His imperative is that the ‘with’ is originary and therefore one must think ‘absolutely, and without reserve, beginning from the “with”, as the proper essence of one whose Being is nothing other than-with-one-another’.<sup>128</sup>

To begin at ‘with’ resonates with the aims of my practice. It is my intention to craft a model of performance that, in a manner that can be both cognitive and embodied, draws attention to the ontological condition of relationality. My practice, therefore, is not about creating something that did not exist before; I am not asking the audience to build a community but instead I employ strategies that will heighten an awareness of the ‘with’ that is at the heart of being, the ‘with’ that actually provides the conditions for us to formulate the singular “I” and yet may often go masked or unnoticed. The aim of the model of performance, then, is not to identify or home in on an essential quality or shared frame of reference that may unite the audience. It is not necessarily the points of identification that bring an audience together that interests me, or the by-product of what is generated through this coming together, but the ‘with’ itself. As Nancy writes, ‘[being-with] operates in the same way as a collective power: power is neither exterior to the members of the collective nor interior to each one of them but rather consists in the collectivity as such’.<sup>129</sup> The emphasis therefore is not so much on what the audience create together but on the experience of creating-, making-, authoring-with in the moments when audience members are more actively partnering and participating with one another, perhaps in pairs, perhaps as one body, and also in those moments when they are reflecting individually. Both are occasions of authoring-with that in turn may heighten a feeling of being-with.

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<sup>126</sup> Nancy, 30.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 30.

I will explore in this chapter why I think there are broader political and social merits to a creative practice that heightens awareness of the ‘with’ and why I think the conditions of co-authoring in performance particularly afford potent conditions for doing so. Here, I will emphasise again that it is not my contention that through co-authoring relations between those participating in the performance (audience, performers, and creative team) are created and that these relations do not exist in other “non-participatory” forms of theatre. Indeed, as Nancy asserts the ‘with’ is a condition of ontology, not something one can opt in or out of. What I am interested in doing through a model of co-authoring is employing strategies that draw attention to these relations. It is not that a strategy of co-authoring, or making-with, is essential for these relations to be ignited, that you either are or you are not relational and that the co-authoring serves to “switch on” the relationality. Instead, I contend that by embedding strategies that require making-with within the performance framework, an awareness of the co-existence at the core of Being remains even in moments of more singular contemplation. This awareness has been enhanced through these co-authoring strategies. Additionally, the strategies designed to bring an experience of relationality to the surface are further supported by the content of the works, as in both pieces, thematically and through narrative and character, I also address the concept of ‘being as being-with’.

### **The Paradox**

The formulation ‘Being Singular Plural’ can be seen to encapsulate something of a paradox that Nancy’s thinking suggests. For Nancy, while the ‘with’ is at the heart of Being and we are always already in a relational condition of plurality, within that we remain resolutely singular. One singularity does not fuse into another no matter how close they may feel or presuppose themselves to be. In fact, for Nancy, closeness serves only to emphasise the distance between each singular being. He writes, ‘from one singular to another there is contiguity but not continuity. There is proximity but only to the extent that the extreme closeness emphasises the distancing it opens up’<sup>130</sup> and ‘[togetherness]

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<sup>130</sup> Nancy, 5.

assembles [singularities] in so far as it spaces them, they are linked in so far as they are not unified'.<sup>131</sup>

To convey this sense of the symbiosis between singularity and the relational, Nancy suggests we are 'interlacing strands whose extremities remain separate even at the very centre of the knot'.<sup>132</sup> This is an image I feel captures something of the intensity that the spatial and temporal proximity of the performance experience can induce and thus the notion that, however distinct our own personal 'strand' may feel, that distinction is heightened through being closely entangled with others. An experience that brings to the fore an awareness of our ontological relationality, our condition of 'with', at the same time can make us feel, and know, the parameters of our self as singular.

In this project, I explore how different co-authoring strategies might be employed to bring to heighten awareness of this paradoxical simultaneity. In 'Chapter One - The Participatory Landscape', I identified two modes of co-authoring, broadly characterised as internalised and externalised. In the works I develop I experiment with blending strategies that engage these two modes of co-authoring. Devices that invite an explicit coming together of the audience to discuss ideas or offer contributions to the work, or moments in which the audience are asked to partner one on one, are, I would suggest, overtly relational and draw upon acknowledgement of, and working with, one another. These are positioned alongside other devices in which space is made for focused individual contemplation: the audience may be invited to close their eyes and bring their focus inwards, to write silently, or produce something just for themselves which is kept secret. In so doing, I am interested in the conjecture that by oscillating between more singular moments of interpretation and shared moments of collective crafting the two modalities enrich and inform one another. We are always 'with'; therefore, it follows that even when working independently it is only through a relational structure that that is possible. I develop strategies designed to draw attention to the situation of being in

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<sup>131</sup> Nancy, 33.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 5.

relation so that even when an audience member is reflecting more introspectively the awareness of being 'with' may remain and colour the singular experience. In this way the devices I employ emphasise the materiality of the theatrical event and the physical context of literally being with one another to support the exploration of this ontological position.

### **Incommensurable Singularities**

For Nancy, singularity denotes uniqueness; what equalises us all in Being is our difference: 'there is a common measure which is not some unique standard applied to everyone and everything. It is the commensurability of incommensurable singularities'.<sup>133</sup> That difference is immutable, yet can be drawn into focus through proximity: 'all of being is in touch with all of being but the law of touching is separation, moreover it is the heterogeneity of surfaces that touch each other'.<sup>134</sup> Again, we return to this idea of a simultaneity. Through an exposure to others we may at once become aware of our innate relationality but at the same time feel our difference from those other "singulars" with whom we come into contact. No matter how closely our 'strands may interlace' our difference remains impenetrable. In his essay, 'A Different Alterity: Jean-Luc Nancy's "Singular Plural"' Christopher Watkins articulates it thus: 'the we is not united by a communal nature or shared values rather each one is exposed to each other, up against each other, without being subsumed into each other'.<sup>135</sup>

In the same way that we cannot opt in or out of our relationality, so too our singularity, our uniqueness, is immutable. While, therefore, an interest in drawing attention to the shared condition of our relationality is at the heart of this research enquiry, following on from Nancy, we might consider that doing so will at the same time highlight the very singular experience of our co-existence. To bring this to the artwork then, what is important in the model of co-

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<sup>133</sup> Nancy, 75.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 5

<sup>135</sup> Watkins, Christopher. 'A Different Alterity: Jean-Luc Nancy's Being Singular Plural.' *Paraglyph*, vol. 30, no. 2, pp.50- 64, 59.

authorship I craft is that there is space for this uniqueness to be experienced and reflected upon. While an audience member may notice and feel aware of the relational, this does not diminish their own sense of singularity and therefore their capacity to respond and contribute in their unique way to both the artwork presented and the experience of being-with one another in the performance space.

Here, we might notice the resonances with Jacques Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator*, which I draw upon in 'Chapter One' to support my definition of co-authoring through interpretation. For Rancière, an artwork is always co-authored as '[the spectator] observes, selects, compares, interprets [...] She composes her own poem with the elements before her'.<sup>136</sup> Therefore, there are as many readings of a work as there are singularities that encounter it. In the model of performance I create, at different junctures audience members may be invited to offer their reading of what is happening in the work and hear the words and ideas that the open textual framework prompts in one another. This is one way in which the mode of co-authoring through interpretation can become embedded with the mode of co-authoring through material contribution. At times there may be an overlap between audience members' readings of the work, there may be moments of a collective convergence on ideas and imagery evoked, and at other times, audience members' readings and resonances might diverge from one another. I endeavour to ensure that no one reading is pursued as the "right" one but instead observe and notice how they may sit beside one another.

As space is made throughout the performance to hear from one another, to share interpretations as the play progresses, this capacity to interpret and generate very different ideas from the same framework will be made explicit. Indeed, what may even occur is that audience members become influenced by one another's readings of the work, which can then colour how they go on to experience the rest of the performance. In this way, the two modalities of co-authoring I have identified begin to inflect one another. For while, as Rancière

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<sup>136</sup> Rancière, 13.

states, one's interpretation of a work will be unique; encountering such a work and 'composing your own poem' is not an isolated process. The conditions for such interpretation are relational. This composition is a relational process, made possible by the condition of 'with', the "plurality" or co-essence that, for Nancy, is the essence of Being.

### **Singularities in Flux**

For Nancy, our singular uniqueness will always be so, no matter how close we may come to others, or how much we may intersect on certain points - shared nationhood, age, politics, life experiences, or points of interest, for example - we remain equally distinct from one another. This does not mean, however, that each singular is fixed and unchanging. Indeed being-with is a process in flux. Nancy writes:

As for singular differences, they are not only individual, but infraindividual. It is never the case that I have met Pierre or Marie per se but I have met him or her in such and such a 'form', in such and such a 'state', in such and such a 'mood' and so on.<sup>137</sup>

There is a fluidity implied here which I find interesting to apply to my thinking on co-authorship. Each audience member may produce their own reading of a work, but they will not produce the same reading each time they encounter it. Indeed, even if one were to gather the same audience members to watch the same performance again, the outcome would not be the same. Being is being-with, experience and interpretation is always relational, but as Nancy suggests there are many layers to that relationality which mean that 'Pierre or Marie' watching a performance on a Tuesday afternoon may respond and experience it very differently to 'Pierre or Marie' watching on a Thursday evening. In our experience of being-with and making-with we are also responding to a host of evolving internal and external conditions - the climate, current affairs, mood, interactions with one another. In this way each singular being is in an ever-

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<sup>137</sup> Nancy, 8.

shifting process of modification in response to their environment and those with whom they share it.

This, of course, is not a phenomenon exclusive to a work that claims to be co-authored or that employ participatory techniques. When working as an usher in a theatre I would sometimes watch a show upwards of twenty times, a show that ostensibly had been rehearsed and designed to be performed in a way that was “the same” each time. I would, however, still observe how the feeling amongst the audience, and reactions to those performances, were coloured by news events that day, the weather, individual reactions in the space, for example. This symbiotic relationship between audience and performers is something Erika Fischer-Lichter has termed an autopoietic feedback loop.<sup>138</sup> We might consider, then, that as well as the singular audience members who encounter it, the very framework of the performance that has been created is a thing of fluidity, always subject to the conditions in which it finds itself on any given day. Ever vulnerable to a whole series of relational resonances, the crafted framework of a performance is as fluid and shape-shifting as those assembled singularities who encounter it.

### **Relational World-making**

The notion that each being is embedded in, and constructed by, a web of reciprocal relations, ever responsive to the reverberations from one another’s actions, leads me to consider Nancy’s ideas on the ‘co-essentiality’ of each singular being to the world. He writes that ‘a world is not something external to existence [...] the world is the co-existence that puts these existences together’.<sup>139</sup> The world is not some object that may be looked upon by an outside, observing subject, but rather the world is formed by the plurality of beings, ‘co-existence [...] forms the essence and the structure of the world’.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Fischer-Lichte, Erika. *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*. London, Routledge, 2008, 41.

<sup>139</sup> Nancy, 29.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 44.

I believe there is potential for exploring the idea of the world as co-originary and predicated on plurality and co-existence in a model of co-authorship in performance. I experiment with drawing attention to how each presence in the room plays their part in building the “world” of the narrative. At times these gestures may be more explicit, or literal: an audience member setting props or materials in the performance space, for example, or the performer employing words supplied by the audience to colour the description of a scene or a character’s feelings. On a more subtle level there are resonances beneath the surface that contribute to the understanding of the world in the performance framework. The physical presence of bodies in the space, resonances from the singular presence of each person assembled, which shape the world of the performance.

I aim to emphasise the audience-to-audience relation in addition to artist-to-audience relation. In this way the co-authored model draws attention to all those who are sharing in this process of building a world and narrative together. As Nancy writes: ‘a world is always as many worlds as it takes to build a world’.<sup>141</sup> It is interesting to then think about being-with and making-with in a mutually-affirming relation. As Nancy asserts, it is being-with that affords the conditions of the world; the presence of singulars in a condition of plurality make the world what it is. In the performance framework, the experience may work backwards. By drawing attention to making-with, or inviting explicit acts of making-with, one in turn begins to feel and become more conscious of our condition of being-with.

For Nancy, there are ethical implications for fully realising the co-essentiality of each being to the world. In his view, a disconnect from our relationality can result in the perpetuation of violence or exploitation of others in the name of self-preservation. What Nancy’s ontology of being-with proposes, however, is that ‘this is the meaning of the world as being-with, the simultaneity of all

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<sup>141</sup> Nancy, 15.

presences that are with regard to one another, where no one is for one self without being for others'.<sup>142</sup> Christopher Watkins explores the consequences of the 'ethics of mutuality' at the core of Nancy's *Being Singular Plural*:

The ethics of mutuality is a potent solidarity where the suffering of anyone, of each one, is a suffering which I share and, concretely, for which I have responsibility. Why? Because I am not *in* relation I *am* singular plural relation.<sup>143</sup>

Nancy's 'ethics of mutuality' has resonances with Judith Butler's work on non-violence in which she critiques individualism and calls for the acceptance of ontological interdependency as a condition of equality. Following on from Nancy's being-with, then, and my exploration of how a model of co-authorship may be a potent form through which to draw consciousness to this in practice, I will draw on Butler's thinking on relationality and its implications for global obligations of equality that are a necessary response to the contemporary political moment.

### **The Relational Subject and Radical Equality**

In *The Force of Non-Violence*, Butler writes that recognising and avowing the relational subject and the innate interdependency of all sensate beings is a necessary basis for social and political equality. She positions the relational subject as one which challenges the 'neo liberal conservation of individualism' that prizes sovereignty and self-sufficiency and, in so doing, denies or wilfully ignores the interdependent relations, the 'with' that is, for both Butler and Nancy, at the heart of Being:<sup>144</sup>

Each is dependent and being depended upon. What each depends upon and what depends upon each one is varied, since it is not just other human lives but other sensate creatures, environments and

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<sup>142</sup> Nancy, 84.

<sup>143</sup> Watkins, 61.

<sup>144</sup> Butler, *The Force of Non-Violence*, 44.

infrastructures: we depend upon them and they depend upon us, in turn, to sustain a liveable world.<sup>145</sup>

She argues, it is the story of ‘timeless, adult, masculinity’, the ‘fantasy of self-sufficiency’ in which the self is conceived as an individualised unit and one whose primary interactions with other individuals are driven by conflict and aggression that characterises political and social conceptualisation of the self.<sup>146</sup> It is this Hobbesian view of the self, she argues, ‘which has been most influential in shaping our understanding of political contracts’<sup>147</sup> and as a consequence ‘at both a political and economic level the facts of global interdependency are denied. Or they are exploited’.<sup>148</sup>

For Butler, inability and unwillingness to know and feel our global interdependency, our always already relational ontology, allows violence, war, xenophobia, destruction of both human and non-human life to proliferate and that ‘only by avowing this interdependency does it become possible to form global obligations’.<sup>149</sup> She argues that affirmation of our innate interdependency is the necessary basis for a ‘radical equality’ that forms the ethical foundation for a practice of non-violence: ‘if we ask why any of us should care about those that suffer at a distance from us, the answer is the fact that we inhabit the world together in relations of interdependency’.<sup>150</sup> For Butler, the call to reframe the narrative of self from one of individualised to relational subject is both ambitious but imperative in the current climate of precarity, global conflict, and climate crisis.<sup>151</sup>

How might this link to co-authorship? Well, the task for affirming awareness of our relationality and interdependency must begin somewhere. It is my belief that awareness of one’s interdependency must arrive at an experiential bodily

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<sup>145</sup> Butler, *The Force of Non-Violence*, 16.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 44.

level as well as an intellectual one. There are two points that Butler raises in her treatise on interdependence as the basis for radical equality which I will draw upon to consider how and why a model of co-authorship within the framework of live performance might be just one site in which our 'condition of radical dependency' can be brought to the fore and experienced cognitively and corporeally.

Firstly, Butler, in her refute of claims that her endeavour towards 'global obligations' is one of naivete, argues that, yes, the task at hand is an ambitious one, and one that therefore requires imagination. If, as she suggests, the individualised man (for as Butler points out, his gender is prefigured) that subsists independently in the State of Nature is a fiction, a fiction that has influenced political and economic thought, and can be seen to embody the ideals of self-interest that define neo-liberalism, she suggests: 'let us then try a different story'.<sup>152</sup> Butler argues it is by exploring new fictions, another imaginary, that an altered state of perception may arise that can loosen the hold of the destructive narrative that purports preservation of the self must be pursued at the expense of others, rather than knowing and feeling that preservation of the self is inextricable from the preservation of others. Before policies and legislation can take hold, she suggests, we need to be able to imagine what may, at present, exist beyond the horizon of the possible for us:

The imagination - and what is imaginable - will turn out to be crucial because we are at this moment ethically obliged and invited to think beyond what are treated as the realistic realms of the possible.<sup>153</sup>

I would suggest, then, that theatre, as a site of play, where one may be invited to imagine beyond the parameters of what appears possible, is an apposite place in which to start. To be part of a co-authored work within that site, one that seeks to bring our ontological relationality to the fore, may then open up the possibility of living out in practice new fictions in which plural selves co-exist entangled in mutually sustaining relation. This is a dramaturgical model that draws attention to the relational, both in content and form, and presents a

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<sup>152</sup> Butler, *The Force of Non-Violence*, 40.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

world in process made by and through relations. I am proposing a co-authored experience that seeks to expose and demonstrate through creative practice that no single character lives as a unit untouched by others, pursuing a one-track path towards a final resolution. Such a narrative model arguably is preoccupied with 'Being', singular and self-driven, rather than demonstrating that 'Being is being-with', entangled and contingent.

I suggest that a model of co-authorship might offer an example of what Jill Dolan describes as 'utopian performative'.<sup>154</sup> She argues that certain experiences of live performance can provide a space where 'people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world'.<sup>155</sup> Central to her ideas on the utopian performative is that the performance model is 'processual', allowing space to imagine what *could* be, rather than driving towards 'a more restrictive, finite image of "what should be"'.<sup>156</sup> It is my conviction that an open, porous model of performance such as co-authorship that draws attention to the fact it is in-process by inviting the audience to have a part in contributing to the unfolding narrative affords an experience of co-creation in which it is possible to experiment with future imaginaries.

Secondly, key to the potency of this experience is that relationality and our inherent interdependence are not just processed at an intellectual level but embodied and felt. Butler, like Nancy, discusses how the relational subject is not simply an abstraction, a concept, or way of understanding our fundamental need for one another to live a liveable life, but is embodied. Indeed, to really move away from the idea of seeing the self as an individualised unit we need to reconfigure our understanding of the body to be one that acknowledges the porosity of our physical parameters. Butler writes:

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<sup>154</sup> Dolan, Jill. *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater*. University of Michigan Press, 2005, 2.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 13.

Without that overarching sense of the inter-relational, we take bodily boundaries to be the end rather than the threshold of the person, the site of passage and porosity, the evidence of an openness to alterity that is definitional of the body itself. The threshold of the body, the body as threshold, undermines the idea of the body as a unit.<sup>157</sup>

Again, I would suggest that the spatial and temporal conditions of the performance space, the assembly of bodies in close proximity, are particularly conducive to experiencing our relationality at an embodied level. It is my contention that these conditions are heightened when engaging in co-authoring devices which draw attention to those bodies you share the space with, to create with them, and notice how in a symbiotic relationship you are informing one another. Butler notes: 'whoever I am will be steadily sustained and transformed by the connections with others, the forms of contact by which I am altered and sustained'.<sup>158</sup> Through the combination of co-authoring strategies, and ideas addressed in the content of the work, I aim to offer a model of performance in which one may experience being 'altered and sustained' by those around them and how they too are altering and sustaining those they are coming into contact with.

### **Being Vulnerable**

Butler writes that vulnerability is a condition of our inherent interdependency and, therefore, inevitable: 'vulnerability should not be considered as a subjective state but rather as a feature of our shared interdependent lives'.<sup>159</sup> She argues that: 'the relational understanding of vulnerability shows that we are not altogether separable from the conditions that make our life possible or impossible. In other words, because we cannot exist liberated from such conditions, we are never fully individuated'.<sup>160</sup> This formulation suggests that our state of vulnerability, although not the same as, is inextricably linked to our condition of interdependence. Drawing upon Butler's work, I will consider how

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<sup>157</sup> Butler, *The Force of Non-Violence*, 16.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

denial of vulnerability, much like denial of relationality, can be seen to uphold values of the individualised self as an impenetrable unit that should avoid being impacted upon by others. Such an avoidance, as Butler notes, is not only impossible but also disregards the capacity of vulnerability to forge connection and open up opportunities for change. I will explore how experiencing vulnerability and an awareness of relationality may work in a symbiotic relationship and how this might manifest in a co-authored performance framework. I also acknowledge some of the risks associated with exposing vulnerability in this way and consider the responsibility that falls to the creator of a co-authored work in mitigating the potential feelings of harm or distress that might arise for both audience members and performers as a consequence of experiencing vulnerability in performance.

While Butler asserts that vulnerability is an ontological given, she also argues it is a socially-induced state that can be exploited or denied to support political agendas and systems of power. In other words, vulnerability is not evenly distributed. While acknowledging the need to recognise and protect those who may be considered more vulnerable to physical, emotional, or institutional threats, Butler also problematises the labelling of one group as vulnerable by another, asking on whose terms are such labels distributed and to what end they are employed. Are those in the position of labelling others vulnerable therefore assumed to be invulnerable? Is a condition of vulnerability always something which must be avoided or ameliorated? What hierarchies are built and perpetuated by such distinctions of vulnerable and invulnerable? She suggests a paternalistic power dynamic arises when vulnerability is viewed as something undesirable, in which the invulnerable party may (should they deign to) alleviate the suffering of the vulnerable, setting up a binary of those who act and those who are acted upon. This is a dynamic she seeks to challenge:

When we oppose ‘vulnerability’ as a political term, it is usually because we would like to see ourselves as agentic [...] If we oppose vulnerability in

the name of agency, does that imply that we prefer to see ourselves as those who are only acting, but not acted on?<sup>161</sup>

Indeed, she suggests that a disavowal of vulnerability is underpinned by the ‘masculinist account of sovereignty’ that denies or ignores the self as an always relational subject.<sup>162</sup>

Butler argues that rather than conceiving of vulnerability as always oppositional to resistance, through the act of exposing their vulnerability to the very forces or institutions that render it so, a body or collective in fact undoes this binary, mobilizing their vulnerability as a form of resistance, ‘in this way vulnerability can be both exposed and agentic at the same time’.<sup>163</sup> Consequently, Butler notes that:

Persistence in a condition of vulnerability proves to be its own kind of strength, distinguished from one that champions strength as the achievement of invulnerability. That condition of mastery replicates the forms of domination to be opposed, devaluing those forms of susceptibility and contagion that yield solidarity and alliances.<sup>164</sup>

The implication is that ‘solidarity and alliances’ can arise through the act of exposing vulnerability. To deny or suppress one’s vulnerability, or to consider a state of vulnerability as something to be feared, one isolates oneself and shrinks. Butler notes, ‘vehement opposition to vulnerability may prove to be the very sign of its continuing operation’.<sup>165</sup> I am interested in how experiencing vulnerability might work to bring an understanding of ontological relationality to the fore while also exploring the contention that through exposing our vulnerability, in relation, ‘solidarity and alliances’ might arise. I suggest this mutual exposure of vulnerability may result in the feeling or condition “moving” or morphing into something else.

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<sup>161</sup> Butler, Judith. ‘Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance.’ *Vulnerability in Resistance*, edited by Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay, Duke University Press, 2016, 23.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Butler, *The Force of Non-Violence*, 201.

<sup>165</sup> Butler, ‘Rethinking Vulnerability’, 23.

## Exposing Vulnerability

Butler writes that it is when the infrastructures that we depend upon to live a liveable life begin to fail us in some way that we become more conscious of our vulnerability. Although she argues it is a fallacy to think we are only vulnerable at the point in which our dependence on others is exposed or becomes in some way threatened:

It was not as if we were as creatures not vulnerable before when infrastructure was working and then infrastructure fails and our vulnerability comes to the fore.<sup>166</sup>

She suggests, however, that it is when infrastructures or relations we depend upon fail us, and therefore become more visible, that we become more aware of our vulnerability. Yet I would propose that it can also work the other way. A situation may arise in which we feel vulnerable and therefore our awareness of our relation to others, our being-with, becomes heightened, which then in turn may intensify the vulnerability. It is my contention that the process is in some way circular and mutually-affirming.

I have discussed how I will explore the potential of a co-authored model to bring to the fore feelings of relationality and interdependence. As I argue earlier in this chapter, I see this as drawing consciousness to what already exists, rather than creating new relations. I am interested in how feelings of vulnerability may work to enhance this consciousness but also may arise as a consequence of this heightened awareness of relationality, of becoming more conscious of the 'with' at the heart of being. We might consider that a co-authored performance model can draw attention to the myriad ways feelings of vulnerability can arise in, and through, responses to one another. The very porosity in the structure of a co-authored work reveals a vulnerability in the form, as the playwright makes explicit a desire, or even a need, for the audience to engage and participate in the acts of co-creation to which they have been invited to contribute. Similarly,

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<sup>166</sup> Butler, 'Rethinking Vulnerability', 23.

the performer who directly interacts with audience members is exposed to a degree of uncertainty. How will their request to interact be received? And through being invited to offer ideas or thoughts in performance, an audience member is asked to expose something of themselves.

There are risks attached to inviting or exposing vulnerability in this way, as I will go on to explore. As the creator of a work that can engender vulnerability, part of the task will be preparing for and managing the experience so that there are contingencies and structures in place that prevent this openness or vulnerability from resulting in feelings of exploitation or harm. This speaks to a central enquiry of this thesis which is the negotiation between the fixed, crafted framework, and the flexibility to respond in the moment to the shifting experiences of the audience. It is also worth noting, especially as I am experimenting with performance for both adults and young audiences, that, broadly speaking, one can say that adults and children will experience vulnerability in different ways. As Butler argues, although we are all interdependent and vulnerable, ‘that does not mean that the adult is dependent in the exact same way that the infant is but only that we have become creatures who constantly imagine a self-sufficiency only to find that image of ourselves undermined repeatedly in the course of life’.<sup>167</sup> Indeed, through the process of developing work for young audiences I have become more attuned to the fact that children experience and are more aware of their dependency on others. As Butler suggests, a child will daily experience the reliance on others, be it parents, teachers, or other adults who care for them, and consequently activities which might make an adult feel vulnerable in a performance setting, creating in partners or even asking for help from others in the room, would not necessarily engender vulnerability in young audiences in the same way.

Butler’s suggestion is that adults have ‘become’ creatures who labour under a misapprehension of self-sufficiency and therefore vulnerability becomes something that adults are more and more inclined to deny or forget. We might

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<sup>167</sup> Butler, *The Force of Non-Violence*, 41.

suggest then that as adults we become more conditioned to conceal our vulnerability in the day-to-day, whereas for young children it is more commonplace to articulate, 'I need your help', 'I cannot do this without you', or even simply 'I am feeling...' Consequently, the maker of performance for young children may be more attuned to the vulnerability of the audience and as a result there will be processes, and devices, adhered to in recognition of this. This might mean adapting the content to the suitability of the demographic, being mindful of offering an equity of opportunities for young audiences, or having additional members of the creative team to offer support during interactive activities.

Conversely, following on from Butler, adult vulnerability might not be as "visible" or apparent, and, as a consequence, there may be a risk of the creator of a performance not being as cognisant of how an adult might experience vulnerability and to what affect. If, as I contend, a co-authored model has the potential to draw attention to innate vulnerability and make it more apparent to those participating in the performance, there is an element of responsibility for the creator of that work to take. In the same way that awareness of the vulnerability of children might call for devices to manage that, so too should there be strategies in place, and responsivity in the structure, to ensure that the performance does not result in distress for an adult audience also. That said, following on from Butler, the aim is not to suppress or ameliorate vulnerability entirely. Rather, to allow space to explore how vulnerability can arise as a consequence of a heightened awareness of relationality and simultaneously it being through this relational experience that the feeling may then move into something else. In this way, the impact of feelings and words is not permanent, but moves in a symbiotic process of acting and being acted upon by that with which they come into contact. To further illuminate this thinking on how emotions may move and the way in which subjects, objects, and text make impressions upon those they encounter, I will draw now upon Ahmed's work on affect.

## **Circularity of Emotions**

Akin to the binary of vulnerability and resistance that Butler problematises, Ahmed argues that emotionality has historically been positioned as an oppositional state to rationality and reason and therefore treated with suspicion or fear. She opens *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* with the text from a British National Party Poster which seeks to spark fear in its reader by proclaiming that ‘Soft Touch Britain’ is being ‘invaded by asylum seekers and immigrants’<sup>168</sup> to illustrate the idea that softness and a susceptibility to being moved by others equates to vulnerability to attack: ‘the fear of passivity is tied to the fear of emotionality, in which weakness is defined in terms of a tendency to be shaped by others’.<sup>169</sup> The notion of emotionality and ‘softness’ parallels with Butler’s analysis of vulnerability as a susceptibility to being moved by or impacted by others, and the suggestion that this is something that the ‘hard’, ‘resistant’, individualised subject would want to avoid. Like Butler, Ahmed argues that, historically, these oppositional attributes have been gendered: ‘the soft, national body is a feminised body, which is penetrated by others’.<sup>170</sup>

As discussed earlier in this chapter, such distinctions are erroneous. It is not that this body is soft, emotional, and susceptible to the demands of others, while that body is hard, impenetrable, and self-sustaining. All bodies are a tangle of relations, both enacting and enacted upon. Therefore, Ahmed writes that her study is not concerned with looking at emotions ‘in’ bodies but instead her focus is ‘what do emotions do?’<sup>171</sup> Looking at how emotions emerge and move through a collective, she suggests, might show us how all ‘actions are reactions, in the sense that what we do is shaped by the contact we have with others’.<sup>172</sup>

I have found Ahmed’s thinking on what emotions do useful in understanding how awareness of relationality may come to the fore in a co-authored performance context: how emotions arise through relations; how they then serve to expose and bring to the surface existing relations; and how the emotions themselves are

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<sup>168</sup> Ahmed, 1.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 4.

impacted upon by the bodies, objects, and words they come into contact with. I would suggest that it is not the case that a performance has particular emotions crafted within it that are then released outwards and enacted upon the audience, nor is it that the emotions reside “in” the audience members and are lured out by the content of the performance. Ahmed moves away from the “in-out” or “out-in” modes of thinking to suggest that rather than feelings being inherent in an object or subject, emotions arise in and through relations in a process of circulation. This sociality, she argues, serves to then expose and make visible the surfaces of those which it moves through:

In my model of sociality of emotions I suggest that emotions create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an outside and an inside in the first place. So, emotions are not simply something that ‘I’ or ‘we’ have. Rather it is through emotions or how we respond to objects and others that surfaces or boundaries are made: the ‘I’ and ‘we’ are shaped by and even take the shape of contact with others.<sup>173</sup>

This echoes Nancy’s assertion that ‘the law of touching is separation’; as singularities coming into contact with one another we feel the edges of ourselves.<sup>174</sup> What is interesting to me about Ahmed’s work is that this process of subjects and objects meeting one another is one of feeling, in the sense that emotions arise, shift, and move by and through these relations. In this research, I explore how the dramaturgical framework I create may elicit certain emotions in the audience while also interrogating how this is actually a multi-way process. The assembled bodies in the space impact upon the emotionality of the framework itself and that this might be made more visible and “feel-able” through a co-authored model.

### **Emotions Make Impressions**

To encapsulate the emotional effect of objects and beings coming into contact with one another and, in so doing, impacting one another, and essentially

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<sup>173</sup> Ahmed, 10.

<sup>174</sup> Nancy, 5.

making visible or felt the surfaces of one another, Ahmed suggests it is useful to think of ‘making impressions’. She writes:

We need to remember the press in impression. It allows us to associate the experience of having an emotion with the very affect of one surface upon another, an affect that leaves its mark or trace.<sup>175</sup>

As I suggest earlier in this chapter, it is not my contention that it is only in a co-authored piece that audience members impact upon or ‘leave impressions’ upon the creative framework. However, I do feel a model of co-authorship may make space for this to be more explicitly realised. Through a variety of strategies, including audience members being invited to offer words to fill gaps in the text, sharing their reading of particular scenes with one another, or individually writing in response to stimuli, attention may be drawn to the multiple relations at play within the performance setting. This calls forth an awareness of how we are all, in our entanglement, bearing some impact upon each other from more subtle to more explicit degrees. The emotions that move through the relational web will reveal something about the singularity of each member assembled, as, through the sharing of ideas, offering of words, and noticing bodily reactions in the room, space is made to reflect upon the differing impact the same material may have on one another. On this Ahmed notes:

How the object impresses (upon) us may depend on histories that remain alive in so far as they have already left their impressions. The object may stand in for other objects or may be proximate to other objects. Feelings may stick to some objects and slide over others.<sup>176</sup>

The effect of two surfaces upon one another will not only speak to the conditions of the present moment but serve to bring alive histories that reside in each body. How that body may react, or the contribution offered in response, will vary in each singular audience member, subsequently making something of their uniqueness visible to themselves, and perhaps also to those with whom they share the space. In the practice I develop there are devices in which the audience offer their words and ideas to be embedded within the work. We therefore see a model in which the generation of feeling in the performance is

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<sup>175</sup> Ahmed, 6.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 8.

more explicitly made two way and consequently space is made to observe and feel how each singular audience member assembled is making their own impression upon the work and the room. Ahmed suggests that this dual capacity of subjects and objects to impress upon and be impressed upon results is a movement between them. Drawing upon the etymology of the word ‘emotion’, which comes from the Latin ‘emovere’ meaning ‘to move, to move out’, she writes that, ‘emotions involve different movements towards and away from others such that they shape the contours of social as well as bodily space.’<sup>177</sup>

We might conclude, then, that awareness of relations in the space comes to the fore, not just through the process of being impressed upon by surrounding subjects and objects, but also the movement of “towardness” or “awayness” that arises as a result. In this way, Ahmed writes, the movement of emotions has the capacity to reveal individual histories, but also those which may be the result of unconscious social conditioning. The manner in which, for example, emotions may “stick” to some bodies but “slide over” others has an inherent political underpinning and can reveal biases and preconceptions about the emotionality of different bodies (whose bodies are read as vulnerable, fearsome, or shameful, for example?). Emotions, therefore, not only make visible the relations that we exist amongst but also can illuminate the nature of the relationship we have with certain words, objects, bodies. Tendencies or patterns might be revealed amongst the assembled artists and audience members through a movement towards, or away from, certain objects and bodies as a result of the co-authoring process. It may be that a character, as per the design of the framework, is assigned an attribute by an audience member. Does this label then remain and “stick” with the character throughout the rest of the performance? How do other audience members feel about such naming: do they move towards or away from the “named character” or the “naming audience member” as a result? How does the audience member feel, having been the one who assigned an attribution to the character? We might consider that the relations between all will be enlivened and made more tangible as a result of this act. What I hope this may also expose is a malleability to the framework that I offer and the

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<sup>177</sup> Ahmed, 209.

manner in which the same written structure may “stick to” or “slide over” different meanings, feelings, and resonances depending on a particular audience and the particular singularities that encounter it on a given time and day.

### **Malleability of Words**

A central enquiry of this research project is how the playwright can employ text as the primary aesthetic tool through which to facilitate co-authorship. Part of my interest in doing so is to explore, and expose, a malleability to words and language. Instead of conceiving of text as a “fixed”, static, artistic material (rather like I seek to challenge the notion of the ‘hard’ impenetrable individualised subject) I aim to expose a ‘softness’ and malleability to words themselves through acts of co-creation.

I explore this through the ‘porous’ framework that I craft. A written structure with “holes” or gaps in it that may be filled by the audience exposes an elasticity or flexibility to the same framework, which I would contend will never be “filled” in the same way twice. (Although I am as interested in examining the similarities that emerge between performances as much as the differences.) I examine the impressibility of words and the relationality of their effect through the practice of co-authoring. To weave this in with Nancy’s thinking, I would suggest that our relationship to words is both singular and plural at once. For while the use of a word in the performance space will bring alive the singular histories of each of those it lands upon, it simultaneously will be coloured by new resonances occurring in the shared present moment, speaking to the shared (recent) history of the space, and the plurality of emotions that all the other singularities assembled impress the word(s) with.

One strategy I experiment with is embedding opportunities within the performance model for the audience to offer words that they associate with a specific feeling. These words are then carried through into different scenes and

different contexts.<sup>178</sup> By taking words offered in one scene into another, I interrogate if they impress upon the audience in the same way, if the affect in a new context speaks to the history of the previous one. How might it feel as an audience member to hear the word that they put into the room at the beginning of a performance, echo throughout? It might be that words that were offered and impressed with a certain resonance in one scene are then woven back in at a later point in the play to create a different affect and meaning. How might it feel to experience a word or an object that had been imbued with a certain emotion, potentially a word or an object that you as an audience member offered to the room, then employed in a differing way? Might audience members forever associate that object or idea with the original person who offered it, even though it is later on employed completely differently? And how might this explicit repurposing of an object or word for a differing emotional affect then serve to heighten awareness of those with whom you are in relation? Additionally, hearing words that others have offered in response to a particular emotion may expose the differing affect, the “moveability” of that very emotion.

What may also occur is that, rather than assuming a feeling or emotion resides inherently in a word, space is made to witness, and participate in, the process by which a word or an object is given that meaning; how two objects, word and character, or words and objects, come to be “stuck” together. Ahmed writes that ‘once an affective quality has come to reside in something, it is often assumed as without history. We need to give this residence a history’.<sup>179</sup> By inviting audience members to generate their own words to fill gaps, to put words into the space which are then “picked up” by characters and woven into the narrative, or indeed by sticking words to objects and bodies themselves, we are playing out in practice the process through which these impressions are made. Space can be made to witness how, through a process of repetition, an affective quality of an object, subject, or character may be established as given, or stuck.

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<sup>178</sup> For example, see ‘The Universe in the Flat’, playtext, 103, in which the audience are invited to suggest words they associate with the feeling of eating a favourite meal. These words are then threaded throughout the play at different junctures.

<sup>179</sup> Ahmed, 214.

What we may become aware of, then, is the extent to which we participate in this generation and continuation of feeling, that the reading of affectual qualities in a subject or object is a relational process.

### Opening Through Wonder

In what feels a hopeful vein in which to conclude this chapter, I draw upon Ahmed to think through the transformative potential of feeling “wonder” and explore why I believe a co-authored model of performance may afford the space for such feelings to circulate. Ahmed argues that ‘what is ordinary, familiar or usual often resists being perceived by consciousness’.<sup>180</sup> It is in this way that the histories of objects or subjects, the process by which they came to be understood as what they are, is rendered invisible. Ahmed defines wonder as the feeling that arises when we encounter an object ‘as if for the first time’.<sup>181</sup> It is a feeling in which the ordinary is transformed into the extra-ordinary and one that she argues ‘expands’ and ‘opens up’ as we notice and become aware of the processes through which the world is made:

Historicity is negated by the assumption that the world is ‘already there’, whereby its ‘thereness’ is taken for granted as the background of action in the present. To see the world as if for the first time is to notice that which is there, is made, has arrived, or is extraordinary. Wonder is about learning to see the world as something that does not have to be, and as something that came to be, over time, and with work.<sup>182</sup>

I would liken this experience of becoming aware of the world as made to the experience of understanding oneself, and by extension all selves, as relational, interdependent, and vulnerable, as opposed to independent and self-sustaining. I believe both call for an emphasis on the processual - things do not come into being as they are, but through a process in which we all participate. I believe that in a model of co-authorship there is potential to experiment with generating feelings of wonder, and ‘opening up’ by making visible the processes

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<sup>180</sup> Ahmed, 179.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 180.

through which the “ordinary” came into being, inviting audience members to see these anew, and therefore transforming these into extra-ordinary.

One way in which this might be realised is through the process of leaving gaps in the text. Audience members will be invited to fill these gaps and perhaps will do so in the manner which feels instinctive, “obvious” to them. To then hear how others have filled these gaps differently can serve to bring biases or assumptions to light as we see the ways in which the same creative material can be moulded differently depending upon whose hands it is in. Similarly, rather than being presented a character, or setting, as “finished”, “completed”, audience members may be invited to add details, characteristics, and feelings to subjects and objects. In this way, they are actively participating in the making of the world. To witness how the details or words that they have offered become “stuck”, and therefore colour our reading of the narrative world, is another way in which notions of the “ordinary” or “fixed” may be challenged and transformed. Consequently, what might be experienced in the (micro) world of the performance is an ‘opening up’; of not simply seeing things as they are but understanding how we came to read and feel them as so. In this way, wonder is an affective process by which the ‘surfaces’ of the world are made visible and tangible to us. Ahmed suggests that this is an experience of corporeal opening up: ‘the body opens as the world opens before it’.<sup>183</sup> Furthermore, she emphasises that this is not a solitary act, but a shared one: ‘wonder opens up a collective space by allowing surfaces of the world to make an impression as they become see-able or feel-able as surfaces’.<sup>184</sup>

To conclude, then, I suggest that co-authoring in this way might be conceived ultimately as a hopeful act. Both audience member and artist are invited to experience ‘as if for the first time’ the entanglement of relations that we all co-exist and participate with, in making the world as it is seen and felt to be. Ahmed writes, ‘wonder is a passion that motivates the desire to keep looking; it keeps alive the possibility of freshness, and vitality of a living that can live as if

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<sup>183</sup> Ahmed, 180.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 183.

for the first time'.<sup>185</sup> Rather than feeling overwhelmingly despondent or pessimistic about things 'as they are', through the act of opening up the boundaries of ourselves and others, what may emerge is a feeling that we are always being-with and making-with and have within us the capacity to do both differently.

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<sup>185</sup> Ahmed, 183.

## Part Two - Creative Practice

### Co-Authored Work for Young Audiences

#### Overview of Process

In October 2018 I worked in partnership with Matt Addicott, Director and Community Engagement Programmer at Platform, Easterhouse. We created a series of “story-making” workshops for primary school students. In each workshop we looked at different devices towards collective storytelling, offering a framework of a narrative that participants were then invited to “fill” and develop together. We delivered these at an Easterhouse Primary School: eight workshops were conducted with 6-7-year-olds and two with 9-10-year-olds. The learnings from these workshops then informed my playwriting practice as I created ideas for a script and began to craft an “open” text to be co-authored with young audiences.

In May 2019, I had a research and development week with Matt. Together we experimented with the textual strategies I had crafted, collaboratively created more material, developed the dramaturgical structure of the work, and considered how the offers to co-author would be presented to the audience. By the end of this week, we had the framework of ‘Version I’ of ‘The Universe in the Flat’, a work for 9-10-year-olds. In August 2019 we had a further week’s research and development, this time with two professional performers, Isabelle Joss and Ashley Smith. Together we rehearsed the script and honed the material in the room. At the end of this week, we staged two rehearsed readings of ‘The Universe in the Flat - Version I’ at Platform to an invited audience of P6 (9-10-year-olds) primary school students from Easterhouse. In addition to the students, these performances were attended by their teachers, my supervisors Professor Dee Heddon and Professor Liz Tomlin, all of whom provided some feedback and reflections on the performance. Taking on board these reflections, my own observations from the performance, watching the video recordings, and returning to my over-arching research questions, I redrafted ‘Version I’ and produced ‘Version II’ of ‘The Universe in the Flat’.

## The Universe in the Flat: A Story Told Together

### The set

*This performance is designed for groups of approximately twenty students aged between 9-10 years old.*

*The audience are seated on the floor in a circle, each audience member is provided with a notebook and a pen.*

*The stories “in the flat” are performed in the centre of the circle. The props that are added into this space over the duration of the performance remain there throughout. By the end of the performance the circle has been filled with the various objects relating to each story.*

### Characters

*Helen and Matt as themselves*

*Longtail*

*Woman, Twin A and B, Bacteria, Painter, Old Woman, Child A and B, Child, Investigator, Whiskers can be played between two performers, or more, if available.*

MATT: This is Helen. She wanted to make a play.

HELEN: This is Matt. He had some questions about that.

MATT: Helen said she wanted to make a play with holes in it. I was confused.

HELEN: Well... I wanted to experiment.

MATT: Experiment?

HELEN: Yes. I've spent quite a long time learning how to write stories and plays. And it's very often in the same way. The writer sits on their own and decides everything that happens and writes the whole story from the beginning to the end. In a straight line like that.

I wanted to try and find a different way of making a story.

MATT: Different how?

HELEN: Well... rather than the writer finishing the story on their own, I thought it might be fun to leave some holes in it.

MATT: Holes?

HELEN: Yes. Holes. Or gaps. That the audience can then fill in.

MATT: Isn't that a bit like not doing your homework and getting someone else to help you finish it?

HELEN: No... It's a chance for us to make something together. Plus, it's exciting because it means the story will never be the same.

MATT: What do you mean?

HELEN: Well... if the audience help write the play...

MATT: Yes.

HELEN: And the audience is different every time...

MATT: Yes.

HELEN: Then the play will be different every time.

MATT: So you aren't writing the "whole" story - you are writing a *hole* story?

HELEN: Exactly!

MATT: (*To audience*) You can see why I had questions.

HELEN: Matt agreed to help me and for a few weeks now we have been working together to make a play with holes in it.

MATT: We have.

HELEN: And now we think we are ready for the final ingredient...

MATT: Which is?

HELEN: You.

MATT: Me?

HELEN: Them. The audience.

MATT: Of course. Hello, audience. *(To Helen)* I have to say I'm a bit scared.

HELEN: Why Matt? Look at them. They aren't that scary.

MATT: I'm scared because they are here. And we are going to show them a play. A story.

HELEN: That's the plan.

MATT: But I don't know exactly what it is we are going to show them. Normally when I make a play, I will practice and rehearse it and know just what it is the audience are going to see. But this time...

HELEN: Yes?

MATT: I don't know exactly what it is they are going to see.

HELEN: That's part of the plan! It's exciting. They are here now - they are going to help us, help us fill in the holes.

MATT: Maybe you should explain what the story is about.

HELEN: I wanted to tell a story about the universe.

MATT: But the universe is massive! Where do you start?

HELEN: I decided to start with the universe that exists in one small flat.

MATT: The universe in the flat.

HELEN: The flat we are going to visit has been around for years and years.

MATT: Lots of people have lived there.

HELEN: Lots of creatures have crawled between the floorboards.

MATT: If the walls could speak, they could tell many stories.

HELEN: Some of the stories have been hidden.

MATT: Some of the mysteries remain unsolved.

HELEN: Some of the memories are long forgotten.

MATT: Some toys might have been left behind.

HELEN: Some food maybe went mouldy.

MATT: Some people were happy.

HELEN: Some were sad.

MATT: Some were silly.

HELEN: Some were mad.

MATT: There is a child?

HELEN: I think?

MATT: Is there a child?

HELEN: There is a woman.

I think?

MATT: Where did the woman go?

TOGETHER: What do you think happened?

HELEN: I think...

MATT: I think...

HELEN: We need their help.

MATT: Their ideas.

HELEN: To help fill in the holes.

MATT: There are a lot of holes.

HELEN: We are going to see seven small stories.

MATT: They are quite different.

HELEN: Different parts of one big story.

MATT: But they all exist in the same universe.

HELEN: The universe in the flat.

MATT: You are going to help us.

HELEN: Help us tell the stories and to understand this unusual flat a little better.

MATT: There are some things we'd like you to do/

*Enter Mouse Detective Longtail.*

LONGTAIL: /Can I just stop you right there?

MATT: Oh hi... er...?

LONGTAIL: I really think this would be more enjoyable for everyone if I took over from here.

HELEN: I see, but we have a few more things we were going to say... I've got them written down here.

LONGTAIL: I'm sure you do but I think that in view of my professional background and experience in the flat then I am/

MATT: /Sorry, who are you?

LONGTAIL: Who am I? What a question! Who do you think I am?

MATT: ...

LONGTAIL: Detective Longtail...

HELEN: Longtail?

LONGTAIL: The mouse detective.

MATT: Mouse?

LONGTAIL: That's right. I am a mouse. And a detective. And what's more is that I have lived in the flat for my whole life. All nine years!

HELEN: I see!

LONGTAIL: So surely you can agree that really, I'm the far better person to be taking our guests here today through the stories in the flat.

HELEN: I suppose that/

LONGTAIL: /Are you a detective?

HELEN: No, I'm not.

LONGTAIL: You see, all these guests gathered here today want to work with me and be detectives, don't you?

*(Encourages the audience to agree with him)*

LONGTAIL: You see?

MATT: Well, I guess that kind of makes sense.

HELEN: What about the holes, in the story?

LONGTAIL: I'm a detective! This is what we do, we fill in the missing pieces to make sense of the whole story. We will look at the evidence from the flat and we create our own theories. That's what you want, isn't it?

HELEN: Well, yes that/

LONGTAIL: /Perfect! You take a seat just over there. Watch a professional at work.

*(Helen and Matt whisper together in a corner)*

HELEN: This isn't exactly what we had planned.

MATT: Well you wanted it to be different. The Mouse does seem to know what they are talking about. We can just take a seat here and keep an eye on things.

*(To Longtail)*

HELEN: Ok, Longtail/

LONGTAIL: /Detective Longtail.

HELEN: Detective Longtail, you can take over and share the stories in the flat. We are just going to sit here, O.K.? So if you need any help, just ask.

LONGTAIL: Help? Oh please, I'm a professional. You just watch us Detectives at work. We'll be able to teach you a thing or two about filling the gaps in a story.

HELEN: Great, we'll just observe

LONGTAIL: And take notes. You might learn something.

*Helen and Matt sit on the periphery of the circle.*

LONGTAIL: Thank goodness for that, now we can get down to work.

So as those humans were explaining, we are going to witness different stories that occurred over different times in one flat; the flat that I have lived in my whole life.

And as detectives we are going to work together to fill in the gaps and to create our own ideas about what has happened in this flat. So, you see, we will watch these stories and use them to make our own story. Does that make sense?

Now we mice make excellent detectives - we are super small, so we can squeeze into little corners and watch things; we are fast, so we can dash about quickly; and (*Sniffs*) we have excellent senses, so we can sniff out clues.

Humans are not as good as mice. But you are young, so you will be better than the older ones. Your brains are still fresh. Not full of nonsense like the adult brains.

Are you ready to help me investigate?

Excellent. Now I am very professional, and I would like to call you all by your correct detective names. I will ask that you take this moment to write nice and clearly your detective name on the sticker here.

*Produces white sticky labels from pocket. The labels are passed around the circle.*

You can put your actual name, or you can give yourself a new detective name.

My name is Detective Longtail.

*Longtail writes themselves a sticker as the audience do the same. Throughout the rest of the performance, if addressing a specific audience member Longtail will use their 'Detective Name'. Where the script reads 'Detective XXX', the performer will insert the chosen name of the audience member.*

*As the audience are writing their names, Longtail brings on a very large trunk and places it in the centre of the circle.*

LONGTAIL: As I am such a superlative detective, I have gathered clues, evidence, props, and pieces that we need to recreate the moments in the flat. All in my suitcase. Look at that, eh? A big suitcase for a little mouse to lug around, but I'm ever so professional.

*(Checking notebook)*

Now the first scene we are going to see is... Aha, yes. Very good. So we need... that and... that and... that.

You, Detective XXX, could you please open the suitcase. There you will find a box marked... P12. Could you bring that out? Excellent. Open it up...we have... A big cooking pan!

Wow, that is big, isn't it? I could almost fit you in there. Now would you lay that out somewhere in the flat for me. In the kitchen is the most sensible. Where do you think the kitchen is?

Ok, Detective XXX could you please fetch me a small black bag marked C1. There we go. A bag of carrots, a chopping board, and a knife.<sup>186</sup> Lay those in the flat for us too please. Detective XXX, one more for us. A small bag marked O2.

What's inside?

An onion! Brilliant. I think that's just about it. Oh except for...

*Longtail rummages inside.*

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<sup>186</sup> Prop used for knife would be a plastic/safety knife.

A peeler. Let's have a bit of fun though. I'll hide it from her.

*They hide it behind the trunk.*

So detectives, given that it's the first story of the day, I'll go easy on you and just ask that you listen carefully. I'll come back once the story has finished to see what you think. Time now for me to head off. This lady doesn't like mice very much.

*WOMAN enters the flat in apron.*

WOMAN: Now where did I put my peeler? Has anyone seen my...? I need my peeler to do my peeling.

*She hunts around before eventually locating it. Audience may, or may not, assist.*

Excellent. How did it get there I wonder?

I need my peeler to peel my vegetables... Need my vegetables peeled for my pie. I am making a massive pie tonight for my party.

Peel. Pie. Party. The three Ps.

*She chops the onion and carrot as she talks.*

Oh, I know the flat is only wee but I've still invited lots and lots of people. The place is going to be packed to the rafters. And I'm going to make sure it's a very big pie so there is enough to go around for everyone.

I like to think of it as a magic pie. The recipe is very old.

It was given to me by a woman who was a little bit older than me and it was given to her by a woman who was a little bit older than her and it was given to her by a woman who was a little bit older than her and it was given to her by a woman who was a little bit older than her and it was given to her by a woman who... must have been really, really quite old actually.

We are going back a long time. Who it was that wrote the original recipe, I don't know. But the woman who gave it to me said the

woman who gave it to her had heard it came from a very wise woman who lived in the mountains.

All I do know is that women have been making pies from this recipe for years and years and that whoever eats the pies feels...

You know that feeling when you eat something and it makes you feel... *(Enacts eating, pure satisfaction and bliss)*

Do you know what I mean? It makes you feel...

What's the word?

Takes words from the audience... *(Satisfied, happy, full, wonderful, etc)*

Yes! Yes! That's it. It makes you feel those things.

*(Repeats the words that have been offered)*

The feeling that everything is going to be alright.

And in my opinion that is all down to the magic ingredient... *(She pulls a bag out from her apron)*

Nettles.

Dark green stinging nettles with thick, tough leaves.

They might sting to touch but put them in a pie and... *(Chef's kiss)*

They do something magic to us. I know a special spot outside where to find them. First thing this morning, I was out in my wellies, picking them.

Vegetables, nettles, bit of salt and pepper, little chilli to give it some spice... Some people put cheese in their pies. Not in my flat, they don't. Eugh. I've never liked cheese, ever since I was a little girl. Do you like cheese? You're mad. It's not for me. It's way too... cheesy.

*She puts the ingredients into the saucepan.*

Mixing it all together... This is where the magic happens.

*Closes her eyes as though meditating/casting a spell.*

Ooft, did you hear that? The wind is howling.

*She goes to look outside the window, she tilts her head to one side.*

Snow. Falling thick and fast. My favourite tree, that you can see, just there... The branches are getting covered.

There are usually these funny little birds that sit on the branches and I have a game that I play each day. If there's one bird on the branch, it's going to be a bad day. If there's two birds on the branch, it's going to be a good day. If there's three birds on the branch, the day will be full of surprises. Today there are zero. What do you think that means?

I hope my guests still make it to the party. You know, I've got some children coming that are about your age. Maybe you can help me think of things they might like to eat. I've got my magic pie, obviously, but what else might make them happy?

It's been a tough winter. Dark. Miserable weather. Bad news. People need cheering up. If you went to a party, what food would make you feel... *(uses the words that were offered by the audience earlier in the scene, satisfied, excited, etc.)*

Think of the food that would make you most happy in the world to have at a party.

Then write down your suggestion on the piece of paper there. And I can collect your ideas. I like to give people food that makes them happy.

And then I can put your words in my bag and who knows, maybe I'll make it to the shops. Will you do that for me?

Brilliant, I'll gather those.

*Audience are given a moment to write down their suggestions, woman then gathers them in a brown paper bag. She writes 'Food' on the bag.*

*Doorbell.*

Gosh, that's far too early for the guests. I wonder who that is.  
You'll excuse me.

*Woman exits.*

*Longtail comes back.*

LONGTAIL: You can really smell that onion, can't you?

Well team, there you have it, the woman and her pie. Let's hear your initial thoughts? Did you like the woman?

*The audience offer answers and Longtail responds to them, for example:*

You didn't like her? Why not? Something suspicious?

You did like her? How would you describe her?

And what about this Pie. Have you ever heard of a stinging nettle pie before?

Would you like to try it? Do you believe her? That it's magic. That it tastes nice?

*Again space is made for Longtail to listen to the audience and respond accordingly.*

You do have a lot of ideas. O.K., before we move on to the next moment in the flat, I'm going to suggest you write down a word, just one word to remind you of this scene here. We don't want to be forgetful like the grownups, do we?

Pick one word that will jog your memory and make you think of this story and put it in your notebook.

Good detectives always take a moment to write down their ideas.

Write it nice and big.

O.K., what are we going to see now?

*Longtail checks their notebook.*

Ah yes. Double trouble in this one.

Detective XXX. Could you please fetch me a black bag marked S5 H4?

*Audience member fetches bag and produces a pair of bright yellow high-heeled shoes and some headphones.*

Please place these somewhere in the flat. Would you like to try them on?

O.K., Detective XXX could you please fetch a black box that has R2 written on it.

*Audience member produces a rug and a magnifying glass.*

Very good. Thank you, so set these out in the flat.

Want to take a look through it? What can you see?

Now, as I said, there's double trouble in this one. But it's O.K. - they are about your age.

We've got all the props in place but in this story, the characters tell us a bit about their schoolteacher. Does anyone feel they can act like a schoolteacher? They are a friendly schoolteacher. Anyone think they can do that?

O.K.. Excellent, Detective XXX. You be our teacher here. Do your best teacher face. Very good, you've obviously seen a few teachers in your time.

I'll help you out with what to say when the time comes.

O.K., let's get cracking. Now in this scene, as I said, there are two characters because they are...

*Enter TWINS.*

TWIN A: Twins!

TWIN B: Us two.

TWIN A: Twins.

TWIN B: We used to live together.

TWIN A: Here.

TWIN B: In the same flat.

TWIN A: But now we don't.

TWIN B: We used to go to the same school.

TWIN A: Here.

TWIN B: In this town.

TWIN A: But now we don't.

TWIN B: The first school we went to, the school we went to together, that was the best one.

TWIN A: Definitely the best one.

TWIN B: In our first week there we both felt...

TWIN A: ...A little bit

TWIN B: You know...

TWIN A: You say it!

TWIN B: No, you!

TWIN A: We both felt a bit...

**TWINS AB: Scared**

TWIN A: What would the other kids think of us?

TWIN B: Will they laugh at how we talk?

TWIN A: We look the same. Will they think that's weird?

TWIN B: We look the same but we're totally different. Will they think that's weird?

TWIN A: One afternoon in our first week there...

TWIN B: All of our class had to go to the hall.

TWIN A: And we had to sit in a circle.

TWIN B: It was called Circle Time.

TWIN A: And it was led by our Teacher Mr/Ms ...

*(Give the detective name of audience member who is playing the teacher)*

TWIN B: Mr/Ms... was a nice, friendly teacher.

TWIN A: They had a kind voice.

TWIN B: And they said...

TWIN A: They said...

*They look at the Detective Longtail to step in.*

**AB: Ahem**

*Detective Longtail jumps to attention and provides a prompt card to the student to read the line of the teacher.*

TEACHER: Circle Time is a time to share how we feel and what we think. We share how we feel and listen to each other.

TWIN B: Sounds weird.

TWIN A: Not weird. Different.

*Longtail provides second prompt to teacher.*

TEACHER: It's a special time for you to be away from your desks and sit in a circle and look at each other and listen.

TWIN B: This isn't like normal school.

*Longtail provides third prompt to teacher.*

TEACHER: The most important rule here is kindness. I want you to be kind to each other and yourself.

TWIN B: I don't get it. How can you be kind to yourself?

TWIN A: Ssh. Then in the circle we would pass around a pen. And if you were holding the pen, you could talk, and finish a sentence.

TWIN B: A sentence the teacher gave us.

TWIN A: But if you didn't want to talk, you could just pass the pen on.

TWIN B: A sentence like:

*Longtail provides fourth prompt to teacher.*

TEACHER: The place I feel most calm is...

TWIN A: Usually we would just pass it.

TWIN B: The place I feel most calm is...

TWIN A: The place I feel most calm is...

*Audience passes the pen around the circle, Longtail sits within the circle and offers the first answer, illustrating an example for the rest of the audience to follow.*

LONGTAIL: The place I feel most calm is in a hole in a wall in the flat that's just behind the washing machine. It's warm and cosy and smells of flowery washing powder.

*The pen is passed around the circle as audience members complete the sentence for themselves.*

TWIN A: But one afternoon during Circle Time the sentence was...

TWIN B: When the world isn't watching I...

TWIN A: When the world isn't watching I...

TWIN A: And this time...

**TWINS AB: We didn't pass it...**

TWIN B: When the world isn't watching I...

TWIN A: When the world isn't watching I...

TWIN B: When the world isn't watching I... get out my magnifying glass.

TWIN A: When the world isn't watching I tie my hair really high on my head and put on the most amazing, bright yellow, flowery high-heeled shoes.

TWIN B: And with my magnifying glass, I go around the flat looking for clues.

TWIN A: The shoes belong to the lady that looks after us - not me. So, I have to do it in secret.

TWIN B: There is a lot going on under the magnifying glass that you miss usually.

TWIN A: But I love them. The heel makes me walk nice and straight and tall like a grown up, fancy person walking down the street in New York or somewhere important.

TWIN B: You become aware of a whole new world that is going on underneath our noses the whole time - that you wouldn't know was there.

TWIN A: In the flat there is a long, narrow kitchen then extends into the hallway - this is my catwalk, or stage, or important street where famous people walk. In another country - somewhere far away.

TWIN B: For example. There is no cat living in the flat now, but I know there must have been once because I've discovered lots of cat hairs hidden between the floorboards.

TWIN A: I put on my headphones. I play my music loud. And I dance!

TWIN B: I make great discoveries!

TWIN A: And then I walk up and down this catwalk, this important pavement in an important city, with my back straight and my eyes looking forward.

TWIN B: Under the magnifying glass, I have discovered all the teeny tiny creatures that live beneath us and we never even notice because they are so, so tiny!

TWIN A: And I feel like I'm on top of the world! Like I could do anything.

TWIN B: Lying on my tummy, on the rug, a furry type of rug... I found a whole family of ants. An army of ants.

TWIN A: When the world isn't watching...

TWIN B: I spent the whole day down low, on my tummy, watching the ants.  
When the world isn't watching...

TWIN A: My head is up high and I walk among the clouds.

TWIN B: Some people in our class laughed. But in a nice way.

TWIN A: One girl said, "I like imagining I'm in a faraway place too."

TWIN B: That was a good day.

TWIN A: At the school we used to go to.

TWIN B: We used to go to the same school.

**TWINS AB: But now we don't.**

TWIN A: We used to live together.

TWIN B: Here.

TWIN A: In the same the same flat.

**TWINS AB: But now we don't.**

*Longtail gives teacher a final prompt.*

TEACHER: Thank you for sharing today.

LONGTAIL: Thank you teacher, you can return to your seat.

*Twins exit.*

LONGTAIL: See what I mean - double trouble.

Well, seeing as we have just been with Twins, I think it might be a good idea for us detectives to double up for a wee while and work in pairs.

So very quickly now, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2.

*Longtail partners up the audience members. If there is an odd number then they partner with that child. Longtail may encourage Helen and Matt to pair up*

*as well, saying “You can join in too”, or if audience members need assistance, they can help.*

LONGTAIL: O.K. detectives, first I want you to choose a word to describe the Twin with the yellow shoes. And then a word to describe the Twin with the magnifying glass. It’s important we remember everyone we meet.

Agree in your pairs.

Make sure you write down each of the words.

And then I want you to think about what could be the reason why they don’t live together or go to the same school anymore?

*Chat in partners for approx. 3 minutes.*

LONGTAIL: Let’s come together and hear your ideas.

*Pairs share their thoughts on why the Twins might have been separated.*

*Longtail might invite Helen and Matt to share their theory. If groups have been struggling Helen and Matt can suggest something to start off the conversation.*

LONGTAIL: Some interesting theories! I knew that you would be good at this detective business. You’ve got lots of ideas.

O.K., before we move on, I have a final question. Do you think there was a connection between the Twins and the lady with the pie?

*Listen to some ideas.*

Excellent ideas. We’ll witness some more stories in the flat and see if that changes your theories at all.

We are going to move on now to something a little bit different.

Detective XXX, could you please fetch the small box with CS45 written on it?

*Audience member retrieves the box, inside is a half-eaten cheese sandwich.*

What's that there? What's inside the sandwich?

Oh, I see. Place it in the flat for us.

Detective XXX, could you please fetch the box marked PB12?

*Audience member retrieves box: a can of paint and a brush.*

Excellent, let's place that in the flat.

Any ideas about what we might be able to see from looking at these?

*Longtail notes down some of the suggestions from the audience.*

Well, let's see if you are right!

*While this conversation has been going on the actor playing BACTERIA has snuck behind one of the audience members.*

*Longtail sits in the circle with them all and there is a moment as they wait in anticipation in the empty playing space.*

*Bacteria circles around behind the audience members. Tapping on the shoulder and then moving away, weaving in and out of them, before rolling into the flat.*

BACTERIA: Can you guess what I am?

I'll give you a clue.

I'm not one of you...

Humans.

So go on, guess...

*Bacteria takes guesses from the audience, giving some clues to guide them "no, I'm smaller than that", etc, etc. Eventually.*

Oh, ok, you are never going to get it/Yes! That's exactly what I am...

*(response depends on what the audience guess)*

I am a, what you humans call, bac-ter-ia.

I have been living with my twins, cousins, brothers and sisters, on a cheese sandwich that was stuffed behind that radiator in the flat here.

There are millions of us. It's bacteria heaven back there. Heat and cheese. Pure bacteria luxury! I'm very lucky, for bacteria it's pretty much the dream life.

I feel grateful for what I have been blessed with, every day as I gobble on my mouldy cheese.

I'm a privileged wee bacteria, I recognise that.

You may be asking yourself, why?

Why on earth is there a cheese sandwich stuffed behind the radiator?

There's not just one, mate. There are loads. Mountains of cheese sandwiches stuffed back there for me and my family to roll about in all day long.

How did it get there, you may wonder?

They just started growing magically one day! The magic cheese sandwich producing radiator!

Nah, I'm joking. That's not it. Would be good though!

The truth is a girl used to live here. About your age.

*This is directed at a member of the audience, who throughout the rest of the scene is positioned as 'the girl'.*

And every day the lady looking after her gave her cheese sandwiches for lunch.

*Bacteria offers the plate with the half-eaten cheese sandwich on it to 'the girl'.*

And every day the girl would take one bite and say "Mmm, delicious".

Then when the lady's back was turned, she would stuff them behind the radiator.

*Bacteria takes the girl's hand and positions her in the space.*

There used to be a little table there in front of the radiator. The table the girl would sit at for lunch. The perfect position to just stuff, stuff, stuff the cheese sandwiches down.

The cheese sandwiches always disappeared so quickly from the girl's plate that the lady thought she must really love them.

So she made her more and more. Every day, cheese sandwiches. Sometimes cut into squares. Sometimes cut into triangles. Sometimes crusts on. Sometimes crusts off. But every day, cheese sandwiches.

And then every day, a smile from the girl, "mmm, that's delicious" and then a secret stuff, stuff, stuff.

And that's how my family got their fortune, their wonderful life in bacteria heaven. My great-great-great-grandmother lived on the first one. Then we all grew and grew. There's loads here for us to live on and the sandwiches just get better over time. The mouldier and crustier the better.

Look how fat I am getting! Lovely and fat. We bacteria like fat, we like growing quickly and fast and spreading all over the place!

The little girl and lady left.

*Bacteria returns the girl to her place in the circle.*

Others were here for a bit. They didn't give us any more sandwiches but they never noticed us so we've been left in peace, behind the radiator.

It's been empty for a while now. Well, empty of humans. There's the mice, the ants, an old cat that sneaks in from time to time, a bird might tap on the windowsill, and of course thousands and thousands of bacteria.

But it's been empty of humans for a while now.

Although, I have a feeling that is going to change. There was someone in here the other day... Singing and banging.

And I thought I could smell... paint.

Who knows what that could mean for us and our mouldy, cheesy, bacteria heaven?

Just as long as they don't look behind the radiator.

But then, nobody ever does.

When was the last time you looked behind a radiator?

*Enter PAINTER, singing and painting. Bacteria hides behind one of the audience members.*

PAINTER: Oh. Was in my own little world there.

Sorry about the singing. I'll keep it down.

Don't mind me ... I'm just going to crack on with the job. Alright?

Not making any trouble just...

Look. Can you keep a secret?

O.K. Good. You seem trustworthy.

O.K., so, to tell you the truth, I shouldn't be here. In the flat.

Not really. It's not my flat.

I promise I'm not a criminal or anything. I'm one of the good ones, honest.

Do you believe me?

But I've been given this job - a kind of secret job.

The boss told me not to ask too many questions.

He was quite a scary man. Sneaky sort of guy in a horrible brown suit.

Anyway, he said, all I have to do is paint.

Paint the flat - every last spot of it.

Paint over everything and start afresh. Start from the beginning, ready for whoever lives here next.

So, I'm going to start... alright?

Just on this wall above the radiator here.

Don't worry - this flat has been empty for months. Nobody is living here. I won't disturb anyone.

Just do me a favour, yeah? If anyone asks you, say you never saw me.

*We use a blackout and flash of light technique to 'magic' the painter off stage.*

*When lights return to normal Painter has gone and Longtail is back.*

LONGTAIL: Well detectives, the plot thickens.

So many things you might be wondering.

Who was the little girl who didn't like cheese sandwiches?

And what about the woman looking after her? Have we met her before?

Did the bacteria and family survive?

You are clever detectives, I'm sure you have some questions of your own.

Now I want you to return to your partner and together I want you to choose one question that you have about what has been going on in the flat.

Agree on the question and then write it down on the piece of paper.

I'm going to give you two minutes to do this, so be quick in choosing your question.

*The audience work in pairs with Longtail assisting and ensuring everyone understands and that the questions get written down. Helen and Matt can also assist with pairs writing questions if needed.*

LONGTAIL: Excellent work, I'm hearing some very clever lines of questioning from you all.

Now for a bit of fun. We are going to make it snow.

Screw up the piece of paper with your question written on it into a little ball, like this.

*They demonstrate.*

Have you done that?

O.K., now 1,2, 3. Throw it into the centre of the circle.

*Audience throw their paper into the circle.*

It's snowing questions!

Well, we hard-working detectives have to have a little fun sometimes, don't we? And it's actually helpful to set the mood as there is some snow in the next story.

Detective XXX, could you assist me by collecting all the snowballs and placing them in this bag here? We'll return to these later.

*When collected, Longtail writes 'Questions' on the paper bag, which is left in the space.*

There is someone else I'd like you to meet.

Let's get things ready.

Detective XXX, can you please fetch the small box with W1 written on it?

*Produces a radio.*

Excellent. Let's check it's working. Can you just push that button there?

*Some loud music plays.*

Oh, that's a bit much! Not right for the scene. Turn the knob and change the channel?

*Some more sedate classical music plays.*

That'll do.

And then Detective XXX could you find the bag with W5 on it and please bring it out?

*Wrapping paper.*

Would you place that out for us?

I might have to help get this one going. The person we are going to meet is a little bit... You know... Oh, you'll see what I mean!

The woman.

*Enter OLD WOMAN.*

The old woman.

The old woman is knelt on the rug.

Wrapping.

The old woman is wrapping.

*Old Woman kneels and lays out wrapping paper.*

The old woman is very forgetful.

*Longtail sits in the circle with audience.*

OLD WOMAN: I can't forget.

I mustn't forget.

Don't let me forget.

I've forgotten!

That day... a happy day. It happens once a year and you get a bit older... what's the word?

That's it!

Birthday!

I cannot forget. She will be ever so upset if I forget.

And I'll make her something nice to eat. My special pie. And her favourite cheese sandwiches. That I can remember. She loves cheese sandwiches.

Oh, and I made a list of other things she would enjoy. I have to write things down now or I quite simply forget them. It's like the words have all fallen out of my brain.

*Here she draws out some of the ideas for food that the audience members offered in the scene PIE. These have remained in a paper bag, in the circle, since the Woman in the first scene collected them. For example:*

WOMAN: "Fish and Chips"

"Chocolate Ice Cream"

"Donuts"

That'll be good, won't it? That will make her feel...

*(embed the same words that were used in the PIE scene provided by the audience, satisfied, happy, wonderful, etc)*

Birthday.

She's going to be... *(counts on her fingers)*

Nine.

That's an important age - so I really mustn't forget.

*The classical music playing from the radio is interrupted by a news bulletin.*

*The woman becomes absorbed in the story and goes to stand and look at the window. She tilts her head.*

RADIO: A search has begun for the bodies of eight climbers missing in the Himalayas.

The climbers, who were trying to ascend the highest point of Mount Everest, have been missing for five days.

The snowy weather conditions mean the chance of there being any survivors is highly unlikely.

OLD WOMAN: I used to live in the mountains. When I was a girl.

*She points outside the window.*

There are three birds sat on the tree. We are in for a surprise today.

*Doorbell.*

Ssh!

*She crouches down.*

I don't want to see anyone. I've got far too much to do.

And it's probably just that rude man in the awful brown suit. Or maybe it was a blue suit? I can't remember but it was awful, and he was rude.

*Doorbell.*

Ssh!

*She crawls silently back towards the rug. She listens.*

Thank goodness, they've gone. I've got far too much to remember.

I've got the...

*Points to the wrapping paper, indicates for the audience to provide the word.*

Thank you - wrapping paper. Sometimes, it's like the words fall right out of my head. I don't know where they go. Wrapping paper.

So what's missing?

Present!

*Deep in thought, she looks around the flat.*

Yes!

*She picks up the magnifying glass that was used in TWINS.*

She will like this. She likes looking for clues and details and making up stories. Yes, this will do nicely.

*She begins wrapping.*

Nine.

When I was nine, I had some big secrets.

I started to collect things that were important to me.

Little things. Things to help me remember good times I'd had. A train ticket. A leaf. An old recipe. Maybe it would look like rubbish to anyone else but to me it was all special. Had meaning.

I put all the things in a shoebox. I decorated the shoebox with my drawings.

When I was ten, I knew we were going to have to move away. Things were getting bad in the country. There were bad stories in the news every day. I knew we would leave soon so I decided to bury my box. What a thing to do!

I was right though. Things did get bad, and we did leave. My box was left, buried in the gardens by the tree.

I've never been back.

I wonder if it's still there. Maybe someone found it?

When we left, we had to climb high into the mountains.

"Don't look down - just look up".

I hope they find those bodies.

They will be buried deep in the snow.

Now. What was I doing?

Birthday. Wrapping Paper.

Mustn't forget.

She'll be upset if I forget.

Don't let me forget.

*Exit Old Woman.*

LONGTAIL: We don't forget things do we, detectives?

Let's take a moment to see what we can remember.

Who have we met so far in the flat?

*Repeats the names of the characters that the audience list.*

Anyone we are forgetting?

O.K., while we have the characters fresh in our minds, let's take a moment to look at some of the questions you had earlier and see if we can suggest any answers at this stage.

*Longtail takes the bag of collected 'snowball' questions and invites a member of the audience to pick one out of the bag. The audience member reads out the question and as a group they discuss a possible response. Repeat for three questions, though if some are very similar, do more than this. Longtail may ask Helen and Matt for their responses.*

LONGTAIL: In the next story there's a bit of a party happening in the flat.

To get us in the mood, let's play a little game.

Have a think about what present you would give your best friend, if you could give them anything for their birthday. Anything to make them feel...

*(Uses the same words that were suggested by the audience in the PIE story again - happy, satisfied, joyful, etc)*

Write down your present idea on a piece of paper.

Fold the paper in half. Then in half again.

We are going to play a game, a bit like pass the parcel. When the music starts, pass your word to the person next to you.

Keep passing until the music stops.

*Longtail turns on the radio, music plays for a minute or so. Stops.*

Now open up your present!

Voila! I hope you are all happy with your gifts.

Detective XXX, what did you get?

Very nice. Detective XXX, how about you?

Lucky you! Detectives, keep your presents safe, put them in your notebook, they could come in useful later.

I just wanted to get you all in a bit of a party mood. We are going to a party in the flat. I want us to try and create some of the atmosphere, so we can feel how it was.

*To create the soundscape, Longtail divides the audience into sections, getting them to contribute different sounds. We then put it all together. Ideally this is recorded on a loop pedal and then played during the scene.*

In this story, the flat is very busy and it's full of people.

Let's try and create that atmosphere.

So, the people in this corner of the circle, I'd like you to make the sound of people chit chatting, you are greeting each other and asking how they are, very happy to see one another. Can you do that?

O.K., very good. Now the people at this party are very happy so the people in this corner, can you provide a bit of laughter?

All chuckle together like you have just heard something very funny.  
Excellent.

Now the people in this corner, you are all celebrating some happy news, so can you all practice saying, "Hip, Hip, Hooray".

1, 2 ,3 - Hip, Hip, Hooray!

Wonderful, now let's put all of those three together and hear how it sounds, so get ready to chat, laugh, and hooray all at once.

Ready!

*Audience simultaneously create their sounds.*

Wonderful, you've set the mood perfectly. We are in the flat and the party is happening all around.

*The soundscape is played as CHILD A and CHILD B enter the space.*

*They each have a party blower that they blow simultaneously. These remain in the flat.*

CHILD A: There were so many people crammed into the flat.

So many grownups!

And they were all excited. And loud.

I only wanted to spend time with you.

It had been ages and ages since we had seen each other, and I wanted to run off into a corner with you so we could have our own secret party and play our own games. You always invented the best games. Weird games. But the best games.

I only wanted to spend time with you.

But you were on the other side of the flat.

There were so many people in-between us.

Old people, tall people, loud people. The lady who once looked after us. That peculiar old woman who lived on the top floor. She had brought her cat with her.

I tried to squeeze my way over to you.

CHILD B: I just wanted to get out.

CHILD A: But so many grownups, squeezing my cheeks, tugging at my hair, wanting me to dance. They knew I liked to dance. And I am very good at dancing.

CHILD B: It was too much. Too much noise and too many people.

CHILD A: So I danced a little bit, to make them happy.

CHILD B: I didn't want to talk to any of the grownups. Too many silly questions.

I decided to crawl my way between their legs and get to the bedroom. (*Crawls*)

CHILD A: I was saved by the news! The biggest news anyone could ever remember! All the adults gathered around the radio. Everyone was completely distracted, asking what on earth would happen now the wall had come down.

I ran to the bedroom to find you... But you were gone.

The window was open. It had finally stopped snowing!

By the windowsill, there was a note with my name on it.

*Child B crawling still.*

*Over the course of this monologue the chatter from the soundscape is reduced in volume to silence by the end of the scene.*

CHILD B: I heard the grownups gasp when the news about the wall came on the radio.

Big news that I knew would distract them for ages - my chance to escape! To slip out into the night unseen.

I didn't want you to be sad, so I quickly wrote you a note. A note that only you could understand.

I lifted the long handle on the window, climbed out, and lowered myself on to the ledge below. Here, I was struck by the thought that I had never seen this view of the flat before, from the outside looking in.

I noticed all the tiny weeds, plants, and flowers growing on the outside of the building.

Behind me was the big tree. The tree that I'd looked at so many times from inside the flat.

I glanced over my shoulder to see how many birds. One black bird, sleeping with its beak resting on a wing.

The bird didn't notice me, slowly moving down the side of the building from floor to floor, careful not to make a wrong move and fall to the ground below.

A flash!

Something caught my eye...

The shape of two shimmering objects beneath me, far away but still distinct in the dark. Their shiny, oily shapes were clear even from up here - a pair of snakes in the grass.

Snakes! I was sure it was snakes...

I'd always been fascinated by snakes.

I paused to watch. I couldn't take my eyes off them.

I think they noticed me too.

They became very still. They were watching me, watching them.

We stayed like that for...

I don't know how long.

Complete stillness.

Until...

My foot slipped.

I grasped for the ledge quickly...

But found only air...

Everything happened very quickly...

Slip, crash, bang, smash.

Me in the grass.

I don't know who found me. Or how far I fell. There were lots of different stories that people told about what happened. About why I was climbing out the window.

But I was in a deep dream. A long, deep dream. And in that dream, I was free. Completely free, playing with the snakes in the grass.

*Children exit.*

LONGTAIL Sometimes as a detective, you have to really use your imagination... Imagine the things that you didn't see and how they could connect to the things you did see.

I'm going to ask you to use your imagination for a minute now detectives.

Think about this on your own for a moment. Close your eyes and think.

Why did the child want to leave?

Where do you think the child was trying to escape to?

Then write the idea in your notebook.

Has everyone written something?

Wonderful, it's good to gather clues and ideas on the way.

Now, Detective XXX, could you please fetch a box marked M10 from the trunk.

*Inside the box is a shoebox covered in drawings.*

LONGTAIL: And place that in the flat.

*As the audience member places the shoebox in the flat, CHILD enters with a notepad and pen.*

*Child sits.*

*Deep in thought they chew on their pen.*

*They lean into the space next to them as though reading over someone's shoulder.*

*Aha! A moment of inspiration.*

*They write a word down, carefully, in capitals.*

*We don't see what they write.*

*They put the piece of paper in the box.*

*They resume their thoughtful position, chewing on pen.*

*Absorbed in thought until...*

*They notice the audience.*

CHILD:       What the...?

Where on earth did you all come from?

When did you arrive?

Now... I'm sorry to have to ask this but... are you real?

Are you sure you are real?

*Child ponders.*

You are sure that you are real but how can I be sure that you are real?

You have to understand my situation... I may be young but, in my experience, I have found it's the ones that say they are real that turn out not to be real at all.

In fact, the only one I can be sure is real is my partner here. My double. My other half.

Can you see them?

But you can see me?

That makes sense. You see, we are total opposites of each other in every way.

Everything I am, they are not. Everything they are, I am not.

So if I am VISIBLE to you, it makes perfect sense that they are INVISIBLE to you.

Everything I am, they are not. Everything they are, I am not.

We are opposites.

What was that?

*They listen to their imaginary friend.*

They told me to tell you that they are very clever.

So that means I am...

Hey!

Anyway, I need to get back to my project.

*Resumes thoughtful, pen-chewing pose.*

I must say it's very UNUSUAL that you have all arrived here.

These days everyone is leaving, not arriving.

The block of flats gets emptier every day.

Even the ants left last week.

The pigeons are still here though. They have a nest in the roof. Sometimes they sit on the windowsill. Other times I can hear them rustling about above.

They are quite chatty birds you know? We've had some good conversations.

If you are quiet, you might hear them now.

Ssh.

*Child invites the audience to be quiet and listen carefully.*

*The faint noise of a pigeon cooing can be heard.*

CHILD:       Hear it?

*Child mimics the cooing back to them.*

*This time we hear the cooing even louder.*

*Child copies and responds again.*

Coo-coo c-coo, c-coo, Coo Coo?

Do you want to join in? I can teach you pigeon.

It's...

Coo-coo c-coo, c-coo, Coo Coo?

*Audience coo together.*

Listen again?

*More cooing from the pigeons, Coo-coo, Coo-cooo, Coo-coo.*

I think they are telling me something. COO-COO, COO-COOOOOO?

*Listen, the cooing is fainter.*

I didn't get that... Ssh. Listen carefully.

*Silence.*

They must have gone flying.

The pigeons are happy that the flats are getting empty, it means they can nest in peace without anyone trying to clear them away.

I don't want everyone to leave though.

When people leave, it makes it very hard to remember them.

That's why I am making my memory box.

Here.

*Shows box to audience, looking for word to demonstrate.*

Oh, I forgot.

*They write 'Memory' on the box.*

My memory box.

When people started leaving, I thought it would be easy to remember. But when you don't see them every day, you soon forget.

A lady once told me she made a memory box and she put small things inside that reminded her of her happiest times.

So, we, me and my friend here, we decided to make one, to help us remember everyone who left.

We decided that we should choose the one word that reminds us of the person we want to remember and write it down and put it in the box.

*They pick words from the box.*

FANTASTIC.

The nice lady who was good at singing and dancing. She was from another country, I can't remember where. But she wore bright colours and said everything was 'fan-tastic', in this voice, like, *faaan tas teeec*. She always smiled and that always made me smile.

QUEENIE.

The ginger cat who lived in the top floor and walked around like this, like she was a tiger in the jungle and she was the queen. She made me feel like she had a secret she wouldn't ever tell me.

NETTLES.

There was a lady here, she used to collect stinging nettles. I'd see her outside in the gardens looking for them. I think she had magic powers or something because she'd hold the nettles and never get stung. I'd see her and always felt curious.

PRICKLES.

The cactus that used to be on a top shelf over there. Just a small

one but it could really prick. Even standing near it made me feel nervous.

WHISKERS.

The mouse I saw once in the kitchen with long dark whiskers, which made him look very, very intelligent, but he moved so fast it sent shivers down my spine.

CHATTY.

The strange black bird, she lived in the tree that's just outside the flat there. She'd chat, chat, chat all day, sat on a branch by the window. I don't know what she was trying to tell me. But hearing her made me feel happy and safe.

QUESTIONS.

The man in the brown suit who came around. I calculated he asked 27 questions in 4 minutes 32 seconds. He didn't smile. Or even seem to breathe properly for that matter. I felt uneasy when he was there.

ANXIOUS.

That was...

BUBBLES.

Ahh...

HYGIENIC.

She was silly...

CREEPY.

...

LONELY.

Some of them are secret.

My friend has a suggestion... Would you like to hear it?

Maybe you would like to add yourself to my memory box?

That way, I will know that you are real? And I'll remember you even when you have left the flat.

O.K....?

Great!

So all you have to do is to choose the one word for yourself. Any word that you would like to be your word.

Write it on the piece of paper.

And then I can keep them here safe in my box.

I still haven't chosen what my word is. I suppose I don't really need to remember me. But I think it would be a good idea to have a word for myself. Just in case.

My friend can help me. They are clever. Good with words.

And they know me better than anyone.

*The audience write their words on the piece of paper and Child gathers these in their box.*

Thanks. I'll remember you now. I promise.

*Exit Child.*

LONGTAIL: I liked that child. They were always kind to me and my mice family. They were kind to all the little animals in the flat.

Do you think they are O.K.?

How do you think they were feeling?

What word would you use to describe the child?

You know, detectives, I've been very impressed with your work.

Your ideas help fill in some of the gaps in the stories. Your ideas help give them a new meaning.

We've only got one more story left to see.

And I have to say the person we are going to meet... Well, they aren't as intelligent as you lot. In my opinion.

So let's prepare the scene.

Just the one item we need.

Detective XXX, could you fetch a bag marked J14.

*The audience member fetches the bag, inside is a suit jacket.*

LONGTAIL: Thanks, detective. Would you like to try it on?

*Enter INVESTIGATOR. They take the suit jacket from the audience member, using them as a mirror to check they are ready. Once they are ready, they indicate for the audience member to return to their seat.*

INVESTIGATOR: I'm all alone in this flat.

It's an unusual experience.

It's an unusual job.

My boss had sent me to investigate. Nobody else wanted to do it.

This part of town has been empty for a long time - like a ghost town.

There used to be a wall, you see, that separated this part of town from my part of town.

The wall came down a long time ago when I was a kid.

I remember that day. Everyone remembers that day.

I never met anyone from this side of town. I heard they were a bit... weird.

We heard stories, that everyone ran away to start again in a new place.

We heard that there were whole buildings, shops, offices, flats, just left completely empty.

Completely empty.

Like this flat.

Anyway, people from my side of town have decided it's time to investigate. To try and understand what the people who lived here were like. Who was here? What did they do? Were they like us?

That's why I'm here.

All alone, in this flat.

Looking for clues.

Everything has just been left.

*Looks at the pot of vegetables.*

Were they in the middle of cooking?

Looks like old leaves or something...

*Finds the party blower the children had.*

A party? I didn't imagine these people having parties.

*Finds the items of food listed in the 'food' bag,*

Fish and Chips, Biscuits, Sweets.

They like their food.

Burgers! They are my favourite.

*They put on the radio; the same classical music plays as in the scene WRAPPING.*

*They try on the yellow shoes, posing.*

Too small. Hmm, so a person with small feet that liked burgers and fish and chips.

*They spot the magnifying glass.*

Ooh, perhaps they were a scientist. Or a spy?

*They crawl around for a little bit peering through the glass. They pause at the rug.*

What the...? No way! My grandma used to have this exact same rug. Exactly the same. That reminds me of going to her house for tea when I was young.

*They notice the memory box.*

More clues maybe.

*They select some of the words the audience members offered of themselves.*

*For example:*

*‘Matthew’, ‘Waterfalls’, ‘Banana’, ‘Fortnite’*

A banana called Matthew swam in the waterfalls for a fortnight.

Maybe it’s a code. Spy Code?

*They pick more words from the memory box that have been supplied by the audience, for example:*

*‘Amazing’, ‘Kitten’, ‘Party’, ‘Coca-Cola’.*

The kitten drank all the Coca-Cola at the amazing party?

The kitten will take Coca-Cola to the party?

Maybe the kitten knows the banana?

*They begin to take out all the words, laying them on the floor.*

*They say each word out loud, perhaps repeating some, or making a rhythm so it becomes a chant. They might make an observation between two.*

*They get a phone out of their suit jacket and take a picture of the assembled words.*

*Again they make some random sentences and conclusions from what is there.*

A dancing cat has been fighting with a joyful jellyfish.

That doesn’t make sense?

So many possibilities. So many clues.

What were they trying to say?

What's the secret message?

This place is...

It's not what I expected.

I still can't believe they have the same rug as my grandma!

I should get back to the boss. Tell them what I found.

It's starting to feel a bit strange.

All alone, in this flat.

*DETECTIVE WHISKERS comes up behind Investigator.*

WHISKERS: All alone?

Are you sure? Did you look closely? In the rug? Behind the radiator? Under the floorboards?

Because if you did...

Maybe you would realise... You are never ALL alone.

*Investigator, oblivious to Whiskers' presence, exits.*

What a joker eh? What was all that about?

*Repeats some of the sentences Investigator came up with.*

"A dancing cat has been fighting with a joyful jellyfish?"

What nonsense!

He is clearly not a REAL detective like me.

Detective Whiskers at your service. Mouse detective, I've been detecting for almost all my life.

I see that you have all been doing some detective work, too?

Maybe now is the time to share/

*Enter Detective Longtail.*

LONGTAIL: /You! What are you doing?

WHISKERS: Ah, Longtail.

LONGTAIL: Whiskers! What are you doing?

WHISKERS: Doing what I do best. I'm investigating.

LONGTAIL: I'm investigating! We (*gesturing audience*) are investigating.

WHISKERS: Excellent, I will join in.

LONGTAIL: We don't need you to join in, we are doing a very good job/

WHISKERS: /I have all the necessary experience, I've lived in the flat my whole life, I'm a quick-fire little mouse that can zoom around the space and I have super sharp senses for sniffing out a story.

LONGTAIL: Yes, yes, I know all that. Detectives, allow me to explain, this here, is my... Well, you are smart you have probably guessed by now. Detective Whiskers is my twin.

WHISKERS: The good-looking twin.

*Longtail scoffs.*

WHISKERS: My whiskers are just adorable, everyone loves them.

LONGTAIL: Oh, enough of your Whiskers - on with the detective work.

*To the audience.*

You just met another new person, they offered a few more clues about what has happened in this flat.

WHISKERS: They were talking a load of gibberish, "The kitten will take Coca-Cola to the party?"

LONGTAIL: They were grown up. Grown up humans aren't as good at making connections - their brains are too busy. That's why I'm working with this lot - they are nice and young.

Detectives, you have seen some moments and memories that occurred in this flat. You have met a...

*Does a recap with the audience. They work together to list all the characters*

*they have met in the flat, and additional characters that have been mentioned or heard.*

Now is the time for you to gather the clues and ideas you have had together. Time for you to decide on a story that happened in the flat, a moment that we haven't seen.

WHISKERS: Can I make a suggestion?

LONGTAIL: If you must.

WHISKERS: Two minds are better than one. I suggest our young detectives work in pairs.

LONGTAIL: Very well. Let's pair up.

*Longtail puts the audience in their pairs again.*

In your pairs you are going to imagine a moment or a story in the flat that we didn't see today.

WHISKERS: I have another suggestion!

*They gather the words that the audience had put into the memory box and were laid out by Investigator. They hand out a word to each audience member.*

The more words the better. You can use them to build your story.

LONGTAIL: Who are the characters in your story? Someone we met? Or heard about?

Lay out all the words that you have both gathered in your notebooks.

These words might help you think about your characters' stories.

Decide who the characters are.

What are they doing in the flat?

How are they feeling?

The only rule is that this must be a story that has happened right here. In this flat.

*They address Helen and Matt.*

Grownups! Are you still awake? Perhaps you could assist us in the gathering of the final theories.

*The pairs are given time to work together.*

*Helen, Matt, Longtail, and Whiskers can be on hand to assist pairs if needed.*

LONGTAIL: There are so many ideas and stories in the room. I think it's time to come together. I know what we need... Circle Time.

*They find the audience member who played the teacher in the earlier scene.*

LONGTAIL: Teacher, can you remind us what circle time is about?

*As in Circle Time a pen is passed around.*

We are going to pass around the pen and in your pairs, you are going to share what your story is about. You will tell us the characters that are in your story. Remember, as teacher said, Circle Time is a time to listen and share.

We will start with the sentence, "In our story we meet..."

*The pen is passed around. All pairs are invited to share what the story is about.*

LONGTAIL: What true detectives you are. You have noticed new things and each come up with so many theories and ideas about the flat.

*To Helen and Matt.*

Aren't you two impressed?

HELEN: Very.

LONGTAIL: Haven't they done a good job?

MATT: A wonderful job.

LONGTAIL: Haven't I done a good job?

HELEN: A brilliant job.

LONGTAIL: We did like you said. We filled the holes together.

HELEN: You helped us tell the stories in the flat.

MATT: And then you created your own stories.

HELEN: You've added even more stories to the universe in the flat.

MATT: Thank you so much for sharing your ideas with us today.

HELEN: We couldn't have done it without you.

LONGTAIL: Ahem.

HELEN: And you, Longtail, we couldn't have done it without you.

WHISKERS: Ahem.

MATT: Or you, Whiskers. You were helpful, too.

HELEN: We needed everybody here to tell the stories.

## **The Universe in the Flat: Critical Reflection**

In this ‘Critical Reflection’ I explore the process of developing ‘The Universe in the Flat’ (TUITF). To support my analysis of how I came to craft ‘Version II’ of the play (included in the body of this thesis) I also reflect upon the process of creating and sharing ‘Version I’ (included as an appendix). I explore how learnings and insights derived from the process of sharing ‘Version I’ with an audience of primary school children informed the decisions and changes made when redrafting to create ‘Version II’. The key changes that I address in this reflection are, firstly, the addition of the character Longtail in ‘Version II’. Longtail, who does not appear in ‘Version I’, acts as a consistent guide for the audience, giving them a specific role in the performance by positioning them as detectives. Secondly, in ‘Version I’ the stories from the flat that were shared in each performance, and the order in which they were performed, were selected by the audience through a random “lucky dip”, in which six out of a possible twelve scenes were chosen. This device is dispensed with in ‘Version II’, as the seven stories in the flat, and the order in which they are shared, is scripted and pre-rehearsed. The third key difference, supported by these two changes, is the move from two distinct dramaturgical structures in ‘Version I’ - the world of the flat, and the “frame” in which Matt and Helen interact with the audience - to a more cohesive narrative structure in ‘Version II’. In ‘Version II’, Longtail acts as the consistent link between each of the stories in the flat, facilitating a discussion amongst the group after each story they watch. In this reflection, I explore in more depth the observations from the performances of ‘Version I’ that led to me making these changes in ‘Version II’, and my aims in doing so. I also discuss how the aesthetic decisions made when developing ‘TUITF’ are informed by the theoretical ideas that underpin this research enquiry, namely relationality, vulnerability, and affect.

### **Different Modes of Co-Authorship**

In ‘TUITF’ I endeavour to blend and connect the two forms of co-authoring I identify in ‘Chapter One’: i) making material contributions to the work; and ii)

meaning-making and interpretation, so that they inform and influence one another. In 'Version II' the audience (placed in role as detectives) are asked to interpret what they see both individually and together, in pairs and as a collective, and they create links between the stories. They then create new stories, which they interpret. Co-authoring through material contribution and co-authoring through interpretation are connected. One might think of this as a model of on-going circularity as the two work in tandem and generate, allow, feed the other. In this way the focus of this work is not just about the encounter between the artist and the audience but also invites an imaginative exchange between audience members. By embedding the two modalities of participation I explore how a co-authored performance model can simultaneously craft space for each audience member to form and share their individual interpretation of the work, while also drawing attention to the multiple relations that influence and shape this interpretation. I will go on to explore the specific devices that were developed to explore this in practice.

### **'A Play with Holes in It'**

Through this practice research I have experimented with crafting what Duska Radosavljevic and Cathy Turner have described as a 'porous dramaturgy'. For Radosavljevic and Turner, these are works in which 'the audience's reaction is integral to the dramaturgy' and by being drawn into the process of performance making, the audience members become aware both of their own and their fellow audience members' presence within the space, and of the contributions they are making as the performance unfolds.<sup>187</sup> The idea of 'porosity' or 'openness' is introduced in the outset of 'TUITF' as the "makers", Helen and Matt, tell the audience they have made a play with 'holes in it' and that they want to work with the audience to fill in the gaps.<sup>188</sup> They have created a number of short stories that exist within one flat and require the help of the audience to both tell the stories and understand the world of the flat.

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<sup>187</sup> Radosavljevic, 191.

<sup>188</sup> Shutt, Helen. 'The Universe in the Flat - Version II.' Playtext, 94.

In 'Version II', this introduction from Helen and Matt is interrupted by Longtail, a Mouse Detective who insists on taking over proceedings. As a lifelong resident of the flat and skilled detective, Longtail assures the audience they are best placed to lead the process and invites the audience to become detectives so they can work together to gather clues and create their own theories about the flat. The audience are invited to give themselves a detective name and throughout the piece are given various roles to assist in setting the space, in addition to offering their ideas and reflections on the individual stories and how they might connect.

This new device arose from the observation that in 'Version I' the role of the audience was not always clear or consistent. In part this was due to the fact that there were two dramaturgical structures at play: the narratives taking place in the flat and the "frame" in which Helen and Matt, following each story, addressed the audience and asked them to answer a question. Rather than relating their ideas to the story they had seen, the questions more often drew upon a theme presented in the short story and invited the audience to reflect on their own perspective. For example, following a scene in which Bacteria describes living in perfect comfort on a mouldy cheese sandwich behind a radiator, the audience were asked, 'Where do you feel most at home?' Following a scene in which a woman describes a memory box she made as a child, the audience were asked, 'What would you place in a box to remind you of a nice time?' The intention in 'Version I' had been to offer a space for the audience to reflect on how the ideas in the story may relate to them and even position themselves in relation to the themes addressed in the narrative. For this age group, however, I became aware that some of the questions regarding how they felt may have been difficult to answer in the short time allocated. It was my observation that rather than connecting the audience members to the ideas in the story, the questions felt too removed and abstract, taking their minds far from the stories in the flat and away to their own homes, lives, toys, pets, etc. Although I was keen for the audience to bring their own lives and ideas to the stories, the dramaturgical structure was not coherently embedded enough to then thread this element of the performance back to the stories in the flat, thus compounding the feeling of two quite distinct structures.

Furthermore, on reflection, I came to understand that by crafting questions that pertained to each audience member's personal life, the narrative became more diffuse, thus undermining the intention of the project to invite an awareness of how each audience member was relating both to the narrative of the performance and to one another. In adapting 'Version II', I worked to develop a structure that allowed for moments of shared reflection on the narrative between the audience, keeping the questions and interaction concentrated on what they had watched together. My intention in making this change is that concentrating on a shared object of focus (ie. the story they have just witnessed) enables attention to be paid to the relation of each audience member to that object, as well as to each other.

In 'Version II', I was keen to ensure that the two dramaturgical structures were intertwined and enriched and informed one another. Whilst the individual stories within the flat remained distinct, the structure that wraps around and links each one is more consistent than in 'Version I'. Longtail, themselves a resident of the flat and familiar with the characters we meet in the stories, returns each time, and invites a reflection or particular line of questioning that specifically pertains to the story the audience have just seen. Following this, Longtail then invites individual detectives (audience members) to help prepare the set for the proceeding story. The activities between the stories vary from individual contemplation, group discussion, or partnered work. In so doing, my aim was to draw attention to the multiple relations at play within this porous dramaturgical framework and the role each of them were playing in building the world of the flat.

Here, I was taking inspiration from, and adapting, techniques I have seen elsewhere, including a device employed by Tim Crouch in his work *My Arm*.<sup>189</sup> Crouch asks audience members to offer up a selection of objects they have on

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<sup>189</sup> Crouch, Tim, 'My Arm'.

their person, 'photographs, lucky charms, key rings, badges, toys...Things no bigger than a shoe', which then stand in as representations of various characters in the narrator's story.<sup>190</sup> This does two things. Firstly, it activates the imagination and the mode of internalized interpretation I describe, as the (often absurd or humorous) incongruity between the object and the character it represents invites the audience to internally create their own vision of that character. Secondly, by inviting audience members to literally bring something of themselves to the work, attention is drawn to each person gathered, heightening the audience's awareness of who is present and who has contributed what. The techniques I use are adaptations of this device but designed for a similar effect. For example, individual audience members are invited to assist Longtail by setting objects from the trunk in the space. The objects do not belong to the audience members, although they may choose how they set and arrange them. At later junctures in the play audience members are invited to offer their words to fill in gaps or add colour and detail to the scenes (ideas for favourite food, for example). In this way, my intention is that- as in *My Arm*- the audience members make an imprint on the piece in a way that furthers the story, as well as drawing attention to one another. For Radosavljevic, performance that can be seen to have a 'porous dramaturgy' places emphasis on the relational experience - the audience become aware both of their relation to the work and one another. While this dramaturgical model may work to draw attention to the shared experience, Radosavljevic argues that in porous works, 'the audience are not an essentialised single body, but a collection of individuals brought into a situation of being together'.<sup>191</sup> By addressing individual audience members by their detective name, giving them specific tasks to carry out, asking them to add words and ideas, space is made for an individualised experience and recognition of their singular contribution to the work. The sharing of ideas as a group, and working in partners to respond to the work, however, also puts an emphasis on listening and responding to one another. In 'TUITF' the structure does not necessitate that one interpretation or reading must be pursued at the expense of others but seeks to show how multiple readings and contributions

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<sup>190</sup> Crouch, 'My Arm', 24.

<sup>191</sup> Radosavljevic, 191.

might sit beside one another. Indeed, hearing another audience member's interpretation might then inspire the creation of a new theory.

### **Playwright as Character, Playwright as Performer**

In both versions of 'TUITF', I inscribe myself, and director Matt, into the script. This evolved from our desire to offer guidance to the audience and to support the execution of the participatory strategies. The fact I felt this sense of responsibility invites a consideration of ways in which the role of the playwright may need to be expanded or augmented in co-authored works. Indeed, when I reflect upon the work of playwrights who experiment with participatory techniques, and have influenced my practice, the presence, both literally and textually, of the writer, can be seen as a common thread. Responding to the central enquiry of this thesis, my focus in the following section is examples of how the presence of the playwright within the performance framework has been utilized to support co-authorship. Representations of authorial presence in text and performance is a rich area of study, however, and one that is explored incisively by Silvija Jestrovic in *Performances of Authorial Presence and Absence: The Author Dies Hard*.<sup>192</sup>

Tim Crouch almost always performs in all his own works, although as a fictionalised character. As a playwright, Crouch develops characters who assist and further the process of co-authoring in a manner that also serves the narrative and overall dramaturgy. In *An Oak Tree*, a two-hander in which the second character is always played by an actor who has no prior knowledge of the script, Crouch plays a hypnotist and his co-performer a volunteer from the audience. In this relationship dynamic therefore, delivering instructions and reassurance is consistent with the character and narrative.<sup>193</sup> In *I, Cinna*, a work for younger audiences, Crouch plays Cinna the poet (a minor character from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*). In a role that questions what words, and poetry, can do in the face of political adversity, he guides his audience through the

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<sup>192</sup> Jestrovic, Silvija. *Performances of Authorial Presence and Absence: The Author Dies Hard*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

<sup>193</sup> Crouch, 'An Oak Tree.'

process of creating their own poem.<sup>194</sup> The role of playwright is expanded as Crouch draws upon his training and experience as a facilitator and performer to design and deliver co-authoring strategies that are at once clearly executed while always consistent with, and furthering, the established character and narrative.

In Nassim Soleimanpour's works, *White Rabbit*, *Red Rabbit* and *BLANK*, we can see how the textual, if not physical, presence of the playwright can be employed towards co-authorship.<sup>195</sup> While Soleimanpour is physically absent, his is the central voice as he speaks to the audience from the page, through his proxy-performer. In these works, it is the literal absence of the playwright that sets the conditions for the participatory experiments that unfold. Soleimanpour utilizes the conditions of his absence for dramatic potential, exploring how he can connect with the audience, and engage them to assist in his storytelling, from the page. The participatory techniques are contextualized with the autobiographical stories Soleimanpour shares with the audience. In this way, although physically absent, Soleimanpour's textual presence is central, and the shared details from his life frame his desire to interact with the audience. In *Rabbit*, his inability to leave Iran fuels his motivation to connect with his audience in other ways.<sup>196</sup> In *BLANK*, it is the stories he received from the *Rabbit* audiences that inspire him to create a 'storytelling machine.'<sup>197</sup> The tension between the absence/presence of the playwright is exploited to establish a point of connection with the audience, and motivation for them to accept the offer to co-author.

In Walker and Thorpe's works together (*The Oh Fuck Moment* and *I Wish I Could Be Lonely*), the writers are present, performing as themselves, rather than as fictionalised characters.<sup>198</sup> In 'Chapter One', I suggest the approachable and affable way in which they engage with the audience has been carefully

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<sup>194</sup> Crouch, *I, Cinna*.

<sup>195</sup> Soleimanpour, *Two Plays*.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-64.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-201.

<sup>198</sup> Walker and Thorpe.

considered to support the process of co-authoring. They set the audience at ease by establishing a friendly and conversational rapport. This is important as in both works, rather than contributing to a fiction, the audience are invited to offer personal details and experiences. The works are structured so that Walker and Thorpe, deliver autobiographical anecdotes before inviting the audience to share their own stories. The performers never ask the audience to reveal anything that they themselves have not also shared. In these works, the writers' lived experience forms part of the textual content of the play, while their warm demeanour also serves to make participation seem more inviting and accessible for the audience.

What we see in each of these examples is the playwright expanding their role to allow for a more direct relationship with the audience. In these works, the level of support and guidance that this augmented role of the playwright affords, has been crafted in a manner that also serves the overall dramaturgy of the performance. In contrast to the above examples, the inclusion of Helen and Matt in both versions of 'TUITF' serves more of a functional, rather than a creative purpose. Scripting these scenes, my focus was on delivering instructions and offering guidance. While I endeavoured to communicate the explanation in a manner that was playful and entertaining, I did not really think about crafting Helen and Matt as characters, nor did Matt and I discuss the qualities we would bring to our performance. Here, I would also acknowledge the limitations of my own skills. While I have spent years developing my playwriting craft and have extensive experience in the role of facilitator, I do not (unlike Crouch and Thorpe for example) have training as an actor. It might, therefore, be more pertinent to the aims of this study to explore how the playwright can guide and support facilitation without necessarily being called upon to perform. Indeed, it may further textual experimentation to think about how this aspect of guidance can be offered by the playwright from the page, or in the development process, in a manner that does not necessitate their presence, or voice in the performance. This proposition is taken forward in 'Being with Raven' and discussed in the accompanying Critical Reflection.

## The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction

Inspired by Ursula K. Le Guin's essay 'The Carrier Bag of Theory of Fiction', I wanted to experiment with employing a non-linear narrative structure in this co-authored work.<sup>199</sup> Le Guin calls for a move away from the masculinist 'spear'-shaped narrative of the 'hunter', driven by conflict, to that which can be characterised as the shape of a container, 'carrier bag, belly, box, house, medicine bundle', which holds gathered seeds beside ones another, 'in a particular, powerful relation to one another and to us'.<sup>200</sup> This theory of narrative structure informed the creative process of 'TUITF' and the invitation, or experience, that was then crafted for the audience in performance. Resisting a linear structure, this performance offers a series of collected moments or "vignettes" which sit beside one another. The audience are invited to gather their clues or ideas throughout the process, concluding for themselves what relation these stories may bear to one another.

The 'carrier bag' provided the framework for our narrative. In the early phases of script development, Matt and I decided that the flat was the 'carrier bag' structure within which a number of scenes or moments sat beside one another. We then explored a number of different stories, memories, or points of view that may have occurred within that framework. Rather than starting with a character and following their journey or deciding on a specific event around which the narrative would pivot, these vignettes were written in response to key words, images, and feelings that existed within the space of one flat. We played with perspectives, scale, and viewpoints, both human and non-human. A number of these moments were written in the rehearsal room, and we experimented with a process of "writing by layering". For example, writing a new scene that responded to a previous one, merging two scenes together, or taking a key word from one scene and threading it into another. These strategies were employed in the interests of resisting a linear structure. The idea was to zoom in and out of spaces within the flat, glimpsing into different moments without imposing a chronological structure on them, or indeed any prescribed order whatsoever.

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<sup>199</sup> Le Guin, pp. 165-170.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 169.

In ‘Version I’, then, the order in which the stories were presented was not pre-ordained, but rather left to chance, as though picking out seeds from a bag at random. Indeed, the audience literally did just that. In the spirit of chance, we invited the audience to pick six of the twelve possible stories to watch. This was facilitated in the style of a “lucky dip” in which audience members picked a story (represented by a shape) out of a bag. I had anticipated that the awareness that they were not being given access to all the stories might pique curiosity amongst the audience. What clues could they have provided? In the performances, both audiences were very excited to take part in the process of the lucky dip, with audience members raising their hands and clamouring to pick out the shapes. The process of selecting the stories absorbed and excited them. However, the idea that there were other stories they were not watching did not seem to have any lasting impact or inform their reading of how the other stories may (or may not) have connected. Instead (as I discuss more substantially in ‘Chapter Three - Care, Craft, Relations’) there were a number of scenes and devices that, as a team, we had prepared for but never got the opportunity to share with an audience. On reflection, therefore, this conceit detracted more than it added to the process.

Consequently, in ‘Version II’ both the number of stories we see and the order in which we encounter them are fixed as Longtail guides the audience from scene to scene. Longtail knows which scene follows which and instructs the audience to set the space accordingly. To an extent, Longtail is one step ahead, leading the direction of the journey but still allowing space for discussion and reflection in between. They serve as a point of connection for the audience, a shared guide, leading them on a shared journey, while also making space for individual ideas and responses to be heard. In this way I envisage Longtail being a supportive presence for the audience members, offering clarity and assurance when facilitating the interactive strategies for the audience to engage with. By inviting space for reflection and audience contributions between each story, my intention is that, while Longtail may know in what direction the audience are

going, the way they feel when they go there, or what words and questions they may be taking with them as they enter into that space, remains open and in their hands. Longtail, therefore, guides in the process of exploration and investigation, in creative interpretation, but not in arriving at a known meaning for this play.

The guidance that Longtail offers the audience as they engage with the different stories is further supported by the setting of each of the scenes in the same, fixed location. In 'Version II', each of the seven scenes shared are located specifically in the flat. In 'Version I', despite the fact that the audience are told they are going to witness six stories contained within one flat, a number of the vignettes were in fact more tangential to the flat than in 'Version II'. For example, there was a scene that took the audience within a TV programme that may have been watched in the flat, a scene in which the tree that grew beside the flats and watched over the window spoke to them, and a scene in which a photo from the wall in the flat came to life, building a picture with the audience of an outdoor picnic. These had been developed with the interest of exploring different viewpoints and to imagine the expansive life that may burst from the ordinary objects within and around one space. In performance, however, this proved to be quite a heady, almost destabilising experience for the audience, who, in addition to jumping very quickly across forms and character viewpoints, were also flung far from the structures of the flat that they had been told they were going to visit. Whilst in the development process I was keen to explore inhabiting different viewpoints, both human and non-human, as broadly as possible, it became apparent that these fast-paced shifts demanded a lot of the audience. The flat was intended to be a supportive, "holding" structure and yet in 'Version I' the stories often took the audience far away from that.

On reflection, I realised this undermined one of the key aims of the work, which is to draw attention to the relational and the role each person plays in building the world of the narrative in performance. Therefore, in 'Version II', I cut the scenes mentioned above and decided to home in on those moments that can be more explicitly seen to have lived within the structures of the flat. My learnings

from sharing ‘Version I’ led me to conclude that having a shared and consistent location in which the audience were continually invited to situate themselves would enable more attention to be paid to the role of each person in relation to that location. This is further enhanced by Longtail’s request in between stories for the audience members to, sometimes individually, sometimes collectively, assist them by preparing the space. The audience are asked to bring objects and words into the space, contributing to building the materiality of the flat as the story progresses. These then serve as physical reminders or markers of the stories that have gone before, adding a depth or resonance to the story that follows, or these may take on a whole new meaning when employed in a different scene or context. They also give a tangibility to the flat, making it more “solid” and visible within the space.

### **String Figures and Making-with**

In ‘Version I’ each separate story sat as quite distinct from the other, as space was not made during the course of the performance to invite connections between them. The audience were asked a question following each story but invited to write quietly and place their answer in their bag before watching the next scene. As a result, the connections between different stories were not observed as a group, reflected upon, or felt. They sat like self-contained pebbles in a bag next to one another. While there were details, words, or inflections that emerged and recurred throughout different stories, there was a missed opportunity to allow time to reflect on or discuss these connections in between each narrative and for the group to hear from one another. Therefore, when drafting ‘Version II’, I was conscious of adapting the narrative structure to establish more points in which the audience could exchange ideas about the stories they were witnessing. Again, this was a choice made to better serve this thesis’s aim of drawing attention to the multiple relations at play in the framework - the emphasis is not only on how each audience member relates to the performer or narrative, but there are also a variety of opportunities to relate to one another.

In 'Version II', Longtail invites reflections between each story, shared as a group or in partners. There are group activities or devices that then set the scene or segue into the next narrative. An audience member may be asked to bring props into the space; in one link, the audience are put into groups to build up the soundscape; in another they play a game to create the snowy atmosphere befitting the proceeding scene. We might consider these devices as falling under the mode of externalised co-authorship. It is my intention that they cultivate an environment in which the audience feels included in and having contributed to. This is underlined by moments in which words the audience have offered, or the sounds they have made, are repeated back to them or referred to throughout the performance as it unfolds.

When configuring this restructure, I drew upon Donna Haraway's thinking on 'SF-String Figures' as outlined in *Staying with the Trouble*.<sup>201</sup> Haraway also cites LeGuin's 'Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction' as an influence on her thinking towards a non-hierarchical narrative, 'a life story' of 'becoming-with'. She writes:

Playing games of string figures is about giving and receiving patterns, dropping threads and failing but sometimes finding something that works, something consequential and maybe even beautiful, that wasn't there before, of relaying connections that matter, of telling stories in hand upon hand.<sup>202</sup>

There is much in this that informed my conception of the dramaturgical structure in 'Version II'. As with 'string figures', I would also suggest this model of co-authoring facilitates a process of back and forth, giving and receiving, between performer and audience, but also between audience member and audience member. There is an unspoken imperative to hear and accept what those around you have put into the space, however incidental. These offers may then colour each person's experience, throwing a different inflection or shade of light upon the material that is being offered. At regular intervals, all audience members are given space to ask their own questions or put forward their words;

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<sup>201</sup> Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press, 2016.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

an offer from one audience member is a simultaneous receiving for another. My intention is that due to the frequency with which this happens in this structure, the words and ideas of the assembled group begin to bleed into each other's readings. As with Haraway's 'string figures', the regular oscillation between watching and reflecting (receiving) and then contributing ideas to the wider group (offering) makes space for a continual layering, of patterning over one another. This ebb and flow of offering and receiving aims to draw attention to the presence of those who are sharing the experience. It is important to note that, for Haraway, the process of 'making kin' through 'lines of inventive connection' is inclusive of the more-than-human.<sup>203</sup> Although the performances I craft are formally human-centred, later in this critical reflection I will discuss how, thematically, I endeavour to draw attention to the multispecies we co-exist with in 'TUITF'.<sup>204</sup>

Haraway describes how string figuring is a process of sympoiesis, making-with, as is, I would suggest, co-authoring. The 'making-with' invited in 'Version II' is not about driving the audience to agree as one on a resolution to the mysteries in the flat, of making one theory that solves the conundrum. Instead, the piece invites individuals to forge their own connections beside one another, to share and be enriched by one another's offerings, to be in a continual process of revising ideas and creating their own stories to layer upon those that are built through the course of the performance. Again, to draw on Haraway, this model invites 'becoming-with each other in surprising relays, a figure of ongoingness'.<sup>205</sup> Both Le Guin's 'container structure' and Haraway's 'string figures' are models of being-with and making-with that emphasise ongoingness and the processual. These are not models striving towards a resolution or completion. In the closing scene of 'Version II' the audience share the stories they have created. In pairs they are asked to layer one story over another, a gesture of ongoingness. This model reflects that there is not an "end" but that

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<sup>203</sup> Haraway 1.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 3.

the sharing of one story gives birth to another, a process that may even continue outside the framework of the performance.

### **Being is Being-with**

A central theoretical concept guiding this practice is ontological relationality. As discussed in 'Chapter Two - Co-Authorship: Relationality, Vulnerability, Affect', my thinking on this has been informed by Jean-Luc Nancy's conception of 'being singular plural' in which 'being is always being-with'.<sup>206</sup> For Nancy, 'being-with' precedes singularity. Singularity is only constituted through exposure to an other. Through the form of this work, I looked to experiment with what might be conceived of as a paradoxical simultaneity, a relational experience bringing to the fore the sense of one's singularity, one's singularity being borne in and through a relational experience, and indeed the sense that, however singular we may be feeling, we are in fact always embedded within a tangle of relations. In developing this model of practice, I was interested in how the relational conditions of the performance, coupled with co-authoring and a collective "world-making", may facilitate a space in which awareness of self as relational could be made explicit and felt. Through the practice of co-authorship, I have been interested in exploring the duality of singular/relational, as the audience are invited to move between moments of internalised reflection and a collective weaving together of ideas.

In 'TUITF' there are a variety of offers to the audience that move between invitations to listen to and contemplate a story, being asked to respond to questions internally and note individually in their notebooks and participating outwardly as a group or with partners. In a manner that is designed to be engaging and accessible for the age group, I explore this ebb and flow between internalised reflection and externalised participation as a creative strategy that may experientially bring to the fore a sense of the singular and the relational existing simultaneously.

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<sup>206</sup> Nancy, 30.

Through the development and staging of 'Version I', I was able to observe which of the various devices Matt and I had crafted were clear and engaging for the audience age group. One technique I had been keen to experiment with was inviting audience members to close their eyes as a performer read text, guiding them through a visual landscape, leaving space for them to fill in the detail and colour in their mind's eye. At the end, audience members would be invited to write a short reflection or description of what they "saw", which would then be shared verbally, exposing how the same textual cues (experienced in relation to one another) may take us each to very different spaces internally. In 'Version I' there was one vignette where I experimented with such a device: 'Old'. In 'Old', a riddle-like piece of text was delivered to the audience who were asked to close their eyes and listen. The aim was to explore guiding the audience members meditatively through their own imagination. As one performer read the text, another performer moved around the audience members, whispering, and echoing words, creating a soundscape to underscore the words. In performance, the audience did not keep their eyes closed for the duration, and became distracted by the "soundscape", giggling and eager to peek at one another.

On the opposite scale, another story from 'Version I', 'Alive', saw all of the audience being asked into the space to take on different roles and build up a tableau to recreate a photo of a picnic that hung on the wall of the flat. In this scenario, everyone was physically "in" the scene, being invited to pose in a variety of ways - eating a pie, dancing, looking at the insects in the grass, for example. Whilst all audience members were keen to partake, the building up of the physical picture with thirty audience members took time, different members fell out of their role, conversations were struck up, and attention wandered. The device was perhaps too loose and messy to keep the focus on the scenario that was being shaped. A learning from this that I applied when crafting 'Version II' was to keep these oscillations between internalised reflection and physicalised modes of participation shorter and more focused to maintain concentration levels amongst the age group.

## Vulnerability and Radical Dependency

As I explore in 'Chapter Two', Nancy's 'being is being-with' has resonances with Judith Butler's work on vulnerability and interdependence. She argues that the ontological condition of interdependence renders us inescapably vulnerable to those very relations that shape us. She asserts: 'we are all born into a condition of radical dependency'.<sup>207</sup> What I have been interested in exploring through my practice is using the situation of being-with and making-with to induce a heightened awareness of this interdependency and the creative and generative possibilities that can arise through interrelations. By exploiting the already heightened conditions of the performance, a shared time and space, amongst a relatively small audience (I suggest that 'Version II' should be performed for groups of 20 who sit in a circle), the physical conditions are already laid bare to bring an awareness of one another. The audience are then explicitly told they will have a role in telling this story, in helping to fill the gaps and bring their own ideas to this work; they are brought into the workings of the creative process. This model draws attention not just to the story itself but to those who, as an audience member, you are listening to it with, those you are contributing to the narrative with, how their responses land on your body, and are then taken through into the next phase of the story. I anticipate an audience member's experience being shaped by the ideas gleaned from their partner, the words and sounds that others have put into the room colouring how the proceeding story is read, or the theory that is put forward by a peer influencing their perception of the next story.

What has emerged in my thinking through developing this practice, however, is that children are dependent, and experience this dependence in a different way than adults. For this audience age group, inviting them to reflect within the performance upon a sense of interdependence is not perhaps appropriate or necessary. Instead, I craft a framework in which the audience enact their relationality rather than necessarily expressing how it feels back to me. In 'TUITF' then, it may be that the audience do not express an awareness of their

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<sup>207</sup> Butler, *The Force of Non-Violence*, 44.

vulnerability and interrelation; they live it through the performance model that has made it possible for these subjectivities to be performed. I am then able to observe the enactment of this relationality through play, even if the participants do not verbalise it themselves. The making-with becomes key to bringing to the fore an enactment of interdependence. In this sense, making-with works to bring into consciousness the being-with. Here I return to Haraway's thinking on sympoiesis. She articulates this through her metaphor of 'string figures', suggesting the framework of making-with, of moving between giving and receiving, 'propose[s] and enact[s] patterns for participants to inhabit, somehow, on a vulnerable and wounded earth'.<sup>208</sup>

Central to Haraway's thinking is that this 'making-with' is a multispecies endeavour. Co-authoring with the non-human is not a point of focus for this thesis; indeed, in this playtext the non-human beings are represented by humans, which I recognise is in many ways antithetical to Haraway's practice. Yet, in this work, in a manner that may be engaging and memorable for the age group, I encourage an awareness of those non-human relations with which we are entangled yet which may, in the day-to-day, be rendered invisible or unworthy of our attention. This is addressed more thematically than through the form. Indeed, the content of the work invites the audience to reflect upon a relationality that is inclusive of the more-than-human. The audience's most consistent relationship is with Longtail, a mouse who considers themselves to have superior knowledge to the humans given their heightened senses and capacity to weave in and out of each corner of the flat. In one story the audience meet a bacterium who has been living in perfect comfort on a cheese sandwich (discarded by a human) but whose safety is threatened by the arrival of a painter. One child is fascinated by the ants they discover in the rug, another converses with the pigeons nesting in the loft. Throughout 'Version II' these encounters with the non-human serve to remind the audience of the perhaps unexpected or unacknowledged relations that they exist-with, and impact upon. The sentiment is most explicitly emphasised in the final scene in which an Investigator in the flat repeats, 'I was all alone in this flat'. He is corrected by

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<sup>208</sup> Haraway, 10.

Whiskers, a mouse, who asks, ‘All alone? Are you sure? Did you look closely? In the rug? Behind the radiator? Under the floorboards? Because if you did, maybe you would realise, you are never ALL alone’.<sup>209</sup> Coming at the end of the piece, the audience will too be aware of the other non-human characters co-existing within the flat. The audience have been invited to listen to, be-with, and make-with non-human characters in a manner that gestures toward Haraway’s ‘generative oddkin’, in which we ‘require each other in un-expected collaborations and combinations’.<sup>210</sup>

### **Impressions in the Room**

Drawing upon Sara Ahmed’s work on affect and language, I have endeavoured to use co-authoring as a way of exploring the emotionality of words and text. Through this practice I have examined how the feelings that words may elicit, or the impact they have, can shapeshift depending on what has come before, or who they are performed by and towards, thus exposing a ‘softness’ or malleability to words. Thinking about how objects and words might impress upon us and make their impact felt, Ahmed argues, ‘we need to remember the *press* in impression. It allows us to associate the experience of having an emotion with the very affect of one surface upon another, an affect that leaves its mark or trace’.<sup>211</sup>

Throughout ‘TUITF’ I embed opportunities for the audience to offer the words that they associate with a specific feeling. These words are then carried through into different scenes and different contexts. By taking words offered in one story through into another, I aim to interrogate in practice if they impress upon in the same way, if the affect in a new context speaks to the history of the previous one. For example, in the first story in ‘Version II’ the Woman describes a ‘magic pie’, that ‘makes all who eat it feel... (*Enacts eating, pure satisfaction and bliss*)’.<sup>212</sup> Words are elicited from the audience as to what this feeling might be.

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<sup>209</sup> Shutt, Version II, 138.

<sup>210</sup> Haraway, 3-4.

<sup>211</sup> Ahmed, 6.

<sup>212</sup> Shutt, Version II, 103.

She repeats the words given by audience members and later on they are also threaded through into other stories. The Old Woman uses these words to describe how she wants her 9-year-old friend to feel on her birthday. In another section Longtail asks the audience to think of a present they could give someone to make them feel these words.

In 'Version II', the food suggestions gathered in one scene are re-used later in the play in a different context. Yet the suggestions remain in the space throughout in a paper bag labelled 'Food'. When these words are read out by the Old Woman, and then in the final story by the Investigator, the audience members may be aware of the feeling that was originally impressed upon these words. This feeling can be carried through but can also shift into something different in different hands, most notably in the final scene when the Investigator, a character of whom we are uncertain, finds themselves surprised to find common ground in their own taste in food and that of the inhabitants of the flat. In this sense the words carry with them impressions from the previous scene.

In the penultimate scene in 'Version II', a Child sits alone in the flat, gathering words that remind them of people, places, and things they once knew but have now gone. They describe reminding themselves of the impression that person or living being made upon them, distilling this impression to one word, and placing it in the memory box, naming as a gesture of keeping alive. Some of these are words or emotions that have been referenced earlier in the play and may take on a new resonance here; others are new "memories" from the flat to which the audience are introduced. The audience are then invited to individually offer a word that represents themselves, which is placed in the memory box. This invites a moment for them to reflect upon what feeling or impression they would like to offer of themselves to the space. In a later scene, the Investigator uses these words as "clues", building nonsensical sentences from them. The effect of this may be humorous, to hear one another's words being put together in an absurd way, but there could also be an unsettling or uneasy effect to hearing one's word "misused" or replayed back upon one in this way.

In addition to words being recycled throughout the piece, I have experimented with how objects are also imbued with a particular emotion or feeling in one story, and, through their presence in the space, carry this through into another story, adding a resonance or flavour that may not have existed otherwise. In 'Version II', Longtail invites individual audience members to bring props out of a trunk and place them in the space in preparation for the story. These props then remain in the space and, in some cases, will be used again in following scenes, albeit it in different contexts. Even when they are not explicitly used in a story however, the intention is that their very presence serves as a reminder of the previous story, so that even when a new story may feel in a very different time or context to a previous one, the echoes of those preceding moments remain alive in the space. As Ahmed writes, 'how the object impresses upon us may depend on histories that remain alive in so far as they have already left their impressions'.<sup>213</sup> These objects serve as a way of keeping alive the characters and emotions of a previous story in another one. For example, the Twin's beloved magnifying glass that they happily use to while away hours in the flat is later wrapped up as a gift by the forgetful Old Woman. For some audience members, this may feel like an intrusion or misuse of someone else's object, or others might feel that the Twin was in fact the recipient of this gift from the Old Woman, therefore adding a connection between the two stories. The effect of the Investigator trying on the yellow shoes and poking around in the flat may seem invasive, as the shoes were a reminder of a secret joyful time for the Twin, or perhaps comic for the audience as they see the Investigator misread the histories of these objects.

### **Embodied Act of Writing**

I have been interested in exploring how, through a process of co-authoring, audience members are invited as individuals to make their impression upon the story and the space in the room. I want to consider the affective experience of writing, and how the embodied act of writing feels, particularly when occurring

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<sup>213</sup> Ahmed, 7.

in close relation to one another. One line of enquiry through this practice has been if the effect of writing alongside one another may heighten an awareness or feeling of ontological interconnectedness.

On this, there were learnings gleaned from the development and sharing of 'Version I'. It was my observation that, for this audience age group, writing in a fast, automatic, almost stream of consciousness style is not accessible or enjoyable. For this demographic, writing one word or one sentence at a time is most appropriate. It was apparent during the performances of 'Version I' that there were differing writing abilities amongst the group, and for many it became stressful. There was a concern about "getting it right" or anxiety for some about not knowing the correct spelling. Whilst for a group of adults, an invocation that "it doesn't matter" about spelling or making sense and simply to write may be accepted, for this age group this is perhaps a confusing request. Additionally, I became aware when observing the performances of 'Version I' that children this age are used to writing alongside one another; that this will be in most cases a daily practice in the classroom. I would suggest this is not so with adults, who are arguably writing long form less and less often, and perhaps rarely in company. An avenue of interest for developing a co-authored work for adults that is perhaps not so relevant with this work is how it feels to enact or "perform" what might often be seen as a private or solitary act in the shared space of one another.

However, to return to 'TUITF' and this age group, while I have been mindful in 'Version II' of reducing the amount of writing the audience are asked to do, my observations from the performances of 'Version I' would still suggest that the audience members derive pleasure from being asked to write down their ideas. In 'Version II' these moments of quiet, singular writing exist alongside regular moments of out loud external sharing. This contrast, and the suggestion that sometimes one's word is a secret or private thing, may heighten the feeling of pleasure or excitement in writing. For those who take their role as a "detective" seriously, there is the added invigoration of feeling there is purpose to gathering clues in their notebook.

Thinking about the physicality of the writing and the idea of literally “making a mark”, in reading through the gathered words from the performances of ‘Version I’, it was interesting to observe how many of this age group had taken great care in how they had written their words. On the gathered pieces of paper there were different inflections that the audience members had employed to “mark” these words as their own: large bold lettering, doodles or smiley faces within and around the words, or impassioned additions to the words themselves. In response to the question, ‘Who would you like to give a present to?’ one audience member had written, ‘Lauren, my best, best, best, best, best x 100000,000000 friend’, filling the page with enthusiastic zeros. This imprint reveals something of the emotion they felt as they wrote.

## Wonder

In this practice I have been interested in exploring how feelings of wonder generated through a collective crafting and world-building may then lead to an awareness of relationality. Again, in this thinking I draw upon Ahmed’s work. She discusses wonder as an affective process by which the ‘surfaces’ of the world are made visible and apparent to us. She emphasises that this is not a private act, but a shared one: ‘wonder opens up a collective space by allowing surfaces of the world to make an impression as they become see-able or feel-able as surfaces’.<sup>214</sup>

Following on from this then, I would suggest that we can think of feelings of wonder bringing to the fore an awareness of those we share the space with; of wonder as an energising force moving through the collective and, in so doing, bringing the presence of those sharing the experience into focus, a heightened relationality. In the performances of ‘Version I’, it was my observation that the use of sound effects in performance created a sense of awe and pleasure amongst the audience. For example, the effect of a birdsong that recurred

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<sup>214</sup> Ahmed, 183.

throughout, indicating the end of one story and a shift back into a different dramaturgical layer, always elicited a hushed excitement that spread amongst the audience who would make eye contact, imploring one another to listen and notice.

In 'Version II', I was aware of employing this even more, experimenting with sound and lighting effects in the space to further underscore the emotionality of the words and objects as discussed above. There are certain sounds that are repeated throughout - the doorbell, for example, and music from the radio - weaving through the emotional memory of one story into the next. At one juncture, Longtail asks the audience to work in groups to build up a soundscape. This invites a more focused awareness of what each individual is bringing into the room but could also engender a sense of awe, most notably when the sounds are put together and played back to the audience, making tangible an "atmosphere" that was not there before. There may indeed be something of defamiliarisation at work in this, as the sounds played back to the audience feel different or unusual to what they might have expected, or hearing the recorded sound of oneself eliciting the common reaction of being surprising or unrecognisable.

In 'Version II' there is a scene in which the Child, alone in the flat, invites everyone to be very quiet and listen for the pigeons. A faint cooing then gets louder, and the audience are invited to converse with the pigeons as the Child does. This new sound in the space, faint initially, but gradually getting louder, may generate a sense of surprise and wonder, as another dimension of the flat, the loft above, and another unseen being, the pigeon, become feel-able as surfaces. Indeed, this making visible of the unseen is a thread that runs through thematically, particularly in the invitation throughout to notice or be aware of all the beings that may be living alongside us.

## Insights and Learnings to Take Forward

I employ learnings derived from creating 'TUITF' to guide and inform the process of creating the co-authored work for adults. As I have outlined above, a key development between 'Version I' and 'Version II' was the introduction of Longtail, who offers instruction, and expresses clearly to the audience their role and purpose as co-authors. The introduction of Longtail was based on my observation that having a character who acted as a recurring guide allowed for clearer facilitation of the different invitations made to the audience to participate. It is my feeling that adult audiences also benefit from having a central figure in the work who acts as an anchor - the insight being that clearly expressed parameters on a co-authoring strategy help audience members feel more inclined to accept, more confident of what they are being asked to do, and subsequently better supported to respond creatively.

I describe how, when crafting 'Version II', I was conscious of varying the types of co-authoring strategies, partly in an effort to keep focus and maintain the audience's interest. Conscious of how energy and concentration levels could quickly rise and fall for the age group, I endeavoured to move between quieter, more reflective partnered work and then more "high energy", physicalised activities such as creating a soundscape. I take a similar approach with adult audiences, in part because I recognise that by offering different entry levels for modes of creative engagement, I create access points for different comfort levels when it comes to participating. I am attuned to the fact that for a group of classmates, familiar with one another and used to worked collaboratively, co-authoring is a different, and perhaps less intimidating, task than it is for a group of adults who may have no prior relation to one another. Developing the work for adults, I consider how varying the types of activities the audience are invited to partake in may make the process overall seem more inviting or accessible. For some, speaking out loud to a group might be intimidating in a way that partnered work might not be, for example. Furthermore, by varying the strategies, and how the audience are asked to relate to one another, I support this project's aim to draw attention to multiple relations at play within the

performance framework and develop multiple creative strategies to facilitate this.

## Co-Authored Work for Adults

### Overview of Process

I developed the original playtext of 'Being with Raven' between October 2020-February 2021. In this period, I received feedback on early drafts from my supervisors, but the text was written alone, rather than through a collaborative process.

From June-August 2021 I had three meetings with director Eve Nicol. These discussions did not lead to material changes in the playtext but offered a space to discuss the questions my research project addresses, share some of the key theories and ideas that informed the piece, and plan together how we would spend our time working with performers.

In September 2021 I spent a week with Eve Nicol and five performers (Rosalind Sydney, Julie Wilson Nimmo, Nalini Chetty, Alison Peebles, and Sita Pieraccini), working on the text collaboratively. At the end of the week, we shared two performances of 'Being with Raven' with an invited audience. During this week there were some edits made to the original text, which have been reflected in the following playtext. This final draft of 'Being with Raven' also includes the audience contributions made in the second performance, which are indicated in bold type.

## Being with Raven

### A note on Casting

I am interested to see, and hear, how the characters jump off of the page to the performer and to allow space for exact biographical details to be developed collaboratively.

*Anna*, *Beth*, *Colette*, and *Daisy* are all characters who identify as women.

I have not specified ages or specific biographical details for *Anna* and *Colette* and am open to working with the actors performing these roles to develop these details together.

We know that *Beth* has been married twice and has a daughter at university and is therefore likely in her late 40s or over, but similarly the exact age and specific background details can be developed in the rehearsal process.

*Daisy* has lived a long life and we know that at the end of the play she dies of old age. Although there are hints at what her background story might have been, the details and timeline can be worked out together.

*Raven* is our guide, an all-seeing, timeless figure. The performer may identify as female or non-binary.

### A note on Audience Contributions

There are junctures in the text where *Anna* asks the audience to answer questions and offer their ideas about *Colette*. To give a sense of how this works in practice, I have embedded the answers that were provided by the audience at the 2.30pm sharing of 'Being with Raven' on 3 September 2021. Audience contributions are indicated in **bold type**.

## Being with Raven

*Some suggestions for staging:*

*The audience sit on chairs in a circle, each audience member is provided with a notepad and pen.*

*In the four points of the circle, like the quarter marks on a clock, is a frame structure, like a door or window frame but there is no glass. Behind each frame is a different woman.*

*Behind one frame, ANNA, sat at her desk writing, surrounded by paper and notebooks.*

*Behind a second frame, BETH, wine glass in hand, caught in a frozen gesture, as though conversing with someone we cannot see.*

*Behind a third frame, COLETTE is positioned further back from the circle, sat at an easel contemplating her painting.*

*Behind a fourth frame, DAISY is holding a sweet wrapper up to the light, face in awe.*

*RAVEN is situated outside the circle and may be raised above so that they are almost looking down upon the circle and the women.*

RAVEN: I'll share with you the view from where I am.

My vantage point.

Nestled in the ledge of a window on the third floor of a block of flats.

We are on a fairly busy road in a Northern European city.

It is raining.

It has been raining for days.

Below, shop signs call for custom.

Discontent feet pound the pavement.

Tired eyes sink into sad faces.

Heads down, brollies up!

A heavy damp weighs down the air.

It's not the best of times.

But then, it's not the worst of times either.

From the ledge I can see into four windows.

Four windows illuminated.

Four windows in four different flats, four different homes, four different worlds on this same street.

Behind each window, a different woman.

A different woman living, breathing, being in her own flat, her own home, her own world.

Yet from here, from my viewpoint, they don't seem so far apart.

Together, each of them sits alone.

Rubbing up against the world in her own way.

Let us be with them a while.

It is raining.

It has been raining for days.

*A moment as the women unfreeze and go about their activities. Anna writes, Colette paints, Daisy eats her chocolate bar. BETH addresses the audience.*

BETH: It's wonderful to have a full house.

I've always loved hosting - I'm an entertainer by nature.

That kind of thing is in your blood.

I come from a long line of entertainers on my father's side.

*At this point Beth indicates that a member of the audience is her father, a light slowly fades-in on them, a soft light from below rather than a harsh spotlight. This light, and all the other lights that indicate family members in the scenes with Beth have been pre-set over the chairs. Therefore, whichever audience member is cast as the family member is done so at random, and not selected by the performer based on appearance or any likeness to the character.*

*The audience member who has been lit is now Beth's father throughout the performance and will be lit in scenes in which Beth talks about/to him.*

My dad was a natural-born comedian, could make a joke out of anything and anyone.

It's a great asset in life to be able to find the humour in all situations.

He was a gas man by trade, but he used to say his customers got

the kind of gags that would have them rolling in the aisles at the Palladium all for the price of having their boiler fixed.

*Beth now gestures to another member of audience; this audience member is her mother. As with the father, a light softly fades-in from below, indicating they are the mother.*

People thought my mother beautiful but she didn't say much.

There was a touch of melancholy about her that meant people didn't like to get too close.

That stuff is catching.

She was, however, very musically gifted.

She had the most long elegant fingers that we saw were put to good use at the piano.

And we, me and my dad, would sing.

He encouraged me from a young age to sing, sing my heart out.

"Let it all out and sing, Beth," he would say.

I was a pretty little thing too, red curly hair.

People loved it - neighbours, aunts, uncles... we would fill the house.

Especially at Christmas.

Everyone would want to come around to ours.

We always had a full house.

So ever since I was wee, I've felt very at home in front of an audience.

*A chime, she notices the time.*

You know what that means don't you?

Walkies.

*Another light fades in on a new audience member who is now Dolly.*

Dolly, my labradoodle. Look at her coat! Isn't she gorgeous?

We're out twice a day come rain or shine.

It's torrential out and has been for goodness knows how long.

The river at the end of the road - well the water is as high as I've ever seen it.

No sign of it letting up either but that'll not stop us.

As my dear dad used to say, there's no such thing as bad weather, just a poor attitude.

*She stands and makes to leave.*

*The sound of a door slamming.*

*Lights fade out on the audience members who are father, mother, and Dolly.*

*DAISY jumps at the sound of the door and is brought out of her thoughts.*

*She holds the shiny sweet wrapper she has been gazing at out to the audience.*

DAISY:       Isn't that wonderful?

I love the shape of the letters.

They express so much...

And look the little teeth here in the 'C'.

You could almost miss them and yet it's very clever as the bar is called "chomp" and the teeth in the curvature of the "c" do indeed look set to "chomp"!

The chocolate bar itself was also very pleasant.

Cadbury tends to be my favourite with the exception of the "Lion" bar which is produced by Nestle.

That is a truly excellent chocolate bar.

When I was a child, I had these beautiful stencils to help you do lettering like this but I lost them somewhere before we... when we moved...

We moved quite a few times actually.

In the end I got very good at gathering my most precious items in one little bag.

This - this is one of the few things that stayed with me the whole time.

*She produces a hat pin.*

A hat pin with a globe on the end.  
It's actually a spherical stone of blues and greens.  
But to me it looks like the whole world.  
From above.

People don't really wear hats anymore.  
Not the ones that require hat pins.  
I've noticed the ones in vogue these days seem to be more like tiny  
tea cosies encasing the skull.  
Functional I suppose.  
But perhaps lacking the artistry of a fully adorned chapeau.

This was my grandmother's originally.  
She would not dream of leaving the house without a hat.  
She was quite a woman.  
Tall, thin, always dressed in black, with feathers in her hat.  
She looked like a magnificent raven.

In fact, whenever I see a raven, I always give it a little bow in her  
honour.

You never know - I wouldn't put it past my grandmother to come  
back as a raven and find me here.  
Even though she was left behind in...

She shot a cow once.

Our cow!

She was so angry we had to leave our home.  
She said, "If I can't have my *samica*, my cow, then I'll be damned  
if those bastards are going to come and drink her milk."

I can't say I agree with her logic.

But it was a stressful time for everyone.

In any case, I was sure to set Bella, my beloved cat, free, in case  
grandma got any more ideas.

Never owned a pet since.

*We turn our attention to COLETTE, absorbed in her painting.*

*We watch her painting for a moment before ANNA calls for our attention.*

*Anna sits on the floor surrounded by paper. She looks out, beyond the circle to RAVEN.*

ANNA: That bird out there, on the window ledge of the flat opposite.  
Raven.  
Raven talks to me.  
Tells me what's going on out there.  
Raven is my eyes and ears.  
I haven't been outside for a long time.  
I don't think it's safe for me, with things as they are.  
It's raining.  
It has been raining for days.  
Discontent feet pound the pavement.  
Tired eyes sink into sad faces.  
I feel it all.  
So I remain inside, looking out.  
I've always felt more at home watching from the edge.  
A room of my own.  
It's delicious.  
When you grow up with a lot of siblings...  
When you grow up with a lot of siblings and a very unpredictable parent.  
Carving out a space of your own is  
Precious.  
I was the oldest.  
Lots of downsides to that.  
But one glorious upside was that when I turned thirteen, I was given a room of my own.  
A tiny room.  
But my own room, nonetheless.  
So I've always enjoyed sequestering myself away.  
With books.  
Stories.  
I write my own now.

*She looks to Raven.*

I haven't actually written for... some time now...  
In part I blame the sirens.  
All through the night.  
It doesn't take much to wake me, more often than not, I'm awake  
anyway.  
I think there are two types of people in this world -  
Those who are blessed with head-hits-the pillow instant slumber.  
And those of us who, no matter how bone-crushingly tired we may  
be when we crawl to bed,  
Will lie awake,  
An unrelenting pinball machine lit up in our minds.  
Which one are you?  
It's a superpower - being able to sleep at will.  
I hear the sirens, even if others may sleep through them.  
I know all is not well out there.  
I feel it.  
But it's not solely the sirens that have hampered my writing.  
It's...  
Some characters will chatter away to you.  
Open themselves up.  
Share who they are in a seamless, gurgling flow.  
In those instances, you hardly notice yourself writing.  
It just pours out.  
Other characters.  
Other characters remain more of an enigma.  
You see them...  
  
And yet...  
  
...  
  
...  
  
It's a matter of time.  
Waiting to peel back the layers.  
It's a matter of time.

BETH: My first husband Jim was a real animal lover.

*Lights fade in on a new audience member who is now Jim and remains so in all scenes with Beth.*

He was quite an unusual man.

His main loves in life were motorbikes, model railways, and miniature dogs.

I thought that was a unique blend - daring but detailed, rebellious but reflective.

We met when he saw me performing at a pub in the West End. It was just something I did when I was in my twenties, at the weekends.

I gathered quite a local following.

I don't think Dad (*Audience member who was father in the previous scene is lit*) ever quite understood why it was that Jim caught my eye.

He got on well with my mum though (*Audience member who is mother is lit*)

Which was unusual because she didn't really get on with anyone. A bit of a cold fish, you could say.

I've been thinking of Jim more and more recently.

I wonder where he is now?

Some of the fashions for young men at the moment - buttoned up shirts and big boots...

They remind me of him.

We didn't last long.

You know how they say the best drivers fail their test first time?

I think it's the same with marriage to be honest.

You want to have that first go around the block to iron out any bad habits or false expectations.

It was great romance with Jim but that'll only get you so far down the road.

My second, Paddy, was a far more pragmatic choice.

*Lights fade in on a new audience member. They are Paddy and remain so in all scenes with Beth.*

Traded cars, ironed creases down the front of his trousers.

That sort of guy.

Dynamic in the kitchen too.

He and my dad were much more aligned.

Although Paddy wasn't musical, he was quite a storyteller.

You'd be surprised at how many anecdotes can arise from working at a car dealership.

Barely a year after we were married, and my Sophie came along.

*Lights fade in on a new audience member, they are Sophie and remain so in all scenes with Beth.*

Such a beautiful baby.

The same ringlets I had, my dad's twinkly blue eyes.

Oh aye, I thought, she takes after me alright.

Another one destined for the stage.

She changed a bit when she became a teenager though.

Started reading a lot and stopped smiling.

I started to see more of my mother in her then.

In fact, those two were thick as thieves.

Particularly at the end...

*She reacts to a sound we don't hear.*

It's alright, pet.

Dolly doesn't like sirens.

*The audience member who is Dolly is lit.*

It's been a real cacophony of them these past few nights.  
I can sleep through most things but the girls at the hairdressers told me they were woken at 3am the other day.  
It's all in the news but I've not been paying too much attention to it all.  
I've been around long enough to know that these things go in waves.  
It'll pass.

*COLETTE also reacts to a sound. She produces some large noise-cancelling headphones. She resumes painting.*

*Anna is watching Colette.*

ANNA: It's four in the morning.  
She's awake and so am I.  
Look.  
Light on by the easel.  
Painting into the wee hours.  
What is she painting?  
Why does she paint?  
It's hard to think.  
Can't think when I'm hungry.  
I've been getting food delivered to my door.  
A lifeline for me while it's not possible to go out.  
But recently the deliveries have been...  
Lacking.  
They keep substituting items.  
I haven't had bananas for weeks.  
Raven tells me the shops are bare.  
I imagine hungry crowds, protesting in the street.  
I know I am lucky here really.  
To be able to watch from the edge.

*She watches Colette.*

How does painting make her feel, I wonder?

Sometimes the ideas come to me fully formed.

I look out the window and I see a woman,  
Animatedly talking to herself as she walks her dog,  
And I think...

I wonder...

Who does she talk to when she goes home?

I imagine all the people who have filled her life.

I see a woman in a hat step out onto the pavement.

A gust of wind threatens to take the hat away.

She raises one hand to rescue it,

And with the other produces a hat pin from her pocket,

Secures the hat with it.

A hat pin?

Unusual for these days.

What's the story behind the hat pin?

And it all just comes.

But this one. (*She gestures to Colette*)

Elusive.

But interesting, don't you think?

What do you say? Care to help me?

Many minds are better than one.

You all have notepads and pens.

I call her Colette.

She looks like a Colette to me.

Maybe she doesn't like her name, maybe she would prefer another name.

We all go through that phase, don't we?

Mine was *Lucilla*.

Growing up I wanted to be *Lucilla*.

But I'm Anna.

I've lived a life as Anna.

Anyway.

She is Colette, that much I can tell you.

Some questions to ask of Colette...

(I find it best to answer short and fast.

Jot down what comes to you, what you feel.)

*Audience are encouraged to write down answers in their notebooks in response to the questions about Colette.*

When did she first begin painting?

What was she like as a child?

How does painting make her feel?

What frightens her?

Who does she paint for?

*Anna asks the questions again, one by one, and invites any audience members who would like to share their ideas out loud to the group.*

*She responds to all suggestions with openness, repeating the ideas as an affirmative statement.*

*The suggestions, no matter how contradictory, are put into the room. They sit beside one another.*

*There is space for each idea to land and for us to look at Colette.*

*Raven will make note of some of the answers provided. These will be embedded into their following text on page 185.*

*Anna will write down some of the ideas offered from the audience, to refer back to later in the scene on page 199.*

*Daisy will write down the suggestions for Colette's fears to embed in her text on page 220.*

ANNA: When did she first begin painting?

AUDIENCE: Now.

ANNA: She began painting now.

**AUDIENCE:** In 1924.

**ANNA:** She began painting in 1924.

**AUDIENCE:** At school - art lessons.

**ANNA:** She began painting in her school art lessons.

**AUDIENCE:** Seriously when she was twenty-three.

**ANNA:** She began painting seriously when she was twenty-three.

What was she like as a child?

**AUDIENCE:** Serene.

**ANNA:** She was a serene child.

**AUDIENCE:** Quiet and reserved.

**ANNA:** She was a quiet and reserved child.

How does painting make her feel?

**AUDIENCE:** Free.

**ANNA:** Painting makes her feel free.

**AUDIENCE:** Peaceful.

**ANNA:** Painting makes her feel peaceful.

What frightens her?

**AUDIENCE:** Emptiness.

**ANNA:** Emptiness frightens her.

**AUDIENCE:** Trees.

**ANNA:** Trees frighten her.

**AUDIENCE:** Spiders.

**ANNA:** Spiders frighten her.

Who does she paint for?

**AUDIENCE:** Herself.

ANNA: She paints for herself

AUDIENCE: Her mum.

ANNA: She paints for her mum.

AUDIENCE: She paints for another.

ANNA: She paints for another.

Colette.

Yes.

Peeling back the layers.

*We all sit and watch her. Colette pauses painting.*

*In the following text from Raven, words in bold indicate those that were provided by the audience in the previous scene and then woven into the Raven's speech.*

RAVEN: Dawn breaks.

I sit amongst the women.

The rain pounds against all of their windows.

The sirens sound out on the street below.

I watch,

As they each experience the same moment differently.

Tension courses through the body of the one who sits rigid, upright.

Not so much woken by the sirens but already alert, anticipating their call.

Wide-eyed, she looks out, anxious, scared.

The urgent nee-naw only confirming her suspicions that "out-there" is not safe.

She does what she has done since she was young,  
Soothes herself with stories.

She travels far and wide in her mind,  
But is fearful of crossing the threshold over the door and beginning

a tale of her own.

Instead she watches from the edge.

Both she and I turn our gaze to another one who sits awake.

From a distance she exudes a calm, moving her arm with fluidity and grace.

She paints.

Blocking out the sirens as she blocks out anything else from the outside,

Anything that might bleed into the room and affect her focus.

**A quiet, reserved, serene child.**

Frightened by **spiders, trees, emptiness...**

She dedicates all hours to her art.

The lamp positioned above her easel throws shadows on her face.

A small tilt of her head and the light falls differently,

Shifting the expression one might read.

How does she feel in this moment as she paints?

**Peaceful. Free.**

In the floor beneath her, another sleeps deeply.

In the bed she once shared with someone who is now a stranger.

My breath falls in time with her as I watch the rise and fall of her stomach.

The warmth of her dog at her feet as she soundly snores.

Her eyelids gently flutter as she dreams of all the faces that have filled her life.

In slumber she reaches out to those whose absence weighs heavy on her days.

In slumber her singing draws the crowds.

She watches herself from the Gods.

Smiles as she stands centre stage, applauds with the audience when she takes her bow.

The rain, the sirens, empty shelves at the shops don't unsettle her.

It will be the silence when she wakes that rattles her the most.

And beside her, another,  
Whose home is technicolour, whatever the grey of the season  
outside.  
One who has heard much worse than sirens in her time.  
Who knows first-hand how deep humanity's cruelty can cut  
Her desperate young years were spent wandering,  
Surviving in the margins.  
But she was given a home and a chance to begin again.  
Dedicating her life now to the small, sweet curiosities  
That can be squeezed out of each moment, each encounter.  
The orbit she operates within may be small,  
Her home, the shop, the local park and nearby river.  
She doesn't need the seven wonders of the world to feel awe,  
But takes each step with a magnifying glass in hand.  
Eyes open to the multitude of colours that inflect each day.  
When you see artistry in the silver trail of a snail, the cheering  
cartoon on a curling crisp packet,  
The wittily graffitied wall, crumbling as weeds break through,  
Then the world sings to you, the world sings for you.

*With great care and evident delight, Daisy picks up a cardboard box decorated with wrappers, tickets, receipts, drawings, and annotations - like a scrap book. She opens the box and takes time to look at the items within it - an assorted collection of seemingly random treasures - a feather, a map from a city she once visited, a fraying woollen glove.*

*Daisy beams proudly and holds the box out for the audience to see.*

DAISY:       My boxes have been an enormous source of pleasure over the years.  
                  There are some of them scattered around - some of you might find  
                  one beneath your seat.

*She encourages audience members to look under their chairs.*

*Beneath half of the seats are more boxes, none of them are the same but all of them have been decorated in a similar manner to Daisy's.*

*Daisy gestures for those with boxes to open them and look inside. The contents of each box vary. There is nothing that would appear of financial value - just a collection of curated everyday items. A pinecone may sit with a napkin with a café logo printed on it. A cinema ticket sits amongst a pressed flower and a mint tin, for example.*

*The annotations on the boxes offer dates, musings, and observations.*

Take them out.

Have a look - go on.

Look inside.

*Daisy watches and allows the audience members to take time looking at their boxes.*

I see it as a form of documenting.

Crystallising moments.

I used to refer to it as a pastime, but then I realised it was anything but.

It's not a means to pass the time; it's about magnifying the time.

Zooming in on moments of joy derived from curious objects.

It started with a Cornetto.

Well a Biro and a Cornetto would be more accurate.

Or perhaps it started before that?

At the chiropodist.

Yes, I guess it started there.

An unremarkable though nevertheless not particularly pleasant procedure.

Bunion removal.

I've been blighted by them since I was very young.

I had to do a lot of walking in bad shoes.

Or no shoes at all sometimes.

Anyway.

I felt I had earned myself a little treat.

It was a sunny day, so I decided to go to the park and on the way buy myself a Cornetto - strawberry, always strawberry.

In the newsagents, at the counter purchasing my Cornetto, an offer caught my eye.

99p for a pack of 12 Bic Biro pens!

Well, you can't look a gift horse in the mouth! 99p for 12!

I'll be having those, thank you very much.

And so I sat in the park on my second favourite bench (my favourite is up a hill too much for that day, my feet were still sore).

Sun on my face, savouring the ice cream but knowing even when that had all gone, I had the chocolate at the end of the cone to look forward to.

The chocolate at the end of the cone is one of the selling points of a Cornetto, I'm sure you'll agree.

Watching the birds patting on the damp grass with their feet - clever things, they do that to draw out the worms...

From nowhere some trivia that had been buried in an unseen crevice of my memory emerges to the surface.

*"Lazlo Biro invented the Biro in 1938. He was a journalist and wanted to create a pen that didn't smudge. He did so by using a tiny ball bearing in the nib."*

I'm a girl, at the front of class, reciting from notes.

I get quite nervous, speaking at the front, but I'm watching my best friend Masha. She's smiling and mouthing the words along with me.

She's smiling and I know I am doing a good job.

It all comes to me so clearly - in a flash.

*"Biro was Hungarian."*

A lot of my extended family were Hungarian too.

I sat in the sun, nibbling on the chocolatey end of my Cornetto cone, turning over this snatch of a memory from a whole other lifetime.

Marvelling at the fact that I now carried twelve samples of this once revolutionary technology in my shopping bag.

I felt something like real joy in that moment.  
A moment worth saving I thought.  
Perhaps one of you has the original box, with the Cornetto and the  
Biro?  
I've amassed quite a collection now.  
It tickles me to think of someone discovering them hundreds of  
years in the future.  
Because this is what we do with our days, isn't it?  
Routine check-ups and Cornettos in the sun.  
This is it.  
And how it all might just swirl by us if we don't take a moment to  
collect, to savour, to document.  
This is my way of saying, I am alive.  
And I remember!

ANNA: "I remember!"

I used to keep everything.  
Everything that had a story attached to it, I would keep.  
And you can find the story behind any item if you want to.  
I kept the shells gathered from the shore I used to live by.  
I kept the card from a teacher who thought I had promise.  
I kept the ill-fitting shirt worn on a special birthday.  
Now I'm quite a minimalist.  
One day,  
I woke with the urge to cull.  
It all suddenly felt like dead weight.  
I approached my clear-out like a ritual.  
Some things I chucked into bin bags with merry abandon,  
But other items, the shirt, the shells, the cards,  
I had a moment with them.  
Thanked them for what they had given me at the time.  
Then let them go.  
And now look - all this space, a cool white, blank canvas for me to  
sit within.

Well, off-white, actually.

The sharp-eyed amongst you might have picked out the grey tones in the walls.

The tin of paint said “Elephant’s Breath” which is almost disconcertingly evocative.

I think of it more as a “river-worn pebble”.

A few simple pictures around me from times I have travelled.  
Mountains.

Waterfalls.

Wide open desert.

I travelled a lot at one time.

I understand why others choose to gather, collect, preserve.

In fact, I quite enjoy rummaging around the treasures and trinkets that belong to other people.

What about her?

Colette.

Do we think she surrounds herself with bags of ephemera?

Or lives within the clean lines of an empty space?

What objects does she sit amongst?

What stories do they tell?

Let’s take a moment to imagine.

*Anna gets her notebook and pen and encourages the audience members to do the same.*

What objects can she see?

What items are in touching distance?

Pick one.

What does this object mean to her?

What is the story behind it?

*The audience are given time to write down their ideas.*

*Audience members are then invited to offer their suggestions of objects that*

*may surround Colette and the story behind them.*

*Again, Anna responds openly to all suggestions.*

*All items that are offered from the audience sit beside one another to build up an image of what surrounds Colette, of what she has gathered.*

*As this happens, Colette stops painting.*

*There is the sense that she is seeing the objects that are being described around her.*

*She may react to the story being told about the object, as though reliving the memory.*

*Anna will make note of some of the answers to embed into the text on page 199.*

**ANNA:** What can she see?

**AUDIENCE:** A small porcelain Alsatian.

**ANNA:** She can see a small porcelain Alsatian.

**AUDIENCE:** Seashells.

**ANNA:** She can see seashells.

**AUDIENCE:** A box of tissues.

**ANNA:** She can see a box of tissues.

**AUDIENCE:** A cat.

**ANNA:** She can see a cat.

**AUDIENCE:** A toy truck.

**ANNA:** She can see a toy truck.

*Anna, taking inspiration from the audience, finds an idea of her own.*

**ANNA:** She can see empty Chinese takeaway packets from her favourite restaurant - she hates to cook.

*Back to Beth's flat, lights fade in on the audience members who are Paddy, Sophie, Mother, and Father.*

BETH: Now me and Paddy we had a good innings.  
And there were no resentments in the end.  
It was perfectly amicable. Honestly.

Once Sophie was away at college... something shifted between us.  
We were living beside one another but not together anymore.  
Separate bedrooms, separate holidays.  
Even when we talked to one another it was as though we were  
having separate conversations.

I'll say this for him though.  
He threw me the most wonderful birthday party - it was a big one.  
Everyone was there. Everyone.  
All my pals from my singing days, the girls at the salon, Sophie, my  
mum, dad, cousins.  
I sang, naturally.  
With my dad.  
Paddy and I parted a week after that. Coming up to ten years ago.  
He lives in Bulgaria now.

*Light fades out on Paddy.*

Dad went not long after.  
Heart attack. All very sudden - over quickly so he didn't suffer too  
much.  
No surprise really, when your heart has worked that hard all your  
life it's bound to give up early.

*Light fades out on Dad.*

I was left to take care of mum.  
I'd always hoped it would be the other way around to be honest.  
It would have been much easier for me to take care of my dad on  
his own.  
He was just a more pleasant person to be around.  
Mum.  
Mum always looked at me like...  
Thank goodness for Sophie in those years.

They connected.

Sophie would read to her and...

It's a real sadness to see a once beautiful woman deteriorate like that.

Whatever you say about my mum, she had always kept herself looking nice.

She dressed well and did her nails and...

After my dad went, she just stopped.

I'd try to brush her hair, wash her.

She didn't like that.

*Directly to the audience member who is Sophie.*

You'd tell me to stop. "Let her be".

But that stuff is important for your spirit.

I do my hair. I put on lipstick, every day.

Even when I know I'm not going to be seeing anyone.

*Lights fade out on Sophie and Mum.*

ANNA:       Thought I'd give it a try.

*Looking in a compact mirror, Anna applies lipstick.*

*She looks at herself in the mirror.*

Perhaps I do feel better?

*She shuts the compact.*

I have a complicated relationship with mirrors.

All or nothing.

Either I obsessively pore up close,

Or banish them from the flat.

I aspire one day to look and feel...

Neutral.

It's hard to look in front of a mirror and be objective.

See what others see.

You always bring old stories

Stories about the angle of your nose.  
Your unusually puffy ear lobes.  
Your footballer's legs.  
Perhaps a way to really know a character,  
Is to put them in front of a mirror,  
And try and see what they see.  
Feel what they feel.

*She looks at Colette. Colette follows the directions that Anna gives.*

She gets up from the easel.  
She walks over to the full-length mirror that rests against the wall.  
She removes the scarves and bags that hang off it, obscuring the reflection.  
She dusts the glass with her sleeve.  
She stands face on.  
And for the first time in years maybe, she looks directly at herself.  
She takes in the view before her.  
How does she feel?

*Anna invites suggestions from audience members.*

*Again, whatever is offered is repeated by Anna as an affirmative statement.  
However contradictory, the suggestions sit beside one another.*

*Daisy will listen and make a note of the suggestions offered by the audience and embed them into her text on page 220*

ANNA: How does she feel?

AUDIENCE: Older.

ANNA: She feels older.

AUDIENCE: Lost.

ANNA: She feels lost.

**AUDIENCE: Confident.**

ANNA: She feels confident.

**AUDIENCE: Changed.**

ANNA: She feels changed.

She takes a deep breath and rolls her shoulders back to open her chest a little bit more.

She allows stillness.

She takes it all in.

This view of herself, this body she hasn't properly rested her eyes upon for some time.

She speaks out loud, directly to the vision before her.

What does she say?

*Again suggestions from the audience are invited and Anna repeats them.*

*Anna will make note of the suggestions put forward to embed in her text on page 199.*

*Raven will make a note of one of the statements offered and embed this in their following text on page 196.*

ANNA: What does she say?

**AUDIENCE: Wow.**

ANNA: She says, "wow".

**AUDIENCE: Get more sleep.**

ANNA: She says, "get more sleep".

**AUDIENCE: Congratulations.**

ANNA: She says "congratulations".

**AUDIENCE: Where have you been?**

ANNA: She says, "where have you been?"

Another inhale and exhale.

Something has shifted.

She doesn't go back to her easel.

Something has shifted.

RAVEN: Ground yourself a moment.

Notice.

In the time we have spent with the four women

The lichen on the wall has spread out and up, a thriving yellow  
blaze upon the red brick.

The flickering neon sign in the café below has lost its c, *coffee* has  
become *offee*.

The advertisements at the bus stop have changed, from bargain  
breakfast burger to hassle-free home insurance.

The rain has stopped,

And the sun is setting a little later in the day.

We are tiptoeing into a new season.

Ground yourself a moment.

Witness the movement around you.

Routines unravel before you.

Sit and be with one another long enough,

Sit as I do,

And an attachment forms.

A pleasure derived from the recognition,

As their habitual becomes your familiar.

The one who writes, the one who paints, the one who sings, the  
one who gathers.

The one who invites you to share delight in her most precious  
treasures.

The one who sees in you the faces of family members who left her  
long ago.

The one who collects your words as she builds a story of her own.

The one who you watch before a mirror as she softly says to  
herself,

**"Where have you been?"**

Wow.

Congratulations!

Get more sleep.”

Perhaps you develop a sense of what they need,

Of what you would like for them.

Glimpse the small and subtle shifts that hint at changes to come.

*A pause between the two scenes that feels a little too long.*

*Beth has been watching the audience, building up to saying something.*

BETH:        Everyone is so serious these days.  
Even with everything going on now I think, do you know what  
people need?  
A bloody good belly laugh.  
Where are all the comedians?

*Light fades in on the audience member who is Sophie.*

Sophie and her pals, they are so serious about everything.  
When I try to make light of something, make a little joke, she  
flinches like it physically pains her.

*Beth delivers this directly to “Sophie”.*

You’re so in your head.  
Always frowning, furrowed, I can hear the cogs turning and I wish I  
could see you...  
It’s great that you are so clever and study so hard, but I think  
perhaps...  
You think too much about things.  
You think too much.  
  
I’d love to see you laugh, be silly, be in your body.  
Like when you were a little girl.  
But you never...  
Not with me.

Out the window this morning, I saw two women on the street.  
Walking along arm in arm.

About your age.

They were laughing so hard that one of them, she had to stop, she doubled over. Like the laughter was running through her whole body.

Watching them. It made me smile.

I wonder.

Do you laugh like that with your friends?

*To the audience more generally.*

We aren't currently in touch with one another. Haven't been since...

Shortly after mum's funeral.

She came around unannounced, which was unusual.

*She takes us back to the memory.*

I make tea but I've not got the right milk in, so she has it black and doesn't drink it.

We sit at the table in the bay window.

Look out onto the street.

Birds swoop down to catch some chips that are spilling out of a bin.

She coughs awkwardly.

It's a fake cough, I can tell you that for nothing.

The girl really has none of my performing streak.

She says...

She says she needs some space.

That she has been reflecting upon our relationship with her therapist.

That while she is going through this process, she thinks it's best that she doesn't come over.

She'll be in touch.

This is something that she needs to do.

It will help in the long run.

It will improve things between us in the long run.

All I can say is...

There is a big gap between us then.

She walks to the front door, turns back to me, and says...

*A silence.*

*Anna is watching Colette who is sat at her easel but not painting.*

ANNA: She's stopped painting.

Look.

She sits by the easel, but she hasn't lifted the brush.

She's in thought.

I know that face.

I know what it is when something gets inside you and you're blocked.

Her mind is full.

*In the following speech Anna embeds the ideas provided from the audience at earlier points in the play. Audience contributions are indicated in bold.*

She thinks of when she first started painting.

**In 1924. In her school art lessons. At the age of twenty-three.**

She thinks of who she paints for.

**For her mother.**

**For herself.**

She looks at the objects she has gathered around her,

**The seashells.**

**The cat.**

**The toy truck.**

**The tissues.**

She recalls the memories they hold.

She thinks of how it was to stand in front of the mirror, to look at herself, and feel...

**Confident.**

**Older.**

**Lost.**

**Changed.**

And now, she can't paint.

She rises.

Walks to the window and looks outside.

Something strikes her.

She notices...

*Anna leaves a silence and goes to write in her notebook. The audience may do the same, but on this occasion, Anna does not invite the audience to share their ideas out loud.*

BETH: Too much time to yourself is not good for the head, is it Dolly?

*Lights fade in on the audience member who is Dolly.*

I've never understood these people who crave their "alone time".

The need to siphon off whole blocks of the day to "be with yourself".

Why would you...?

Ghosts come out to play, right enough.

You end up haunting yourself with questions and memories and the whys and wherefores of... it's haunting.

You haunt yourself. Taunt yourself...

Talking to the shadows with regrets and recriminations.

*In what follows, all the questions and frustrations that had been left unsaid and rattling around in Beth's mind come tumbling out of her. Her frustration builds as she confronts her family members until all she can do to release this feeling is sing.*

*Lights fade in on the audience member who is mother as Beth addresses them directly.*

Your sadness scared me.

I don't think a child should have to live with that.

Why couldn't you pretend for me?

Why did your sadness have to be the biggest thing in the room?

Why were you so cold with dad just because he was chatty and cheerful like me, what's so bad about/

*Lights fade in on the audience member who is Jim as Beth addresses them directly.*

You took her side!

I remember. I always remember, at dinner that time, dad was away and you... you two barely said a word.

Silently chewing your food like it was...

It was down to me to keep the conversation going.

"Imagine if you had a daily ration of words," you said.

"Beth would be out of stock before breakfast time."

A knowing smile between the two of you.

*To mother.*

"Beth doesn't appreciate the beauty in silence," you said.

At least dad appreciates my...

But even you/

*Lights fade in on the audience member who is father as Beth addresses them directly.*

I overheard you that time with Paddy!

*Lights fade in on the audience member who is Paddy as Beth addresses them directly.*

Conspiratorial laughter, lads together...

“Put her behind the mic for god’s sake, if she’s singing then at least she isn’t chattering on.”

Chattering on. Too much. Too much.

*Lights fade in on the audience member who is Sophie as Beth addresses them directly.*

“You’re just too much mum. Sometimes, it’s just too much”

Too much what, eh? Too much?

*She sings. Not to herself. Out loud, to her audience.*

*The particular song can be chosen by the performer playing Beth. In the September 2021 performance Julie Wilson Nimmo chose to sing the first two lines of Carole King’s ‘I Feel The Earth Move’.*

“I feel the earth move under my feet

I feel the sky come tumbling down”

You enjoy it when I sing, don’t you, Dolly?

DAISY: Some things are easier to say in a letter.  
You find yourself able to express things you might not otherwise.  
I should know, I’m quite the epistolary expert.

*She produces a big folder full of letters.*

I suppose, following on from my Boxes, the Letters were a logical next step.

It was important to share with people the joy that their items gave me.

I begin every letter by telling the person the day it is, where I am, what I can see from where I am sat, maybe a weather overview.

This is one of the first things I learnt upon arriving in this country - reflections on the weather are an essential component of everyday conversation.

I like to paint a picture of where I am writing.

I believe the reader appreciates it too because in the many, many replies I have received over the years the vividness of my writing has been much commented upon.

I log all of the letters that I have sent and then any replies received in my logbook.

There's a few of them scattered around.

*Half of the audience (those who did not have boxes in the previous scene with Daisy) have envelopes with letters in them under their chairs. Daisy invites them to get their letters out and read.*

Get them out, have a look.

I like to take them out and have a read from time to time.

I spent twenty years as a clerical officer in the civil service, so I've got a talent for maintaining unwieldy bureaucratic systems.

*See following pages to read the selection of letters that had been placed in the envelopes. Note that only those audience members with letters under their chairs will read them and they will only have one of the letters from the selection below.*

Dear Daisy,

How nice to hear from you. Has it really been fifteen years since you retired? No wonder the place has gone to the dogs! I jest. It's much the same really although all digital now - even old school Luddites like me have been forced online.

Your letter inspired me to put pen to paper and reply 'analogue' style. A jolly nice fountain pen it is too that's just been gathering dust. Reminds me what a joy it is to feel the ink gliding over the paper. Also reminds me how illegible my scrawl is - how did you ever decipher my notes?

It's been a hell of a year Daisy, I'll be honest. As you well know each time the Ministers do their reshuffle, we have to follow suit. Like learning a new dance routine each time. It's been like Musical Chairs this year what with all the kerfuffles at the top. Last one was only here for six months! Still, I'm just biding my time now - the pension is in sight. I'm learning to make my own cider - seems like a suitably bucolic retirement pursuit!

Family all fine. Julia's taken up pottery. Boys both graduated - they're chalk and cheese. Cameron has gone into asset management and Julian is an environmental activist. Makes for some lively conversations around the dinner table!

Hope you are keeping well and are as fit and spritely as ever Daisy. Still sketching too, I hope, I so used to enjoy your little cartoons around the office. Very cheering, you had quite a unique eye if I remember.

That's my coffee break over, back to shuffling the (digital) papers!

Best Regards,

Iain Binnie

Dear Ms Kuzmina,

Thank you very much for taking the time to feedback on your recent experience with our product and alerting us to the fact that although you purchased Beef Monster Munch, the flavour of the crisps inside was unmistakeably Pickled Onion. Thank you also for including the aforementioned defective packet of crisps with your letter as proof of this error.

To be greeted with the vinegary tautness of the Pickled Onion snack when instead expecting the smokey warmth of the Roast Beef must have been quite a shock to the system and received as a violation to the tastebuds. For this, we can only apologise.

We are truly thankful to have diligent and loyal customers such as yourself who take it upon themselves to draw attention to us when we have fallen short of expectations. As a gesture of thanks and as an apology for the error you endured, please find enclosed a month's supply of Roast Beef Monster Munch. We have also included a sample of our Flamin' Hot range (my personal favourite).

Please also accept our thanks for the annotated collage you produced of our Monster Munch packaging.

With very best wishes,

E. Heseman,

Customer Experience Agent, Walkers Crisps.

Dear Daisy Kuzmina,

I must say your letter cheered me greatly. As a writer, one has to accept that criticism is par for the course, one must be mature and rise above it. But the review to which you referred in your letter particularly stung. The writer really seemed to take the greatest pleasure in unleashing his poison pen in a personal attack on me rather than considering the merit of the work itself. To have one's Magnus Opus (for I personally consider it to be the finest of my twelve published novels) described as "more bloated than a rotting whale", "the wheezing last gasp of an out of touch narcissist more anachronistic than the typewriter they punch this drivel out on". Well, it went straight to the jugular.

At the advice of my agent and well-meaning friends I have kept quiet, though feel somewhat aggrieved in having to do so. To hear that a wonderfully loyal fan as yourself took it upon themselves to contact said critic (his name I refuse to pass my lips!) and seek my redress has provided me with significant comfort. I must confess your letter made me smile from ear to ear and a flush of happiness spread through me as my greedy eyes lapped up the colourful rebukes you tell me you threw at my detractor! (You have quite the sharp tongue yourself it seems, my dear!)

So, I thank you dear Daisy and I am delighted to enclose a signed copy of my latest book and a short pamphlet of poems I have produced in this period of isolation and reflection. Both sent with the deepest gratitude and thanks.

L. J. Fiennes,

Flâneur, Writer, Raconteur

Dear Daisy,

Honestly, I cannot thank you enough for looking after our dear Ginger over these past few months. Your generosity has been one of the few saving graces during this most terrible time. Knowing that our cat has been safe and well fed in your company has been a great source of comfort to us.

Cat care is so expensive these days and what with the costs of mum's funeral, not to mention all the legal fees involved in settling the Will... Nothing in life is straight forward, is it? Uncle Willie has really shown his true colours during this whole ordeal. A real eye-opener. It has been a true test of faith Daisy, it really has. I wouldn't wish this experience on anyone. What a legacy for poor old mum, she was a pacifist. She'd hate to see the fighting that has broken out in her name.

Anyway, I'm waffling. Sitting down to write this letter is the first time I've had two minutes to myself in months. And I've just heard the boys walk in from school, so they'll want feeding any minute now. Gone are the days when I could send them around to yours for jam sandwiches after school.

Anyway Daisy, when all this settles down, I'll be sure to pop round for a cup of tea. Or better still, have you over for your dinner. It's been too long it really has but know that I really do appreciate all you have done for us.

Love, Sally, Ginger and the boys at No 24 xxxxxxxx

Dear Mrs Kuzmina,

Thank you so much for taking the time to share with us your recent experience on one of our buses. At Thru-Line Buses we strive to offer the most efficient, smooth, and comfortable journey at affordable cost. It therefore gives us utmost pleasure when a happy customer confirms that we have done just that.

The Route 38 that you enjoyed with us passes through a variety of celebrated sights, taking in our city's famous landmarks before venturing out to less frequented but equally worthy patches of the city - a real through line.

We are delighted to hear that you enjoyed your day travelling the entire bus route from end to end. It is, as you suggest, a great way to take in all the shades our great city has to offer. Clever of you to bring your packed lunch and flask so you could stay replenished on our journey.

From the ticket you enclosed we were able to identify the journey number and driver. I am sure you will be pleased to hear that we have passed on your feedback to them. Our drivers always appreciate hearing from a happy customer. As a result of your letter the driver in question has been entered into our monthly Golden Staff raffle - entrants are those who have been recognised as going the extra mile that month. Your driver is now in with a chance of winning a family meal at the Local Carvery - this is all thanks to you.

Very Best Wishes,

K. Dextor

Thru-Line Support Associate

Dear Daisy,

Wow, what a beautiful drawing of the bird you saw near your home. It is clearly a very special bird. We love all the colours around it, it is like it is surrounded by the most beautiful bright rainbow.

You are very good at drawing - art must be one of your favourite classes at school. We love your drawing so much we are going to put it in our Studio Gallery. Here is a certificate from all of us at the Crafty Kid's Club team recognising your creative talents. Perhaps you can take it in to school to show all your friends and teachers. You should be really proud of yourself.

We are glad to hear that Crafty Kid's Club is one of your favourite television programmes. We have lots more great episodes coming up that we are sure you will love. Next month we will look at how we can create a magical forest from objects you have gathered from the garden and in December we will start building a Christmas Wonderland from household items. Be sure to stay tuned.

Thanks, and well done once again.

Keep Crafty!

Love all the Team at Crafty Kid's Club

Dear Mrs Kuzmina,

We write in response to your recent correspondence. I feel obliged to clarify that the Sherlock Holmes Society does not in fact undertake private detective work or endeavour to solve any of the mysteries that may leave us perplexed yet somehow fall beyond the remit of the Local Constabulary. While the proliferation of bright yellow plastic bags by your local riverbank does indeed sound intriguing, as do the curious foot and paw prints observed in the freshly laid cement by your front door, I regret to inform you that the resolution of such puzzling foibles falls outwith the purview of the Sherlock Holmes Society.

Formed in 1951, our Society is for those with an interest in Sherlock Holmes, Dr John H. Watson, and their world. We began with an exhibition of mementoes recreating the home of Sherlock Holmes - a meticulously detailed installation including a Persian slipper for Holmes's tobacco, a gasogene for Watson's soda, a jack-knife for Holmes to skewer his unanswered correspondence to the mantelpiece.

In the intervening years we have produced a quarterly journal and academic literature, an annual dinner, and a number of trips abroad. Destinations have included Oslo, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Paris, and Tallinn, not to mention five prestigious pilgrimages to Switzerland - all undertaken in full Victorian dress.

While we meet in London, we welcome guests from across the globe from all walks of life. All that is required is an interest in Sherlock Holmes and a willingness to *play the game*.

I enclose the appropriate literature should you wish to consider joining our group.

With very best wishes,

Angus Kennedy,

Secretary, The Sherlock Holmes Society

Dear Daisy,

I'm writing to you on behalf of my mother, Marija. I'm sorry to tell you that she passed away last month. You may remember that she suffered with asthma as a child, this most recent bout of pneumonia proved to be too much for her.

I know this will be upsetting for you and I'm sorry to have to be the bearer of painful news. Your friendship meant a huge amount to my mother, who, until the very end, referred to you as "my best friend Daisy". I found it remarkable that you had not seen each in person since you were schoolgirls. To maintain a friendship over letters - a friendship that has survived wars and feuding (both political and familial!), traversed borders and the seas. It truly is special.

I am not in touch with any of my school friends anymore. This is something I can't help but reflect upon with some regret, especially when I consider the power of yours and mama's friendship.

To have someone in your life who knew you as a child keeps that part of you alive. I think I am only beginning to understand that now.

Upon my mother's instruction I enclose a set of drawing stencils and some marzipan. She tells me you have a sweet tooth.

Sending very best wishes Daisy, and thanks for all the joy you brought my mother.

Natalia Nagy

DAISY:       Who has the one from the Sherlock Holmes society?

*Directly to the audience member who has this letter.*

I was quite underwhelmed by their response to my question.

I approached them on the belief they undertook detective work and then I discover it's actually a group of dafties in Victorian fancy dress pretending to be Watson and Holmes. No use to me whatsoever.

Not all responses are so disappointing, however. Who has the one from Walkers?

*Directly to the audience member who has this letter.*

I wrote to tell them that although I had purchased a packet of Roast Beef Monster Munch, the flavour inside was unmistakably Pickled Onion.

They gave me a month's supply! A month's supply of Monster Munch! All as a consequence of a letter.

And LJ Fiennes - my favourite author! Who has that one?

*Directly to the audience member who has this letter.*

LJ writes some of the most wonderfully imaginative literature, practically created a new genre - the Baroque whodunnit. It's gripping stuff.

Treated very cruelly in the broadsheets, so I intervened, wrote to the critic, and gave them what for.

I think LJ was rather taken by me.

Perhaps one of you has the one about Marija, Masha, my best friend.

*Directly to the audience member who has this letter.*

I've not seen her since I was ten, eleven.

Letters kept our friendship alive.

*Daisy quotes the letter from memory.*

“A friendship that has survived wars and feuding (both political and familial!), traversed borders and the seas...”

She sent me marzipan every year!

Some things are easier to say in a letter.

When a person is stood before me, I often don't have the right words.

I surprise myself at what I express when the ink starts flowing.

Feelings emerge that I didn't know I had!

I've come to believe that many of life's stumbling blocks can be mounted with a letter.

Feeling aggrieved, air your displeasure in a letter.

Missing someone, call them to mind and converse with them in a letter.

Keen to show a gesture of thanks, show you mean it in a letter.

Want to support a cause, give it your voice in a letter.

Need a piece of advice, send yourself a letter, that one works very well.

A lot can change as a consequence of a letter.

*Anna watches Colette.*

ANNA: I stand at the window,  
Watching her,  
As she stands at the window  
Watching...  
She stands at the window a lot now.  
She's stopped painting.  
I notice a new expression written across her face.  
  
See.  
  
...  
  
Something has got inside her.  
Something has shifted within her.

And now a question has formed,  
A question is swirling around in her head and just won't settle.  
It's been rattling around in her mind for days.  
I watch her,  
Turning over this question, looking at it from all angles  
But unable to answer it.  
I follow her gaze.  
A familiar red van has pulled up on the street below.  
Out gets the Postie,  
Always in shorts, whatever the weather.  
She watches,  
As they pull out their big satchel,  
And begin sorting through the pile of envelopes.  
I glance from the envelopes, the postie, to her, envelopes, postie,  
her,  
And I catch it!  
The moment when the idea lands.  
The expression on her face morphs.  
An idea has lit her up from within.  
She moves, with purpose.  
She returns with...  
Yes.  
See!  
A letter.  
She is going to put her question in a letter.  
She sits now, absorbed in the task.  
Pen in hand.  
Poised and ready to write.  
To put this question that has been lingering over her for days to the  
one person she thinks maybe, just maybe, could offer the answer.  
So what do we think?  
  
What is the question?  
  
Let us write as she does.

Imagine what she is putting in this letter.

What is the question that she needs answered?

*As Anna and Colette write, the audience are encouraged to do the same.*

*All write together for a moment.*

*After some time Anna asks if anyone would like to share.*

ANNA: Questions.

What question does Colette need to be answered?

*Anna takes time to listen to any questions they may be offered by the group. As in previous scenes, all suggestions sit beside one another.*

*Raven makes a note of the questions to embed in their text on page 218.*

ANNA: What does she ask?

**AUDIENCE: When are you coming home?**

ANNA: She asks, “when are you coming home?”

**AUDIENCE: Shall I quit my job and paint full time?**

ANNA: She asks, “shall I quit my job and paint full time?”

**AUDIENCE: How will I know when the time is right?**

ANNA: She asks, “how will I know when the time is right?”

She places her letter in an envelope and seals it.

RAVEN: The arrival of Spring,  
Challenges the logic of diminishing returns.  
For it is my observation that the more winters one makes it  
through,  
The more delight is taken in that joyful skipping over the Vernal  
Equinox.  
Lighter mornings, brighter thoughts.  
Brollies down, shoulders drop.  
On the street people look ahead and meet each other’s gaze.  
Warmer temperatures invite bodies to stretch out and unfurl.

The sirens haven't ceased - not completely - only now their call  
intermingles with  
chatter on the street,  
As people reclaim the parks once again - rude not to, when the  
daffodils have made such an effort!  
Cool pockets of air meet the skin and gusts of wind refresh tired  
minds.  
The sun rises higher in the sky as nature seeks her equilibrium.  
Transitions are fully in motion.  
Seeds of change that were planted in the winter months have  
begun to bloom.  
Green tips shooting above the soil, manifest, visible.  
But changes don't happen in isolation.  
Wild flowers flourishing by the river bank, spring greens sprouting  
in the lanes,  
Share the same light, drink the same rain,  
Their roots weaving amongst one another beneath the earth.  
In much the same way, we may see with more clarity how the four  
different women,  
Exist in relation to one another.  
Entangled beings.  
As each one moves, they leave an imprint,  
An impression that will be felt by those they exist beside.  
Brushing past one another,  
Contact might not be visible, might not be tangible,  
But each action prompts a reverberation.  
A resonance that will colour the course of those around them.

BETH: Would you look at me? Look at my hair!

I'm all... What's the word?

Dishevelled.

I - we - me and Dolly, we've been...

I'm going to sound daft, but we were walking down by the river like usual.

Dead quiet, as it always is at this time of day.

I noticed Dolly react to something...

Then I saw it too, a kind of ball of colour further along the bank...

A sphere of purples, bright, bright purples and vibrant blue and green.

I couldn't tell if it was a... bird or? But it was moving and...

Dolly goes bounding after it, I follow, but it was always that bit ahead.

If we stopped then it would come closer to us, luring us towards it and then when I moved it was off again.

Almost like it was playing games with us.

One minute at the riverbank, the next further inland.

And curiosity just...

I quite lost myself.

Like a girl again.

Convinced myself it was fairies, or magic, or...

We kept going and going and then...

Gone!

Daft. Daft, eh? What did I think?

I haven't run in years!

It did Dolly good.

It did me good.

*Anna looks to Colette as she delivers the following description. Colette remains in her window frame, looking out at the audience as Anna describes what she has seen.*

ANNA: There's something different in the way she moves.

That letter has started something.

There is a regular correspondence now.

I watch.

Postie arrives, enters the building.  
She moves to the front door.  
Returns, letter in hand.  
Pores over it.  
Then begins writing herself.  
A regular correspondence has developed.  
I watch.  
She disappears from view,  
Then emerges on the pavement, crosses the road to the post box.  
It shocks me at first.  
Seeing her out there on the street,  
The way she moves, holds herself, is not what I expected.  
Today - it goes further.  
She deposits the envelope.  
But she does not turn back and return to the flat.  
No.  
She carries on walking, all the way down the street.  
I don't believe it.  
I thought she was like me!  
But no. She carries on walking.  
I crane my neck, strain my eyes, following her for as long as I can.  
  
She walks in the direction of the river.  
Then disappears from my view.  
I stay for some time, gazing in the direction she walked, even  
though she is no longer there.  
  
Eventually, I move.  
Return to my writing.  
Pick up my pen.  
And as I always do before beginning a story,  
I look for guidance.  
I look to the window ledge.  
Then I notice.  
They aren't there.

Raven isn't there.

*Daisy is wearing a flamboyant feathered hat, a mass of purples, blues, and greens. She is light on her feet and dancing around her room*

DAISY: I spent the morning dancing by the river.  
It was like I was ten years old again.  
I was quite transported.  
And energy! I had so much energy.  
I followed the river further than I have ever been before.  
I just kept going.  
The bank was awash with colour, a richness of greens, hot pinks,  
and playful yellow.  
Then amongst it I noticed.  
A regal black silk.  
  
*Well, hello.*  
  
Of course, I did a curtsy.  
  
*You found me here.*  
  
*Or perhaps I found you?*  
  
Some people fear Ravens.  
  
Sense they know too much, messengers, crossing the threshold  
between one life and the next.  
But I don't fear them.  
  
I take a moment and listen.  
  
Be with the raven.  
  
Magnificent raven.  
  
When the time comes to move, it's instinctive for us both.  
They take flight, as I turn on my heel and begin dancing my way  
back home.  
  
Gathering things along my way.  
I'm preparing a box.

One last box.

And this one, this one is for someone in particular.

Someone I have seen.

*Daisy looks to Colette, here she embeds ideas that were supplied by the audience in earlier scenes. Audience ideas are indicated in bold type.*

I know her fears.

**Trees. Emptiness. Spiders!**

I know she feels

**Older. Lost. Confident! Changed.**

But I also know that things are changing.

She has a great adventure ahead of her.

So I'm preparing a box, things that might be of use for her journey.

My boxes have been an enormous source of pleasure over the years.

*She takes off the hat and gently bows her head.*

ANNA: I slept.

I slept for longer than I have in months,

A deep, heavy, unbroken sleep.

I dreamt of Raven.

I dreamt of all that Raven might see as they soar above in the sky,  
a boundary-less journey.

Crossing over the edge and landing on damp soil that no human has  
yet trod upon.

I woke, rested, whole, filled with a sense of possibility.

I look out the window and see the ambulance.

No sirens necessary for this is not an emergency.

Simply an old woman who has passed over from one life to the  
next.

No.

I decide

I will not stay and watch this.

I will not stay and watch her.

I choose to move.  
And so I cross over the threshold, over the door, and find myself on  
the street.  
For the first time in...  
I walk down to the river.  
Slowly.  
I hadn't fully appreciated spring's arrival.  
But outside I feel it.  
Cool pockets of air meet my skin and gusts of wind refresh my mind  
I notice...  
Green tips shooting above the soil,  
Wild flowers flourishing, spring greens sprouting.  
I take small gentle steps.  
Not walking far, trying to take in each detail as I go.  
This feeling I am experiencing,  
I almost mistrust.  
For so long I was sure it wasn't safe for me outside,  
But as I walk, I begin to feel something like real joy in the moment.  
Another small step forward and I see something on the bank before  
me.  
An unusual object.  
I bend down and pick it up.  
A hat pin.  
A hat pin with a globe on the end.  
It's actually a spherical stone of blues and greens.  
But to me it looks like the whole world.  
From above.

BETH: It was the Lady with the Hats.

*Lights fade in on the audience member who is Sophie as Beth continues to talk  
to the audience about her.*

That's what Sophie used to call her.  
Years ago now, Sophie must have been nine or ten.  
She had just started taking the dog for walks on her own.

So many times she would come back, all excited.

“Mum, mum I saw the Lady again. This time the hat was orange with real fruit in it!”

Or, “Mum, this hat was the biggest one yet, bright yellow with flowers!”

To begin with I thought it was in her head.

I never saw the Lady with the Hats.

But one time when we were out together...

We saw her.

“See mum!” she said.

And I did. I saw.

I understood then.

It became a little joke of ours.

One of the very few we had together.

We’d make up stories about the Lady with the Hats.

About who she was, where she came from, what she did...

I’d quite forgotten about her.

And then I read the story in the paper - it was her.

Found dead, alone in her flat.

But surrounded by the most wonderful collection of, well, knick-knacks, all sorts.

Objects going back years and years - things you can’t get any more.

They might make a display of it, that’s what I heard.

The Lady with the Hats.

She was a neighbour. Lived beside us the whole time.

Now I’m a proud person and I had been told not to call.

But something about this story made me feel...

So, I called.

*(To Sophie now)*

“Hello?” you say with a question mark at the end. I hear a tightness in your throat.

“You alright?” You ask, tense, suspicious.

“Yes... I’m calling about...

Well, actually, I’m calling about The Lady with the Hats.”

A pause.

And then laughter, giggling, giggles tumbling out of you, like when you were a girl.

Just the same.

RAVEN: We pan out now as I take flight,  
Leaving my position on the window ledge.  
A new journey lies ahead of me.  
I start slow.  
A gentle glide down the road, past the café, the shops calling for custom.  
Sun warms my feathers causing the dusky silk to glisten in the midday light.  
I sail on down towards the water,  
Reach the crumbling wall that marks the end of the road and the pathway towards the river bank.  
Overnight something has appeared -  
An explosion of colour upon the decaying stones.  
In the dead of night someone has crept out and delivered an artwork to the unsuspecting public.  
Swirls of purples, greens, and blues.  
A rainbow halo, a magnificent crown, a fully adorned chapeau sits atop the head of a smiling woman, with bright, impish eyes.  
The artist has captured the woman’s delight as she takes the first mouthful of an ice cream -  
Zoomed in on this moment of joy derived from one of life’s sweet pleasures.

This curious fresco, a firework of colour, gifted to the community overnight has drawn crowds.  
Amongst them a mother and a daughter,  
Newly reunited, sharing in the buzz that this celebratory mural has generated.  
They know who it is the artist has portrayed so perfectly.  
Sharing a smile, now inspired to treat themselves to an ice cream of their own.  
They wander down the road together pondering who the secret artist could be.  
But she left the scene some hours ago, just as the sun was rising.  
A parting gift for those she had lived amongst.  
She's off on a journey now.  
A journey that began with a question - **shall I quit my job and paint full time?**  
**How will I know when the time is right?**  
**When are you coming home?**  
With a small box of precious items,  
She steps off. Onwards.  
The street was quiet when she left, too early even for the postie.  
Walking down the road with a spring in her step, she turns behind to catch a final glance of her most recent creation.  
Her greatest yet.  
She smiles to herself, enjoying the afterglow that follows an energetic creative flurry.  
Looking over her shoulder her focus is drawn away from the path before her,  
She knocks into another woman.  
Another who has been out since the early hours, revelling in her new found pastime, walking the urban sprawl.  
Having spent night and day, in a room on her own, watching from the edge, fearful of what lay out there,  
She's found a new lease of life, now walking all the miles she missed in her confinement.

The two women pause.

Instinctive apologies leave each other's lips before they meet each other's eyes fully.

A momentary electric jolt sparks between them,

Time suspends for a second too long as they stand before one another,

And then the breath they both retained is released in a long exhale as they both continue on their way.

Two separate strands, briefly interlaced, before branching out in opposite directions.

The afternoon performance of 'Being with Raven' that took place at Gilmorehill Theatre, University of Glasgow was filmed and edited by Jassy Earl.

The recording of the performance can be viewed [here](#).

## **Being with Raven: Critical Reflection**

In this 'Critical Reflection' I explore the process of developing and sharing 'Being with Raven'. I have divided the chapter into three sections, Writing, Collaborating with Director and Performers, and Performances.

### **Writing**

#### **Co-Authorship Through Material Contribution, Co-Authorship Through Interpretation**

In 'Chapter One - The Participatory Landscape' I describe two distinct modes of co-authorship. One, I term co-authorship through material contribution, the second mode of co-authorship I describe is co-authorship through interpretation. As with 'TUITF', when developing 'Being with Raven' I experimented with crafting strategies that invite the two modalities of co-authorship with the intention of exploring how they might inform and enhance one another. I was aware, however, that when creating 'TUITF', crafting the devices towards co-authorship became the driving thrust of the piece, and developing character and the world of the narrative became secondary. With 'Being with Raven', my approach was different, as I worked to embed the strategies towards co-authorship more seamlessly into the narratives of the characters and the world they shared.

I began with the starting point of four different women living alongside one another, separate but together, in the holding framework of a block of tenement flats. Each of the women is distinct and absorbed in their own world and own story, but through the eyes of Raven, who observes them, the audience are offered the viewpoint that the women are in fact much more entangled than might first appear. As the play progresses, the audience both bear witness to the women's stories becoming more interwoven and contribute to the making of these interlacing strands.

## Co-Authorship and Crafting Character

I decided that each character would interact with the audience in a different way, and it was important that the mode of interaction befits the character and the story they share with us. In this way, form and content work together in a manner that is mutually enriching. Beth tells us she is a natural performer and that it is ‘wonderful to have a full house’ yet we soon come to understand that she is lonely and disconnected from her family.<sup>215</sup> Living alone she is filled with the memories of family and friends that are no longer part of her life. I explore positioning the audience as characters in this narrative strand. I was interested in how, through lighting and gestures from the performer playing Beth, an audience member can be positioned to represent a character and how this may contribute to a heightened awareness of one another in the performance space. This also works with the broader design for the space, performed in a circle. Throughout the entire performance all audience members and performers sit beside one another, yet in the scenes with Beth, the awareness of one another may be further magnified through the device of positioning the audience as characters.

The audience members are not asked to speak as the characters, which supports the idea that Beth is alone and effectively talking to herself, playing out memories and conversations in her head. Pre-set chairs are gently lit from below to indicate the different family members Beth tells the audience about. Over the course of the play, we “meet” her mother, father, both of her ex-husbands, her daughter, and her dog. I specify in the stage directions that the position of each character’s light is pre-set so that the “casting” of the audience member as the family member would be demonstrably random. I did not want any suggestion that the performer playing Beth was choosing the audience member to be a family member based on how they looked or presented. Indeed, I welcomed the eventuality that there may be some disconnect between the audience member and the character they were representing. This technique is inspired by the device employed by Tim Crouch in *My Arm* (referenced in ‘The

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<sup>215</sup> Shutt, Helen. ‘Being with Raven.’ Playtext, 172.

Universe in the Flat: Critical Reflection’), whereby objects provided by the audience represent characters in the work.<sup>216</sup> In this instance it is the audience members themselves, rather than their objects, which stand in as characters. As with Crouch’s device, I would suggest this draws attention to the internalised co-authoring each audience member will undertake. The audience do imaginative work in their minds to transform the person in the space to the character being described and we see the two modes of co-authorship become intertwined. An audience member is cast as the physical representation of a character and therefore transformed into aesthetic material within the scene. Simultaneously, as each audience member looks to the person who is representing the mother, for example, they are forging their own distinct reading of the character in their mind.

For those audience members who are lit, it might be that they experience a heightened awareness of those around them, the perhaps inevitable consequence of being drawn attention to in a space in which you sit in close proximity and feeling somewhat vulnerable as a result. As I discuss in ‘Chapter Two - Co-Authorship: Relationality, Vulnerability, Affect’, drawing upon Judith Butler’s work, it is through feelings of vulnerability that awareness of ourselves as interdependent may become more acute.<sup>217</sup> Yet my intention was that the combination of the pre-set lighting, it being explicit that the audience member is being addressed as a character, not themselves, and not being called upon to speak in role, would serve in some way to protect and reassure the audience members and prevent the device from feeling confrontational or intimidating. This was designed to strike a balance between a potential level of vulnerability being experienced by the audience member as they are gently brought into focus, but at the same time the fictive framework adding a protective layer.

While this mode of interacting with the audience is a way of experimenting with the two forms of co-authorship, it also links to the character’s narrative.

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<sup>216</sup> Crouch, ‘My Arm’.

<sup>217</sup> Butler, ‘Rethinking Vulnerability’.

Although alone in her flat, Beth is haunted by memories. She ‘taunts herself’ with ‘regrets and recriminations’, re-playing conversations or giving voice to feelings towards others that in “real life” were left unsaid.<sup>218</sup> Even when physically alone, her sense of herself is contingent on the relations that have shaped her life. The lights fading in and out become a material representation of the bright lights that once illuminated her social life and those interactions progressively being dimmed as she finds herself more isolated.

With Daisy, I explore an externalised form of participation by inviting the audience to engage with physical objects in the space. In a recurring trope from ‘TUITF’ I began with the idea of a precious box full of meaningful objects gathered over the years, exploring how objects might represent key moments or relationships in life which inform a sense of self. From this starting point Daisy emerged. Despite having suffered hardship in her early life, she has found an inner peace, taking pleasure in the small details found in ordinary objects and habitual interactions that infuse her day with joy. In her world, even the most mundane object - a Biro pen, for example, or the wrapper from a chocolate bar, has the capacity to hold a story, spark a memory, and elicit pleasure.

This allows me to employ the externalised mode of co-authoring through participation as audience members are invited to engage with the different boxes that Daisy has gathered over the years. There is a tactile and sensory mode of engaging with the work as they are invited to look through the assorted items gathered. The unspoken imperative here is for audience members to imagine what it might have been about the items that made an impression on Daisy and moved her to keep them. In this way, once again, the two modes of participation inform one another, as the physical engagement with an object in the space calls for individualised meaning-making at the same time. Through Daisy and her invitation to see everyday items with the same spirit of curiosity and awe as she does, I am exploring in practice Ahmed’s ideas on affect and the transformative potential of feeling wonder.

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<sup>218</sup> Shutt, ‘Being with Raven’, 200.

Ahmed defines wonder as the feeling that arises when we encounter an object ‘as if for the first time’.<sup>219</sup> It is a feeling in which the ordinary is transformed into the extra-ordinary and one that she argues, ‘opens up’ as we notice and become aware of the processes through which the world is made. Daisy, in a playful and quirky way, invites the audience to see objects ‘as if for the first time’, perhaps by pointing to an unnoticed detail on some everyday food packaging, or describing the merits of a favourite ice cream. There is something light and pleasurable for audiences to engage with in Daisy’s eccentricities and to view the world in this way, but it also carries the secondary imperative to open one’s own eyes and become curious. This ‘opening up of the world’ and level of creative engagement with the everyday, may then inform how the audience respond to more explicit calls to co-author later in the play. Following on from Ahmed we might consider that the opening up of the world afforded through feelings of wonder, also brings to the fore an awareness of the relational, the processes - and people - that contribute to the “thereness” of the world:

Wonder is about learning to see the world as something that does not have to be, and as something that came to be, over time, and with work.<sup>220</sup>

Experiencing objects, and the world around us, as in a state of becoming, I would suggest, draws attention to the relational. Nothing is independent or self-sustaining but in fact always embedded in a series of ongoing processes which bring its existence into presence. Daisy, in a playful manner, frequently makes connections between everyday objects: how they came to be and how they connect to her personally. There is an invitation for the audience to share in this way of experiencing objects.

I discuss in ‘The Universe in the Flat: Critical Reflection’ the decision to inscribe myself in the work and how this served more of a functional purpose, rather

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<sup>219</sup> Ahmed, 180.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

than contributing to an overarching narrative. Instead of offering an explicit framing and exposition outlining the aims of the play (as I do in 'TUITF') in this work, it was my intention that the process of co-authoring would be more embedded in character and narrative. I, "the playwright", do not feature, literally or textually, however I did create Anna, a writer, as the character who invites the most overt acts of co-authoring with the audience. When developing her I focused on her approach to writing, how writing makes her feel and how her identity as a writer informs how she sees the world, imagining the stories behind each person she encounters and in turn encouraging the audience to do the same. I explored how Anna is writing-with the audience, and that the "with" might be more readily experienced if all audience members are invited to look at the same source of inspiration as Anna. I therefore developed Colette, the woman Anna sees in the window and asks the audience to imagine together, alone, what her story might be. Rather than calling upon the audience to imagine the big conflicts or sources of drama in this character's life, Anna invites the audience to find a sense of who this woman is by asking more tangential questions that might reveal something about her. Provided with a notebook and pen, the audience are given time to look at Colette and write down their responses to prompts that Anna offers. Here the co-authoring through interpretation is made more tangible and embodied as audience members are given the space to commit their ideas to paper, bringing consciousness to the act of co-authoring through interpretation.

Following this period of individualised reflection and writing, Anna then invites the audience members to share some of their answers and to hear from one another. Again, the two modes of co-authoring become entangled as the audience are invited to move from quiet focus on their singular interpretation of the work to then externalising those ideas by sharing them out loud and seeing them become part of the aesthetic material of the performance. Even for those who choose not to share their ideas, my intention is that hearing fellow audience members offering their suggestions may serve to heighten a sense of relationality and being in the presence of others. Simultaneously, however, it will bring into focus how we each respond to the same source of inspiration

(Colette, and Anna's prompts) in a singular way. Indeed, with this device there is also the capacity to experience how offerings from other audience members can then inflect how one goes on to read and experience the rest of the play as it unfolds.

Anna and Colette's intertwining strands do not exist in isolation from Beth and Daisy's narratives. The shape and details of Beth and Daisy's stories also informed the types of questions and observations that Anna invites from the audience about Colette. I structured the work so that the audience have spent time with Beth and Daisy, two characters who share much of themselves, before being invited to look at Colette, "the blank canvas" and begin to colour in the details of her life. The experience of engaging with Beth and Daisy may offer inspiration for the audience as they develop their own story for Colette. In this way I explore how, as a playwright, I can guide and support the audience in co-authoring but "from the page"- through the structuring of the narrative, and character development, rather than needing to be a direct voice and presence in performance offering instruction. Although Colette never directly speaks to the audience, she is very much a living and evolving presence within the performance framework. It was important to me that Colette would be represented by a physical performer in the space and not a projection or image. She is not a static being and, in the text, I offer specific beats or actions that she performs that give hint at how she is moving about and experiencing the world. These are simple gestures that remind us she is a live and fluid person responding to the world around her, not simply a mannequin.

The structure of the work is designed to draw attention to an interdependent relationship between Anna, Colette, and the audience. There is a scene, for example, where Anna guides Colette to stand in front of the mirror, yet this is not simply a one-way relationship in which Anna is the puppet master. Anna and audience watch Colette before the mirror and respond to what they see. They offer ideas and words based on what they feel Colette projects towards them. These ideas are then verbalised in the space and may in turn shape how Colette moves or is read by the audience. There is a circularity and reciprocity to this

relationship that occurs in-process. Colette shapeshifts in the space as words from the audience are layered upon her, which then informs how the audience read her, and so on.

This allowed me to explore in practice ideas on the affect of words as informed by Ahmed's work. To encapsulate the emotional affect of objects and beings coming into contact with one another, Ahmed suggests it is useful to think of 'making impressions'.<sup>221</sup> I explore, through practice, how words make an impression upon bodies, objects, and characters. We may experience how words stick to the body of Colette and carry through into other scenes, informing the audience's impression of her. Simultaneously, we might observe how the words or ideas that an audience member impresses upon Colette leave an impression upon them. Later in the critical reflection, I explore how this manifested in practice as audience members evidenced their awareness of who had offered what words to the narrative, suggesting the words had become impressed upon the person who delivered them into the performance space.

Raven exists as a guiding presence, both for the characters and the audience, in the content of the play but also in the structure of the performance. In the narrative strands with each of the women we zoom into the minutiae of their respective lives and become embedded in the particular way they experience the world. Raven offers a different perspective; they are able to pan out and see the bigger picture. At different junctures Raven returns, inviting the audience to step back, allowing them to digest the stories and interactions they have had with the women, and offering a sense of what is happening in the world beyond their homes. Raven offers a calming shift in energy, as they invite the audience to take a breath and a metaphorical step back to situate the women in the wider landscape. In this way, Raven also supports co-authorship in the performance, inviting the audience to notice subtle changes, to be attuned to details that are unfolding. In a less explicit and direct way than Anna, for example, Raven draws attention to the situation of both being-with and making-with, calling upon the

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<sup>221</sup> Ahmed, 6.

audience to ‘be with’ the women and notice the small shifts.<sup>222</sup> This is guidance that can inform how the audience read and digest the piece as a whole, in turn influencing the specific offerings they make in response to the prompts throughout the play. Again, this is a move away from the more explicit explanation provided by Helen and Matt in ‘TUITF’, instead offering an example of how the playwright can develop characters and instruction for co-authoring in a way that is seamlessly embedded into, and serving, the narrative.

### **Heightened Language**

With ‘TUITF’, I felt that brevity of language was perhaps necessary in a co-authored work, equating sparseness on the page with “space” for the audience to then fill in and add detail. My thinking on this changed when developing ‘Being with Raven’. Responding to this project’s enquiry into how text can be used to facilitate co-authorship, I experimented instead with being detailed and playful with the language. As a playwright I explored using my craft to demonstrate how words can be used to build a world that feels vivid, tangible, and recognisable, and that the audience may feel drawn into and inspired to contribute to. The language employed in ‘Being with Raven’ is therefore poetic, colourful, and lyrical. There are examples of alliteration, word-play, and rhyme. This was designed to reveal to the audience the pleasure and joy that can be taken when crafting words and the ways they can be artfully used to suggest a world and a character.

When writing ‘Being with Raven’, I endeavoured to keep in mind that for some audience members sitting down to create a character is not an everyday exercise. As the playwright, one way I can make this invitation seem more accessible is to demonstrate having fun with crafting words, which, in turn, might not only help to draw a vivid world that engages the audience, but also inspire them to interact playfully with language themselves. There is, of course, no expectation that audience members would write in the same style - indeed they might find themselves reacting against this or adopting a very different

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<sup>222</sup> Shutt, ‘Being with Raven’, 172.

voice - the point is more to demonstrate how text can be used, rather than suggesting that this should be emulated.

There is a heightened quality to the language, particularly that of Raven, which I felt was appropriate for the character and the other-worldly, omniscient presence they have in the piece. They draw a picture of the street and specific context within which the women are situated but also share observations on the wider landscape and broader shifts in time and climate:

RAVEN:       The arrival of spring  
                  Challenges the logic of diminishing returns  
                  For it is my observation that the more winters one makes it through  
                  The more delight is taken in that joyful skipping over the Vernal  
                  Equinox<sup>223</sup>

Similarly, the language of the women is also stylised. Whilst wanting them to feel recognisable and rooted in knowable people with authentic experiences, the form and style of the work is not realism. In the same way we zoom in and out of their homes in an intensified manner, the way these women interact with us and the language they use to detail their experiences is exaggerated or amplified everyday parlance. Beth, for example, on describing her first husband Jim, remarks:

BETH:         He was quite an unusual man.  
                  His main loves in life were motorbikes, model railways, and  
                  miniature dogs.  
                  I thought that was a unique blend - daring but detailed, rebellious  
                  but reflective.<sup>224</sup>

This is not naturalistic dialogue, but is crafted to demonstrate a playful, tongue-in-cheek way of experimenting with language for an exaggerated effect. It also works with my interest in “wonder” and making every day and “mundane”

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<sup>223</sup> Shutt, ‘Being with Raven’, 215.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 178.

details that may so easily be rendered invisible, alive and “see-able again”. At one point Raven tells the audience to “notice” that:

RAVEN:       The lichen on the wall has spread out and up, a thriving yellow  
                  blaze upon the red brick  
                  The flickering neon sign in the café below has lost its c, *coffee* has  
                  become *offee*  
                  The advertisements at the bus stop have changed, from bargain  
                  breakfast burger to hassle-free home insurance<sup>225</sup>

Here, Raven invites the audience to see these small shifts and changes in the world of the play in their mind’s eye, activating co-authoring through interpretation. My intention being that by using a more heightened and overtly crafted form of language, the words may make an impression upon the audience which inspires and influences how they later choose to contribute to the work using the mode of co-authoring through participation.

### **Collaborating with Director and Performers**

#### **Quality of Engagement**

Ahead of spending five days with actors, which would culminate in two performances of ‘Being with Raven’ to an invited audience, I had three days of preparation with director Eve Nicol. One aspect of this involved considering the different ways that the performers are asked to interact with the audience. Given that in this work, I am not present in the performance to support the execution of participatory strategies in the way that I was in ‘TUITF’, I felt it was particularly important to consider how I could offer guidance, to both Eve and the performers, throughout the development process. A learning from ‘TUITF’ was the value of clearly conveyed instructions and the capacity to be responsive to the contributions from the audience to affirm their role as co-authors. In ‘Being with Raven’ it is the performers who I ask to be “on the front line” of the performance and deliver that support. Recognising that the uncertain nature of the interactive form can place the performers in a position

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<sup>225</sup> Shutt, ‘Being with Raven’, 196.

of vulnerability, Eve and I discussed how we could work collaboratively to prepare them for the task. We considered how both the stage directions and characterisations suggest the quality of engagement the performers should establish with the audience and how we could guide them in achieving that.

In this work I explore the conjecture that audience members may feel more inclined to accept the invitation to co-author if they feel they are being cared for within the performance. This hypothesis arose from learnings developing 'TUITF' and also from reflecting on the work of other playwrights who invite audience co-authorship. I discuss in both 'Chapter One' and 'The Universe in the Flat: Critical Reflection', how Hannah Jane Walker and Chris Thorpe establish a friendly and conversational relationship with the audience in *The Oh Fuck Moment*.<sup>226</sup> Lines of reassurance and encouragement are scripted, but further underscored by a warm and welcoming delivery from the performers which, I believe, makes the act of co-authoring more accessible and inviting to the audience- they feel cared for and supported through what they are being asked to do.

Another example of a co-authored work where I would suggest the open and encouraging relationship between performer and audience supports the process of participation is Duncan MacMillan and Jonny Donahoe's *Every Brilliant Thing*. In this work, the Narrator (performed by Donahoe) shares their experience of writing a list of 'every brilliant thing' worth living for in response to their mother's suicide attempt as a child.<sup>227</sup> Audience members are called upon to assist in the storytelling, either by being cast as characters in the Narrator's life, or by reading out the various 'brilliant things'. Playwright Macmillan describes how the work had many iterations before he collaborated with Donahoe and that it was the performer's experience as a comedian that opened up the possibilities for audience participation.<sup>228</sup> The collaboration results in a work that balances

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<sup>226</sup> Walker and Thorpe, pp 13-41.

<sup>227</sup> Macmillan, Duncan with Jonny Donahoe. *Every Brilliant Thing*. Oberon, 2015.

<sup>228</sup> Thompson, Jessie. 'Every Brilliant Thing: Jonny Donahoe and Duncan Macmillan on the show that charmed the world'. *The Evening Standard: Culture* 11 October 2017.

carefully considered instructions in the text with Donahoe's improvisational skills. The published script gives examples of how, still working within the structure crafted by Macmillan, Donahoe responded to contributions from the audience, in a manner that was spontaneous and unique to them. Here, we can see how Donahoe applied the principles of improvisation, as outlined by pioneers of the form, including Keith Johnstone and Viola Spolin, to support the audience to co-author.<sup>229</sup> Johnstone explains how in improv, an 'offer' from one performer can either be accepted or blocked by another.<sup>230</sup> A successful improvisation is one in which all offers are accepted, and then built upon or developed, often encapsulated in the maxim 'yes, and...'. Donahoe welcomed and accepted whatever contribution was made from the audience, skilfully interweaving it into the narrative; as Macmillan observes 'Jonny is amazing at finding a safety net where no answer is bad'.<sup>231</sup> The result, I would suggest, is an atmosphere in which the audience feel safe and supported, as Donahoe demonstrates no response will be dismissed, but draws upon improvisational technique to practice inclusivity, valuing what each audience member has to offer.

Taking inspiration from these works, and the improvisational principle of 'acceptance', I felt it important that in 'Being with Raven', the audience are put at ease, and the atmosphere cultivated is one of support and encouragement. Eve and I discussed the quality of relationship we would like the characters to establish with the audience. Anna, for example, as the primary guide in co-authoring, should be attentive to who has and hasn't spoken, there should be a kindness in her delivery as she gives space to all who want to share, to be heard. We agreed that if the experience we want to cultivate in performance is one of generosity, attentiveness, and support, that needed to be modelled in the rehearsal room. These qualities-care, respect, responsivity- then guided our approach to the entire planning and development process, offering a framework

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<https://www.standard.co.uk/culture/theatre/every-brilliant-thing-jonny-donahoe-and-duncan-macmillan-on-the-show-that-charmed-the-world-a3656001.html> Accessed 30 January 2023.

<sup>229</sup> Johnstone, Keith. *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre*. Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 1981; Spolin, Viola. *Improvisation for the Theater: Third Edition*. Northwestern University Press, 1999.

<sup>230</sup> Johnstone, pp 96-100.

<sup>231</sup> Thompson, Jessie.

to refer back to when we were making decisions about casting, communications with the team, structure of the day and the types of activities we would do in rehearsal. Although not appearing *in* the performance, this is a way in which the playwright can expand their role to assist in the process of co-authoring.

### **Care and Communication when Casting**

Eve and I took care to consider the type of performers who would be open to contributing to a project that is concerned with answering research questions (I reflect more on the duality of roles as researcher/artist below) and also who would be comfortable interacting directly with audiences, and the potential risk and uncertainty this can invite. When approaching performers and their agents I took care to be clear about the nature of the project and the work involved so they could be as prepared and well-informed as possible before agreeing to join the team.

We were also particularly conscious that the performer playing Colette is placed in a potentially vulnerable position. She is the only character who does not speak in the performance. The audience are invited to create their own ideas about who she is largely by looking upon this character and how she presents in the space. There is one scene in which Anna asks the audience to imagine how Colette feels looking at herself in front of a mirror. As the performer stands, as though looking in the mirror, the audience are invited to offer words suggesting how she feels in response to what she sees and what she says to herself as she looks at her reflection. Eve and I were aware this could be very exposing to the performer: it could be that words offered from the audience land in a way that feels personal, vulnerable, and there is the potential to cause offence or upset.

We approached Sita Pieraccini for the role. As someone who has a wealth of experience in clowning and physical theatre, we felt she would feel confident in offering a nuanced and playful physical language to Colette. We were aware that she had an understanding and appreciation of how the body could offer a dynamic language of its own beyond text. We also spoke with her before and

during the process about how it might feel to have words and ideas impressed upon her in this way. Here, the role of the playwright in a co-authored work is expanded to fulfil a duty of care. I recognised my responsibility to be sensitive to the vulnerability of the performer in a role I have crafted and as such it was important that I listened to how they felt and was reflexive and willing to adapt in response to what they experienced during rehearsals and performances.

### **Co-Authors and Co-Researchers**

Rather than focusing solely on the performance text and how we would deliver that to the audience, it felt important to share with the whole team the theories that informed the work and the research questions I was seeking to address through this project. Being open and explicit about the aims of the project and positioning everyone in the room as co-researchers with valuable experience to bring to it is also demonstrates care and respect. It means acknowledging the competency and skills of each team member and gives space for each person to respond to the questions and be empowered to take a shared responsibility in addressing the aims of the project.

For example, at one point early in the process, one performer questioned if ‘Being with Raven’ really did position the audience as co-authors if they did not make material changes to how the piece ends. This offered an opportunity for me to clarify how I am defining “co-authorship”. We considered the etymology of “co”, meaning “together”, and how this links to the significance of ideas on ‘being-with’. In this case co-authorship is not necessarily about equity of material contributions between playwright and audience but the experience of making-*with*, authoring-*with*. Here, it was also pertinent to discuss how the quality of relations, and the level of support and respect the audience experience in the performance, can inform the success of the co-authoring strategies. Conjecture that I explore in practice in ‘Being in Raven’ is that it is not so much the size of the contributions that the audience make as co-authors but *how* those contributions are treated that will inform the audience members’ experience of being recognised, and in turn recognising themselves, as co-

authors. It is my proposition that if an offer from the audience is dealt with carefully, listened to, given space within the piece, and responded to, then the impression the audience has of themselves as co-authors may be heightened, even if the only material contribution they make to the piece is one word.

This discussion proved helpful in supporting the performers' understanding of why the quality of the relationship with the audience was significant to this research project and in turn, informed their characterisation and style of performing. For example, Nalini Chetty, playing Anna, had a deeper understanding of why she repeats all the contributions that the audience makes and how this relates to the aims of the research enquiry. It informed her performance of Anna, particularly when she asks audience members to share their answers, as she understood that it was important that there was a warmth and encouragement in this invitation - that the audience members would feel cared for and supported, rather than pressured or put on the spot.

### **Introspection and Collaboration**

Throughout this thesis I propose that oscillating between, co-authorship through material contribution and co-authorship through interpretation may result in an experiential awareness of oneself as simultaneously singular and embedded within entangled relations. One way in which I worked to create awareness as a team of how it might feel for the audience to move between the two experiential modes (singular contemplation to externalised group contributions) was to structure the types of activities we did in the rehearsal process in a similar way. Similar to how the types of devices planned for the audience weave between the more introspective and the more externalised and collaborative, we varied the types of exercises in rehearsal to find different ways for the ideas and the characters to become realised and embodied. For example, early in the week, when developing their understanding of the characters, each performer was invited to go to the prop store and choose the chair that their character would sit on in her flat. Independently, each performer spent some time choosing simple props and considering what details might be part of their

character's home. After having time to individually think about this and set the space, each performer then presented to the group the room they envisaged for their character. Listening to one another's reading and emergent understanding of their character was an important part of the process.

Through the process of listening and being-with one another as they each prepared their separate parts of the text; the performers became more attuned to the echoes in the language that resonate across the inter-weaving narrative strands. These observations then began to inform their own performances. For example, Rosalind Sydney, playing Raven, at the end of the play describes the 'fully adorned chapeau' in the mural.<sup>232</sup> This phrase is originally said by Daisy (Alison Peebles) earlier in the play.<sup>233</sup> Rosalind soon began to deliver this line with the same intonation and gesture as Alison. This emerged through listening - the moments of individual reflection allowing subtle connections to become more tangible and externalised.

Another important activity in the development process was creating Daisy's boxes. In the text, I describe Daisy's boxes as annotated with her drawings and musings and holding within them assorted precious items she has gathered over the years.<sup>234</sup> We invited each of the cast to imagine "seeing the world like Daisy". We spent a morning collaging boxes and filling them with an assortment of items. During this process of crafting and making together, conversations flowed about the items we chose to keep and the stories they might hold. What soon emerged was how readily stories arose, sparked by looking at objects in this playful and tangential way. One person took inspiration from what they saw another doing. There was a passing back and forth of the crafting materials we were each using. I had not consciously planned it to be so, yet this became a process of making-with as singular yet interlacing beings. The situation of being-with and making-with allowed for a free flowing, explorative engagement with some of the ideas and themes in the work in a manner that was experiential and

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<sup>232</sup> Shutt, 'Being with Raven', 223.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 187.

embodied. What was evident too was how taking time to create and invest something of themselves in these objects generated feelings of care and investment towards them. It was my observation that it resulted in a deeper engagement with, and investment in, the work, as space was made for the performers to find their own way relate to this character and the offer of co-creation they make to the audience.

## **Reflecting on Performances**

### **Bodies in the Space**

After five days preparing and rehearsing 'Being with Raven' with the actors, we shared two performances, morning and afternoon on the same day, with an invited audience of Glasgow University friends and colleagues, and peers from the Scottish theatre industry. The performance space was set as one large circle within which both performers and audience members sat. Following Covid-19 regulations each person was seated at a one metre distance from one another. In the afternoon show, there was an audience of 16, meaning the circle was complete. In the morning show there was an audience of 11, meaning there were gaps/empty chairs within the circle.

### **Beth's Lights**

The co-authoring strategy that was most impacted by the gaps in the circle in the morning performance was positioning audience members as characters in Beth's life. As I have outlined above, the position of the lights over chairs indicating that a particular audience member was being addressed as one of Beth's family was pre-set. Reduced numbers in the morning performance meant that some of the characters referred to were represented by empty chairs. It was my observation that the absence of just two characters undermined the clarity of the strategy and its effect as a whole. In the afternoon performance, the fact that there was a person physically present in the space for each character worked to communicate this strategy more clearly, and visibly clarified for those lit, and those observing who was lit, the roles that had been

assigned. What this evidences is that the audience really are integral to the success of this strategy.

There was a breadth of responses that this device elicited in the afternoon sharing. A young male audience member was cast as Beth's mother, for example. As the audience were told by Beth that 'people thought my mother very beautiful' he visibly straightened his back and puffed his chest open, in what appeared an automatic response to the characteristics assigned to him. I observed other audience members also noticing this. At first there may have been some humour derived from the evident dissonance between the character described and the person before them. Yet in future scenes when the mother was being described by Beth, audience members would look to this person. This person in the circle, who, although clearly was not the character being described, became the "container" or "receptacle" for the words that Beth offered about her mother. They became the focal point for the co-authoring through interpretation that was invited as audience members layered their own imagining of Beth's mother upon this body representing the character in the space.

One woman was cast as Beth's daughter, Sophie. This audience member was still and focused, and whenever Beth directly addressed her the two women held each other's gaze. Without overtly taking on the role of Sophie, her body language was open, her attention was focused, and she was receptive to being the person in the room to whom Beth directed her feelings. This felt like a caring and generous act on the part of the audience member. She supported the performer to deliver what, at moments, was emotionally charged dialogue, but also, simply by being, and allowing herself to represent Sophie in this way, she gave space for other audience members to form their interpretation of the character. If, in the morning performance, delivery of these lines to an empty chair resulted in a diminished impact of the text, then in the afternoon performance those same words being delivered to, and openly received by an attentive audience member, heightened their emotional resonance.

Another audience member exhibited generosity in a different way. Positioned next to Beth, this woman was cast as “Dolly the labradoodle”. When first introduced to the audience, as Beth exclaims, ‘Look at her coat! Isn’t she gorgeous?’ “Dolly” smiled and playfully looked to her fellow audience members.<sup>235</sup> Throughout the performance, Dolly would respond to Beth’s observations and overtly nod to rhetorical questions she delivered to her, ‘you enjoy it when I sing, don’t you Dolly?’<sup>236</sup> Although small gestures, this physicalisation of her role offered a visible representation of a relationship between Beth and Dolly. We might conceive of this as an act of care from the audience member as they demonstrably accepted the responsibility that they had been given to represent a character and appeared to want to honour that for the performer and their fellow audience members. Initially, this might have been in response to the warm and friendly way Julie, as Beth, engaged with them. Through this device, I would suggest a reciprocity between performer and audience member became more evident. The acceptance, sensitivity, and openness exhibited by the audience members, simply by allowing Julie to interact with them and support the story in this way, energised her performance. Additionally, there was a sense it was more satisfying and moving for the other audience members to see Julie relating to a physical body in the space, and that having a real physical presence representing the character also supported their own capacity for co-authoring through interpretation.

### **Relating to One Another**

Throughout the play Anna (Nalini Chetty) asks the audience to join her and develop their own reading of Colette (Sita Pieraccini). The audience members are invited to write down their ideas independently. Afterwards, Anna invites audience members who would like to, to share their responses with the group. My instruction in the text was that Anna should repeat all offers made by the audience so that they are each heard and given equal space in the material body of the work, no matter how contradictory they may be. During the rehearsal

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<sup>235</sup> Shutt, ‘Being with Raven’, 173.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 202.

process I worked closely with Nalini to think about how that offer to share is made to the audience. We agreed that there should be no hint of apology or nervousness in Anna's voice; that she should be open, positive, and welcoming of any idea that might be put forward. When she repeats the answers given by the audience, they should all be delivered as affirmatives. This is an example of how the improvisational principle of 'acceptance' informed the co-authoring strategy I developed. Were Anna to query or disregard any suggestion from the audience, this could be experienced as 'blocking', whereas Anna's repetition is a demonstration of the 'acceptance' of the offer in the work.<sup>237</sup>

There were discernible differences in how the two audience groups responded to this device. In the morning performance, in response to the first question Anna asked about Colette, 'when did she begin painting?', the first audience member to reply suggested, 'two years ago - after a breakdown'.<sup>238</sup> Anna repeats this statement as an affirmative:

She began painting two years ago, after a breakdown.<sup>239</sup>

Anna asks the audience again, 'when did she begin painting?' There was some silence before another audience member, pointing to the first person who spoke said, 'I thought the same as you, after a breakdown'.<sup>240</sup> Observing this, I was aware that the audience members were not clear that contradictory answers were welcomed. Indeed, this second audience member seemingly wanted to demonstrate solidarity with the first audience member who had volunteered his idea. While, as the performance progressed, the audience seemed more aware that differing ideas were welcome, this initial desire to show support and demonstrate agreement evidenced an awareness between audience members of one another and how they are each relating to the work.

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<sup>237</sup> Johnstone, pp 96-100.

<sup>238</sup> 'Being with Raven.' 11am Rehearsed Reading, 3 September 2021, James Arnott Theatre, University of Glasgow.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

In the afternoon performance, the response to this first question and invitation to co-author was markedly different. An extract from the performance script evidences the variety of answers offered in response to this first question:

ANNA: When did she begin painting?

AUDIENCE: Now.

ANNA: She began painting now.

AUDIENCE: In 1924.

ANNA: She began painting in 1924.

AUDIENCE: At school - art lessons.

ANNA: She began painting in her school art lessons.

AUDIENCE: Seriously, when she was twenty-three.

ANNA: She began painting seriously when she was twenty-three.<sup>241</sup>

The audience members were quicker to offer their answers and there was no hesitation in putting forward a suggestion that might seem contrary to what a previous audience member had said. It seemed the audience derived some pleasure in hearing these divergent responses.

The different ways that the two performance groups responded to the invitation, and subsequently related to one another, continued throughout the performances. In the afternoon group the audience continued to offer diverse responses, seemingly finding amusement in this, viewing it as something of a game to layer the contradictory statements upon one another. In the morning, as the piece progressed there were instances where one audience member would reference what another audience member had said previously. For example, when asked by Anna what objects Colette is surrounded by in her home, one audience member had suggested 'bird feathers'.<sup>242</sup> At a later point in the play, when Anna asks the audience what question Colette writes in a letter, a

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<sup>241</sup> Shutt, 'Being with Raven', 182-3.

<sup>242</sup> 11am Rehearsed Reading.

different audience member said, ‘What am I going to do with all these bird feathers?’<sup>243</sup> This received a knowing laugh from the audience, who evidently appreciated this nod from one audience member to another.

This passing back and forth of ideas between audience members is, I would argue, a demonstration in performance of what Donna Haraway has described as the capacity to relate and form lines of kinship through playing games of string figures.

Playing games of string figures is about giving and receiving patterns [...]relaying connections that matter, of telling stories in hand upon hand.<sup>244</sup>

What the offers from the audience members described above illustrate is the giving and receiving of ideas and threads: the second audience member weaves back in the idea she has received from her fellow audience member at an earlier point, offering it back, in altered form, to other audience members to receive and weave into their singular reading of the narrative. Through this process lines of kinship, acknowledgement of one another, and what they have contributed to the piece, come to the fore. While I was aware that this back and forth might emerge between performer and audience, I could not have predicted the extent to which audience members might begin to exchange their own threads of ideas and make connections with one another. What I would argue emerged here were acts of care between audience members, who in referring to ideas each other have offered, demonstrate attentiveness and responsivity to one another, and signal to one another that they value the offers made. These acts of care are simultaneously acts of making-with, at once a demonstration of the quality of relation between audience members and part of the aesthetic material of the work.

## Act of Writing

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<sup>243</sup> 11am Rehearsed Reading.

<sup>244</sup> Haraway, 10.

Watching back the recorded material of the performance I observed how the physical act of writing by the audience members became part of the artistic content of the work. It was not just that the writing was a means to an end, the process by which an audience member would generate the idea that would then be shared as part of the co-authoring. I would argue that the moments when audience members sat quietly writing beside one another became part of the aesthetic material of the performance. In these moments of contemplation and focus, audience members watch Colette and write, aware of those around them doing the same; they are in an entangled situation of being-with and making-with. As an outsider to this, I can observe each of the beings in the circle taking part in a collective endeavour, yet clearly occupied with their own reflections and singular responses to the task.

There were audience members who I noticed wrote in their notebooks but chose not to share their answers at any point during the performance. As I outline in the script, I did not want there to be any pressure or expectation for anyone to share if they did not want to. In this way, the work was designed to offer multiple ways in which an audience member might feel themselves to be co-authoring without having to speak out loud if they did not wish to. This responds to the values of acceptance and support, exploring how co-authorship can be activated sensitively in a number of ways without an audience member being pressured to speak out loud.

Some audience members left their notebooks behind. Looking through them after the performance, I was given a glimpse into the rich and thoughtful ideas that had been written but not shared with the group during the performance. For example, in response to being asked what Colette can see in her flat, two suggestions from different audience members in the same performance, put beside one another, have a powerful resonance.

A big stack of books, they are connection and inspiration, they are what remains of her pre-breakdown life.<sup>245</sup>

A stone that she holds on to, she found it on the beach on a day when she felt lost.<sup>246</sup>

Although these audience members chose not to read these responses out loud, they demonstrate a considered, imaginative, and attentive engagement with the character and her narrative. Produced in the relational conditions of the performance, these reflect singular responses to the work that, in the duration of play, remained “theirs” as they chose not to give voice to it and offer it out loud to the group. This singular reading, however, will have been informed by, and bear the impressions and inflections of, those readings that were shared by others.

Observing *how* different audience members had written in their notebooks also revealed to me the process of an idea coming into being through the physical act of committing to the page and seeing the words materialised. One audience member had written that Colette can see:

‘Special paint brushes.

Given by a lover.

He died too young’<sup>247</sup>

Each new line on the paper indicates to me, the reader, a sense of the thought process and narrative unfolding in the writer’s mind. Another audience member, in response to being asked what Colette says to herself in front of the mirror, had written, ‘I want to parent you’. They scrawled a line through this and then wrote. ‘I **will** parent you’.<sup>248</sup> Committed to paper, I am able to observe the feeling the audience member wanted to express moving, shapeshifting, in-process, as the writer swerves from one affirmation to another.

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<sup>245</sup> ‘Audience Notebook I.’ 11am Rehearsed Reading.

<sup>246</sup> ‘Audience Notebook II.’ 11am Rehearsed Reading.

<sup>247</sup> ‘Audience Notebook V.’ 11am Rehearsed Reading.

<sup>248</sup> ‘Audience Notebook VI.’ 11am Rehearsed Reading.

There were audience members who I noticed wrote at length in response to the prompts and, in some cases, continued to write freely at different junctures throughout the performance. The fact that they may have been inspired to continue layering their own thoughts on top of what was being performed is, I would suggest, another form of co-authoring. Indeed, it was my observation that for some there was an appetite to write more, and they would have welcomed more extended periods of writing. Later in the chapter, I reflect on possible ways the audience could be invited to offer more of their written material to the performance in future iterations of the work.

Observing these audience members write freely during the performance, outside of the strategies in which they are explicitly invited to do so, led me to reflect on a potential limitation of my co-authorship model. Following on from Rancière, I propose that the audience engage in the mode of internalized participation in any performance. My model of co-authorship aims to draw attention to that process by embedding strategies that call for a more externalized mode of participation. Watching these performances led me to consider the risk that these invitations to interact may in fact interrupt the internal creative engagement that is occurring for the audience anyway. For some audience members, it may be that bringing consciousness to internalized participation might result in the adverse effect of stymieing their own creative flow. Although I have endeavoured to mitigate this by developing a variety of ways in which the audience are called upon to interact, I accept that the direct line of questioning called for by Anna, for example, could intrude upon the internalized interpretative work each audience member was undertaking unprompted. Whether intended as so or not, the audience members who wrote spontaneously during the performance might be seen to be offering a riposte to the possible disturbance to their imagination that arose from the direct requests to contribute and share ideas. They demonstrate that their creativity exists beyond the parameters of the strategies that call upon them to utilize it more explicitly. Whilst I acknowledge it as a limitation of my model that the devices I have crafted could result in the undesired outcome of interrupting some

audience member's experience of imaginative engagement, I welcome the possibility that it might inspire them to respond with their own expressions of co-authoring, such as the free writing evidenced in these performances.

### **Words Woven and Echoed**

A contention of mine when developing this work, has been that whether or not an audience member comes to recognise themselves as a co-author in performance may be contingent on how the ideas they offer are treated. Part of this, as I describe above, is allowing any audience member who wishes to share an idea to be heard, and for Nalini, as Anna, to demonstrate that they have been heard by repeating their idea back, giving it space within the performance framework, upholding the principles of acceptance and responsiveness.

This initial repetition comes immediately after an idea has been offered by the audience member. However, there is another layer to this device. At different junctures the characters Raven, Anna, and Daisy will take ideas that have been offered by the audience at earlier points in the play and weave them into text they deliver in a later scene. Through this device the audience may experience their contributions as not only listened to, but also valued as aesthetic content, filling a space within the text that otherwise would have been empty. In both performances it was my observation that this device elicited a sense of awe from the audience, especially the first time it happened. In part I would suggest this is because there is an element of surprise in how this is structured - words elicited and gathered in one narrative strand (Anna), are then repeated back in later scenes in a different strand (Raven and Daisy). As a formal device this supports one of the thematic concepts in the play: that our stories are always entangled and bear the reverberations of those around us. Yet I would suggest it also has an affective resonance, generating a feeling of "wonder". One might conceive of it as an experience of clairvoyancy from these characters who reveal themselves to sense all that is going on around them.

My observation was that audience members visibly sat up and became more alert when they realised their words were being echoed back to them in this way. It seemed to elicit a more focused quality of listening as audience members noticed that they were not just being offered words written by the playwright but that their own creative contributions had been moulded into the text and were being performed back to them. It also served to reinforce an awareness of one another in the space. I observed audience members looking to the person who had shared the idea that was then being repeated back. This seemed to me a manifestation in practice of Ahmed's ideas on the impressability of words. She writes that:

How the object impresses (upon) us may depend on histories that remain alive in so far as they have already left their impressions.<sup>249</sup>

Here the 'history' of the words within this performance framework was tangible, clearly felt by those audience members who then looked to the person who had first 'impressed' that word or idea upon the space.

Rosalind Sydney, as Raven, also demonstrated a care and respect for the contributions made by the audience, and a skilled and playful engagement with them. Rather than repeating back ideas from the audience in the order they had been delivered, Rosalind engaged in co-authoring of her own during the performance. In the afternoon show, she took the statements that the audience suggested Colette says in front of the mirror and embedded them into a section of text she delivers in the following scene.

RAVEN:       The one who you watch before a mirror as she softly says to herself,  
                  **"Congratulations! Where have you been? Wow. Get more sleep"**.<sup>250</sup>

*(Bold type indicates audience suggestions)*

Rosalind delivered the statements in a different order to how they had first been

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<sup>249</sup> Ahmed, 8.

<sup>250</sup> Shutt, 'Being with Raven', 196-7.

offered by the audience. She performed them in an impassioned flow, as though they were Colette's stream of consciousness. The effect, I would suggest, was one of wonder for the audience, as they simultaneously recognised the ideas that they had offered but at the same time they were defamiliarised, made different, as Rosalind, using her skill as both performer and co-author, reshaped them, delivering them back to the audience in a different form. She spoke with a fluency that implied these words had been written in the text; they flowed as seamlessly as the ones I had crafted, and that she had learnt and rehearsed before.

I would argue that the wonder that was elicited in response to these moments was in large part due to the skill of the performer, and the way in which she was able to deliver the ideas back to the audience in a manner that was so embedded that - had they not recognised them clearly as their own contributions - would have sounded like the pre-written parts of the script. While, therefore, the textual co-authoring device that I crafted, was, I would argue, successful in performance, this was in large part due to the skilful delivery of the performer who in turn become a co-author as well.

In many ways, I would argue that it was through this device - the audience hearing their words woven into the body of the text, filling gaps that would be empty without these contributions - where they may have most explicitly recognised themselves as co-authors. It is my conviction that the potency of this device derived from the fact that these moments were peppered through the text sparingly. The fact that there was not a set pattern as to how the words would be used called for more careful and considered listening on the part of the audience. While one learning from the two performances was that it was this device that felt most exciting, for performers, audience members, and playwright alike, my instinct is that part of its success lay in the fact it occurred fleetingly and at surprising moments within the performance and consequently the sense of it being somewhat magical remained.

## Co-Creating Colette

I felt that for each audience member to feel a sense of singular connection with Colette, her performance needed to allow space to hold all the different words and ideas that were being placed upon her. Sita (playing Colette) and I discussed that, even as words and ideas were “placed” upon Colette by the audience, there would be an openness, even a neutrality in her physicality. For example, in one scene she is stood in front of the mirror and audience members are invited to imagine what she feels as she looks at herself. In the afternoon performance this included such suggestions as, ‘Older’, ‘Lost’, ‘Confident’, ‘Changed’.<sup>251</sup> Sita did not move her body or offer facial expressions that might accord with these words, but remained grounded, focused, breathing deeply in and out. When rehearsing this, we felt it would more explicitly draw attention to co-authoring through interpretation if there was a subtlety and nuance to Sita’s performance, rather than becoming a clay model, shapeshifting at the audience’s every instruction.

The interdependent relationship that arises between Anna, Colette, and audience builds throughout the performance. Anna invites the audience to look with her as she creates a narrative for Colette. She both offers her own reading of this woman while inviting the audience to do the same. As ideas are shared the various readings become entangled, informing one another, while simultaneously Colette stands before them, hearing their suggestions. These scenes invite a heightened quality of focus; there are extended moments of silence as each person in the space is invited to bring their attention to Colette and really look and observe. In so doing, a potential synergy and feeling of connection may arise. This was particularly notable during the afternoon performance. In Raven’s final speech, before taking flight and leaving the women, Raven paints a picture of where each of them are: Colette about to leave on her adventure and Anna out walking the urban sprawl, the two women cross paths. In the performance Anna (Nalini) stood for the first time and looked

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<sup>251</sup> Shutt, ‘Being with Raven’, 194-5.

directly at Colette (Sita) across the circle. The two women lock eyes, inhale and exhale as Raven tells us:

RAVEN:       Time suspends for a second too long as they stand before one  
                  another,  
                  And then the breath they both retained is released in a long exhale  
                  as they both continue on their way.<sup>252</sup>

In the afternoon performance, I observed a number of audience members visibly exhale in time with Anna and Colette. Observing from outside, I witnessed a moment of shared physicality from those in the circle, who seemed to breathe as one for a moment. This close attunement with each other and breathing in rhythm with the women was possibly the consequence, the affect, of being-with and making-with them, for the past hour. An unconscious response to one another and the text, a moment of heightened relationality in the shared space of the performance before, much like the two women, each singular audience member dispersed.

### **Co-Authoring and Covid Limitations: Daisy's Boxes and Letters**

When originally crafting this play, I had hoped that engaging with Daisy's boxes would offer an opportunity for audience members to come together in pairs. I had intended for there to be one box for every pair in the audience and this would allow the pairs to interact with each other, making space for a more intimate and focused relation between two audience members. Similarly, with Daisy's letters, the intention was there would be one letter between a pair of audience members to read, and they would be given time to reflect upon it together. My thinking was that for some people talking to one other person might be a more comfortable way of sharing ideas rather than out loud to the group. It was also another way that I could play with offering slightly divergent experiences to the audience members within the collective framework of the performance.

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 225.

Due to Covid-19 regulations, however, this was not an option. All audience members were seated at a one metre distance from one another, meaning that close, partnered work was not possible. It was also not safe for audience members to pass objects between one another, and any props that the audience were invited to touch had to be cleaned in advance and pre-set. Therefore, in this iteration of the play, audience members either had a box or a letter under their chair - half the audience had boxes, half the audience had letters. Each box was different and each letter was different.

In the scene with Daisy's boxes, those audience members with boxes were invited to take a look inside them, as Daisy tells the story of her pastime.<sup>253</sup> In rehearsals we prepared this moment so audience members without boxes would still be occupied, engaged by Daisy's anecdotes, while those with boxes could take as much time as they wanted to look through them. At the end of the play Daisy tells the audience she is making a box for Colette. In the original iteration of the play, she asks the audience if they would like to add anything to the box. My intention was that words could be gifted by the audience; Daisy would gather anything audience members wanted to offer in a box which would be delivered to Colette during the performance. The audience could then watch Colette opening the box and engaging with the words the audience had offered her. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, we removed this device as it was not safe or practical to collect and pass objects around in this way. Giving audience members the opportunity to gift to Colette could also offer an opportunity for those keen to write more to do so. As well as objects, one device I would have like to have explored was inviting audience members to write a letter to Colette, or to offer words of advice for her journey. As I describe above, there was evident appetite amongst some audience members to write more, and this could have been a strategy which allowed those who wanted to, to write more freely and at length.

In the version of the strategy I was able to share in these performances, space is still made for each audience member to have a personal and singular connection

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<sup>253</sup> Shutt, 'Being with Raven', 187.

with an aspect of the story as they engage with a box or letter that was unique to them, while simultaneously being aware that those around them are experiencing something different. In the scenes with Daisy's letters, for example, Daisy refers to specific letters, asking audience members who had which one. This draws attention to the fact that each person read something different. It is also evident from Daisy's comments that the tone and quality of the letters vary significantly. This device is designed to simultaneously offer audience members a moment of individual engagement with "their" letter, while also piquing curiosity about what others had and what other letters might have revealed about Daisy. In performance, Daisy (Alison Peebles) took the prompts in the script, in which she asks who had which letter, to allow for a shared moment between her and individual audience members.

### **Audience Feedback**

I discuss in the 'Introduction' my rationale for not conducting a formalised post-show discussion or audience questionnaire. I do, however, recognise that my conjecture on the affectual experience of co-authoring could be enhanced by opportunities to engage more fully with the audience on their experiences during the performance. Whilst I maintain my hesitancy with pursuing a more discursive post-show 'talk', I think exploring creative audience research methodologies, such as those modelled by Matthew Reason, could afford a more nuanced analysis into the embodied and affectual experiences of audience members.<sup>254</sup> Further, this could also work in tandem with some of my suggestions above for extending co-authoring strategies beyond the parameters of the performance, for example, writing letters to characters, responding personally to a creative writing prompt, or even producing drawings. Developing a more extended audience feedback strategy could provide an opportunity for collaboration with a researcher with expertise in qualitative research methods and would offer scope for exploring how co-authoring techniques can also be innovated beyond the initial parameters of the performance but extended in a more longitudinal model.

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<sup>254</sup> Reason, 'Asking the Audience'; Reason, 'Writing the Embodied Experience'.

## Summary of Findings

The learnings gained through the process of developing and sharing 'Being with Raven', resulted in a more nuanced understanding of how the tools of playwriting could be embedded within the development of participatory strategies to facilitate audience co-authorship in performance. For example, the mode of interaction a particular character invites from the audience can also inform and complement the evolution of that character and their narrative. Similarly, the qualities of a character might suggest a fitting way in which they engage with the audience. In this way, form and content become embedded with one another. Additionally, as a playwright I can demonstrate to the audience how words can be used to build a character and their world, experimenting with the quality of language used to suggest how they may want to craft their own contributions. Consequently, I have come to understand how the playwright can use the tools of their craft to support the audience in co-authoring, without necessarily needing to be inscribed in the script, or present in the performance to offer guidance. In this way I am making visible the *tools* of playwriting, rather than the playwright as a character or performer, as a way of making the process of co-authoring seem more accessible.

Through this practice research I have explored the conjecture that an audience member may be more inclined to accept the invitation to co-author if they feel cared for and supported in the process of doing so, and subsequently that they recognise any contributions they make as being valued as aesthetic content in the performance. This, I argue, is in large part contingent on the relationship that the performer establishes with the audience. It has been my learning that the capacity the performer has to enact care towards the audience is informed by their own experience of being cared for in the development process. I argue that the feelings and relations established within the creative process between all collaborators can have an impact on the delivery and reception of the crafted textual framework. This invites a consideration of the playwright's role in the preparation and rehearsal process, and how they may model the type of caring

and supportive relationship that the performers are then asked to establish with the audience. I explore these insights in more detail in the next chapter.

## **Part Three - Consolidating Theory, Practice, and Findings**

### **Chapter Three - Co-Authorship: Care, Craft, Relations**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter I explore how the field of care ethics has allowed me to expand upon the theoretical frameworks that informed the model of co-authorship I have developed. Like the work of Jean-Luc Nancy and Judith Butler, whose respective ideas on ‘being singular plural’ and ‘radical dependency’ I draw upon in ‘Chapter Two - Co-Authorship: Relationality, Vulnerability, Affect’, care ethicists such as Joan Tronto and Virginia Held propose a relational ontology. Where I have found an ethics of care to add an additional layer to my thinking, however, is in the attention paid to how these ideas might be realised in practice. Bringing together learnings that emerged through developing my co-authored works, in this chapter I explore how the values and practices of care can guide the process of creating and sharing a co-authored performance model that draws attention to the shared condition of relationality. I consider how both aesthetic craft, making-with, and relations, being-with, can be shaped by the values of care in a way that mutually enhances the experience of both. Drawing upon James Thompson’s ‘aesthetics of care’, I consider the interplay between craft and relations at different phases of the process when developing a co-authored work.<sup>255</sup> I describe how the playwright can demonstrate care for the craft of writing as a way to relate to the audience and enhance their engagement with the work. I consider how the crafted framework for audience participation in performance, what Gareth White terms ‘procedural authorship’, can be designed to perform care towards the audience as a strategy to encourage them to accept the invitation to interact, and to characterise that relationship if the invitation is accepted. In the final section I consider how some of the more logistical elements of developing a co-authored work can become part of the aesthetic and generate feelings and sensations that inform the spirit in which collaborators approach the artistic material and subsequently the affect of the performance experience itself.

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<sup>255</sup> Thompson, ‘Towards an Aesthetics of Care’, 36-48.

## Care Ethics and Relationality

Care ethics is a normative, moral philosophy that emerged from feminist ethics with key, foundational works from Carol Gilligan (1982), Nel Noddings ([1984] 2013), Virginia Held (1993), Joan Tronto ([1993] 2009), and Eva Feder Kittay (1999). Although within the field there are divergent definitions of care, a central, unifying principle is that care ethics is concerned with relations and derives from a relational ontology. As Held writes, ‘it is the relatedness of human beings, built and rebuilt, that the ethics of care is being developed to try to understand, evaluate and guide’.<sup>256</sup>

How a model of co-authorship might draw attention to our ontological relationality has been a central concern of this research project from the outset. I have drawn upon Jean-Luc Nancy’s concept of ‘being-singular plural’ in which he argues that ‘being is being-with’. For Nancy, there is no singular ‘I’ before, or without, the ‘with’. In ‘Chapter Two’, I explore how a model of co-authorship might be crafted to bring to the fore a heightened experience of the simultaneity that Nancy’s ‘being singular plural’ encapsulates, where it is through awareness of our relationality that one simultaneously experiences oneself more acutely as singular.

Like Nancy, care ethicists do not believe that relationality is optional, but rather a shared condition. Our capacity to formulate the singular ‘I’ is always contingent on relations that permit us to do so. Held writes:

That we can think and act as if we were independent depends on a network of social relations making it possible for us to do so. And our relations are part of what constitute our identity.<sup>257</sup>

Care, therefore, emerges, in and through relations, the “in-between” space where singularities become entangled, the ‘with’.

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<sup>256</sup> Held, Virginia. *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, Global*. Oxford University Press, 2006, 30.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 14.

A key principle of Nancy's *Being Singular Plural* is that, although in a condition of plurality, each singularity is incommensurate and remains unique. His is not a conception of relationality that sees singularities becoming homogenised but argues that the closeness only serves to emphasise the difference: 'interlacing strands whose extremities remain separate even at the very centre of the knot'.<sup>258</sup> What is important in the model of co-authorship I have developed is that there is space for this uniqueness to be experienced and reflected upon. While an audience member may notice and feel aware of the relational, that does not diminish their own sense of singularity and therefore the capacity to respond and contribute in their unique way to the artwork presented. The aim of the model of performance, then, is to explore if co-authoring, 'making-with', can bring to the fore an awareness of our ontological relationality, the condition of 'being-with', at the same time as an experience of our singularity.

This also resonates with a key value for care ethicists, who place an emphasis on 'responsiveness' to the needs of the particular context and relation. Held and Tronto, for example, each emphasise attentiveness and sensitivity to relations as guiding principles of a caring practice; being attuned to difference is essential.<sup>259</sup> This is why an ethics of care differs from moral philosophies that put forward universal laws, formulated from the perspective of an autonomous individual acting freely of their own will, rather than being aware of and receptive to the relations they are both constituted of and embedded within. An ethics of care calls for an evaluative approach which is attuned to, and cognisant of, the particular needs made present by a particular relation. An ethics of care is therefore both relational and situational, responsive rather than absolute.

For Nancy, this shared condition of relationality forms the basis of an ethics which underpins a broader political imperative: 'this is the meaning of the world

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<sup>258</sup> Nancy, 5.

<sup>259</sup> Held, 39; Tronto, Joan. 'Theories of care as a challenge to Weberian paradigms in social science.' *Care Ethics and Political Theory*, edited by Daniel Engster and Maurice Hamington, Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 252-270, 262.

as being-with, the simultaneity of all presences that are with regard to one another, where no one is for oneself without being for others'.<sup>260</sup> In 'Chapter Two', I note the resonances between what Christopher Watkins describes as Nancy's 'ethics of mutuality' and Judith Butler's work on interdependency and vulnerability.<sup>261</sup> Butler writes that recognising and avowing the relational subject and the inescapable interdependency of all life is a necessary basis for social and political equality. She positions the relational subject as one which challenges the 'neo liberal conservation of individualism'<sup>262</sup> that prizes sovereignty and self-sufficiency and, in so doing, denies the interdependent relations, the 'with', at the heart of Being. She writes, "no one is born an individual [...] We are all born into a condition of radical dependency."<sup>263</sup>

Butler's emphasis on shared dependency also aligns with care ethics. Like Butler, care ethicists such as Virginia Held seek to challenge political narratives that emphasise individualism and self-sufficiency:

The ethics of care works with a conception of persons as relational, rather than as the self-sufficient independent individuals of the dominant moral theories. The dominant theories can be interpreted as importing into moral theory a concept of the person developed primarily for liberal political and economic theory, seeing the person as a rational, autonomous agent, or a self-interested individual.<sup>264</sup>

For Butler, and many of the philosophers working in the field of care ethics, starting from a position that acknowledges dependency on others, and need for care as an immutable experience of the human condition, has wider political implications. Butler argues: 'only by avowing this interdependency does it become possible to formulate global obligations'.<sup>265</sup> In a similar way, care ethicists argue that it is through relations of care that foreground the reciprocity that is inherent in the experience of caring and being cared for where we can, in

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<sup>260</sup> Nancy, 84.

<sup>261</sup> Watkins, 61.

<sup>262</sup> Butler, *The Force of Non-Violence*, 44.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 40

<sup>264</sup> Held, 13.

<sup>265</sup> Butler, *The Force of Non-Violence*, 44.

Held's words, 'cultivate mutuality in the interdependencies of personal, political, economic, and global contexts'.<sup>266</sup>

In 'Chapter Two', I propose that a model of co-authorship that is designed to heighten awareness of ontological relationality can prefigure a politics where these interdependencies are avowed. Therefore, the theoretical compatibility between the philosophies that have informed my research from the outset and the values that guide care ethicists is evident. The principles of an ethics of care support my exploration of how these ideas might be realised in practice. As Held notes, care is 'both a value and a practice'.<sup>267</sup> Positioning "care" with "ethics" means that care ethicists do not just address ideals in the abstract but are concerned with the practical application of the values of care in a range of contexts from the intimate, familial, institutional, and global. A philosophy of care outlines intrinsic values which should then inform how we act with one another in practice. Joan Tronto defines four 'ethical elements of care' as 'attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness'.<sup>268</sup> These qualities may act as guidelines against which to understand and evaluate behaviours and relational experiences.

### **Performing Care**

The practice of care, then, is crucial for care ethicists, and it is through the mutual and experiential process of caring that one may come to fully understand the values that underpin the ethics. Marian Barnes argues:

Not only does care reflect the relational ontology of human life and not only is it provided through relationships. It can generate dialogic processes that develop relational capacities among both care giver and receiver. We develop our capacity to care through the practice of care with others.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Held, 53.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>268</sup> Tronto, 262.

<sup>269</sup> Barnes, Marian. *Care in Everyday Life: An Ethic of Care in Practice*. Bristol University Press, 2012, 24.

I explore how a co-authored creative performance framework, making-with, an awareness of relationality, being-with, and a practice of care, caring-with, may work in symbiosis together. Following on from Barnes, it is my conjecture that it is not simply the case that we are all in a condition of relationality and dependency and therefore should care for one another, but rather that through practicing care we might also come to feel more acutely our condition of ontological relationality; the two work in a mutually-affirming relationship. It is this emphasis on developing our relational awareness through practice that resonates with the aims of my research project but also has been instructive for scholars of performance more broadly. Amanda Stuart Fisher suggests that care has a constitutive relationship with performance:

It is impossible to conceive of caring practice outside the parameters of how it is performed. In this sense, care, like live and theatrical performance, exists only as a live encounter and within a specific juncture of time and space. Furthermore, as with performance, care also involves forms of embodied knowledge.<sup>270</sup>

Like live performance, Fisher argues that acts of care may be rehearsed and prepared for. Indeed, this pertains to the quality of ‘competency’, one of Tronto’s defining principles of care. Yet, also like performance, an act of care will be singular and different each time it is performed. This speaks to Tronto’s principles of ‘attentiveness’ and ‘responsiveness’: the caregiver is concerned with how their caring action, or “performance”, is experienced by the care receiver and will therefore respond to, and adapt their behaviours, accordingly. We might draw parallels here between the way in which modes of live performance, particularly those that invite direct interaction, are informed and continually shaped by responses from the audience. The balance required between offering practiced and rehearsed gestures but delivering them with a flexibility that can respond to the particular relational conditions of the live performance speaks to a central concern of this thesis; namely, how to negotiate the “fixed” text of the performance framework, and the “open” space

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<sup>270</sup> Stuart Fisher, Amanda. ‘Introduction: caring performance, performing care.’ *Performing Care: New Perspectives on Socially Engaged Performance*, edited by Amanda Stuart Fisher and James Thompson, Manchester University Press, 2020, pp. 1-18, 7.

crafted for audience members to contribute to that framework as co-authors of the live event. Later in this chapter, I will explore in more detail how this negotiation might be approached in practice and how the values of care can afford guidance in doing so.

Fisher also emphasises that care involves forms of knowledge that are embodied, rather than solely cognitive. Relatedly, care ethics pay attention to the sensory and affective aspects of the caring relation. In my exploration of affect and the sensory aspects of co-authorship, I draw upon the work of Sara Ahmed. She offers a conceptualisation of emotions that also emphasises the relational. Looking at how emotions emerge and move through a collective, she suggests, might show us how all ‘actions are reactions, in the sense that what we do is shaped by the contact we have with others’.<sup>271</sup> For Ahmed, emotions are not simply something that “I” or “we” have. Rather, it is through emotions or how we respond to objects and others that surfaces or boundaries are made: the “I” and “we” are shaped through a relational process of coming into contact with others.<sup>272</sup>

Again, Ahmed’s theorisation calls for us to pay attention to the ‘with’: what occurs through contact with another; how this contact shapes us; the affectual quality of that contact; attention to the way sensations move and morph amongst the collective. We can apply this understanding of emotions to the practice of care which requires sensitivity and awareness of the sensory and embodied aspects of the relational experience and, as such, conceives of an affectual reciprocity at play in the caring encounter. I explore how the framework I create in performance may elicit certain emotions in the audience but examine how this is actually a multi-way process and that the assembled bodies also shape the emotionality of the framework; through contributing their own responses to the porous model, audience members imbue the written framework with affective qualities which emerge through a process of contact.

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<sup>271</sup> Ahmed, 4.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 10.

## Aesthetics of Care

It is care ethics and performance's converging interest in the relational and the sensory that informs James Thompson's 'aesthetics of care' - a mode in which he explores the artful aspect of caring acts and how care may be embedded within arts projects, particularly those concerned with building community or generating sociality amongst participants.

Where an ethics of care focuses upon the values inherent, exhibited or perhaps desired within these human interdependencies, the aesthetics of care seeks to focus upon how the sensory and affective are realised in human relations fostered in art projects.<sup>273</sup>

An aesthetics of care is then about a set of values realised in a relational process that emphasise engagements between individuals or groups over time.<sup>274</sup>

For Thompson the relational and the affective are crucially intertwined in these arts projects as the 'shape and feel' of relations that emerge through the creative process become part of its aesthetic.<sup>275</sup>

Thompson's 'aesthetics of care' follows on from his call to 'end' the emphasis on measurable outcomes and impact in applied theatre projects and pay attention to the affective experience of participating in socially engaged arts, which I explore in 'Chapter One - The Participatory Landscape'. Both he and Fisher argue that, despite stated intentions, community-based arts practices can undermine any intentions to demonstrate care or afford social benefits if they 'are not constructed around affective attentiveness towards the other'.<sup>276</sup> For Thompson then, the aesthetics of care extends the understanding of caring principles that might underpin the aims of an applied theatre project to draw

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<sup>273</sup> Thompson, 'Towards an Aesthetics of Care', 43.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>276</sup> Stuart Fisher, 'Introduction', 3.

attention to the artistry that may be present in how these values are delivered in practice.

Thompson notes that he developed his aesthetics of care principally in response to applied theatre practices. As I outline in 'Chapter One', my practice is not applied theatre, although it has been informed by innovations within its genealogy. My practice is primarily interested with the relational, however, and how relational awareness might come to the fore through the embodied and sensory experience of co-creation. Consequently, I have found Thompson's ideas pertinent to the aims of my research enquiry, offering a useful framework to refer to when analysing how an emergent understanding of a reciprocity between care and aesthetics has informed the evolution of my practice. Furthermore, it is my contention that, while principles of care may be more readily discussed in applied theatre where explicit aims of social transformation are likely to drive the project, the values of care can still enrich and guide playwriting and participatory performance in wider contexts, as I will go on to examine.

To suggest how a project in the mode of an aesthetics of care might be shaped, Thompson distinguishes three distinct aspects of the process, 'preparation, execution and exhibition'.<sup>277</sup> He argues that preparation should involve 'openness and honesty of intention' when communicating the aims of the project with collaborators.<sup>278</sup> For Thompson, consideration must be given to the accessibility of locations, timings, and programme of the work. He argues that these are not 'mundane organisational matters but crucial ethical propositions'.<sup>279</sup> Later in this chapter, I consider my own experiences of preparation for 'Being with Raven' and argue, like Thompson, that the care taken over these logistical choices, and the visibility of the decision-making process to all involved, generates feelings of mutual respect and understanding amongst the creative team. I will explore in more detail how these preparatory

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<sup>277</sup> Thompson, 'Towards an Aesthetics of Care', 44.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

acts of care will then have direct implications on aesthetics and on how the written text is received, and delivered, by the performers.

For Thompson the execution phase focuses on creative collaboration and the relations between all participants that emerge through this process. He writes that 'emerging connections between individuals coalescing in this process have an aesthetics - a shape, feel, sensation and affect'.<sup>280</sup> Thompson emphasises that this emergent sensory quality does not reside with one person or object but emerges in the 'in-between'. We might consider that what he is describing is the embodied and affectual experience of becoming attuned to the 'with'. This resonates with Nancy's assertion that '[being-with] operates in the same way as a collective power: power is neither exterior to the members of the collective nor interior to each one of them but rather consists in the collectivity as such'.<sup>281</sup> In 'Chapter Two', I suggest it is through a model of collective creativity, making-with, that one might become more attuned to the condition of being-with. In this chapter, I explore how a performance's capacity to offer an experience that affords a heightened awareness of the relational is contingent on a carefully crafted structure being in place to facilitate this.

For Thompson the exhibition phase focuses on the public sharing of the artwork. This involves thinking about the experiences and needs of an audience. In addition to accommodating a range of audience requirements in terms of accessibility and the material conditions of the exhibition, Thompson also suggests an artwork in the mode of an aesthetics of care approaches its audience with respect and regard: 'performances might need to move from a suspicion of the audience, to one where the range of life experiences of the spectators is not assumed'.<sup>282</sup> Guided by an aesthetics of care, opportunities for engagement and reciprocity are embedded into the work, with aesthetics emerging in the relations that arise through engagement rather than simply being assumed to be something inherent in the artwork.

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<sup>280</sup> Thompson, 'Towards an Aesthetics of Care', 45.

<sup>281</sup> Nancy, 30.

<sup>282</sup> Thompson, 'Towards an Aesthetics of Care', 46.

What is key for Thompson in all phases is the ‘mutual respect and regard’ that can be cultivated and emerge in an artistic project where time and consideration is given to the relational conditions of the endeavour, yet this attention to the sociality of the situation does not preclude awareness of the variety of subjectivities present.<sup>283</sup> For Thompson, then, in a project modelling an aesthetics of care, the ‘power of the artwork’ should never be valued as more important than the multiple relations that make it possible; indeed what emerges through the relations then becomes central to the aesthetic itself. Following on from Thompson, I have considered more carefully the interplay of care and aesthetics within my own practice. Drawing upon the principles of care as I develop a model of co-authorship has guided my response to the questions central to this research project, supporting a central aim of the work which is to offer an experience in performance that draws attention to the ontological condition of relationality.

In the following sections I will outline what I have come to understand as defining characteristics of the model of co-authorship I have developed. I will explore how an understanding of how care and playwriting craft can intersect has led me to reach and evaluate these characteristics. I will examine how, responding to the caring principles of ‘attentiveness’ and ‘sensitivity’, I endeavour to be attuned to the multiple relations at play in developing a co-authored work; playwright to performer, playwright to audience, performer to performer, performer to audience, audience to audience. I will explore how awareness of these multiple entangled relations is crucial at each point of the process, although it might appear that in some phases a particular relation is focalised, the quality of that relation will always impact others. In this model then, it is not possible to single out one relation (for example, playwright to audience) as more significant than any other. All of these relations are entangled and contingent. As I explore the different phases of the creative process and the attention paid to the relations made present in each phase, I

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<sup>283</sup> Thompson, ‘Towards an Aesthetics of Care’, 45.

will also analyse the symbiotic relationship between craft and care. While it might seem that in some of these phases it is the development of the aesthetic craft and skill of the work that is foregrounded I will, following on from Thompson, consider how this can be framed as an act of care. Similarly, I will consider how some of the more logistical or pastoral elements of developing this work either become part of the aesthetic or generate feelings and sensations that inform the spirit in which collaborators approach the aesthetic material.

### **Care for the Craft**

Here I explore the way in which my approach to writing evolved from when I created my first performance ‘The Universe in the Flat’ (‘TUITF’), a work for young audiences, and the second work, ‘Being with Raven’, designed for an adult audience. This change in approach was informed both by learnings that emerged from creating the first work but also the growing significance of care values and practices on this project in the intervening stages.

When creating ‘TUITF’ I spent a week with director Matt Addicott during which much of the playtext was developed together in the rehearsal room. We created text-led devices to facilitate co-authoring, such as leaving gaps in the text to be filled, asking questions of the audience and crafting space to take offers of words or ideas from the audience that were then woven back into the work. In this process of creating this work, it was the strategies towards co-authorship that drove the development of the piece, with the creation of character and narrative becoming secondary.

The conceit of ‘TUITF’ is that the audience are presented with a series of vignettes that have all occurred within the same flat and are invited to consider what links the separates scenes and, in turn, to create a connecting story of their own. In ‘TUITF Version I’ (the version that was performed twice to primary school audiences) we created twelve short scenes and in the spirit of randomness invited the audience to pick out six of the twelve possible stories to

watch. This was facilitated in the style of a “lucky dip” as one by one audience members picked a story out of a bag. In the performance, each of the twelve stories were represented in the space with a shape on the floor. Audience members picked out which of the “shapes” we would be watching. The selected shapes were removed from the circle, leaving the shapes signifying the stories that would remain unseen physically present in the space. My idea was that the fact that there were some stories that were left unseen or some clues that the audience were not privy to may generate a feeling of intrigue. In ‘The Universe in the Flat: Critical Reflection’ I describe how, in both of the performances, while the lucky dip process of selecting the stories excited the audience, they soon appeared to forget about the “unpicked” stories.

Although at the time of writing the ‘Critical Reflection’ I was not thinking about the effect of this in terms of care, it now strikes me that there was an absence of care in the preparation, execution, and exhibition of this device. There were multiple scenes that the performers, the director, and I had committed to and rehearsed that were never shared with the audience. While not intentional, on reflection I can read that this device does not value the time and efforts the creative team contributed to create these scenes. Awareness during the rehearsal process that not all the scenes were going to be shared might have impacted the extent to which the performers felt fully engaged with the work. Although I felt the randomness was aesthetically exciting, in many ways it removes agency from the performers and diminishes their capacity to prepare for the performance - it undermines their ‘competency’. Additionally, the “chance” device restricted the extent to which the creative team were able to demonstrate care for the dramaturgical structure - the random selection meaning it was difficult to ensure connections could be made between stories and, subsequently, to support the audience in doing so. While the “pay-off” might be considered justified if it had added a frisson of intrigue, in these performances this was not the case. I also considered how visual representations of the abandoned stories forming part of the scenography of the work in some way suggests to the audience an absence of care on the part of the playwright - that the stories and the craft that went into creating them was not valued.

Although not thinking about this explicitly in terms of care, these instincts informed the changes I made in the second version of 'TUITF'. In 'Version II' both the number of stories we see and the order in which we encounter them are fixed, and the audience are guided from scene to scene by the Mouse Detective Longtail, a character newly introduced in 'Version II'. Moving away from the aesthetic of randomness, Longtail serves as a guide and a consistent point of connection for the audience in the play. As it is Longtail who has this key relationship with the audience, I was aware of developing them in a manner that would be endearing and engaging for the age group. Longtail interrupts the 'grown up humans' in the play and introduces themselves as a nine-year-old mouse detective. The humorous absurdity of a mouse detective shifts the tone from the more naturalistic workshop format initially introduced and establishes a more playful and fun mood. Longtail positions all the audience members in the role of detective also, suggesting a point of kinship between them, as well as offering them a defined purpose in the unfolding narrative. Furthermore, as detectives, Longtail invites the audience to view each vignette closely, citing the significance each story might have in revealing clues and offering a reading of how they all link together. In this way the character invites the audience to value and be attentive to each of the stories.

This illustrates an evolution in my thinking in how the way in which a playwright presents their relationship to their own work and might be seen to value their craft (or not) may then impact how audience members respond to the stories and feel inclined (or not) to engage with them. This instinct, although not articulated in these terms in the 'Critical Reflection', reveals a growing understanding of how a practice of care can inform the quality of the multiple relations at play in a co-authored work and clearly impact the extent to which it may be successful in its aim in both communicating the invitation to co-author to the audience and the likelihood of them recognising and accepting that invitation in the performance.

Following on from this, I would suggest that a practice of care can be performed by the playwright from the outset, even in the early, more solitary stages of developing a text. When developing 'Being with Raven', I came to understand this phase as demonstrating 'care for the craft' of writing. Given that a specific interest of this research project is how text can be used to structure a model of co-authorship in performance, I paid closer attention to how the tools of the playwright could be employed to this end. As a playwright, I have skills in developing character, for example. I am interested in how text and language can be used to paint a vividly drawn world and how these aesthetic qualities might then work to engage an audience and see them inspired to both step into the world and creatively contribute to it themselves.

I reflected on the fact that when developing 'TUITF', crafting the devices towards co-authorship became the driving thrust of the piece. Characters were conceived secondarily, developed in a way to serve these devices rather than the two reciprocally informing one another. When developing 'Being with Raven' I was more attuned to how I could use text to build characters that the audience might come to care about, but also to carefully embed the strategies towards co-authorship more seamlessly into the narratives of the characters and the world they shared. As I developed the characters, I decided that each of them would interact with the audience in a different way and it was important that the mode of interaction befitted the character and the story they shared with us. In this way I developed form and content to work together in a manner that was mutually enriching. I reflect in more detail on this process in the 'Being with Raven: Critical Reflection'.

Although ostensibly undertaken alone, relationality was at the core of this process as I was thinking about how an audience member might relate to a character but also, in this model of co-authoring, how that particular character engages with the audience and invites them to contribute to the performance. Here the craft of playwriting and performing care become intertwined; the skills of the playwright are employed to develop a character, and the principles of care inform how such a character might engage with audience members and

develop a relationship with them in performance. In the following section of this chapter, 'Procedural Authorship as Care', I will explore in more detail how the invitations to interact were crafted and managed.

In addition to using playwriting craft to build characters that audience members might feel inspired to engage and literally interact with I also considered more carefully how the style of language might be used to inspire audience members to contribute creatively. Again, this marks a shift in my approach in response to the learnings gained from developing 'TUITF'. Earlier in the process, I was hesitant to offer too much detail, equating sparseness on the page with space for the audience to then fill in and add detail. As I explore above, I do not necessarily feel that an audience may be more inclined to contribute as co-authors by reducing the visibility of the work of the playwright. In fact, stripping away the craft of the writer could be experienced as care-lessness, and certainly seems antithetical to a project that is concerned with how text might be structured to invite co-authorship with the audience. In 'Being with Raven', therefore, I experimented with how a playwright might demonstrate the particular characteristics of their craft - namely shaping text and playing with language, to suggest to the audience co-authors how they could contribute. The language used in 'Being with Raven' is therefore more poetic, colourful, and lyrical. There are examples of alliteration, word-play, and rhyme. What this may reveal to the audience is a pleasure can be taken with words and the ways they can be artfully used to suggest a world and a character.

I was cognisant of the fact that being asked to respond to a character and offer details about their life (as they are asked to do in 'Being with Raven') may not be something that an audience member has spent time doing before. As the playwright, one way in which I can make this invitation seem more accessible is to demonstrate having fun with crafting words, which, in turn, might not only help to draw a vivid world for the audience to feel engaged with, but also inspire them to interact playfully with language themselves. We might consider that this responds to Tronto's caring qualities of 'competency' and 'responsibility', where the craft of the playwright is modelled in a way that can

invite reciprocal contributions. Thinking about it in this way, I came to consider how the textual offerings of the playwright can inspire the audience as co-authors. Rather than being restrictive or limiting, a detailed and considered textual framework can actually spark ideas and expand the creative possibilities available to the audience co-authors.

### **Procedural Authorship as Care**

A significant aspect of preparing a co-authored model is crafting the gaps in the structure for the audience to fill. There is a negotiation at play in this process as the creator of a participatory work needs to offer a robust enough framework that the audience members understand their role and feel engaged enough with the performance to want to accept the offer to contribute, yet simultaneously for that framework to be flexible enough to respond to the different offerings received from different audience members in each performance.

In *Audience Participation in Theatre*, Gareth White argues that the quality of the audience contribution in participatory performance, and how the audience member will perceive the experience of contributing, is contingent on how the invitation is made to interact from the outset.<sup>284</sup> In this, he posits that the creator of an interactive performance becomes a ‘procedural author’. White borrows the term ‘procedural author’ from Jan Murray, who discusses the way participation is managed by computer game designers. Murray writes:

Procedural authorship means writing the rules by which the texts appear as well as writing the text themselves. It means writing the rules for the interactors’ involvement, that is, the conditions under which things will happen in *response* to the participant’s actions<sup>285</sup> (emphasis mine).

We might conceive of procedural authorship as thinking about the management and maintenance of the relationship between artists and audience in a participatory performance and, following on from White, how the management

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<sup>284</sup> White, *Audience Participation in Theatre*, 29-31.

<sup>285</sup> Murray, Janet. *Hamlet on the Holodeck - The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. The MIT Press, 1999, 152.

of that relationship is part of the aesthetic of a participatory work. Procedural authorship, then, is concerned with the intersection of relations and aesthetics in participatory performance.

Both Murray and White highlight that a procedural author needs to craft a framework that is able to respond to the contributions made by participants once it is underway; relatedly, ‘responsiveness’ is one of the key characteristics of a caring practice. Additionally, in crafting a framework for participation, the procedural author will, White suggests, need to make judgements about the resources which will be available to the participants on the day of performance, how prior knowledge of performance conventions will inform their understanding of how interaction may work, as well as the individual skills, knowledge, language, and understanding of social conventions each of them may draw upon.<sup>286</sup> This, I would suggest, speaks to the requirement of the procedural author to both take ‘responsibility’ and to be ‘attentive’ to the expectations and experience that the audience member may be bringing to the performance.

While I am not proposing that procedural authorship is always caring, or performed with care, I would suggest that evaluating the model of procedural authorship against the values of care is one way in which the artist, or playwright in this project, can inform and influence the experience of relationality within the performance. I would also suggest that procedural authorship can be consciously designed in a manner so that care is performed towards the audience and the effect of this may result in them feeling more supported to contribute and subsequently recognise themselves as co-authors of the performance. Through the act of co-authoring the audience themselves can come to demonstrate care towards the narrative that they share in crafting. In this way, then, the act of caring comes full circle.

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<sup>286</sup> White, *Audience Participation in Theatre*, 48.

White suggests that modes of procedural authorship can be defined as ‘overt, implicit, covert and accidental’.<sup>287</sup> Although in both ‘TUITF’ and ‘Being with Raven’, there are multiple layers of participation, both works have a core strand within them where interaction is ‘overtly’ invited and communicated by a central character. In ‘TUITF - Version II’, Longtail positions the audience in the role of detectives and returns in between each vignette with clear instructions for how to participate in response to the scenes. In ‘Being with Raven’, acts of co-authorship are facilitated through the character Anna, a writer who leads the audience in a series of writing prompts in response to Colette, the woman she views from her window. It was my intention that in both works the central relationship with these characters would act as an anchor through the process of co-creation.

When an offer to interact is made by the procedural author, the audience participant will arrive at, what White terms, a ‘horizon of participation’.<sup>288</sup> This denotes the range of participatory possibilities that appear available to the participant from their position in the performance framework. This horizon will always vary from participant to participant, as each person will bring their own singular subjectivity and their own resources. Yet the horizon will also be informed by the parameters of the interaction that are suggested by the framework offered by the procedural author.

The procedural author can work to change the horizon, both as a limit, as they indicate that the invitation is open to more than previously understood, and in the sense of landscape, as they guide participants towards certain paths or terrain.<sup>289</sup>

By having a regular relationship with a character who grounds the audience in the ‘open terrain’ of the interactive performance, and offers instruction on how they might navigate it, my intention was that the invitation to co-author may be received as more accessible and readily understood. Further, I recognise that the familiar relationship with a central character, and an element of repetition

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<sup>287</sup> White, *Audience Participation in Theatre*, 40.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

in how they relate to the audience - for example Longtail returning after each vignette to ask the audience what they thought - can afford a feeling of reassurance, trust, and security in the process.

In this way, I considered that some parameters on the ‘horizon of participation’ could actually enrich the process of creativity. Here, I was informed by what Duska Radosavljevic identifies as a ‘dramaturgy of liberating constrictions’; how, when developing a new work, having a “rule” or fixed parameters to adhere to can be creatively liberating.<sup>290</sup> Paradoxically, having structures to work within can invite more artistic freedom. Being given too much choice or being faced with a blank page and the imperative to “write anything” can in fact be stultifying. I was cognisant of this when setting the instructions for the audience in both works, recognising that offering clear prompts would provide a “way in” to co-creation. In ‘Being with Raven’, Anna asks specific questions of the audience about Colette, such as ‘what was she like as a child?’, instead of, for example, a more open-ended invitation to ‘tell me her back story’.<sup>291</sup> Rather than being restrictive, following the logic of the ‘dramaturgy of liberating constrictions’, the parameters of the instruction are designed to provide a focus which then opens up the creative possibilities for the audience.

Similarly, in both works the audience are invited to respond to something in the performance space. In addition to clear, overt instruction, my feeling was that having something physical in the space to respond to would also provide both focus and inspiration in a manner that would make the invitation to co-author seem more accessible. In an early draft of ‘Being with Raven’, for example, Anna asked the audience to ‘draw to mind a character’. I realised that for an audience to be called upon, on-the spot, to create a character out of nowhere could be quite alienating. Instead, I explored how Anna might be writing-with the audience, and the ‘with’ might be more readily experienced if all audience members were invited to look at the same source of inspiration as her. Furthermore, this strategy more explicitly addresses the aims of this research

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<sup>290</sup> Radosavljevic, 156.

<sup>291</sup> Shutt, ‘Being with Raven’, 182.

by, in the first instance, asking the audience how they relate to the same physical subject in the space, and then offering the opportunity to share their singular responses in relation to one another. I would suggest that clarity of instruction, designing a character to guide the audience, and offering a clear source of inspiration to relate to are features of procedural authorship that demonstrate an 'aesthetics of care', exhibiting competency in the preparation and craft of instructions, and a sensitivity to the fact that invitations to create spontaneously could be intimidating and easing this process by providing objects and prompts to respond to.

In addition to providing clarity of instruction, I also considered how a framework of procedural authorship, guided by the values of care, might be attuned to the different comfort levels that audience members would have in participating and to design a model which offers a variety of entry points of engagement. 'TUITF' is designed for 9-10 year olds, and to be performed in schools, likely to a classroom of students who have an established relationship with one another. Although when developing this work, I had not yet familiarised myself with the field of care ethics and therefore was not consciously evaluating the design of the piece against its principles, I was cognisant of the needs of the age group and considered how best to structure strategies in a manner that could accommodate a variety of learning styles. One learning from sharing 'TUITF Version I' to an audience of 9-10-year-olds, for example, was the mixed levels of confidence with writing amongst the age group. Therefore, invitations to write in 'TUITF Version II' are limited to single word answers and occur in between activities which invite discussion of ideas. Similarly, to optimise concentration while also keeping the audience engaged, the types of activities invited oscillate between more focused partnered work and then livelier group discussion.

There is a different dynamic to be attuned to in 'Being with Raven', a performance designed for a small group of adults who may have some relationship with one another but equally could be unknown to each other. Unlike school children who work and create together on a daily basis, the audiences for this work likely do not engage regularly in collective creative

exercises. Awareness of this, and the growing influence of care ethics during the development of this play, resulted in the application of my own ‘dramaturgy of liberating constrictions’ when crafting this work. A rule I adhered to in designing this piece was that no audience member would be put on the spot to speak out loud or share ideas if they did not want to. I would suggest this rule served the dual purpose of demonstrating care for the audience and allowing exploration of the aesthetic aims of this work. Throughout this research, I have described two modes of co-authorship: co-authorship through material contribution and co-authorship through interpretation. In ‘Being with Raven’, not every audience member may speak out loud or share their ideas with others, for example, yet by being explicitly invited to reflect internally, and then bearing witness to fellow audience members engaging in different degrees of co-authorship through material contribution, they may still experience the heightened awareness of ‘being singular plural’. What is explored in practice is how awareness of the relational can occur, and audience members may come to recognise themselves as co-authors, even if they do not necessarily speak out loud or offer words that are embedded into the materiality of the performance text. Here, I would suggest the principles of care and the aesthetic aims of the project become intertwined and inform one another. The principles of care foreground the need to be attuned to the different experiences of audience members and to sensitively offer different entry points for engagement; in turn, this drives the aesthetic impetus of the project to experience the multiple ways we can both co-author and become aware of our relation to one another.

### **Affect and Procedural Authorship**

Procedural authorship is not just limited to writing instructions and crafting the strategies to participate. I would argue it also falls upon the procedural author to offer guidance to performers on the sensory and emotional quality with which the instructions are delivered. Although characterised in a manner to be engaging for the demographic of their specific audiences, both Longtail and Anna, the primary “guides” through co-authorship in ‘TUITF’ and ‘Being with Raven’ respectively, have been developed as characters with an open and encouraging presence. Longtail establishes a kinship with the audience when

they recruit them as fellow detectives and throughout reinforces a sense of camaraderie between them: ‘We don’t forget things, do we detectives?’<sup>292</sup> Lines in the script indicate that audience contributions will be met with encouragement: ‘some interesting theories! I knew that you would be good at this detective business, you’ve got lots of ideas’.<sup>293</sup>

Anna is portrayed as open, curious, and receptive to the audience’s ideas. She is eager to hear from them and there should be no hint of embarrassment or apology from the performer when she asks for the audience to share their answers. If the “guide” seems uncertain or negative about the task at hand, this affect may in turn be impressed upon the audience. Therefore, Anna is not forceful but delivers her request for the audience to contribute in a calm, supportive manner. Thinking about imbuing these instructions with a certain feeling and energy then becomes a collaborative exercise between playwright and performer in the rehearsal process and, in this way, procedural authorship is a shared endeavour between all creative collaborators. As I explore earlier in this chapter, a practice of care is concerned with the sensory and affective quality of the relational encounter. In a project which aims to deliver procedural authorship with care, crafting the bare bones of the instruction is not enough; it is important to be attuned to the affect of the delivery and how the emotional quality of the ask will impact the audience’s response and inclination to accept. In this way, and through this collaboration between playwright and performer in the ‘execution’ phase of the project, sensory acts of care can become crafted, prepared, and form part of the aesthetic material of the work. Later in this chapter, I explore how the relations established between collaborators when developing the work crucially shape and enhance the crafted strategies in the written framework.

The feelings of generosity and acceptance, while key in informing whether or not the invitation to interact is accepted in the first place by audience members, should be maintained and characterise the ongoing relationship

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<sup>292</sup> Shutt, ‘Version II’, 123.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 112.

between the performer/character and audience members. On the one hand, in 'Being with Raven', care is demonstrated by not forcing anyone to speak out loud, but a counterpoint feature of the dramaturgy is that all those audience members who do want to offer a contribution will be heard. In this way the procedural authorship is crafted so that the gaps in the framework can expand to accommodate the offerings of anyone who wants to contribute. Here, I would suggest we witness the negotiation between the "fixed" text and "open" space for interaction to come into play. A focused and clear instruction in the framework, which in 'Being with Raven', for example, would be a specific question about Colette, may be followed by as many answers from different audience members who wish to contribute. The written framework is designed so it can expand to accommodate this, but simultaneously there are parameters in place which prevent the structure of the piece from collapsing. Collapse of the structure could be a possibility were the procedural authorship designed in a more loose and open-ended manner. A more general question such as 'What do you think of Colette?' for example, could prompt long, unfocused answers from audience members and make it harder for the performer to adhere to the rule of allowing everyone to speak. Here the parameters of the instruction actually work to accommodate a breadth of responses from audience members. This demonstrates care by offering space for all those who wish to share to be heard and also can enrich the materiality of the work. Aesthetically, this can result in the universe of the fiction expanding exponentially, opening up the potential to hear the many responses to be found from a singular prompt.

As outlined above, both White and Murray cite 'responsiveness' to be a key characteristic of procedural authorship, and it is also a central value of a caring practice. Being receptive to the contributions from audience members and ensuring they are all demonstrably heard was something I designed as a feature of 'Being with Raven', all contributions that audience members wish to share are heard, and then repeated back by Anna. This was designed to demonstrate attentiveness, an affirmation from the performer that the audience's contributions are valued that also underlines the insertion of their ideas into the body of the work. The stage directions read:

*Anna asks the questions again, one by one and invites any audience members who would like to share their ideas out loud to the group.*

*She responds to all suggestions with openness, repeating the ideas as an affirmative statement.<sup>294</sup>*

These guidelines of procedural authorship state that there is an equity in how the audience responses are received. Again, how this will be performed in practice will be prepared for through discussion and collaboration between the playwright and performer. Together they can plan how responses to the audience's offerings can be delivered in a way that is positive and encouraging, but simultaneously does not favour one audience member's idea as better than another. The aim of this model is not about the audience working together to find a "right" answer or land on a unified reading but instead to draw attention to the multiple readings that might emerge in this relational situation, and to experience the different feelings that can arise in the shared conditions of the performance. It is worth noting that the principle of treating all audience responses with equity may be more commonly adhered to in applied theatre practices, or indeed works for young audiences. Whilst it is not my contention that equitable and respectful treatment of the audience is entirely absent from non-applied theatre contexts, it might be the case that these values are not as clearly expressed, or visible. What I am illustrating here is how embedding these principles within the artistic process, and in the crafting of aesthetic devices, can enrich the creative material while making visible the principles of care in a manner that serves the artistry and the politics of the work.

Key for the model of co-authorship I am crafting, then, is that the contributions from audience members are treated with respect by the performers. In part this will arise through the technique of allowing all contributions to be heard, and the open and appreciative reception of them. In both 'TUITF' and more deliberately so in 'Being with Raven', I demonstrate this respect for the audience's contributions by taking them and embedding them into future moments in the play. This was a technique that I first explored in 'TUITF' (words

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<sup>294</sup> Shutt, 'Being with Raven', 182.

that audience members have offered in one vignette are then “found” and used by a different character to build sentences in a later vignette) but developed further in ‘Being with Raven’, where contributions made by the audience in one scene are woven into the body of the text in later scenes. At different junctures the characters Raven, Anna, and Daisy, will take ideas that have been offered by the audience at earlier points in the play and weave them into text they deliver in a later scene. This strategy was crafted to demonstrate an additional level of care and attentiveness, revealing that not only the character who asked for audience contributions (Anna) has been listening to them, but that other performers/characters were listening and making note of these ideas to then embed these into the body of the text. This device signals to the audience that their contributions have been listened to and are valued as aesthetic content.

Again, this strategy of procedural authorship calls for collaboration and a mutual understanding between playwright and performer. While I, as playwright, can offer detailed instructions in the playtext such as ‘*Raven will make note of some of the answers provided, these will be embedded into their following text on page 179*’, in the live conditions of the performance the success of this strategy is contingent on the capacity of the performer to be attentive and responsive while listening to the offerings of the audience members.<sup>295</sup> A further display of competency and skill is required as they then shape and embed these words into the text and deliver them as seamlessly as pre-rehearsed lines. This performance of care by the actor may be received by the audience and have the reciprocal effect of inspiring them to care more or feel more invested in the work. Furthermore, demonstrating that the audience’s ideas are treated with care and respect may motivate audience members who have previously been reticent to contribute to do so later on. In this way, there is a ripple effect of care as experiencing being ‘cared-for’ can then inspire audience members to ‘care-about’.

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<sup>295</sup> Shutt, ‘Being with Raven’, 182.

A central question in this thesis has been ‘how can the playwright craft a structure in which the audience are placed and recognise themselves as co-authors?’ Drawing upon the significance of ‘responsivity’ in both the aesthetics of care and a process of procedural authorship, I will home in here on the word ‘recognise’. I would suggest that using the audience’s contributions, not just hearing them but actually embedding them into the text, gestures to the playwright’s and performers’ *recognition* of them as co-authors, thus inviting a reciprocal response for the audience to in turn recognise themselves as co-authors. Following on from this, I propose that whether or not the audience recognise themselves as co-authors is less about the size of the contribution made and informed more by how they experience that contribution being responded to and treated. I would contend that the quality of care that any contribution made by an audience member is met with will impact upon how they perceive and experience their role as co-authors of the framework as a whole. Furthermore, following on from Barnes’s proposition that we ‘develop our capacity to care through the practice of care with others’, we might consider how recognising that the audience’s artistic contributions are being cared-for by the performers can reciprocally result in the audience members demonstrating care for both the fictional world of the narrative and to one another.<sup>296</sup> In ‘Being with Raven: Critical Reflection’, I note examples of the audience responding to one another’s ideas, demonstrating listening and attentiveness to each another. In these moments, the audience can be recognised as co-carers as well as co-authors.

### **Aesthetics of Care - Preparation and Execution**

In the previous section I draw attention to how playwriting craft and procedural authorship can be designed to exhibit and perform care towards the audience. It is the relations between playwright and performer, playwright and director, and performer and performer that I will foreground in this section, as I will focus on what, in Thompson’s model of an aesthetics of care, we would term the preparation and execution phases of a performance.

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<sup>296</sup> Barnes, 24.

Thompson draws attention to the potential intersection between acts of care and aesthetics, the relational and the sensory, by highlighting the manner in which acts of planning the material conditions of a project, if delivered with care, instil the project with affective sensibilities which have an aesthetic but will then influence the creative model itself. He argues this form of planning and infrastructure is not then a ‘hidden mechanism of creative endeavour but a valued component of the aesthetics’.<sup>297</sup>

His use of ‘hidden mechanism’ points to the fact that very often in creative projects, these elements of logistical planning such as sourcing a location, liaising with collaborators, communicating about fees, detailing the amenities available, and/or planning the timings for the day, will be viewed as a necessary part of the project but situated as distinct from the actual aesthetic component, or research, and therefore likely not acknowledged in any accompanying analysis. We might consider that this does two things. Firstly, it neglects to account for how these types of choices, and indeed how they are communicated to a creative team and participants, have a tangible impact on how people feel about the work, how they perceive themselves as being valued, and therefore affect how they relate to one another and the artistic project. Secondly, to “hide” these essential parts of the creative process suggests they are not important or are not where the “real” work happens. Marian Barnes has argued that there can be a cloak of invisibility around acts of care, which is both borne from, and then perpetuates, the idea that they are of little value.<sup>298</sup> Yet these gestures of consideration and attentiveness to the needs of the singular beings who will be working beside one another and influencing one another play a crucial role in shaping the experience for everyone involved in the project. Likewise, delivering these acts of planning in a manner which is guided by the values of care requires skill, effort, and labour which, if unremarked upon, is further devalued. Centralising the significance of these acts, then, serves to underline their necessity to an arts project and makes them more visible. Making

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<sup>297</sup> Thompson, ‘Towards an Aesthetics of Care’, 45.

<sup>298</sup> Barnes, 3.

this work more visible and reflecting on it as a crucial part of the creative project brings a greater awareness of how it is delivered, prompting one to act more consciously.

A significant difference between how I approached these acts of preparation when planning the development week for 'TUITF' and then for 'Being with Raven' was the level of awareness that I brought to them. The same acts - communicating with actors, organising the rehearsal and performance space, planning the programme for the week - were informed by the burgeoning influence of care ethics upon my research, and therefore delivered with a greater attentiveness during 'Being with Raven'. In practical terms this emerged through more considered forethought, which resulted in my asking more questions of my collaborators so that I had a greater sense of their preferences and needs to then shape the programme for the week of working together. I also delivered more detailed and explicit communications in advance of the project about the type of work we would be doing, the space in which we would be doing it, and who would be present. Preparing in this way demonstrates a sensitivity and willingness to be responsive to the individual people in the group.

These acts affect the quality of relations amongst collaborators from the outset by, as Thompson notes, demonstrating and modelling 'mutual respect and regard'.<sup>299</sup> While one would hope that these acts of consideration are careful and courteous gestures that would inform the preparation for any performance practice, I would suggest they are particularly pertinent to a project that is concerned with drawing attention to the relational, and that, to realise this aim, asks for a "performance of care" from collaborators towards audience members.

As I explore earlier in the chapter, care emerges through relation; it cannot exist or thrive as a one-sided endeavour. A performance is made up of a network of relations and consequently one cannot single out one relational thread to exhibit

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<sup>299</sup> Thompson, 'Towards an Aesthetics of Care', 45.

care if these values do not characterise the web of relations within which it is enmeshed. Much like the care-worker whose capacity to offer care to a patient or care receiver will be rapidly diminished or compromised if they are not cared for by their employer or the systems in which they work, then so too a performer needs that foundation of support from the playwright and creative team to then be in a position to perform care to an audience. This begins, as I note above, in the preparation phase, where care can be demonstrated by assessing the physical conditions of the space on offer and making enquiries about the needs of the team to inform the planning for the week. This should then continue into what Thompson would refer to as the 'execution' phase. For the purposes of my research project, I would define this phase as the period of development in which I worked alongside a director and performers to respond to the textual framework I had written and to develop it collaboratively before sharing with an audience at the end of the week (the sharing in this project would be what Thompson would term the 'exhibition' phase). I will focus on my experiences of 'executing' 'Being with Raven'.

### **Relational Solidarity**

Thompson notes that the execution phase should be defined by collaboration and a mutual appreciation of the skills and experiences that every member brings to the process:

The execution of a project figured around an aesthetics of care, therefore, relies on building mutual activities of sharing, support, co-working and relational solidarity within a framework of artistry or creative endeavour.<sup>300</sup>

For Thompson, then, a project formulated on an aesthetics of care will facilitate co-creation and collaboration throughout the process. I would suggest for this to be realised in practice, there needs to be a shared understanding of what the aims of the project might be. In 'Being with Raven: Critical Reflection' I acknowledge that this is both a creative project and a research enquiry, and consequently I endeavoured to position all collaborators as co-creators and co-

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<sup>300</sup> Thompson, 'Towards an Aesthetics of Care', 45.

researchers who were invited to engage with both the creative exploration and the research questions underpinning it. This demonstrates a respect for, and appreciation of, the variety of experiences and viewpoints each person will be able to bring to the project. In the 'Critical Reflection' I offer examples of how this informed the types of activities we undertook as a team and the conversations between collaborators.

I would suggest what arises as a result of the time made for exploration and discussion is what Thompson describes as 'relational solidarity', which emerges in and through activities designed to facilitate sharing, co-creation, and dialogue. This can occur as a result of a working structure that allows for reciprocity and attentiveness to the viewpoints of all contributors. It might evolve organically through the discursive process of working on the script and creative experimentation, but can also be realised through scheduled times for reflection and sharing. During development for 'Being with Raven', each day would begin with a warmup breathing exercise, designed to draw in focus, and turn attention to the body. This would be followed by the invitation for each member to share how they were feeling, how their evening had been, and anything that had stayed with them from the previous day. Although not the only opportunity to share how they were feeling, this was a carved-out space for doing so, which the team knew would be honoured each day; each person would speak, each person would be listened to. In one sense this could be viewed as functional, a clearly allotted time to air any questions before moving more specifically into the process of creating. Yet, as Thompson has argued, the lines between the practical and creative cannot always be so easily delineated. Some members of the team would use this platform to tell stories about their evening or an experience on their journey to the space; some might offer an idea or thought more specifically related to the work; others might simply offer a word or a gesture. There was undeniably an artistry evident in the ways people chose to express how they were feeling, but additionally there was a sensory quality to the relations that arose as a result of this process of sharing and listening to one another. Embodied responses such as laughter, an assuring nod of the head, or a shared sigh took on an aesthetic quality, and bore evidence of the connections

and mutual understanding between those present. This was one structured device that allowed time and space for the feelings of ‘mutual respect and regard’ that Thompson centralises as a characteristic required of work in the aesthetics of care to flourish.

It was my perception that the value and importance that collaborators attributed to this device arose as a result of it being adhered to each day. Thompson also argues that we might conceive of structure as a demonstration of care; indeed, he suggests that while the word might carry connotations of rigidity that is antithetical to creative freedom and exploration, the opposite could in fact be true.<sup>301</sup> We might consider that structure can perform an aesthetics of care in two ways. On the one hand, having regularity, a sense of the programme or shape of each day, means that collaborators can prepare themselves, as well as demonstrate a respect for everyone’s time. Secondly, the structures themselves may take on an aesthetic feel as a repeated act, such as a morning check in, if imbued with meaning, can take on a ritualised quality that might be considered artful.

This also recalls the negotiation between the “fixed” and the “open” that I referred to earlier in the chapter when analysing crafting the creative framework of a co-authored piece, and similarly Radosavljevic’s ‘dramaturgy of liberating constrictions’.<sup>302</sup> In the same way that Radosavljevic argues having a rule to follow when developing a work can foster creative freedom, I would suggest that having some fixed infrastructures in the creative process, a morning ritual that is observed before script work, a set lunch time and commitment to prepare the space accordingly, can generate a sense of safety and physical ease which then creates an environment in which collaborators feel supported as they explore artistically. The relations that arise as a result of this structure of care, or meaningfully-devised activities that allow for dialogue and collaboration, can

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<sup>301</sup> Thompson, ‘Performing the Aesthetics of Care’, 227.

<sup>302</sup> Radosavljevic, 156.

be considered as part of the aesthetic material that is being woven into the piece, as Thompson notes:

I am locating the aesthetics here in the shape, style, action and interaction between two people, and I propose that in that focused attention between bodies we can recognise an artfulness that is too rarely acknowledged.<sup>303</sup>

In 'Being with Raven: Critical Reflection' I outline the process of collaboration with the performers and the creative lines of enquiry that emerged as we developed the piece for performance. My focus here is on how the preparation and execution of the activities in the development phase cultivated mutual feelings of respect. I suggest that these relational qualities then informed the sensory feel and atmosphere of the space, which coloured the presentation of the textual framework itself.

### Care Reciprocated

I explore earlier in this chapter a reciprocity inherent in a practice that is guided by the values of care, that experiencing being cared-for can in turn lead one to care-about. As Amanda Stuart-Fisher notes: 'it is through the caring encounter that the givers and receivers of care learn what caring is and how it feels'.<sup>304</sup> I would suggest that, as the initiator of the creative project, the responsibility fell upon me to "set the tone" and suggest what the affective quality of the relations when collaborating might be. I have described above some of the devices I employed to model and enact care towards the team. This inspired reciprocal acts of caring from the creative team towards one another, which in turn shapes the quality of care they then perform towards the audience. Here I will focus on one example of how an act of care, seemingly adjacent to, rather than specifically part of the performance model, was delivered and received between performers.

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<sup>303</sup> Thompson, James. 'Performing the Aesthetics of Care.' *Performing Care: New Perspectives on Socially Engaged Performance*, edited by Amanda Stuart Fisher and James Thompson, Manchester University Press, 2020, pp 215-220, 215.

<sup>304</sup> Stuart Fisher and Thompson, 7.

On the final day of the week together, ahead of the performances with an invited audience, one performer told the group she had prepared a playlist and offered to lead everyone in a physical warm up before the performances. This performer had volunteered to do this of her own volition and the playlist she had created comprised of songs that, although not explicitly in the script, had been referred to in conversations during the week or carried some relevance to themes in the play. The performer demonstrated an attentiveness to the collective experience of the week spent together, the song choices referring to the shared stories and ideas that had emerged through the creative process. Leading this warm-up was, on the one hand, an act of care in a functional, practical way - a physical activity to prepare the body for performance - but curating a list that would be meaningful to the team, and their shared experience, also illustrated an artistry and an additional level of attentiveness to specific people in the group. Aesthetics then emerged in the quality of relations that arose as the team did the warmup - laughter, a physical loosening up and letting go, a confession of nerves from one performer that was met by assurances from the rest. There was an aesthetic quality both to the movements of the bodies in the space but also to the feelings of care, affection, and support that emerged in and through the activity.

I would suggest that this gesture from the performer, and the reception it was met with, evidenced a level of care amongst the creative team, and indicates the mutually affectionate and respectful quality of relations between them. The offer of leading this activity was borne from feelings of care and trust that had emerged throughout the week; yet in the practice of taking part in the dance, further sensations of connection, pleasure, mutual support, and recognition were generated.

It is not insignificant that the example I cite of caring relations between the performers occurred shortly before they delivered their performances to the audience. In the above section on 'Procedural Authorship as Care' I describe how there are written directions in the text that need to be imbued with a caring, sensitive quality to achieve their intended affect. For example:

*She responds to all suggestions with openness, repeating the ideas as an affirmative statement.*<sup>305</sup>

This strategy of procedural authorship is designed to be performed in a manner that demonstrates attentiveness and openness towards the audience. These feelings then become part of the aesthetic of the work. I describe earlier in this chapter how I believe that crafting acts of care towards the audience in the aesthetic framework, and then ensuring that all contributions they make are met with care, is a key method that a playwright can employ to offer a performance model in which the audience experience themselves as co-authors. Acts of care are designed to be part of the artistic material of the work. I would contend that this aesthetic component of the piece will be more readily understood and valued by the performers if they have experienced these caring qualities during the preparation and execution phases. The mutually respectful relations cultivated between performers and playwright, performers and director, and performer and performer then act as a foundation from which they can they deliver and perform these acts of care towards audience members. In turn, the experience of being cared for by the performers can be seen to result in reciprocal acts of care performed by the audience, in the way they engage with and contribute to the narrative body of the work, and in the manner in which they engage with, and respond to, one another. The practice of care then exists in a mutually sustaining cycle.

We might consider, then, that the relations that have been modelled in the execution phase lay an affective blueprint for the performers to follow when interacting with the audience. A sensory quality has been suggested throughout the creative execution process that is then realised in the exhibition phase. The caring values that I have suggested are integral to this project realising its aim in performance have not just been discussed, but demonstrated throughout the phases of creating together. As Thompson has argued, and I have supported in the analysis of my own practice, the relations that arise within a collaborative arts project can become part of its aesthetic material. Therefore, in the same

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<sup>305</sup> Shutt, *Being with Raven*, 182.

way we might pay attention to the design of other creative elements - lighting, configuration of space, sound, and how these affect the atmosphere and feel of a work - so too can we pay attention to the quality of relational interaction that the project invites. This can be demonstrated within the crafted framework and artistic devices but also in the structure and organisation of the whole event. I would suggest that this is about valuing the interpersonal and organisational components of a creative project, recognising the impact these have on how collaborators relate to one another and on the artistic model. In the same way I have explored how artistic craft, such as playwriting, can be produced with care and employed to invite care within the performance framework, organisational and preparatory elements of a performance can also be delivered in a manner that is both caring and artistic. Communication amongst teams, warmup activities, and break times can be guided by the values of care and delivered with the same attention to detail and skill as one would design the lighting of the room or soundscape for the performance.

Thompson's aesthetics of care is focused on socially engaged work; likewise, my project is one in which experiencing relationality is positioned as both a driving aim and part of the aesthetic of the work. The necessity of foregrounding the quality of relations, therefore, might feel more imperative in these projects. Yet I would suggest that any creative model that involves collaboration, which arguably will be any performance project, could benefit from considering carefully how organisational tasks and the structure of activities "around" the creative work can model and invite feelings from collaborators that will in turn shape and enrich the aesthetic quality of the entire performance experience.

## Conclusion

### **Co-Authorship and Playwriting**

This study contributes to playwriting craft by exploring how textual strategies can be employed by the playwright to facilitate audience participation in performance. By focusing on how playwriting specifically can be used to structure audience co-authorship, I have contributed to the understanding of a historically underexamined aesthetic tool in discourse on participatory practices. Employing a methodology which brings together techniques from both participatory performance and playwriting, with the learnings derived from writing and staging two co-authored plays, I have developed a set of key principles to support the development of textual strategies that invite audience co-authorship. My intention is that, in addition to contributing to scholarly discourse in the field of playwriting and participatory performance, these principles can guide or inspire playwrights who share an interest in audience co-authorship. Before outlining these principles, I will summarise the findings that emerged over the course of the research, and which support me in articulating a playwright-led crafting of participatory performance.

### **Co-Authorship, Relationality and Care**

From the outset, my interest in experimenting with a participatory form was underpinned by a wider political aim. I wanted to explore how an experience of co-authoring in performance can draw attention to ontological relationality. What soon emerged in the process of this investigation was the imperative to move away from conceptualising an experience of relationality as an intended outcome of the performance. My engagement with theoretical concepts, such as Jean-Luc Nancy's ontology of 'being as being-with'<sup>306</sup> and Judith Butler's 'radical dependency'<sup>307</sup> reconfigured my understanding of relationality as the starting point rather than the destination of the work. This was the foundation from which I approached the development of these co-authored plays. As such, I was

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<sup>306</sup> Nancy, 30.

<sup>307</sup> Butler, *The Force of Non-Violence*, 44.

particularly attuned to what I came to conceive of as the “relational web” of a performance. While the focus of this research may seem to be on the relation between playwright and audience, a clear finding for me was that it is not possible to isolate one relation in a co-authored model, embedded as each person - writer, performer, director, producer, audience member - is within a relational network. I have argued it is essential to be attuned to the different ways in which each person is present in and contributes to the making of the world of the performance. This practice research revealed that paying attention to the multiple relations at play can support the development of new creative strategies towards audience co-authorship. In this way, the social informs the aesthetic, the aesthetic is contingent on the social relations that allow it to be fully realised. Being-with and making-with work symbiotically and mutually enhance each other. This attention to the network of relations in performance informs the key principles of co-authorship that I have developed.

The interest in both participatory performance models, and the relational experience, led me to recent developments in the field of applied theatre, namely James Thompson and Amanda Stuart Fisher’s work on ‘performing care’.<sup>308</sup> Thompson’s ‘aesthetics of care’ proved to be instrumental in informing my understanding of what the role of a playwright can be, not just in the crafting of textual strategies, but also in the planning, development and execution phases of a participatory work.<sup>309</sup> Additionally, the work of care ethicists proved highly pertinent to the aims of this project, sharing as they do the starting point of ontological relationality. Care ethics provided me with a set of values to respond to, making more evident how the social and the aesthetic can be consciously developed to enrich one another. In this way, principles from care ethics, such as Joan Tronto’s four tenets of care<sup>310</sup>, shaped what Duska Radosavljevic has termed a ‘dramaturgy of liberating constrictions’.<sup>311</sup> They provided the supportive and structured framework, which in turn allowed for artistic experimentation. While these practices and values are prevalent in

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<sup>308</sup>Stuart Fisher and Thompson.

<sup>309</sup> Thompson, ‘Towards an Aesthetics of Care’, 36-48.

<sup>310</sup> Tronto, 262.

<sup>311</sup> Radosavljevic, 156.

current discourse on participatory performance in an applied theatre context, I have endeavoured to expand their application to address how theories of care, and Thompsons' aesthetics of care, can be applied to playwriting craft, and the role of the playwright. Indeed, so doing has supported my distillation of the principles of playwriting and co-authorship, outlined below.

### **Principles of Playwriting and Co-authorship**

What follows is a summary of the key characteristics of the model of co-authorship I have developed. A common thread through each of these principles is the need for the playwright to pay equal attention to form and content when developing co-authoring strategies. In the early stages of this research, the development of formal participatory devices was at the forefront of the dramaturgical process, at the expense of character development, dialogue, and narrative. The resulting work lacked coherence as the character and plot development merely served the execution of the participatory strategies. Consequently, I came to understand that co-authoring devices are enhanced when embedded within the storyline of the characters and there is a consistent synergy between the participatory offers made to the audience, and the characters and narrative they are being invited to respond to. Each of the following principles address how the tools of the playwright can be applied to work in generative dialogue with formal participatory techniques.

### **A Guide**

The playwright and performers can work together to ameliorate any hesitancy or unease amongst the audience at the prospect of participating. A principle that I applied to address this was having a character (although this need not be limited to one), who serves as a guide and develops a consistent relationship in which the audience feel supported. The guiding and explanation should not purely serve a functional purpose but is an opportunity for a playwright to apply their skills in character development and crafting dialogue to consider how this character might communicate with the audience, and how their invitation to co-author relates to the wider narrative. In this way, the acts of audience co-authorship cohere with the overall dramaturgy.

### **Clearly Expressed Instructions**

The playwright can ensure that the instructions for specific co-authoring devices are clearly expressed so that the audience fully understand what is being asked of them. This might mean indicating the time given to undertake activity, providing source material in the space for the audience to respond to, or modelling with an example beforehand. These are gestures that can be embedded in the text and can make the prospect of co-authoring more accessible for the audience. This principle responds to the learning that having a structure, or clearly conveyed parameters to work within can be more creatively liberating than a more generalized, open offer to participate. Playwriting craft can enhance this tenet of co-authorship by ensuring that the delivery of instruction, and clarifying the audience understand what they are being asked, is communicated in a manner that is consistent with the established character and works to further the narrative.

### **Different Entry Points for Engagement**

At the beginning of this project, I identified two modalities of participation: participation through material contribution and participation through interpretation. I have experimented with different co-authoring strategies which invite both modalities. In these co-authored plays there are multiple ways in which audience members can participate: out loud to a whole group, partnered work, silently writing, or internal meaning-making. This takes into consideration different levels of comfort that audience members may have when it comes to participating. Indeed, in the spirit of care, and wanting audience members to feel at ease, it is a principle in my works that no audience member will be put on the spot to contribute out loud. Being pressured in this way is not, I would suggest, conducive to an audience member feeling creatively inspired, indeed for some it could cause distress or discomfort. Further, seeing another audience member put on the spot can have a ripple effect of tension, making others feel nervous. By offering different entry points for engagement, space is given for those who feel comfortable to share out loud, while remaining inclusive for those who would prefer not to. This can be considered as an act of care, and

demonstration of respect to the audience, but it also facilitates creative experimentation, encouraging the playwright to craft a variety of different ways to invite co-authoring. Indeed, one way of approaching this is to think about how different characters might elicit a different mode of interaction from the audience, in a way that befits their narrative journey.

### **Treatment of the Contribution**

A key learning for me has been that the extent to which the audience come to recognise themselves as co-authors of the performance is contingent on how any contributions they make are responded to and treated. This pertains to my conviction that it is not the size of the offer an audience member makes that determines whether or not they consider themselves as co-authors but whether they experience that offer (even if only one word) as being valued as aesthetic material in the work. A key principle in my model of co-authoring, therefore, is that any offer made by the audience is given space to be heard and responded to. No suggestion made by an audience member is dismissed or overlooked. Here, I endeavour to uphold the caring values of responsivity and attentiveness, but also take inspiration from a key principle of improvisation, in which offers from one performer to another should always be accepted rather than blocked.<sup>312</sup> As a counterpoint to the principle of not putting audience members on the spot, I also made it a rule that anyone who did wish to share an idea would be heard. It is not necessary, in my model of co-authoring, for all audience members to agree on an idea or to find consensus, contradictory ideas may sit beside one another, what is important is that they are treated with equity.

### **Collaboration**

These principles all take seed in the script, and call upon the playwright to apply, and augment, existing tools in their repertoire to incorporate participatory strategies. These principles do not necessitate that the playwright play a role either by performing in the work or appearing as a character in the

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<sup>312</sup> Johnstone.

play. These strategies do call for an active presence of the playwright in the preparation and execution process. A shared characteristic of these principles is that they ask the performers to establish a caring, sensitive and attuned relationship with the audience. Their capacity to do so will be enhanced by these values being modelled and performed towards them in the preparatory and rehearsal phases of the work. The playwright has a role in establishing what I have described as an “affective blueprint” for the performance by demonstrating these values towards the performers and wider creative team. These tenets of care do not just characterise the way the strategies are delivered in performance but also guide the approach taken to planning, communications and rehearsal activity, all of which the playwright has an active role in shaping.

### **Limitations of Research**

A limit of the data gathered over the course of this research is the small sample of audience members with whom I was able to share the works. My analysis would be enhanced with larger and more varied audience groups, including spectators unfamiliar with me and my work. Relatedly, these works are also explicitly designed for small audience groups (a maximum of 20). This does beg the question of whether this model of co-authorship could be scaled up? To offer the level of care and attentiveness I stipulate in the text to larger audience groups would prove challenging. The financial feasibility of a model that can only accommodate reduced audience members would certainly be a practical concern for playwrights and theatre-programmers with an interest in sharing this work. A further line of enquiry is whether this performance framework could be adapted for a larger context.

My understanding of the audience’s affectual experience of these co-authoring devices would be enhanced by employing creative methodologies for audience feedback in future work. So doing would allow me to further interrogate what I have identified as a potential limit in my approach to co-authoring. While these devices are designed to draw attention to the different ways in which the audience creatively contribute to the performance, I am aware that, in some

instances, the overt invitations to interact and share ideas, could interrupt the internalized imaginative work they would be participating in anyway, unprompted. A proposition that I have not fully explored in this research is that bringing the audience's consciousness to the interpretative participation that is always, already at play in spectatorship could disturb their creative engagement, and potentially be experienced as an intrusion. Developing a more extended audience feedback strategy would provide insight into this conjecture and afford opportunities for adapting the co-authoring strategies accordingly.

### **Future Research: A Dramaturgy of Care**

In this study I have applied theories and aesthetics of care to playwriting craft, to demonstrate how the playwright can structure a model of audience co-authorship. While questions of care are currently shaping practice and discourse in the field of applied theatre, I believe that a commitment to ethics and a practice of care is vital to performance practice more broadly. Since I began this research in 2017, social and political events including the Me Too movement, Black Lives Matter protests, the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the climate crisis, have led creatives and leaders of organisations to identify and address oppressive practices in the theatre industry. There is a growing awareness of the necessity for artists and arts organisations to more consciously examine how they care for one another, and their audiences. One response has been the evolution of industry practitioners, including Intimacy Co-ordinators, Wellness Practitioners and EDI Advisors, whose role can be seen to address or ameliorate these inequities and contribute towards making theatre-making practices safer and more inclusive. It is my conviction that each person within the relational web of a performance can have a role to play in fulfilling a duty of care. In this research I have explored how an 'aesthetics of care' can guide the playwright in developing a co-authored performance. A future avenue of enquiry might be further exploration into how attention to care ethics can shape approaches to playwriting, in all models, not just participatory performance. This would allow me to explore how an attentiveness to ethics can shape a dramaturgy of care, initiated in the earliest stages of script development with

the playwright, towards both a safer working environment and aesthetic experimentation.

## Appendices

### **Appendix One - 'The Universe in the Flat - Version I'**

The following performance text was developed over May-August 2019 by Helen Shutt, with dramaturgical and directing support from Matt Addicott.

Following a week's research and development with performers Ashley Smith and Isabelle Joss, the work was presented at Platform, Easterhouse, Glasgow on Friday, 30 August 2019.

Two performances took place to an invited audience of P6 pupils from St Benedict's Primary School, Easterhouse and their teachers.

## The Universe in the Flat - Version I

### The Frame

HELEN:        There is a child.

                  The child is very....

                  People don't like..... children.

                  This child, they know this.

                  They try to make it better by being very.....

                  They have a place they go to.

                  This place is.....

                  In this place it doesn't matter what people think.

                  In this place they can make their own universe.

                  And in this universe, they create their own story.

                  A story about.....

                  This story is very important to the child.

                  This story makes them feel.....

                  This is their story.

MATT:        This is Helen. She wanted to make a play.

HELEN:        This is Matt. He had some questions about that.

MATT:        Helen said she wanted to make a play with holes in it. I was confused.

HELEN:        Well... I wanted to experiment.

MATT:        Experiment?

HELEN: Yes. I've spent quite a long time learning how to write stories and plays. And it's very often in the same way. The writer sits on their own and decides everything that happens and writes the whole story from the beginning to the end. In a straight line like that.

I wanted to try and find a different way of making a story.

MATT: Different how?

HELEN: Well...rather than the writer finishing the story on their own, I thought it might be fun to leave some holes in it.

MATT: Holes?

HELEN: Yes. Holes. Or gaps. That the audience can then fill in.

MATT: Isn't that a bit like not doing your homework and getting someone else to help you finish it?

HELEN: No... It's a chance for us to make something together. Plus, it's exciting because it means the story will never be the same.

MATT: What do you mean?

HELEN: Well... if the audience help write the play...

MATT: Yes...

HELEN: And the audience is different every time...

MATT: Yes...

HELEN: Then the play will be different every time.

MATT: So you aren't writing the "whole" story - you are writing a *hole* story?

HELEN: Exactly!

MATT: You can see why I had questions.

HELEN: Anyway, Matt agreed to help me and for a few weeks now we have been working together to make a play with holes in it.

MATT: We have.

HELEN: And now we think we are ready for the final ingredient...

MATT: Which is?

HELEN: You.

MATT: Me?

HELEN: Them. The audience.

MATT: Of course. Hello, audience.

HELEN: Hello to our very special audience here at Platform Easterhouse on Friday, 30 August, 2019.

MATT: I have to say I'm a bit scared.

HELEN: Why Matt? Look at them. They aren't that scary.

MATT: I'm scared because they are here. And we are going to show them a play. A story.

HELEN: That's the plan.

MATT: But I don't know exactly what it is we are going to show them. Normally when I make a play, I will practice and rehearse it and know just what it is the audience are going to see. But this time...

HELEN: Yes?

MATT: I don't know exactly what it is they are going to see.

HELEN: That's part of the plan! It's exciting. They are here now - they are going to help us, help us choose what it is we see today.

MATT: Maybe you should explain...

HELEN: I wanted to make a play about the Universe.

MATT: But the Universe is massive! Where do you start?

HELEN: I decided to start with the universe that exists in one small flat.

MATT: The universe in the flat.

HELEN: Exactly. We thought about all the stories, all the people, animals, insects, objects, memories, and mysteries that might have happened in one flat.

MATT: Think about it. Even in one small flat, there are hundreds of thousands of different stories. It's a big universe even in one flat.

HELEN: We worked and worked and we made twelve moments that all existed in the same flat.

MATT: They are quite different.

HELEN: Different parts of one story.

MATT: But they all exist in the same universe.

HELEN: The universe in the flat.

MATT: We made twelve of the stories.

HELEN: You see these pieces of paper in the circle? There are twelve of them. Each one is a story.

MATT: And here is a big but.

HELEN: We are only going to show you six of them.

MATT: Which six?

HELEN: I don't know Matt. They are going to choose.

MATT: Do they understand?

HELEN: I think so, they look pretty clever to me.

How many stories did we make?

How many are we going to see?

Who is going to choose them?

See. They are clever.

MATT: O.K., but how are we going to choose them.

HELEN: The most sensible way possible.

MATT: What's that?

HELEN: Lucky dip.

MATT: O.K.

HELEN: We will pick out six. At random. And those are the stories we will hear. In the order they are chosen.

MATT: Let's get started then.

HELEN: Excellent. In the bag are twelve segments of story 1-12. One by one we will pick out six. Do I have a first volunteer?

*The stories are selected one by one by volunteers from the audience. The shapes representing the selected stories are removed from the circles. The shapes representing the unselected stories remain visible in the circle.*

HELEN: Well, this is exciting.

MATT: Is that it, can we all sit back and relax now?

HELEN: Not quite. There are some other things I'd like the audience to do.

MATT: Really.

HELEN: Yes. We are about to go into the universe in the flat and see the first story. The first of six stories we will see today. After each story there will be a sound.

MATT: What kind of sound?

HELEN: This sound!

*(Birdsong)*

MATT: Good sound.

HELEN: When you hear this sound, you will know that one story has finished. And then before we see the next story, we will come and ask you a question. And we would like you to answer that question with one word.

MATT: Is it a test?

HELEN: No. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. These answers are yours. Your ideas. The only thing to try and do is keep the answer to one word.

Write it down on this coloured paper and put it in the paper bag.

And then the next story will begin.

MATT: Could you go through that one more time?

HELEN: How many stories are we going to see?

*After each question Helen waits for the audience to respond with the correct answer to check they have understood.*

When the story finishes, what will happen?

And after the sound we will come and ask a question.

MATT: And the audience will write down an answer. A one-word answer.

HELEN: Exactly.

MATT: What will happen to the words?

HELEN: You will find out later. For now, just remember to collect your answers in your paper bag.

And so we can keep track of how many stories we have seen, we will cross them off on our special story board.

MATT: I like that. That's very organised.

HELEN: Now it's time.

MATT: Time to...

HELEN: Enter the universe in the flat. Are you ready?

MATT: I'm ready.

HELEN: We will come back. In between the stories.

MATT: To see how you are...

HELEN: But now it's time to get on with it...

## The Universe in the Flat

*What follows are twelve vignettes from the 'universe in the flat'.*

*On the day of performance each story was represented by a coloured shape. At the beginning of each performance the audience selected six shapes at random and the stories were then performed by actors Ashley Smith and Isabelle Joss, in the order they had been chosen.*

*Both audiences were made up of approximately 30 P6 pupils (aged 9-10-years-old) from St Benedict's Primary School, Easterhouse.*

### Performance One - 11am, Platform, Easterhouse

*Feast*

*Radiator*

*Letter/Black*

*Wrapping/Radio*

*Snake*

*Investigation/Detective*

### Performance Two - 1.30pm, Platform, Easterhouse

*Snake*

*Radiator*

*Alive*

*Old*

*Letter/Black*

*Feast*

*After each story had been performed the audience were asked one question.  
These were delivered by Helen and Matt.  
At the end of each story you will find the question that would have been asked,  
had it been selected.*

### WRAPPING/RADIO

A: The woman is wrapping  
Knelt in front of the TV.  
The woman is wrapping.  
Wrapping Christmas presents.  
She has been there a long time.  
Who are the presents for?  
The TV chatters.  
Neighbour's kettle hisses through the wall.  
Below, the bustle of a busy restaurant.  
Bills pile up on the doormat.  
The TV chatters.

B: I can't forget.  
I mustn't forget.  
Don't let me forget.  
Birthday.  
She'll be ever so upset if I forget.  
Birthday.  
I'll get a present too. If I remember... I've got some wrapping paper.

### *Radio*

A // A search has begun for the bodies of eight climbers missing in the Himalayas.

The climbers, who were trying to ascend the highest point of Mount Everest, have been missing for five days.

The snowy weather conditions mean the chance of there being any survivors is highly unlikely. //

B: She will be nine. Nine.

That's an important year so I mustn't forget.

*(Doorbell)*

Ssh.

I'm going to leave it.

I don't want to talk to anyone just now.

Too many things to do. Too many things to remember.

If we are quiet, they will go away.

Ssh.

See - they have gone.

She is going to be nine. Special age. Important age.

Nine was when I... I had some big secrets at nine.

I started to collect things that were important to me.

Little things. Things to help me remember good times I'd had. A train ticket. A leaf. An old recipe. Maybe it would look like rubbish to anyone else but to me it was all special. Had meaning.

I put all the things in a shoebox. I decorated the shoebox with my drawings.

When I was ten, I knew we were going to have to move away. Things were getting bad in the country. I knew we would leave soon so I decided to bury my box. What a thing to do!

I was right though. Things did get bad, and we did leave. My box was left, buried in the gardens by the tree.

I've never been back.

I wonder if it's still there. Maybe someone found it?

I had to climb a mountain, when I was ten.

"Don't look down - just look up."

I hope they find those bodies.

They will be buried deep in the snow.

Now. What was I doing?

Birthday. Wrapping Paper.

Mustn't forget.

She'll be upset if I forget.

Don't let me forget.

A: The woman was found wrapping.

She has been there a long time

Wrapping Christmas presents.

Who are the presents for?

**QUESTION: What would you put in your shoebox to remind you of a nice time?**

## PIE

Do you know what this is?

It's fresh mint.

I picked it today.

I never used to know what any plants were, but my friend showed me this, fresh mint, and she showed me where it grows. A special spot.

And if you're not sure - well the good thing about fresh mint is, it really smells. So, you can have a sniff and then you know.

*(Fresh mint is passed around the circle for audience members to touch and smell.)*

I went out this morning. Picked this mint. Now I'm home. Back in my flat. In my little kitchen. Chopping the mint. And vegetables. I like chopping up food. You have to concentrate. It keeps me relaxed.

I'm chopping vegetables for...

A pie. I'm going to make a pie.

I'm here, in my little kitchen, in my flat but making this pie takes me away to another place. It reminds me of a story that someone told me when I was a child.

A story about a woman and a pie. A woman, a bird, and a pie. A woman, a bird, and a pie and some children.

I'll share it with you.

We meet the woman in the forest. The forest in a country called...

Well, the country's name keeps changing. There have been many wars there and each time a different person wins, they change the borders and they change the name. But for the woman the place is the same. It feels the same. It's home.

It's very early in the morning. The woman had a dream in the night that told her what she needed to do. So as soon as she woke, she came to the forest.

She is kneeling, looking for some special nettles. She needs these nettles.

As she is looking, she is joined by a black bird.

A rare black bird that only lives in this country.

The bird hops next to the woman. They look like each other. They both have black shiny hair; they both move in a very clear, smooth, precise way.

They both have eyes at the back of their head.

*You came to help? I need the nettles. Let's find a good stack.*

With the bird's help she gathers a basket of nettles and takes them back to her little white house that sits in the valley.

There are lots of people at the house. People she has welcomed. People who need her help. Some are very young. Some are a bit old. There are lots of children.

*Out of the house! I need space to prepare.*

Everyone is sent outside. They all run towards the tree. A great old tree in the garden. Perfect for climbing on, or drawing, or leaning against and taking a nap in its shade.

The black bird and the woman get to work in the kitchen.

They are going to make a pie. A pie with the nettles. A nettle pie. Why?

The children need the nettles and the magic healing powers that lie in their tough green leaves. But they won't eat the nettles so the woman is making a pie, a delicious pie to bake them in. She is good at making pies.

She and the bird get to work. Both small and elegant they work in unison.

It looks like a dance as they cook together.

*I'll finish here. You go and keep an eye on them.*

The bird hops outside to the tree and the children. Some of them are climbing, some of them are skipping together, some of them are sleeping.

The bird watches them. She is completely still and calm.

She watches and protects them, until the pie is ready. They all eat together.

The pie tastes differently to everyone. If you asked them the flavour each child

would use a different word to describe it. But the important thing is not the taste but how it makes them feel.

It makes them feel...

.....

I'm making this pie for a friend.

Imagine if someone you knew, someone you knew and cared for was feeling sad or old or empty. And you give them something to eat. And it makes them feel better.

Even if only for a little bit. But when they take a mouthful, they feel better.

Can you imagine that?

That's what my pie is going to do. For my friend.

It's going to make them feel...

**QUESTION: How does the pie make the children feel?**

## INVESTIGATION/DETECTIVE

A: *Take us back somewhere.*

B: A memory?

A: *Perhaps we can help.*

B: I'm all alone.

In this flat.

They asked me to investigate.

I arrive at this flat.

Empty.

But the TV is on. The TV is chattering away.

The sound of the neighbour's kettle can be heard through the walls.

On the floor. In front of the TV - tape, scissors, presents, wrapping paper.  
Christmas wrapping paper.

But it's August. The flat is empty.

TV chatters, neighbours bang in their kitchen - are they cooking?

Cars pass by outside.

An old mug of tea by the presents.

The flat is empty of people but full of things. Clothes, photos, toys.

The neighbours don't remember the woman arriving.

Nobody noticed when she left.

Who was she? Where did she go? Was there a child?

A: *Why did you decide to tell us this?*

B: It's in my memory. You asked for a memory.

A: *How do you feel?*

B: I'm all alone.

In this flat.

They asked me to investigate. I'm a bit annoyed because it's my day off.  
And it's sunny.

I arrive at this flat.

Empty.

But the TV is on. The TV is chattering away.

The sound of the neighbour's kettle can be heard through the walls.

On the floor. In front of the TV - tape, scissors, presents, wrapping paper.  
Christmas wrapping paper.

But it's August. The flat is empty.

TV Chatters, neighbours bang in their kitchen - are they cooking? Cars  
pass by outside.

An old mug of tea by the presents.

The flat is empty of people but full of things. Clothes, photos, toys.

Something feels familiar. The rug. My mum has the same rug.

The neighbours don't remember the woman arriving.

Nobody noticed when she left.

Who was she? Where did she go? Was there a child?

I did something a bit strange. I've never told anybody this.

I finish wrapping the presents.

Who were the presents for?

I finish wrapping the presents. I leave them on the rug. The TV continues  
to chatter.

I'm all alone.

In this flat.

A: All alone?

Are you sure? Did you look closely? In the rug? Behind the radiator? Under the floorboards?

Because if you did...

Maybe, sir. You would realise... You are never ALL alone.

I think I'll take over from this fool.

Good morning.

My name is Detective Whiskers.

I'm eight years old.

And yes, I am a mouse.

We don't have long.

My report on this incident is due soon.

*(Picks one person in the circle to direct these lines to.)*

So what have you heard?

Talk me through it.

Let's fill in the gaps.

We're in the flat, the TV is on, the floor is covered in wrapping paper.

Why is that do you think?

What is on the TV? Do you know?

Who are all these presents for?

The wrapping paper has tiny Christmas trees all over it - why are they wrapping Christmas presents in August?

Something doesn't add up.

Who lives next door?

Is there something you aren't telling me?

*(Picking another person in the circle.)*

Excuse me!

I have reason to believe somebody has been peeling vegetables in that kitchen?

Would you know anything about that?

Was it you?

Because you do know you need a peeling license?

You need to be a licensed peeler to be peeling vegetables in this kitchen.

I'd hate to think there had been unlicensed peeling going on in here.

*(Picking another person in the circle.)*

Is someone laughing? Is somebody amused?

You think an eight-year-old mouse detective asking questions, trying to find out the truth is funny, do you? Well, you just wait there.

Something mysterious is going on here and I intend to get to the bottom of it.

Oh, I may be small... But I'm very fast. And my senses are super sharp.

I can smell when something... cheesey... is going on... I can hear when something... snakey is happening... I can feel it when something isn't quite right.

*(Writes in notebook.)*

Right.

Write.

Write it down.

A good detective always makes sure to write down their clues.

**QUESTION: Right now, if you could give a present to anyone, who would it be?**

## SNAKE

HUMAN: Welcome back to Every Morning TV, the country's most popular breakfast show, asking the questions others are too afraid to ask.

My guest today - and we are very happy to have them here - is, well, as you can see, a snake.

SNAKE: Yes, thank you for having me.

HUMAN: We are delighted! You are so welcome. This is what's so great about theatre, you can do things like this!

For the next few minutes, we have me, a human, talking to our friend, the snake.

SNAKE: That's right. I am a snake.

HUMAN: And you are all... Well, I was going to say that you are all humans, but it doesn't have to be that way for this part of the show. For this little section, you have a choice. You can stay human, or if you would like, you can be a snake. Let's see, raise your hands if you would like to stay human... O.K., now raise your hands if you would like to be a snake?

*(During the voting, snake is friendly, encouraging of those who opt to become snakes.)*

HUMAN: Lots of snakes in the house today/just a few snakes with us.

*(Comment on the result depending on how the audience have voted.)*

Before we start perhaps the snakes would just like to close their eyes for a moment, take a deep breath to prepare the mind and body.

Say to yourself, "I am a snake. I feel like a snake. I am a snake."

Slowly open your eyes... You are a snake.

SNAKE: Lovely. Can I just say how nice it is to see so many friendly snakes in the audience today. You're all looking beautiful. Beautiful and snakey.

HUMAN: They really are!

And now, just to be fair... I would like to invite the humans in the room... Would you take a moment to close your eyes?

Take a deep breath and prepare the mind and body. Say to yourself, "I am a human. I feel like a human. I am a human."

Slowly open your eyes... You are a human.

Wonderful. And I must say you are all looking particularly human now.

Let's get cracking! I'm so glad you are here today as we are going to spend a bit of time discussing the relationship between humans and snakes. It will be great to hear from your point of view, because, and I'm sorry to say this as you are obviously very lovely, but a lot of humans are incredibly scared of you and your fellow snakes.

SNAKES: I know, I just don't understand why/

HUMAN: We have some statistics here. Apparently snakes are the third biggest phobia in the UK, with 52 percent of people saying they are frightened of snakes.

SNAKES: It's upsetting because/

HUMAN: Some quotes from online, "They are slimy, creepy creatures that make me feel sick to the stomach", "snakes are sneaky, malicious and always out to trick you - never trust a snake." And "snakes have lied since the beginning of time, of all living creatures on the earth, the snake is PURE EVIL." And they've put that in capitals there you see...

*Snake shakes head and looks to fellow snakes in the audience.*

HUMAN: How does that make you feel? Are you surprised?

SNAKE: Sad. It makes me deeply sad to hear these cruel words. I mean, look at me - look at us - we aren't sneaky. I'm lovely. Most of the time.

But it's not surprising because to be honest, this has been a problem for hundreds, thousands of years...

HUMAN: Why is that do you think?

SNAKE: There are many reasons. I think we can all be a bit suspicious of other creatures that may look a bit different or sound a bit different. Obviously, as a snake, I am physically different to you, a human... I'm more green and scaly. You are more white and hairy.

HUMAN: We are physically very different that's true.

SNAME But I think snakes in particular have suffered as there are so many stories that humans have written with snakes portrayed as "the baddies". This goes a long way back, it started a long time ago but it still happens today.

You may have heard of Harry Potter? Terrible book.

I was a teenager when those books first came out and it was a nightmare. All this stuff about evil, snakey Slytherins. Lord Voldemort's deadly snakes killing off characters. These books were so popular and snakes came off terribly!

HUMAN: So stories are a big problem, stories that tell us all snakes are creepy and evil?

SNAKE: Absolutely. Huge problem. We need more stories, written by humans, that change this idea of us as evil and sneaky. I mean, I'm a snake storyteller but humans will listen more to other humans. We need you to think about the stories you tell.

HUMAN: It is wrong then, this idea of you as "pure evil"?

SNAKE: Of course! I mean firstly, I don't believe any creature is pure evil, just like no creature is pure good. We can all be bad sometimes and all be good sometimes. Right? Humans and Snakes?

And, just like no humans are exactly the same, no snakes are exactly the same. I'm sure all my fellow snakes out there will agree with me? We're all different. I've got some very gentle family, cousins, tiny little grass snakes. So sweet natured. But then there's my Aunt Boa.

HUMAN: Boa?

SNAKE: Great Aunt Boa. Boa Constrictor, you may know her as. Well, she's quite a tough old lady. Incredibly strong and she really doesn't like to be bothered so if you disturbed her in a bad mood (*mimes being strangled*) you would know about it.

HUMAN: So perhaps she is the type of snake that has got the reputation for being frightening?

SNAKE: Yes, but even she isn't *pure* evil. You see, when she gets together with her friends, she loves a joke. Brilliant sense of humour, she has. Her friends say she is a natural comedian. So funny. She just doesn't like people getting in her space.

That's fair enough, right?

HUMAN: I do see your point, of course. I think you may have a difficulty in persuading all the humans out there.

Perhaps we should open it out to the audience and have a quick show of hands amongst the humans here today. Raise your hand if you are frightened of snakes? O.K... And raise your hand again if you think the snakes are *pure* evil?

O.K. interesting. (*Reflection on the outcome.*)

But let's turn it around for a moment and think about it from the other point of view. I'd be really interested to hear what you snakes think about us humans.

SNAKE: Oh, well... you're very nice.

HUMAN: Come on, be honest.

SNAKE: We think you're... cute.

HUMAN: Cute. You think I'm cute?

SNAKE: Well, I mean... we think you are, like cute-funny, funny-cute.

HUMAN: What does that...?

SNAKE: The way you are always running around and workworkwork and doing all these things and building all these things and then they break so then you build more things and building, building, building, working, working, working. Huff puff. Busy, busy, phone in hand. Work, work. All day long. Inside buildings. It's funny. Cute.

HUMAN: Right?

SNAKE: But you're not all the same. Obviously. Like I said about us snakes.

HUMAN: Oh, yes, we're very diverse, very different - aren't we, humans?

SNAKE: *(Laughing)* But we do sometimes do this impression of you like... I mean, it's just a silly thing, don't take it personally, but some snakes we do this impression of you like...

*Does a very exaggerated, hunched, tense, frowning face.*

HUMAN: Oh right.

SNAKE: *(Laughing more)* Like this.

*Mimes driving and being on the phone, typing.*

HUMAN: I see.

SNAKE: But that's just a stereotype. Obviously. We know you aren't all like that, don't we snakes? They aren't all stressed and tense and working a lot.

It's mainly the older ones that look like that. This lot are all quite young.

And you. You are very nice.

HUMAN: Well, it's nice to hear your point of... I suppose we'll be finishing up but before we do. Any final advice, words you would like to offer all the humans watching?

SNAKES: Write better stories. And play in the grass.

HUMAN: Right. Write better stories. And play in the grass.

SNAKE: Quite simple. Play in the grass. Write better stories.

HUMAN: Can we all remember that?

SNAKE: Play. Grass. Stories.

HUMAN: Well, listen. That's all we've got time for in this part of the show. Those of you who chose to be snakes for this interview can return back to being humans now. Or perhaps you want to stay in a snake frame of mind a little bit longer. The choice is yours.

Join me in giving a round of applause to our delightful snakey guest.

Next up, recipe time! We will be joined in the studio by a chef to learn how to make the perfect pie! See you after the break!

**QUESTION: What word would you use to describe snakes?**

## TWINS

A: Twins.

B: Us two.

A: Twins.

B: We used to live in the same flat.

A: But now we don't.

B: We used to go to the same school.

A: But now we don't.

B: The first school we went to - in this town - the school we went to together, that was the best one.

A: Definitely the best one.

B: In our first week there we both felt...

A: ...A little bit...

B: You know...

A: You say it!

B: No, you!

A: We both felt a bit...

**AB: Scared.**

A: What would the other kids think of us?

B: Will they laugh at how we talk?

A: We look the same. Will they think that's weird?

B: We look the same but we're totally different. Will they think that's weird?

A: One afternoon in our first week there...

B: All of our class had to go to the hall.

A: And we had to sit in a circle.

B: It was called Circle Time.

A: And the teacher said, "Circle Time is a time to share how we feel and what we think. We share how we feel and listen to each other."

B: Sounds weird.

A: Not weird. Different.

The teacher said, "It's a special time for you to be away from your desks and to be away from computers and phones and sit in a circle and look at each other and listen."

B: This is weird. This isn't like normal school.

A: She said, "The most important rule here is kindness. I want you to be kind to each other and yourself."

B: I don't get it. How can you be kind to yourself?

A: Ssh. Then in the circle we would pass around a pen. And if you were holding the pen, you could talk, and finish a sentence.

B: A sentence the teacher gave us.

A: But if you didn't want to talk, you could just pass the pen on.

B: A sentence like, "The place I feel most calm is..."

A: Usually we would just pass it.

B: The place I feel most calm is...

A: The place I feel most calm is...

*Audience pass the pen around the circle.*

A: But one afternoon during Circle Time the sentence was...

B: When the world isn't watching I...

A: When the world isn't watching I...

A: And this time...

**AB: We didn't pass it.**

- A: When the world isn't watching I...
- B: When the world isn't watching I...
- B: When the world isn't watching I... get out my microscope.
- A: When the world isn't watching I... tie my hair back high on my head, put on pink leggings and find my mum's special pointy shoes with a sharp heel.
- B: ...and with my microscope, I go around the flat looking for clues.
- A: I actually have bigger feet than my mum so they are a bit tight.
- B: There is a lot going on under the microscope that you miss usually.
- A: But the heel makes me walk nice and straight and tall like a grown up, fancy person walking down the street in New York or somewhere important.
- B: You become aware of a whole new world that is going on underneath our noses the whole time - that you wouldn't know was there.
- A: We have a long, narrow kitchen then extends into the hallway - this is my catwalk, or stage, or important street where famous people walk. In New York.
- B: I'm afraid to tell you. I'm a murderer.
- A: I put on my music. LOUD.
- B: I'm afraid to tell you. You are all murderers.
- A: I walk up and down this catwalk, this important pavement in an important city, with my back straight and my eyes looking forward.
- B: Because under the microscope, I have discovered all the teeny tiny creatures that live beneath us and that we just stamp upon and stomp over every day.
- A: I do not make eye contact with anyone. Because I'm far too important. On this important, famous street in New York. My head is up high.

B: Lying on my tummy, on the rug, a furry type of rug... I found a whole family of ants. An army of ants.

A: When the world isn't watching.

B: I spent the whole day down low, on my tummy, watching the ants.  
When the world isn't watching.

A: My head is up high, and I walk among the clouds.

B: Some people laughed.

A: One girl said, "I wear my mum's shoes too."

B: That was a good day.

A: At the school we used to go to.

B: We used to go to the same school.

**AB: But now we don't.**

A: We used to live in the same flat.

**AB: But now we don't.**

**QUESTION: What do you do when the world isn't watching?**

LETTER/BLACK

A: To my dearest Old Bean,

It's been a long time. I thought it might be good to write you a letter. I don't know your address but that's O.K. I'll work it out. I think the most important thing is that I write the letter.

I think of you a lot and the things we used to do and play.

You always invented the best games.

Weird games but the best games.

Yesterday I went to the beach with some new friends. They're O.K. We played a game called cricket but there were so many rules I soon got bored. It wasn't like your games.

Afterwards we made a bonfire and just sat around. But I didn't like the smell. The smoke. It reminded me of what happened.

I bet you have made some new games since I last saw you. And probably found some new words.

*B is sat with a bag of beans. Two empty jars.*

*One by one they look at the beans. They give each bean a word then place it in one or two of the jars.*

B: Cute

Happy

Healthy

Anxious

Cheerful

Strong

Calm

Hygienic

Shy

Rude

Rude

Rude  
Curious  
Big  
Placid  
Chatty  
Gentle  
Posh  
Bad  
Good  
Good

A: I remember you said to me, “Use the right words and you can do anything.”

You are a clever old bean.

Clever. Curious. Strong old bean.

Nuts. It’s nuts what happened. What they said about you. What they said about me.

B: Nice  
Limp  
Lonely  
Banal  
Nuts  
Patient  
Cautious  
Quiet  
Keen  
Invisible

A: I’m sorry about that.

I’m sorry about all that, Old Bean.

So here’s the letter. With some of the words.

Know that I've not forgotten you.

B: Black.

The day she moved out; I painted the wall black.

Black, black, black.

The best colour in the whole world.

Because it isn't a colour.

She would have hated it, but I don't care because she left.

So, I can do whatever I want.

Buh luh ah cuh

I wanted to paint it black because it had been white. Like her.

And black is the opposite of white. Like me.

If you would peer in through that front window there, this is the first thing you would see.

Black.

There are some scuff marks against it.

But that's O.K.

That's just from where I was practising handstands.

And I hit the wall with the backs of my heels.

She would have shouted at me for that.

The day she left. Almost the very moment she left.

I painted the wall black.

**QUESTION: What is a word you would use to describe yourself?**

## OLD

You are old.

Incredibly old.

Nobody knows exactly how old. You have been around for as long as anyone can remember.

But you know how old you are. It's your secret.

You have seen many, many things in your time.

You've played with all sorts of creatures, you've seen crimes, heard whispered stories, and taken part in magical celebrations.

You've seen the world change a lot.

You've watched as new homes and buildings grew up around you.

You are old. Incredibly old.

But you are young too. As your old roots sink deeper into the earth, each year new buds grow on your branches. Bright green leaves bathe in the sun and with them come new stories.

You are old. Incredibly old.

Sometimes people are too busy to notice you. Looking down, not up, they pass you by.

In one day, hundreds of people may walk past and not give you a second glance. But in that same day there are hundreds of creatures who crawl beside you or sit on you or even nest within you and make a home.

You are old. Incredibly old.

But there is a lot more life within you yet.

**QUESTION: What are you?**

## FEAST

A: A game we used to play.

B: First I need your help.

Close your eyes and in your head, answer these questions.

What's your earliest memory of food?

What is your favourite food smell?

Is there a food you find simply disgusting?

What's the last thing you ate?

And now, the most important one... Someone you care about needs cheering up, what would you feed them - if you could give them anything - to cheer them up?

Write that last one down on a piece of paper. And then put the paper in this bag.

O.K. I will gather all these words. All these magic ingredients.

*(The pieces of paper with the audience's answers are gathered and put in a paper bag.)*

A: A game we used to play.

B: Did you do as I asked?

A: Yes.

B: Excellent.

A: There wasn't much left, but I got everything I could find.

B: Well, done, Little Bean. What an excellent assistant you are. A hard-working Little Bean.

A: I am very hard-working.

B: But don't get cocky.

A: What's cocky?

B: When you think you are the best. You are a good bean but not the best bean. O.K.?

Right, time to play.

While you were in the kitchen, I've been gathering seeds. Word seeds.

A: Word seeds?

B: Yeah, kind of like ingredients.

You get the right word seed, and you can make anything.

So for today's delicious feast we will start with...

*A offers first item, a can of beans.*

B: Beans.

O.K. and now we all close our eyes, pray to the lucky pink elephant and....

Now we can see it's a...

*Takes one of the words provided by the audience from the bag.*

.....

A: Delicious

B: Isn't it? O.K. next we have...

*A offers another can of beans.*

A: Beans.

B: And once again we close our eyes and...

That's right, it's a...

*B takes word from bag.*

.....

*Repeat until they have five items.*

B: So for today's delicious feast we have... *(They list all the items/words that have been picked from the bag.)*

.....

Are you satisfied Young Bean?

A: Very satisfied Old Bean.

B: What would you like to start with?

*They choose from the words/food on offer.*

A: I'll have the ..... followed by the.....

B: Excellent choice.

A: And what about you?

*They choose from the words/food on offer.*

B: I'm going to tuck into this.....

A: Yummy.

B: Bon Appétit.

A: Bon what?

B: Bon Appétit. It's what you say before you eat. To be polite.

A: Bon Appa teet

B: Bon Appétit.

A: That was a game we used to play together.

B: A lot.

A: A good game when you are together. I tried it on my own.

It didn't work.

Didn't taste the same.

**QUESTION: How do you feel eating your favourite food?**

## ALIVE

Hey there!

Hello!

Hey!

Can you see me? Hear me? Notice me?

You can?

Oh, I'm so glad! Mostly people just ignore me, walk by, forget that I'm here.

But I am here! Caught in a moment. A moment that one person, a long time ago, decided was a happy, nice, important moment. A moment that they would want to remember.

So, they took a photo. They framed it. Hung it on the wall. This wall. With the pretty wallpaper.

My home.

I sit just above the radiator. In my frame. It's a great spot 'cause I can see the whole flat. So even if nobody notices me, I can see everything.

I've seen a lot of people come in and out of the flat.

Now you are here. And for the first time in such a long time, I'm with people who can see me.

But can you see the rest of the photo?

Just me?

I thought that might be the case. The sun has faded the picture and I think the other people in the photo have almost completely disappeared.

It's been a little lonely, I'll be honest with you.

I can still remember the moment perfectly... Even though it was captured years ago and everyone around me has gone.

Perhaps I can share with you? The photo that I am in. Would you like that? It's a lovely moment.

Maybe you can help me. We can build it together. We can recreate that memory together.

Well firstly, right in the middle of the picture is a beautiful tree.

The tree is tall, with branches that stretch out wide. And it's summer in the photo so the tree has lots of beautiful leaves that create lovely shade.

Let's have a couple of people make the tree together.

*Two audience members enter the circle and pose as the tree.*

There's one person taking a nap against the tree. They have their eyes closed and look so peaceful and happy like they are having a really good dream.

*An audience member enters the circle and positions themselves taking a nap against "the tree".*

There is one person who has a magnifying glass. They are lying on their front peering through the glass at all the insects crawling about in the soil.

*An audience member enters and poses with magnifying glass.*

Two people have been practising dancing together. They have their arms above their head and are standing on one foot and are looking at each other like they are a mirror of one another.

*Two audience members mirror one another in the dancing pose.*

The biggest group of people are here, on a big picnic mat. In the middle of the mat is a pie.

*Remaining audience members who want to join in pose as though on the picnic mat about to eat a slice of pie.*

All of the people have a slice of the pie.

This moment captures the first bite.

And then me. Well, just before the photo was taken, I flew over here, near the tree.

My nest is up in the top branch of the tree. But I flew down so I could watch over all the children enjoying the pie.

Of course, there is a person missing from the picture.

Who?

The person taking it! This is an old-school photo. Not a selfie! We don't see the person behind the camera.

It's a woman. The same woman who made the pie.

The camera is big. Old fashioned.

"Everyone look at the camera!"

She'll take the picture on the count of three. And we all need to say is the magic word...

What should we say?

*Takes a suggestion from the audience for the "magic word".*

.....

O.K.

One.

Two.

Three.

.....

**QUESTION:** Who would you like to take a photo of?

## RADIATOR/PAINTER

A: Can you guess what I am?

I'll give you a clue.

I'm not one of you...

Humans.

So go on, guess...

*Takes guesses from the audience, giving some clues to guide them: "no, I'm smaller than that", etc, etc. Eventually.*

Oh, O.K., you are never going to get it/Yes! That's exactly what I am...

*Response depends on what the audience guess.*

I am a, what you humans call, bac-ter-ia.

I have been living with my twins, cousins, brothers and sisters, on a cheese sandwich that was stuffed behind that radiator in the flat here.

There are millions of us. It's bacteria heaven back there. Heat and cheese. Pure bacteria luxury! I'm very lucky. For bacteria it's pretty much the dream life.

I feel grateful for what I have been blessed with, every day as I gobble on my mouldy cheese.

I'm a privileged wee bacteria, I recognise that.

You may be asking yourself, why?

Why on earth is there a cheese sandwich stuffed behind the radiator?

There's not just one, mate. There are loads. Mountains of cheese sandwiches stuffed back there for me and my family to roll about in all day long.

How did they get there, you may wonder?

They just started growing magically one day! The magic cheese sandwich producing radiator!

Nah, I'm joking. That's not it. Would be good though. We could sell it on eBay and make millions.

The truth is a little girl used to live here. About your age.

And every day the lady looking after her gave her cheese sandwiches for lunch.

And every day the girl would take one bite and say, "Mmm, delicious."

Then when the lady's back was turned, she would stuff them behind the radiator.

There used to be a little table there in front of the radiator. The table the girl would sit at for lunch. The perfect position to just stuff, stuff, stuff the cheese sandwiches down.

The cheese sandwiches always disappeared so quickly from the girl's plate that the lady thought she must really love them.

So she made her more and more. Every day, cheese sandwiches.

Sometimes cut into squares. Sometimes cut into triangles. Sometimes crusts on. Sometimes crusts off. But every day, cheese sandwiches.

And then every day, a smile from the girl, "mmm, that's delicious", and then a secret stuff, stuff, stuff.

And that's how my family got their fortune, their wonderful life in bacteria heaven. My great-great-great-grandmother lived on the first one. Then we all grew and grew. There's loads here for us to live on, and the sandwiches just get better over time. The mouldier and crustier the better.

Look how fat I am getting! Lovely and fat. We bacteria like fat, we like growing quickly and fast and spreading all over the place!

The little girl and lady left.

Others were here for a bit. They didn't give us anymore sandwiches but they never noticed us, so we've been left in peace, behind the radiator.

It's been empty here for a while now.

But I have a feeling that is going to change. There was someone in here the other day... Singing and banging.

And I could smell... paint.

Who knows what that could mean for us and our mouldy, cheesy bacteria heaven.

Just as long as they don't look behind the radiator.

But then, nobody ever does.

When was the last time you looked behind a radiator?

*Enter PAINTER, singing and painting. The person has been absorbed in their own world, then they notice us.*

B: Oh. Was in my own little world there.

Sorry, about the er... singing. I'll keep it down.

Don't mind me... I'm just going to crack on with the job. Alright?

Not making any trouble just...

Look. Can you keep a secret?

O.K. Good. You seem trustworthy.

O.K., so, to tell you the truth, I shouldn't be here. In the flat.

Not really. It's not my flat.

I promise I'm not a criminal or anything. I'm one of the good ones, honest.

Do you believe me?

But I promised somebody I would do this thing. They need me to...

Well, they need me to paint this room.

A completely different colour.

I can't tell you why.

You just have to trust me.

So, I'm going to start... alright?

Just on this wall above the radiator here.

Don't worry - this flat has been empty for months. I won't disturb anyone.

Do me a favour yeah? If anyone asks... You never saw me.

**QUESTION: Where do you feel most at home?**

## BIRTHDAY/WINDOW

A *Happy Birthday to you.*

*Happy Birthday to you.*

Come on everybody!

*Happy Birthday, Mrs Elephant.*

*Happy Birthday to you.*

Take a deep breath.

Close your eyes.

Make a wish.

And blow!

I never asked you what you wished for.

You probably wouldn't have told me if I had.

It was our ninth birthday.

It was our ninth birthday and the last time I saw you. Properly. It was the last time I saw you properly.

There were so many people crammed into our tiny home, friends, family, neighbours...

But I only wanted to spend to time with you.

I wanted to have our own party away from all the loud noise and grownups.

I was pulled away from you and into the middle of it all.

Uncles, aunties, cousins I hadn't seen before. That peculiar woman that lived in the opposite flat.

"Peculiar." You taught me that word.

I was pulled, prodded, questioned, and encouraged to dance.

I tried to be polite and stick it out for as long as I could.

I was saved by the news! The biggest news anyone could remember.

Everyone was completely distracted, asking what on earth was going to happen now the wall had come down.

I escaped and ran to find you but when I arrived you had gone.

The window was open. There was a note on the table with my name on it.  
The name that you gave me.

I still have that note. In a special box.

But I don't need to read it.

I can remember it. Word for word.

B: I slipped out at night unseen.

I lifted the long handle on the window and slowly lowered myself down to the ledge below.

Here, I was struck by the thought that I had never seen this view of the flat before, from the outside looking in.

As I moved down from floor to floor being careful to watch where I was putting my feet, I noticed all the tiny weeds, plants, and flowers growing on the outside of the building.

Again, I realised I had never seen or noticed this before. I'd lived there most of my life - all nine years and never noticed or spotted them

At the far end of the ledge was a black bird, sleeping with its beak resting on a wing.

The bird didn't notice me, slowly moving down the side of the building from floor to floor, careful not to make a wrong move and fall the seven storeys to the ground below.

Something caught my eye...

The shape of two shimmering objects beneath me, far away but still distinct in the dark. Their shiny, oily shapes were clear even from up here - a pair of snakes in the grass.

Snakes!

I'd always been fascinated by snakes.

I paused to watch. I couldn't take my eyes off them.

I think they noticed me too.

They became very still. They were watching me, watching them.

We stayed like that for...

I don't know how long.

Complete stillness.

Until...

My foot slipped!

I grasped for the ledge quickly.

But found only air.

Everything happened very quickly...

Slip, crash, bang, smash.

Me in the grass.

I don't know who found me. Or how far I fell. There were lots of different stories that people told about what happened. About why I was climbing out the window.

But I was in a deep dream. A long, deep dream. And in that dream, I was free. Completely free, playing with the snakes in the grass.

**QUESTION: Where would you like to travel to in your dreams?**

## WEATHER

A: You are standing in front of the most magnificent painting.

B: I don't have the words.

A: Looking. Feeling. Noticing.

B: Not the right words.

A: Don't think too much. Just look. What do you notice?

B: ...

A: What colours do you notice?

B: ...

A: You are standing in front of the most magnificent painting.

B: ...

A: How does it make you feel?

B: Stormy.

A: Yes.

B: Violent storms. Sky is moving and swirling. Sea is angry.

A: Yes.

B: But that's not it. Not enough. Not the right words.

A: What do you notice about the painting?

B: Light.

A: Light.

B: Light is moving.

A: How does it make you feel?

B: It can take me away from here.

A: Yes.

B: Big. It makes me think...everything is so big.

A: Yes.

B: It makes me feel...

A: Yes?

B: How do you say...?

A: Go on.

B: It makes me feel...

A: ...

B: Invisible.

**QUESTION:** What would you like to make a painting of?

### The Frame

MATT: We've seen six stories from the Universe in the flat.

HELEN: But the story doesn't really end.

MATT: A never-ending story?

HELEN: Kind of. One story starts a new story. You've heard some of the stories we made today, you've helped us tell them...

They are your stories now and from them you can make your own.

MATT: So, one story makes another story makes another story makes another story - round and round -

HELEN: Exactly - like a circle. We've been in a circle. Let's return to where we started.

There is a child.

MATT: Take a look at the words you have collected.

HELEN: And listen to this story, with holes in it.

MATT: Take a look at the words you have collected and, in your head, think if you could use them to fill in the holes.

*Audience are given time to take out their gathered words and lay them in front of them on the floor.*

HELEN: There is a child.

The child is very.....

People don't like..... children.

This child, they know this.

They try to make it better by being very.....

They have a place they go to.

This place is.....

In this place it doesn't matter what people think.

In this place they can make their own universe.

And in this universe, they create their own story.

A story about.....

This story is very important to the child.

This story makes them feel.....

This is their story.

Only they know how it ends.

MATT: We're going to listen to this one more time.

This time, if you would like to fill the gaps with your own words,  
you can share them with the group.

You can call out an idea you may have to fill the story.

We'll hear each other's words. We'll hear the stories we have  
begun to create ourselves.

HELEN: There is a child.

The child is very.....

People don't like.....children.

This child, they know this.

They try to make it better by being very.....

They have a place they go to.

This place is.....

In this place it doesn't matter what people think.

In this place they can make their own universe.

And in this universe, they create their own story.

A story about.....

This story is very important to the child.

This story makes them feel.....

This is their story.

Only they know how it ends.

MATT: Thank you so much for sharing your time and stories with us today.

You are very welcome to take your bag and the words you have collected with you, and you can perhaps use these to make new stories in the future.

If you don't want to take the bag with you, please leave the bag and words here, and we will keep them and use them to build new stories.

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