

# Working Theory

*An analysis of the use and misuse performance tools*



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## ***Those without whom***

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**Abstract:**

In this paper, I work through some of the theoretical and practical research concerns which have emerged during my MA in Theatre Making, including the Minor, Medium and Major projects developed as part of its coursework component. I begin with an outline of my core hermeneutic lenses, describing the relationship between the expressive faculties of the brain, voice and body in performance articulation, advocating for their de-conventionalisation within theatrical modes, and indicating a more diverse range of possibilities for these performance tools.

I then describe the three primary examples I will be using in my explication, and relate each to a specific chapter; Siri Hustvedt's novel *The Blazing World* is discussed in the chapter of the Brain, and used to speak about the relationship between an expressed, materialised art object, and its invisible progenitor or counterpart which exists privately in the mind of the artist.

Boris Nikitin's *Woyzeck* is discussed in terms of its approach to representation and communication, and the peculiar relationship it establishes between audience and performer.

Finally, I talk about my Medium Project *Journey from the Centre of the Earth* in a consideration of the bodily and ethical implications of participatory performance practice, before beginning to describe my final production, *CLOAKS*, and concluding.

## 1. Introduction:

*These rules, the sign language and grammar of the Game, constitute a kind of highly developed secret language drawing upon several sciences and arts... and capable of expressing and establishing interrelationships between the content and conclusions of nearly all scholarly disciplines...*

*... Nothing is harder, yet nothing is more necessary, than to speak of certain things whose existence is neither demonstrable nor probable. (Hesse, 1943:14&18)*

In *The Glass Bead Game*, Herman Hesse imagines a way to instrumentalise the disciplines of Art and Science in order to channel and codify cognition. This enigmatic game, practiced by highly trained scholars and inside elite academies, combines mathematical logic and aesthetics to construct a method of distributing tools towards shared philosophical experiments and investigations. Although conceived as a sophisticated form of communication, the Game, in its unfathomable complexity and covert execution, produces secrets and confusion even as it facilitates the transfer of knowledge.

In this paper, I would like to draw several parallels between the high concept abstraction of systems like the Glass Bead Game, and the latent capabilities of theatre and performance methodology for transmuting thought into communicative exchange. This includes an in depth look at how these capabilities have already been repurposed by theatre makers, performance artists and writers alike, as well as possible ways to further these repurposings by adding or foregrounding gaming elements to nudge performance into an emergent, indeterminate state. These alternative performance modes provide ways of moving towards a space of communicative and dialectical narratives, and away from the use of fiction and narrative as mere vessels for representation, entertainment, display or commentary.

The possible prioritisations of communication over presentation in theatre and performance (the act of *exchange* rather than the act of *showing*) can be enhanced by acknowledging and incorporating its complicity in secrets and secret keeping, and its long relationship with play. The acknowledgement and instrumentalisation of secrets, in conjunction with the innate potential for knowledge generation within theatre and performance, and the traditions which assist in preparing this newly formed knowledge for expression (techniques like improvisation, devising, and performance writing), will also be carefully examined in the body of this paper.

Both the logic of games and the constructs surrounding performance attempt to determine the shape and procedures of things which do not yet exist, or are in the interstitial space between non-existence and existence. Both dwell on the borderland between clarity (in the form of their establishment of rules, roles, and marked boundaries between real and fictional spaces), and a host of concealed, covert, and indeterminate forces which this kind of heightened expression often draws from (unpredictable, intersubjective decisions, personal agency to express or withhold information).

In each case, it is through a careful alignment of linkages – a weaving of what is said and what is not said (but assumed) – that patterns are formed and used to make or represent sense. This pattern is held in balance in order to keep the interplay between knowledge and expression lively and productive, and eventually made ready for public display.

I am using the format of the game, here, as a way to set down an initial, catalysing structure. The games I will refer to fall largely in the realm of embodied and/or dialectical roleplay games, rather than improv, free play, or computer gaming. I will be extracting the aspects of these kinds of games which allow and encourage participants to solve problems in ways that suit or interest them, and have this mutual problem-solving activity feed into or mirror performance expressions. These systems of expression and play are echoed in the catalysts which support much theatre and performance too, defining roles, creative models and other strategies of ‘making’, which move around each other in order to support the larger product – the game or theatrical event. The agreements made between performers, audiences and participants on ways of collaborating within an acceptable range of divergence, ephemerality and imperfection keep these unique forms of communication from breaking down.

In order to transmute theatre/performance into a form of (heightened) communication between performers/participants<sup>1</sup>, I will argue that gaming elements must be introduced – chance must be introduced. Without chance, conversations remain preplanned, or non-dynamic. With chance, and the risk of failure, comes the capacity for significant variation.

I will consider how the inclusion of chance has a fragmentary effect on the stages of creative production, and how these partitions make it possible for its stages to become dislodged from their original positions, and re-coded to function as malleable rule systems which can result in the creation of

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<sup>1</sup> By ‘performers’ I refer to those who are asked to play, interact or act in a work in front of an audience. By ‘participants’, I mean those who are asked to play, act or interact with a work without (necessarily) doing so explicitly for an audience.

new performance structures – new agreements formed between creators, performers, participants and audience members. Having been shuffled and loosened, these new structures have the capacity to create unstable, surprising results, which may be used to map, think about or capitalise on a conceptual territory or pattern. I will attempt to establish how performance – performance theatre in particular – can be used experimentally, with the purpose of producing or rendering abstract thought, as well as helping to prepare this abstract thought for textual, physical or vocal communication.

Given the necessarily live, embodied qualities of theatre and roleplay, these forms of expression will be investigated individually through three broad metaphysical lenses: *brain*, *body* and *voice*. The division of these elements abstractly represents the limits of human articulation. Politically, it points to a Marxist aesthetic, tracing ideas of alienation and the division of labour, and a modified Cartesian dualism which inserts the mouth as a mediator between the mind and the body.

This triffecta of mysticism, mechanism and representation will be positioned in relation to four primary theoretical texts; Claire Bishop's discussion of the politicised body in performance (*Artificial hells* [2012]); Sara Jane Bailes' *Performance Theatre and the poetics of Failure* (2011); in particular her writing around the failures of representation and communication; *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political* (2013); which looks at anti-theatricality and the relationship between thought, stage and performance, and Theodor Adorno's mapping of thought patterns and processes in *Negative Dialectics* (1966).

This research follows on from the investigations carried out in a previous paper, *Some Educated Guesses*, presented in August 2014. I was particularly concerned with how auxiliary parts of human interaction (such as the act of guessing) help to 'cheat' their way into mutual understanding through a similarly convenient ignoring of details in the interests of success. By making a series of assumptions and 'best guesses', lapses in understanding are bridged over in order to get on with the business of more general communication. In this instance, the problem was how to convey or fake an understanding of unattained knowledge using heightened performative, improvisational tools such as role-play, storytelling tropes, folklore, and gaming logic. There, as here, I found it useful to engage with socio-linguistic theorists like Bakhtin and Wittgenstein, whose work places language within a complex dialogic zone, and divvies up the capacity for interpreting particular forms of discourse across disciplinary, cultural and professional fields (Bakhtin, 1981:269).

These divisions seem to occur not just between disciplines, but within them. Theatre and performance practice uses tactics similar to those used by individual interlocutors for making and establishing sense,

and also for ensuring that the right kind of sense is accessed by the correct parties (audiences receive one kind, stage crew another, performers one more, and so on. In the same way, I might frame a piece of information differently when relayed to a parent, a friend, my partner, or a therapist. All moving parts are kept in place through systems which regulate the terms of engagement between these discrete parties' respective expressive apparatus (broadly, their physicality, vocal-ity, and cognition), and in doing so theoretically ensure satisfying interactions.

This follow up inquiry will begin to look at the consequences of disrupting these terms – setting them loose from their orbits within the context of a performance, and looking at the ways they might ricochet off of the expectations of those involved, and point to different kinds of possible relationships, responses, and problems.

If performance is purposed, as Brecht proposed, to provide contradictions which generate information and emergent reactions (Barnett, 2014:49), how can its relationship to an audience and those involved in its production be reconfigured appropriately? In this scenario, the reconfigured performance introduces a wave of insecurity which interferes with these long established relational codes, its tools released from convention in the construction of experiments of articulation, communication and expression.

## 2. Examples

In order to demonstrate the flexibility of these ‘performance tools’ (which is to say, methods of engaging in heightened, performative states), I will be using a set of three examples from literature, theatre and performance art (Hustvedt’s *The Blazing World* [2014], Nikitin’s *Woyzeck* [2012], and my own *Journey from the Centre of the Earth* [2014]); with the understanding that these traditions of, respectively, storytelling, performance and roleplay are able to be transmitted recognisably across modalities.

I will be using Siri Hustvedt’s novel *The Blazing World* as a way to look at how ideas of performance, roleplay and meta-fiction unfold in print literature; Boris Nikitin’s de-dramatisation and abstraction of Georg Büchner’s *Woyzeck*, which uses similar strategies to challenge audience expectations and the suspension of disbelief from within performance; and my own work, *Journey from the Centre of the Earth*, which disrupts and fragments dramatic and theatrical concepts from its adjacent position as performance art.

*The Blazing World* is the fictitious biography of fictional artist Harriet ‘Harry’ Burden. Burden, passing middle age and largely ignored by the New York art world, conceives of a final series of works; *Maskings*. For each of these works, she solicits a man artist as an avatar, and, working with their public image and persona, she creates three distinct artworks, each of which is received better than the last. In the wake of her death, controversies over the progenitors of the works abound, and the editor of her biography works with a collection of interviews, articles, and testimonials to constitute the bulk of her book, along with a series of extracts from diaries discovered after Burden’s death. In *The Blazing World*, Hustvedt creates an incomplete and ambivalent meta-narrative, incorporating aspects of roleplay and radical shifts in tense and point of view. The reader is provided with various assessments of Burden’s own art works – profound successes or trite anti-climaxes depending on who is speaking. These works, often framed as interactive or performative, transform between perspectives, which, along with the fragmented format of the book itself, generates a complex dialogue between subjectivities by exploiting the gaps in the knowledge and experience of the various characters which feature. I will predominantly be using this text in relation to ideas of the brain and interiority – how invisible or inaccessible spaces of thought, secrets and creativity are represented and speculated about.

In my explication of the function of the voice, or the mouth, in creative communication, *Woyzeck*, presented at GIPCA’s *Live Art Festival* in 2012, and conceptualised by Boris Nikitin with Malte Sholtz, will act as a way to draw out the ambiguities of speaking. Using Georg Büchner’s famously unfinished play (the most complete version of which was published in 1879), this work engages with the problems of

authorship, as well as Wittgenstein's social theories of language, play and cognition. *Woyzeck* has been posthumously completed and re-completed by multiple authors, and as such has been subjected to as many forms of creative co-option. Like *The Blazing World*, Nikitin's *Woyzeck* manipulates and disrupts narrative coherence in its rendering of the story, much of which is told anecdotally, almost incidentally, by Sholtz in his 15 minute introduction to the work, where he idly muses about personal agency and the tenuous relationship between fiction and reality, before almost indistinguishably transitioning into an abstracted rendering of the play.

Lastly, this investigation will use my 2014 Masters' Medium Project, *A Journey from the Centre of the Earth*, as a touchstone and case study for the application of these ideas and their potential consequences with regard to the politics and physicality of the body – in particular the use and treatment of other people's agency and creativity within participatory performance games, and the relationship between play, labour and product.

*Journey from the Centre of the Earth* follows the exploits of three archetypical characters trying to escape the clutches of the netherworld. Each of these characters relates to a different aspect of enquiry in terms of this research – the *Ventriloquist* character to ideas of verbal expression and dislocation, the *Spiritualist* to the mysticism of the brain and the invisibility of thought, and the *Mentalist*, in their reading and instrumentalisation of physical and psychological cues, to ideas of presence, control, and the body. In the playing of *Journey*, three people assume the archetypes noted above, and are able to manipulate these heightened personas in the world of the game<sup>2</sup>.

This game constitutes one half of the work, which is split between two parallel venues. In one of these venues, players are able to privately participate, role-play and contribute to the plot of work. This room is closed to the public, and the exact expression and content of these spontaneously created narratives remains hidden. The second space is open to audiences. Here, performance artist Matthew King listens to their story unfold via a set of earphones receiving a simultaneous transmission of the concealed room. As King speaks, his retelling is reacted to by Angelo Valerio, who mixes atmospheric sound, and Francois Knoetze, who plays related video clips. This story is relayed to the audience in real time, filtering multiple perspectives into a single narrative thread. As Matthew listens and translates, this thread runs the risk of being tangled, stretched, or broken.

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<sup>2</sup> This kind of a role-playing game involves minimal physical activity – it is maybe best described as collaborative storytelling. The 'action' occurs through the descriptions, decisions, and verbal interactions of the players involved, all of whom are seated at a table, or round a couch, or on the floor – the venue is unimportant. The players are expected to interact with and pursue goals within this fictional structure.

### 3. Brain: The Silver Cord

*Furious as a lute my body,  
Furious as a saint my soul,  
For I am being wrenched from study  
Of time, and torn from time's control.  
Thin as a silver cord my breath  
(Thin as a wick untouched by oil),  
As I am leaving earth for truth And  
touching sword to quivering foil*

(Fairclough, G. 1949. *Furious as a Lute*)

According to the biblical myth of the Silver Cord, the soul departs at night to travel the ether, attached to its body by a long winding thread. While it travels, fantastic images are transmitted to its earthly self, which lies unaware of the journey of its spirit. The myth warns of waking dreamers abruptly, in case the shock causes the silver cord to sever, permanently separating body from soul.

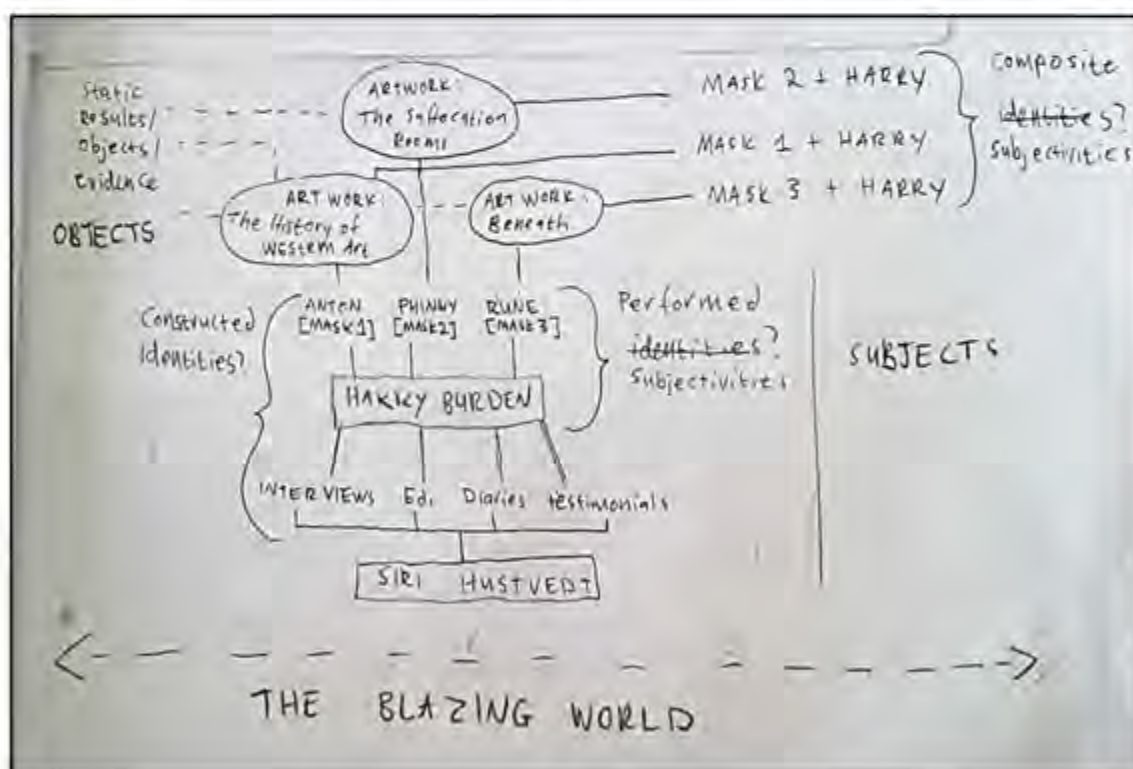
In this section I will be considering the relationship between object and subject as akin to the relationship between dramatic structure and content/performer. In parallel, I would like to hold the image of the work of theatre as a tenuous silver cord connecting the body of the performers (and by extension the audience) to the invisible mind of its progenitor. Through the manipulation of these functions, the concrete object of the performance is made, with all of its structural implications, and used as an anchor for the ephemeral components it gives rise to – a mechanical armature which can support a restricted range of potential forms. I will argue that these ephemeral components can act as a surrogate subjectivity for the audience in question – a limited personhood predetermined by the expectations of its viewers (Bailes, 2011:12-13). This personhood is a cipher made out of a roaming collection of thoughts which have been caught and confined within the boundaries of a performative act. The (badly kept) secret here, is that behind this cipher is the real, but unintelligible, imagination of its creator.

*Secrets are at odds with sequence – a passion for sequence may result in the suppression of the secret* (Kermode. 1980:87)

The potential discomfort or disorientation experienced by viewers made aware of the presence of a

secret (what is 'behind the scenes') is a product of what Frank Kermode calls 'the situating impulse' (1980:83). This is the desire to find causality and sense within the material of a given text (be it a play, a novel, a film); a desire which flattens time and content into a single plane, and attempts to neutralise its underlying chaos by denying the existence of a space behind the scene (Bailes, 2011:20). This impulse means negating the presence of an active mind – of a subjectivity at play underneath the performance which may, under different circumstances, have produced an entirely different work.

Kermode talks about the viewer's natural pre-occupation with logical progression with regard to a work of art (1980:88). The expectation is that they will receive a narrative which has been vetted for conceptual noise and meaninglessness, whose details will naturally relate to some greater message. This process is made visible in Hustvedt's presentation of *The Blazing World*, where its fictional 'editor' has explicitly spent time sifting through the wealth of material which exists around artist Harriet Burden in order to establish a presiding narrative; constructing a protagonist out of the detritus of Burden's life (See Figure 1 for a rough illustration of this process). The parts which are left out of her biography are shrouded in mystery, rather than mundanity – a sense that whatever has been left out must be in some way illuminating or revelatory – allowing the reader to feel safe that the world of the novel is providing maximum relevance and meaning (a feeling which is gradually problematized as the story unravels).



| Figure 1 |  
Working diagram of Siri Hustvedt's *The Blazing World*

The upshot of this trend of receiving creative media is that, unless its extraneous parts are either transformed into secrets or relegated to background decoration, they are dismissed as pointless or obtuse. Kermode describes an intentional (if unconscious) effort to look away from this surplus (1980:84), with the understanding that the fear of being confronted with what is chaotic and incidental in a work will be met in its creator with a desire to hide their editing processes, and draw focus to what is polished, final and intentional. Therein lies the perceived danger implied in the Silver Cord myth – that the body must be kept ignorant of the full extent of its soul under threat of death (in this case, costing the dignity of the narrative or an inability to suspend disbelief). The body is kept in place and placated with a phantasmagoria of images and stories – representations of a journey made static and available for interpretation upon waking.

In watching a play or reading a novel, the changeability of the viewer's subjectivity remains intact, while the interiority of the creator must, like the dream, become fixed in order for the work of art to 'cross over' from one side to the other – to change from thought to form and text. This means that the immediate reactions of the viewers are validated (in the moment, they may be shocked, amused, affronted, bored), while the reactions and motivations of the artist, performers and characters are imagined to be predefined. Readers, viewers and audience members experience an enactment of decisions which have already been made, in accordance with a particular set of expectations which shape the work even from the moment of its inception. Nothing is left to chance. These expectations change according to medium and discipline – assumptions around methods of communication, and the unspoken relationship between artist-transmitter and viewer-receiver, are applied to theatre differently than they are applied to prose or film.

Departing from the mythological parallel of the Silver Cord, the means and consequences of the transference of concepts from source to recipient are rendered much more diagrammatically in the following excerpt from *The Blazing World*, where Ethan Lord, Burden's son, tries to make sense of the conversion process from artist to artwork to perception.

## *An Alphabet Towards Several Meanings of Art and Generation*

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*Artist A generates artwork B. An idea that is part of the body of A becomes a thing that is B. B is not identical to A. B does not even resemble A. What is the relation between A and B?*

....

*C is the third element. C is the body that observes B. C is not responsible for B and knows that A is B's creator. When C looks at B, C does not view A. A is not present as a body, but as an idea that is a part of the body of C. C can use A as a word to describe B. A has become one of the signs to designate B. A remains A, a body, but A is also a shared verbal tag that belongs to both A and C. B cannot use symbols.*

(Hustvedt, 2014:144)

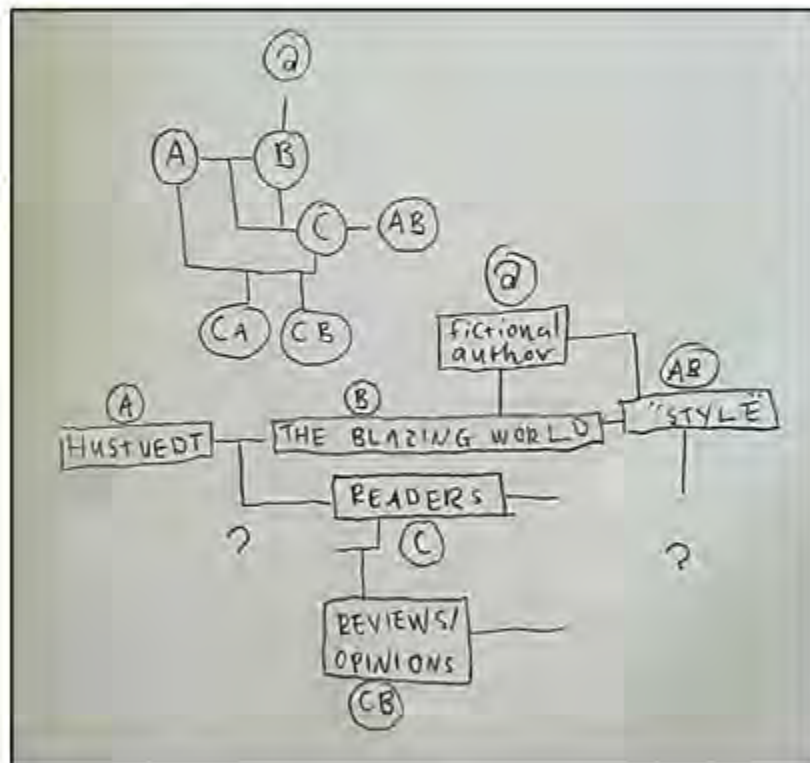
Here, Lord, grappling with the death of his mother and the splintered, contested legacy of her artworks, attempts to schematically trace the mutations undergone by an idea, in relation to the distance it travels from the body of its creator (also locating himself as a product of the artist's body; his mother's child). Lord is not only figuring the process of creating and transmitting works of art, but a general problem of knowledge transmission and communication as well – the formula tracks what is gained and what is lost – which parts become unnecessary along the way, and are naturally edited out via the evolution of the thought or idea as it passes between people, as well as information which is valuable but also lost as a result of bias or circumstance. He accounts for A, the artist; B, the artwork; and C, the receiver or viewer of the artwork, and the shifting relationships between these letters. A (the subject), creates B (the object), and in doing so externalises an abstract concept which was once only a part of them. Thereafter, B is available for scrutiny by C, who may use A as a way to vocalise or describe the art object. The idea passes from mind, to body, and finally to vocality. Lord's diatribe goes on to include the rest of the alphabet in an increasingly futile attempt to keep track of these permutations.

This exercise is enacted on a macro level in the form of the novel itself, which attempts to reconstruct the body of its protagonist in the absence of her actual self or body. In order to achieve this, its fictional editor must work backwards – must go from Z to C to B to A in order to reverse engineer an understanding of the subject under scrutiny. Here, Hustvedt begins to undermine the certainty of Burden's identity, resisting the instinct to frame it as finite or arrested within the pages of the book. Burden, described by various people as strident, vociferous, overbearing – a decidedly 'larger than life' character – spills out over the edges of the fiction, cannot be contained by the testimonials and interviews which attempt to border her in. Her diaries, also labelled according to the letters of the

Roman Alphabet, are incomplete – at least two are missing, allowing her to escape complete scrutiny and comprehension.

The languages of representation and documentation fall short in rendering her life in full. This is not an observation unique to the novel, or even specific to the character – interior worlds are evasive, and no amount of intersubjectivity can fully bring these worlds into the light. However, Hustvedt structures the novel in such a way as to parade these gaps and shortcomings before her readers, inviting a cognizance of its incompleteness.

Similarly, Lord's attempt to generate a blueprint for understanding communication is insufficient; its chief value in its poetics rather than its semantics. The discrete letters prove increasingly resistant to clarity, insinuating infinitely complicated combinations of themselves – AB, CA, BD, etc – like so many proteins. (See Figure 2)



[Figure 2]

Working diagram of Ethan Lord's *Alphabet Towards Several Meanings of Art and Generation* from Siri Hustvedt's *The Blazing World*

### 3.1: Narratology

Driven by narrative necessity, our navigation of meaning is outside of both scientific verification and subjective assessment. In the case of *The Blazing World*, a special combination of performance and narrative is used to unite semiotically unstable signs and symbols in the mind of the reader, and form networks of carefully sequenced story fragments through a case-specific, interpretative editing process.

Jerome Bruner, a scholar of narratology, describes the individual's construction of the social world as achieved through the conscious or unconscious telling of stories which arise from the rearranging of these fragments – stories about themselves, other people, and the situations which occur between them (1998:7). The Relational Other is understood through telling a limiting story about the possible details of their lived experience, not via a brain-to-brain communion of what that experience might actually be (Taylor, 1992:123). This means that effective communication relies more heavily on a stylistically wrought image of another person than on the supposed raw facts of their being. As Bruner puts it:

*'Our factual worlds are more like cabinetry carefully crafted than a virgin forest inadvertently stumbled upon'* (Bruner, 1998: 3)

Conveying experience, then, relies on the crafting of ontological objects (like stories, myths, memories, and art works) which resemble a *reasonable interpretation* of the gross stimuli (social environments, events, facts, etc) a person has been exposed to. It is a way of digesting and conventionalising raw subjectivity, reformatting it in a way that is useful, compartmentalised, and human-scale – the reduction of a forest to a cabinet. In order to be communicated, an experience must be hewn – must lose some of itself.

In crafting, the individual assembles a version of reality that is shaped by a 'narrative necessity' which does not require empirical validation (1998: 8). Though this necessity is not subject to the checks and balances of scientific modes, neither is it free-roaming. The individual is not at liberty to combine facts and impressions at will – she is constrained by larger, more powerful narrative patterns which are supported by implicit and explicit socio-cultural norms able to control the form of her stories and storytelling in any number of ways. These include culturally specific manifestations of etiquette, gender, race, relevance, social context, history, class, education, and so on, over which the individual may have a greater or lesser personal ability to manipulate or move away from (Baudrillard. 1998:11-12). These expectations and social limitations have profound effects on how, why, and if stories are told – as Hustvedt explores in the complicated case of Harriet Burden, who is particularly affected by restrictions and expectations placed upon her because of her gender.

Although this process may provide a working paradigm for understanding the fabric of communicable reality, Bruner maintains that these narrative structures are fallible and inexact (Bruner, 1991:4). Even realised in extensive detail and skilfully crafted, their highest purpose is to provide verisimilitude rather than immediate or reconstituted experience.

This means that, at least in part, we understand the world (and especially the social world) through representation. While techniques of representation are already embedded in the navigation of the everyday, they are drawn out and exaggerated in performance, where interlocutors engage in heightened forms of communication, further reducing the possibility of chaos slipping out from under the greater narrative. In this way, representation may be considered a force of limitation and control as well as, and by virtue of it being, a major tool of expression.

In order to express a substance as nebulous as experience, it needs to be cut off from a range of potential meanings and hinged to others (Baudrillard, 1993:133). The margin of distance required to make these representational choices necessarily sets them out of sync with their referents, lagging behind, accounting for them, but never taking their place. This delay in space, time and understanding is what throws the narrativising process ever so slightly off balance. It is these decisions, which are also nebulous but guided by a range of socio-cultural patterns, that introduce the capacity for error, chance, miscommunication and other social glitches. Narrative imperative cannot be 'weeded of falsification' (Bruner, 1991:4) – it cannot hold true at all angles, and for all people. This is where the smooth, continuous boundaries of storytelling lie, and the cobbled edge of assumption and intersubjective exchange begins.

The selection process inherent in a narrative construction of reality, while isolating a trajectory of significantly interrelating factors, does not neutralise the destabilising potential lying dormant in the legion of remaining unselected factors (Roberts, 2011:254). These factors, which still occurred, which still exist in a kind of ontological No [Man]'s Land, retain the possibility for selection by other people. As such, an encounter between individuals with differentially selected narratives may result in a series of communicative errors or a complete communication breakdown (Baudrillard, 1998:14). It is in the interests of both parties, then, to keep the Silver Cord intact, preventing their expressive link from severing and setting them adrift in the unknown and unknowable.

### 3.2: Secrets

Herbert Blau offers some insight into the role of the 'secret space' of the interior in his essay *Seeming, Seeming: the illusion of enough* (2006). Blau uses the theatre in specific to illustrate ways of conveying, keeping and disclosing secret thoughts. He describes theatre as "a sort of leak in the real... brought into being by thought" (2006:232). But this leak also represents a threat to the real, which the 'governing norms' of theatre are used to limit and control. The staging of a play, he says, is an attempt to lock it down (2006:236). Like seeing a movie before reading a book, the images will forevermore precede the text, overriding or erasing the possibility of seeing anything else. For all its rhetoric of ephemerality, theatre can also be a way of concretising experience – of bringing it as close to the state of a fixed object as possible.

*Anything can be cheapened by performance; but what's not there, and should be, preys upon the brain* (Blau. 2006:235)

This idea of 'cheapening' points to the ability of theatre to assign value to abstract thought, and in doing so pulling it into the material realm, diminished. This is the bargain struck between interiority and representation – that the interior is able to be communicated on condition that it allows itself to be bound and rescaled. Blau extols the benefits of keeping a play unrestricted by 'staging it in the mind' instead (2006:236). This is one way to escape the confines of expectation, but has its own trade-off of keeping the work of art hypothetical. Instead, there is a loss of temporality and physicality, lodging a Cartesian wedge between mind and body.

Theatre and literature make use of this mechanism in different ways. Theatre has the ability to imaginize the abstract, and literature is able to abstract ideas into text, conjuring images inside the brain rather than before the eyes.

For its own part, *The Blazing World* contains an inbuilt interiority, with faux-haphazard insights into its protagonist via her disjointed diary entries. These diaries, described as being dense with anecdotal, theoretical and emotional information, provide the 'editor' (and in turn the reader) with a mass of unruly material to be sifted through for sense and relevance. Using the poignant gaps left between entries, Hustvedt leaves room in the narrative for what is expansive, uncontrolled, unwieldy and unseen. Although we are provided with direct extracts from Burden's private documents, the story itself not told in first person – what Burden narrates in her diaries is not *The Blazing World*, but her own story; a different story; one that the reader is never afforded complete access to.

This approach follows a staggered mode of production, where its interlocking components dart around in a futile attempt at achieving an appropriate chronological order, adding an immediacy of thought – a way to follow disparate thought processes – which is able to mirror the physical immediacy of theatre and performance.

Performance figures into this narrative via a thorough exploration of shifting roles/identities, which are either enacted in the tacit way of performativity, or quite explicitly in Burden's experiments with performance art and roleplay which contribute to her relationship with two of her three Masks. During her final and most calamitous collaboration, she and enigmatic art world darling and notorious bad boy 'Rune' play a series of private games in order to align and key into each other's creative thought processes. During these games, Harriet wears the blank-faced mask of a man, while Rune wears a mask of a woman<sup>3</sup>, and the two begin to develop new fictions and personas through their characters' interactions. Their concealed faces maintain a balance between interior and exterior, testing Hustvedt's suspicion that it is the interplay between locution and deception that constitute the creative act – that lying, rather than being simply a tool to obfuscate, may necessarily precede and facilitate art-making.

The performing of other people – performing their ideas, fears, weaknesses and ways of thinking – becomes a way to come to a mutual understanding, and also a method of generating new forms and possibilities of expression. The same is done by Hustvedt in her writing of the novel, as she performs disparate voices in order to triangulate an idea of her protagonist – to unite the voices of many fictional characters in order to express a single, meta-fictional character.

Though present here in the form of a novel, this sensitisation to the mechanics of performance and storytelling also forms part of a lineage of theatre makers attempting to establish a more honest relationship between performers and viewers. The most prominent example in terms of contemporary discourses of the postdramatic comes out of the logic of Brechtian theatre and anti-theatre, which are typically engaged in a process of foregrounding the constituents of representation, and are ideologically opposed to the maintenance of theatrical secrets (Ackerman and Puchner, 2006:6-7).

Postdramatic theatre represents a departure from the primacy of 'story', and stands in defiance of the prevailing stature of grand, absolute narratives. Schechner imagines the postdramatic work of theatre

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<sup>3</sup> These games, in their overt constructedness and pantomiming of traditional gender roles, also enact some of the key ideas in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), referencing Butler's conception of performativity in particular.

to have abandoned 'story' in favour of 'game', with all its connotations of non-linearity, chance and indeterminacy (Carroll, Jürs-Munby, Giles, 2001:26). The components of a game, unlike the components of classical theatre, are not bound by the principles of co-operation or harmony – they are empowered to work against or destabilise each other within a shared system of logic.

This irreverence for the integrity of narrative manifests in Brecht as a way to out the insides of theatre – to let the veneer of the stage begin to chip away. However, as Woolf notes in *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political*, Brecht remained “committed to a theatre of stories”, more concerned with dissolving the pretences of the stage than pretences of content (Woolf, 2013: 35). In the same collection of essays, David Barnett critiques the abilities of these strategies to fully or effectively detach themselves from a reliance on the trappings of representation (Barnett, 2013:47-48). Where the frames of theatre were laid bare, the working processes which surround the theatrical product remained largely unaddressed and shrouded.

He argues that although Brecht identifies contradiction as the presiding purpose of theatre, by virtue of the identification and stylisation of this purpose, the changeability and risk necessary to sustain contradiction is diluted or lost. Without relinquishing this measure of stylistic control, Brechtian theatre becomes a representation of a detachment from direct representation, rather than a true departure from it (Barnett, 2013:47). Anti-theatre, in its attempts to reveal the essential mechanisms of theatre, presupposes that it has the faculty to reveal itself without remaining caught in its own definitions.

In concerning himself with the unseen in theatre, Brecht also had to conceive of a way to pictorialize the unseen. With this pictorialisation came a more transparent way of presenting theatre, even if it kept the subjective and temporal aspects of it flattened into presentation and aesthetic. While this is a crucial step towards disentangling the subject/object dynamics of performance, it is executed at the expense of the invisible, which disintegrates in the harsh Epic light. What is perhaps lost here is a full engagement with the subjectivities at work within a given piece of drama.

While this may not always have been present in praxis, Brecht, as well as Adorno, was deeply concerned with deconstructing the notion that there exists a part of subjectivity which is reliable and innate (Barnett, 2013:49), holding the subject up against the naturally occurring contradictions caused by the smallest of its dealings with a given object (Adorno, 1966:28). In the interface between subject and object, it is imagined that it is the object that moves, while the subject remains still. However, Adorno posits that the subject transforms in response to the object, and as it does so becomes non-cogent with itself. This is the question of where thinking takes place in theatre – how a thought is passed from one

state to another, and 'fetishised' (Adorno, in Buck-Moss, 1977:85), into a representation of itself. This interface between subject and object can also in some ways be taken as a model for the mechanism of the 'unreliable narrator' – an individual whose voice which presents itself as consistent and capable of relaying information about a given thing, while simultaneously twisting themselves around it in order to validate their own thinking, framing and speaking of the thing.

In *The Origin of Negative Dialectics* (1977), Buck-Moss elucidates Adorno's concept of 'Exact Fantasy' (1977:86). Adorno puts forward this theory as a way to explain how the subject moves around and interprets a given object. His use of 'fantasy' here is not indicative of invention so much as discovery and translation – it is *non-representational similarity* (Benjamin, in Buck-Moss, 1977:86). In order to understand an object, a person must arrange its components first to make it sensible to themselves, and thereafter rearrange it to make it intersubjectively communicable. This is not a fantasy of complete departure, but one which keeps itself tethered to the material world (as in the fantasy of the Silver Cord). This transformation is performed not to move away from the object, but to keep it believably close to itself even when rendered in a foreign modality (Buck-Moss, 1977:88).

In the example of *The Blazing World*, the reader, encountering the transmission of the story not as a combination of subjectivities but as a consolidated interpretative object (a book), performs an act of *mimesis* – they must change the way the story-object exists on the page, as a singular entity, and reform it so that its implied subjectivities (the various characters who give testimony, are recorded or interviewed) can be considered both individually, and in their capacity as a unified narrative which constitute a representation of a single, primary protagonist. As the reader 'discovers' the story, they must create an auxiliary fantasy which replicates its logic.

To speak of logic and replication, though, is also placating. The private negotiations between subject and object must always remain illegible, and desperately negotiated by craft and fantasy.

In Harry Burden's words:

*Why do I feel there is a secret I carry in my body like an embryo, speechless and unformed, beyond knowing? And why do I feel it might erupt in a great blast if not checked? It must be easy, so easy to fill in that damp, throttling unease with words, to write the disturbance, to write a story to explain the why of it.* (Hustvedt, 2014:64)

#### 4. Voice: Against Words

*“Even when you are not in a room,  
you are in it, your voice everywhere.”*

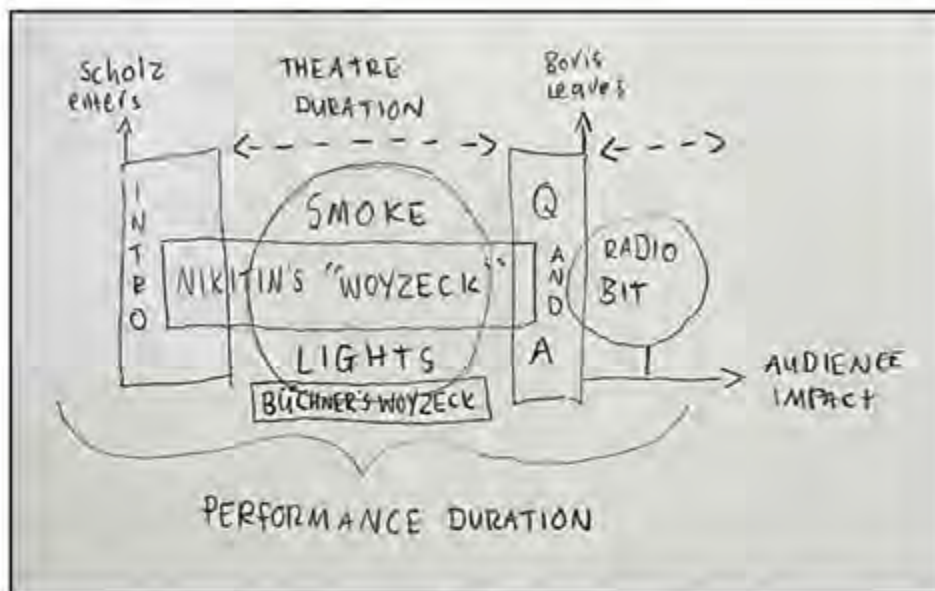
(Vinz, M. 2010. *Absences*)

This chapter will be considering how the performer, as an envoy from the brain, engages with different forms of authorial control which produce vocalisations with a greater or lesser sense of confidence, autonomy and reliability. I will be looking more closely at the way story matter is vocalised within performance – the choice and form of words in terms of scriptedness or non-scriptedness, as well as the style of delivery and its attendant representational factors. In this sense, the figure of the ‘voice’ will to some extent be discussed as a catch-all term for expression and representation.

I will distinguish more specifically between linguistic and general representational models, but employ Wittgenstein’s notion of ‘family resemblance’ within his broader theory of language games from *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) to illustrate the co-dependent relationship extant between these three components.

In Nikitin’s *Woyzeck* (2012), the performer, Malte Scholz, begins by introducing himself to the audience, as well as providing a preparatory précis of the play. Scholz speaks informally, anecdotally, in what seems to be a preamble to the show itself. Without shifting in register, this more or less standard introduction begins to mutate into something else – Scholz poses questions around the politics of personal agency and artistic influence, drifting into an increasingly philosophical monologue. In one crucial moment, the growing discrepancy between the casual, anti-dramatic tone of the performance, its theatrical framing, and loaded content, is foregrounded when Scholz poses the question; “What is speaking?” Spoken within the boundaries of the performance, this question turns back on itself; both a scripted line and an earnest question about vocalisation – what does it mean for Scholz to be expressing himself within the context of the work? Where has his own voice – his own agency – gone if he is speaking the words of others? Does he speak with the voice of Boris Nikitin, or Georg Büchner, or Malte Scholz as a character in *Woyzeck*? This, together with his stream of consciousness-type musings about the position of the self within a work of art, acknowledges the multiple voices and multiple subjectivities with which the drama talks.

He repeats the question multiple times, and continues to interrogate what it means to do, think and speak, before finally transitioning into a mode of expression more clearly identifiable as theatrical, or dramatic. The lighting shifts, smoke machines exhale – the stage sets itself. Now, we are to understand, the show (the *real* show), has begun.



| Figure 3 |  
Working diagram of Boris Nikitin's *Woyzeck*

As outlined in the previous chapter, Adorno uses the idea of *mimesis* to explain how objects are understood by individuals, and how these objects are translated into different hermeneutic 'languages'.

The implication here is that language is fundamentally in the service of private, abstract thought – that it is first instrumentalised by a searching brain, and thereafter reused in praxis – used to communicate conversationally (Johansson, 2008:129). Wittgenstein argues against the assertion that linguistic ideas are formed hermetically, situating them in a practical, discursive sphere rather imagining that their origins could be as mentally individualistic as proponents of *mimesis* might suppose (Wittgenstein, 1953:329). *Woyzeck* manipulates its audience's expectations around the use of these languages, employing mundane, conversational language where heightened, dramatized expression has implicitly been promised. It utilises social and theatrical assumptions to create a disjuncture between language and meaning, applying communicative styles which are out of sync with the content they seem to convey.

The appearance of this discrepancy refers again to a Cartesian understanding of knowledge and being; of a sharp split between the private realm of the brain and the public realm of the body. The function of language here, in Wittgenstein's understanding, is to mediate between these two spaces without pledging allegiance to either (Benjamin in Buck-Moss, 85:1977). He doubts whether linguistic expression as we know it could exist apart from physical and social factors, understanding language as a

range of interpersonal activities accessible to all of its users (within a given culture), who are enabled to make and convey sense through this common system without needing access to the full extent of the 'life worlds' of their interlocutors (Johansson, 2008:128).

This is precisely the phenomenon *Woyzeck* tries to unpick. Taking as its base an unfinished play which has been concluded time and time again by various practitioners<sup>4</sup>, the production is from the get go self-consciously reliant on the work of others. Scholz says: "I am a human being, and this society, with all the people surrounding me and its media have been influenced by me, on me, all day, seeping through my mind" (Nikitin and Scholz, 2012). He wonders how much of what he speaks belongs to himself, and how much is a coagulation of invisible influences which join to form the impression of personal thoughts and ideas.

Johansson, following Wittgenstein, notes in his book; *Performance and Philosophy* (2008), that the intersubjective context available to a performance product is provided by its audience, who act as a social counterbalance for the language of the production (2008:132). This relational sensitivity does not necessitate that the work remains sensible, but rather ensures that, in the event it does become insensible, it would do so in comparison with the counterbalance provided. In other words, the audience bring with them responses, expectations and interpretative potential from the external world which determines whether or not the performance is legible.

Obviously, the language of performance operates differently from ordinary language because, like all forms of fiction, it is not bound as strictly by the rules that govern the physical world (2008:129). However, it retains a *family resemblance* (Wittgenstein, 1953) with this world in the form of a shared grammar – the semi-arbitrary system of structural linkages embedded in the muscle memory of all attempts at expression (within a given culture) (2008:131). This grammar is what grooms information for expression, not especially concerned with *what* is being expressed so much as the conventions of *where* and *to whom* it is being expressed. This is how, as Johansson says, performance and other art forms can be "literally meaningless while at the same time being artistically as well as philosophically interesting" (Johansson, 2008:130). They are able to be interpreted, via a pervasive grammar, without needing to conform to literal reality.

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<sup>4</sup>Including Werner Herzog's 1974 film *Woyzeck*; a 1969 stage adaptation directed by Ingmar Berman; a musical devised by Robert Wilson featuring music from Tom Waits and Kathleen Brennan in 2000; and *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, performed, designed and puppeteered by the Handspring Puppet Company and directed by William Kentridge in 1992.

#### 4.1. Discourse and Dialogism

Bakhtin says as much in his book of essays *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981). He speaks about the social life of a given discourse away from its containing artistic and historical forms – of the manifestation of discourse unfettered by circular critiques of style and subject matter – how it may be spoken in public spaces and adjoining fields of experience (the ways in which it might be transferred between public, private and disciplinary modes) (Bakhtin, 1981:269). He refers to a ‘living discourse’ which exists in attempts to move a system of knowledge into a system of expressions of knowledge.

*Discourse lives, as it were, beyond itself, in a living impulse towards the object*  
(1981:292)

Knowledge without the capacity for personal transmission is a dead weight, a senseless object. Like folklore, discourse remains vital only within a near constant negotiation of its meanings from person to person (or context to context), rather than from the presentation of a fully formed, static object to a person (1981:292). This is the ambitious, aspirational quality of discourse located in assumption; the factor which moves away from itself. Bakhtin accounts for this factor in the form of the utterance, in which the processes of ‘unification and disunification’ intersect (1981:272). In other words, the spoken component of discourse simultaneously threatens itself with the dissolution of its own borders, and attempts to impress its meaning upon a susceptible other. In order to be communicated, a discourse must necessarily be made vulnerable to addling, misunderstanding and misrepresentation.

These utterances, which take the form of heightened or aestheticised language, are understood to belong to or emerge from a particular dialogic perspective – they are located within a specific discipline or field of experience. They are categorised as such not only by virtue of a series of shared grammatical, stylistic and linguistic markers, but through a unified capacity to convey compound meanings related to those fields (1981:289).

*‘The language of the cadet, the high school student, the trade school student are all different languages’* (Bakhtin, 1981:290)

These meta-languages lie on top of the literal word, and act as systems for the expression and adaptation of disciplinary and experiential knowledge. They stratify into dialogic genres, and are used as common linguistic markers to identify specific professional realms. As Bakhtin says, all words have the ‘taste’ of a profession – residual marks of use and context (1981:293).

From this perspective, the metalanguage is treated as a knowledge object or aesthetic – local colour, texture, uniform, costume (1981:289). This is how we are able to identify, and moreover typify, what the

languages of doctors, lawyers and astronauts sound and feel like, without an aptitude for medicine, debate, or space travel.

Bakhtin characterises this simultaneously playful and uneasy co-opting of specialised language as a ‘buffoon spectacle’ (1981:273). He positions the clown as a figure who is able to begin to unpick and democratise these opaque languages through performance – irreverently assuming the elocution and demeanour of characters across spectrums of class, profession and ideology. In this ‘lively play’, no enacted language is able to assert authority or authenticity – all languages are ‘masks’; easily worn, easily shed (recalling Harriet Burden’s use of masks as a way to shift into and between foreign perspectives). The function of this carnivalesque rendering of speech identities, he explains, is critical and parodic, more concerned with pointed commentary than the reproduction of their given linguistic source. But with play comes uncertainty, the loss of mastery, and the risk of failure.

#### **4.2. Error**

To slip into the realm of failure and anxiety, however, is not necessarily to enter space devoid of meaning. In *The Necessity of Errors* (2011), John Roberts defends the relevance of mistakes across various realms of human endeavour (including philosophy, linguistics, science and art), and outlines their ambiguous framing and functions. In an evolutionary sense, errors or otherwise imperfectly rendered copies are ultimately responsible for the survival and viability of a species. In a relational sense, these miscalculations occasion problem-solving, and engage with faculties of reason, dialogue and imagination, and in doing so keep the social and creative mind vigorous (Roberts, 2011:25). In fact, as Roberts goes on to intimate, in order for a person to maintain a perfect sphere of ‘rightness’ (to exist in a state where wrongness is not risked), she is required to make no strenuous leaps of imagination or intuition – to not follow the reasonable pathways which lead away from what is already known for fear of being led astray. She must try to form a closed circuit of experience (when of course errant behaviour must have occurred in order to have established this circuit in the first place) (2011:253). The implication that ‘error’ is a stable negative term is also misleading, and, ironically, incorrect (2011:255). Once made, a mistake or irregularity in understanding has the potential to be assimilated into, add to, or change the epistemological context it has fractured off of. Just as mutated genes contain the potential to shift or delineate species, missteps in expressed knowledge may ultimately lead to the production of new knowledge.

While an exchange-narrative is bounded by a fictional structure (like a novel, a poem, a folktale or a play), the risk of relational misfire is reduced. Although of course open to interpretation, the self-evident fiction is understood to have a conventionalised interior logic, and moreover, to be static and finite, and therefore more readily co-opted by any subjective engagement (Bakhtin, 1981:8).

Interpretation may be performed in private; the narrative territory may be claimed, reimagined, and projected over without posing an immediate threat to social cohesion. This is complicated in the case of live or interactive manifestations of narrative, which appear to be on a slightly longer leash than purely text-centred storytelling modes<sup>5</sup>. This live element allows for the activation of various emergent possibilities, whether in the form of interruptions, call-and-response, immersion, or rapid adaptation (Bauman, 2003:48). Communicative narratives, vulnerable to any number of interruptions, introduce a relational wildcard, and in so doing are more able to capitalise on these more unpredictable qualities of performance.

In the case of *Woyzeck*, this wildcard takes the form of a “post-performance” question and answer session. After an hour of anti-narrative fragments, monotone monologues, blaring lights, smoke machines and oppressive heat, the audience is released into ‘neutral’, non-dramatic lighting. According to all available signs, the performance is over. Scholz bows and thanks the room, and is joined (in the case of its 2012 staging at GIPCA’s Live Art Festival), by Jay Pather, curator for the Festival, and Boris Nikitin, the author of the work. They initiate a performer/director/audience exchange which, while initially seeming to lead out of the drama, is slowly folded back inside it. Audience members are not unsuspecting – one person raises their hand to say; “I feel like you are making us perform right now”.

This suspicion is confirmed, as Nikitin unceremoniously leaves the performance space in the midst of answering a question. The lights change again – this conclusion is as false and misleading as the introduction to the play. The room is plunged back into theatricality, as Scholz listens to the recorded audience questions on a set of headphones, and paraphrases them back to the room. This back and forth of voices sampled from the Q+A session are compressed into one voice, as Scholz listens and decides how and what to respeak. The informal, conversational atmosphere of “post-performance” is hijacked, and becomes stylised through its co-option into the drama.

*Woyzeck* moves in and out of the performance frame, changing a space that was set up with a cohesive logic into a space of insecurity and disorientation. The relationship between the interior and exterior of the work becomes indistinct. One audience member is confused – if this was meant to retell the story of Büchner’s *Woyzeck*, they say, then, they have not come away with a greater understanding of the play.

The grammatical layout of the text has been stretched and strained, and the link between its dramatic and non-dramatic elements has become dangerously elastic. Aside from their positioning within a shared performative space, these disparate agents leak into and out of the real along with Scholz’s elocution and varying relationship to the performance frame. Their common meaning is nonetheless

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<sup>5</sup> These include participatory performance, games, roleplay, and even ordinary social interaction.

shaped through their situatedness within a theatrical space, a theatrical work, and before a primarily theatre-orientated audience.

This, at least in part, works as an experiment to determine how performance factors may act autonomously from pre-emptive 'grammatical' expectations, as *Woyzeck* moves between languages without regard for conventional and/or sensible sequencing or contextualisation. This forwards and backwards movement may cause a kind of disorientation or seasickness in audiences who prepare themselves for the start of the performance, only to realise it has already begun, and too hastily release themselves as audience members when they believe the performance to be over, only to be pulled into it again.

These undulating relationships prevent the work from "playing nicely" with both its spectators and itself; with Scholz constantly undermining the validity and creativity of its structures and his own speech acts.

One of the basic concerns outlined in *Negative Dialectics* is the principle of eliminating harmony from the dialectical process. Adorno says that it is only through the conflict between what an object seems to be, what it is not, and what it could be, that allows disparate elements to fall under a common definition (Adorno, 1966:145-147). This is what Barnett refers to as an 'uncomfortable, awkward dialectic' (2013:52) – where a destabilisation of the authentic, steady 'intact' world prompts insecurities which provide ways of engaging with heuristic material (in the sense of Brecht maintaining that contradiction is the 'means through which change occurs'). The world of the stage has embedded within it certain epistemological assumptions which creep into theatrical modalities. Façade, slickness, co-operation and trust must all fall away in order for the awkwardness of *Negative Dialectics* to make itself significantly apparent, and to allow the frissons and vying forces to make themselves known.

One of the presiding assumptions of theatre is that reality is able to be represented, whether in a literal, metaphorical, demonstrative or abstract sense (Barnett, 2013:50). Representation happens the moment something sets itself apart from the world, and in designating this space, creates a space for an aesthetic or technical definition. This definition is manifest in the theatre frame, which acts as a holding factor in the dialectic of performance – a category formed out of its own internal contradictions.

In Wittgenstein's terminology, this frame stands as the only reliable piece of grammar – a paragraph holding a tangled mass of awkwardly long ellipses and run-on sentences with no full stops, capital letters, parentheses, or real sense of concord. This is what I mean when describing the tools of

performance as discrete 'parts' to be recombined to form new ways of eliciting and producing thought. Through this disavowal of coherence, new avenues of noise and meaninglessness are opened up, but also new opportunities for meaning-making

The kinds of blueprints mobilised within theatre making practices are naturally concerned with the success, failure or "effectiveness" of theatre products. If this alternative desire is to move away from a prioritisation of the success of a piece of theatre, while at the same time keeping it within a theatrical context, these blueprints and their promises of structural integrity need to be put aside in favour of a potentially erratic pin-n-mix of dramatic elements.

This recalibration creates an atmosphere of insecurity and enquiry, a departure from habit which may stimulate alertness as much as confusion or irritation. The audience is promised no definite or satisfying theatrical experience, and actors, participants or performers alike may stand on slippery ground in their attempts to catch up with and adapt to one another, tense in the knowledge of how swiftly the performance could unravel. For all parties this represents a lack of control over the outcome of the performance, and, more specifically, a lack of reliability. This is what it means to expose a performance to chance, and so to failure.

Bailes, in her book *The Poetics of Failure* (2011), says that the spectre of error and collapse within performance can offer constructive information about "coping, accommodation and repair" (2011:5) in performers, while "smoking out" the tacit expectations of their audience. This departure from mastery entails a self-conscious uneasiness with the relationship between scripted and non-scripted performance – it is something between improvisation (which retains pretensions to virtuosity) and traditional theatre. She distinguishes between what is professionally awkward – which pieces of performance work have metabolised awkwardness – and what is earnestly awkward (2011:56-57).

Up to this point I have mostly been referring to a loose definition of voice within performance theatre – of the idea of 'voice' as a synonym for 'representation'. But, the physical fact of words and their delivery remains crucial in considering how concepts are bounced between thought and materiality. As briefly outlined, Scholz's lackadaisical narration lacks the crisp articulation usually required to score a clear line between those who are speaking and those who are silent. He does not *project*. His voice betrays a lack of or disregard for classical theatrical training. He does not go to lengths to mark himself as different or more worthy of speaking than the rest of the room. His speech is punctuated by silences as he fumbles with lights or pauses to remember a line. He self-consciously tries to avoid 'umming'.

Bailes' talks specifically about this kind of 'performance theatre', which she differentiates from performance art and traditional theatre forms in terms of it embracing the play and elasticity of performance art as well as its continued use of theatre frames. In performance theatre, text is no longer used necessarily as a vehicle for story or narrative (2011:21-22). The link between voice and dialogue is severed. The voice can become free-floating, nonsensical, autonomous. It is able to leave the service of logic and become a "dramatisation of the thinking process" (2011:20). The voice exists in a separate domain from the story, communicating its own meaning as distinct from the trajectory of the narrative. Under most circumstances, the function of language on stage is to erase the difference between thought and body – to knit them together into a simultaneous moment. When this severing of ties happens – when the voice fails to find or express an appropriate likeness of words or sounds – it becomes apparent just how much the narrative thread relies on its compliance.

## 5. The Body: Rube Goldberg Machines

*O who shall, from this Dungeon raise  
A Soul inslav'd so many wayes?  
With bolts of Bones that fetter'd stands  
In Feet; and manacled in Hands*

(Marvell, 1653. *A Dialogue Between the Soul and the Body*)

*Of this I am certain: There has been more than one turn of the screw.*

(Hustvedt, 2014. *The Blazing World:248*)

Along with its previously discussed (and questioned) ephemerality, theatre practice is also identified through its collaborative modes of production. This understanding of theatre as a joint activity should not (and does not) halt at an appreciation of its inclusiveness (Bogart. 2014: 106). The designated roles implied in this process of making can also be used to maintain hierarchical power dynamics and provide guidelines for professional valuation. Although of course these roles do blur, for the purposes of this argument (and in keeping with a focus on archetypes) I will be considering the discrete, “classic” treatment and categorisations of skill in the theatre (actor, director, writer, and so on).

In the last two chapters I have been outlining the notion of a performance-machine as an experimental apparatus – a petri dish cultivating various epistemological/ontological interactions. Herbert Blau problematises this use of performance, noting the danger of it becoming an objectifying, chillingly distant activity, eager in its appropriation of scientific (not to mention industrial) approaches (Blau, 1989:103) – a farming of responses, whether critical or physical, from practitioner and audience alike. Here, I would like to begin discussing this machine in terms of a methodology for soliciting labour from bodies, whether as a by-product of or catalyst for its experimental function. In this scenario, the workings of the machine do not obfuscate this commodification of theatre and theatre bodies so much as prompt a consideration of how the commodification comes to be (Blau, 1989:96).

Marx and Brecht both talk about the phenomenon of *alienation*, although of course they describe it in different ways. For Marx, alienation has to do with the division of labour for the sake of industrial efficiency – many hands acting in the creation of a product, which ultimately evades their individual grasp – the worker is confined to their place in the production line. Consequentially, they are prevented from deriving pleasure or satisfaction from the by-products of their labour (Thompson, 1979:31). Brecht expresses a desire

to make the audience, as well as the work, productive; inserting a space for criticality by reducing the space previously occupied by the visceral and emotional (Barnett, 2013:50). Here, the viewer is pulled back from the seductive functions of narrative in order to achieve a regard of the work which accommodates calculation. In both of these conceptions of alienation, the experience of pleasure is deferred in the interests of productivity (Blau. 1989:104).

Although an innovative framing of performance for its time, this impulse to alienate reflects a separation of product, producer and consumer present within a broader socio-political realm. The meeting point between Brecht and Marx represents a double-sided estrangement which is, as Blau puts it, “as much of a symptom as a solution” (1989:99). Herein lies the reversible nature of performances which deploy the A-effect<sup>6</sup>– the tension held between willing and solicited criticality.

With a mounting focus on the actuality of bodies within the theatre in the 1920s and 30s, the diversions provided by representation having been lifted, criticality loses its aura of dignity and is pulled back into the industrial complex. Marx referred to “intellectual labour”, Brecht referred to intellectuals as “brain workers”, Benjamin wrote *The Author as Producer* (Buck-Moss, 1977:30-31). Adorno maintained that, although the bourgeois philosophical circles of the time held themselves aloft from the systems of economic control which exploited the proletariat (while appointing themselves as their spokespeople) (1977:34), the objectifying forces of capitalism were nevertheless sleekly and cleverly replicated within them.

The framing of artists as workers forms part of an attempt by the so-called intelligentsia to identify and enter into a discourse with the traditionally conceived working class. The demystification applied to both audience and practitioner in its turn sought to make explicit these pervasive processes of commodification, its sights modestly set on revealing the mechanisms of theatre rather than resolving their associated problems and conventions(1977:32).

In her essay *Outsourcing Authenticity* (2012), Claire Bishop describes the evolution of this phenomenon into trends which become part of what we understand today to be (contemporary) performance art. Specifically, she talks about changing approaches to and instrumentalisations of skill, where expertise are sought omnivorously within an interdisciplinary field. Holding this tendency against the rising popularity of ‘outsourcing’ labour in the early 1990s, Bishop points out that while this practice requires skilled,

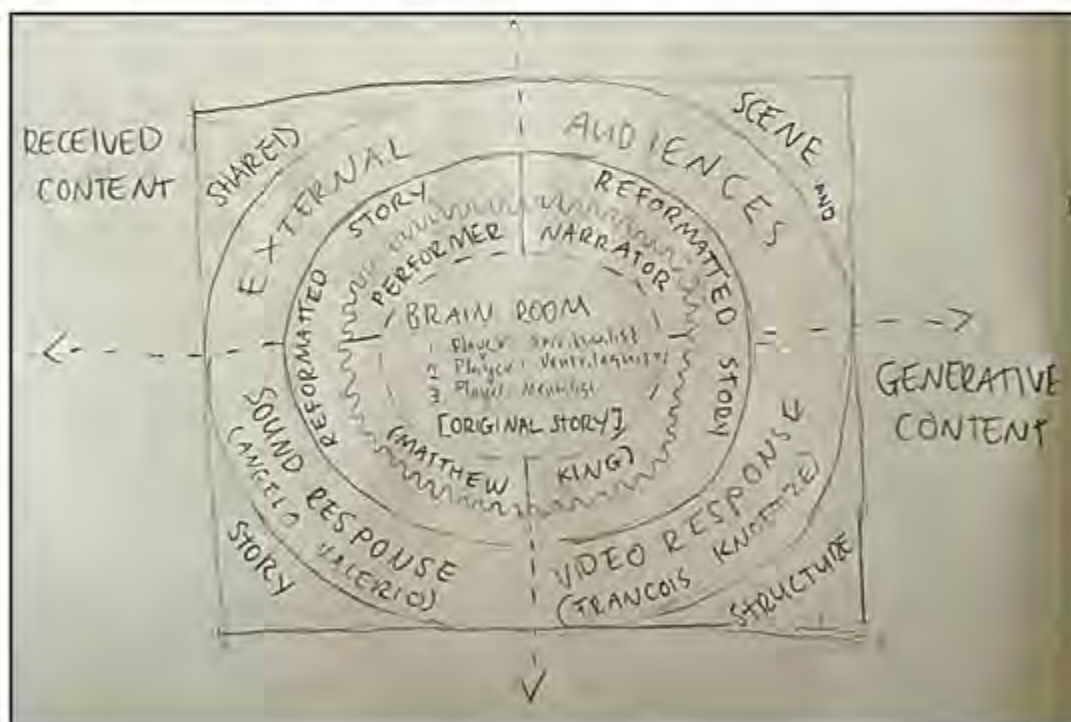
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<sup>6</sup> The A-Effect or *Alienation effect*, refers to Brecht’s conception of an audience made to feel ‘estranged’ from the performance, discouraged from any suspension of disbelief in favour of a critical distance from which to observe and evaluate the mechanisms in play (Féral, 1987:461)

individuated labour, it maintains an alienated distance by ensuring a generous pool of replicable individuals (2012:231).

Without being overly cynical, there are significant parallels to this practice in participatory art making, where, although 'unique' qualities are valued, the individuals possessing them are non-essential in and of themselves – the work may require the expertise of a forensic pathologist, but can get on alright without Dr Lorna Martin in particular. The framing of this kind of work as socially engaged creates a nifty bait and switch, where participants are at once "individuated and metonymic, live and mediated, [pre]determined and autonomous" (2012:238). It's a nice bridge between the faceless exploitation which occurs on the factory floor, and the agenda of neo-liberal Capitalism which exploits individuals based on a manipulative presentation of their subjectivities (Klein, 1999). The essential element remains lodged in those who control the mode and form of production – the artist/s themselves.

Within the course of its plot, the production of *Journey from the Centre of the Earth* teases its characters with promises of progress, opportunities for problem-solving, individuality and the expectation of a reward for labour. As the game progresses, it presents three distinct challenges to its players, each of which calls for the abilities of a specific character, validating the usefulness of their particular skills, but at the same time limiting the possibility for collective action. These vital tools of human endeavour (thought, action, speech), are separated and neutralised, suspended in the non-space of the underworld.



| Figure 4 |

Working diagram of my Masters Medium Project *Journey from the Centre of the Earth* (first produced in 2014)

The three characters given agency within the game world represent the primary tools necessary for expression. The Spiritualist is associated most strongly with the realm of the brain. They engage with the invisible and the mystical – that which is dislodged in time and space. They commune with elements which have no voice or body, whose presence is ephemeral, and whose existence is conveyed via a divulging of secrets inaudible to the other two characters.

The figure of the Ventriloquist functions as an active metaphor for the dislocation of voice and body. They are gifted with a preternatural ability to steal, change and throw the voices of others, unhindered by the bodies they once belonged to. The Ventriloquist makes of sound an independent agent, able to control and define its own meaning

Finally, the Mentalist serves as a figure of calculated, bodily exploitation. Observing physical and psychological signs, they are able to shape the ambitions, motivations and behaviours of those around them. Using their understanding of embodiment, The Mentalist manipulates the expectations of their subjects in order to keep them responsive and docile.

Together, these qualities constitute a whole human being. In the game, the wholeness of subjectivity has been subjected to division – not just an alienation of the worker from their tools of production, but the worker and their internal tools of expression.

In the final scene, it is revealed to the characters that they have simply been caught in a Sisyphusian trap. Having met all the challenges posed, they are magically transported back onto the tiny island they left off from, doomed to run through the same arduous trials forever.

In addition to *Journey* the game, *Journey* as a larger artwork presented a number of sensitive socio-economic problems. Conceiving of an appropriate way to divide the budget, I had the following exchange with Matthew King, who performed in the public component of the work:

“Do you think it’s alright to pay Angelo [the sound designer] and not to pay you or Francois [the video mixer]?”

“Well, it is and it isn’t.”

(King, personal communication 2014, November)

Here we come up against the murky waters of transactional art practice, where appropriate recompense becomes defined by soft understandings of worth, profession and skill. I'd chosen Matthew as a performer based on an idea of his mannerisms, personal history and sensitivity to my practice. Because these attributes are 'soft', and not clearly claimed by one professional realm or another, I am able to solicit his labour without compensation. I am also able to get away with this because Matthew is my friend, and within friendship there is a second currency in operation – the currency of favours. I ask him to participate on the grounds of his personhood, not his technical capacity as a worker, and in so doing I put this personhood to work.

Participatory performance art has its identity rooted in these conceptions of reduced authorial control and inclusiveness. This idea is particularly popular in light of *Relational Aesthetics* (2002), in which Nicolas Bourriaud discusses the burgeoning practice of relational art-making, and its endeavours to gently point out and re-frame pre-existing social structures (co-opting the form of a dinner party, a gallery opening, a panel discussion, and so on) (2002:16-18). In practice, of course, it is often not as uncomplicatedly hands-off as that (or as gentle). Bishop nuances the role of the artist within this mode of production, noting that although there is the conceit of risk, this conceit also acts as a failsafe – a way to channel failure and filter undesirable outcomes (2012:237). In the commercial terms above, what this amounts to is not just risk but 'calculated risk'. The artist uses voluntary participants and their potentially divergent reactions as producers of 'authentic' material (isn't it fascinating, who could have predicted, etc), as if they might reveal some kind of subtle insight into the workings of inter-subjectivity. Underneath this posturing towards free-form collaboration, though, is also the sense of some pre-planned narrative lying hidden, waiting for unwitting participants to 'stumble upon' it (2012:227).

And so, for all this talk of a lack of authorial control, there seems to remain an awful lot of it within the construction of *Journey From the Centre of the Earth*. First of all there is the foregrounded presence of a pre-planned narrative, even as the work tries to communicate ideas of chaos and chance. The participants who play and invent the story in the private 'brain room' are monitored by a stage manager (Thando Mangcu), who keeps time. Although they are not visibly embodied, the treatment of their bodies is controlled by a concern for efficient output – for the sake of the audience, Matthew, and the atmospheric outputs of sound and video by Valerio and Knoetze. There is also a determining super-structure – a list of scenes to work through, assigned characters, and so on. All these things curtail the potential for participants to truly act of their own free will.

When the performance is over, the artist's work as an instigator is complete, and their work as a curator

begins. Having set the terms of engagement, the performance has by now probably generated a usable set of results. These results are reconfigured in the afterlife of the event; transformed into anecdotes, marketing and documentation (2012:227). Not to labour the industrial point, but this setting of filters, sifting and refining of materials, also communicates very clearly who is ultimately in control of the public life and framing of an artwork, irrespective of how diverse it may originally have been. As the artist begins to edit the work, confirmation bias sets in, limiting participants' space for self-determination, making the casual/incidental streamlined and professional, and betraying the hidden influence of hierarchical power structures.

Even so, within the discourse of contemporary performance art, non-professionalism becomes a sought after resource, valued for its potential to avoid the slickness of proficiency, and side-step the familiar 'art world' taint. The presence of the artist's body is no longer as crucial as it was in the performance art of the 70's and 80's, its function replaced by a practice of 'delegating' other bodies to perform the act of being present; of embodiedness (2012:219). As this particular practical trajectory develops, the body becomes a self-conscious proxy for social and participatory concerns, its material, somatic qualities – its bone and flesh – relegated to the savage, primal beginnings of performance art.

Moreover, the bodies which house these skills begin to be placed more evidently into the interpretative matrix of a performance. The fact of these bodies and lived realities, sampled from outside the arts, are hungrily absorbed as readymade fragments; curios from the world beyond the work. This faux-inclusiveness is an extension of the complicated relationships between artists and non-artists, where attempts to equalise result in loaded and strangely wrought relational zones (Rayner, 2002:544).

In comparing performance art to theatre, Bishop explains that the protocol which defines the performer's relationship to time and labour within the latter comes out of a much longer and more established tradition (2012:231). In art historical terms, the direct, mystical link between the artist's hand and the work has only recently been wrested from the Modernist obsession with subjectivity, and an investment in ideas of genius. At last, the causal link between the work and the body is loosened, and this gradual relinquishing of control introduces new kinds of risks and emergent outcomes.

It also opens up new kinds of ethical problems, where what is at stake is no longer purely ideology, reputation or abstract commerce, but the mishandling of other people within the borders of the work (of course exploitation and creative production predate participatory performance art in many other ways) (2012:234). Like the destructive romance attached to the Modern avant garde, and the deconstruction of

representative modes in theatre practice, once harnessed, unpredictability becomes mired in technique – becomes conventionalised.

Matthew's function as a performer in the room is also in some ways intended to be placating – yes, there are parts of this performance hidden away, but look, there is also a person in the room with you. For their part, the bodies of the players; present but out of sight; do not lose vigour. They are not inert and unthinking, like ghosts; they are corporeal and intervening, like poltergeists. Though invisible, the effect would not have been the same to have these bodies off-site. The adjacent fact of them manufactures a physical tension between the audience and the players.

Adorno describes the terms of engagement between cognition and the body more succinctly:

*Thought presses close to its object, as if through touching, tasting, it wanted to transform itself.*

(in Buck-Moss, 1966:11:83)

## 6. MASTERS/CLOAKS

*The master presupposes that what the student learns is precisely what [she] teaches [them]. This is the master's notion of transmission: there is something on one side, in one mind or one body – a knowledge, a capacity, an energy – that must be transferred to the other side, into the other's mind or body*

(Ranciere, 2007:277)

This problem of the position of the audience – of treating them as either extraneous material, or absorbing them completely into the fabric of the work as participants – has been an enduring one in both the theoretical and practical trajectory of my MA. Being torn between a fascination with the secrets embedded in theatre, and a desire to produce spaces of play and accessibility has resulted in attempts at an exploded diagram of performance systems in the hopes of recombining their disparate parts to support a range of experiences wired for emergent interactions, rather than or in addition to illustration. Participation and viewership can, on the face of things, seem antithetical. When exposed to 'stage light', the qualities of ease, and intimacy, and the existence of subjective, interior spaces of thought and process, often shrivel up or are lost.

In *DUNGEONS&DISCOURSE* (2014), the very first project I conceived as part of my Masters, the audience was excluded from the entire performance, afforded access only via a conversation with participants after the event was over. This, I hoped, would keep the experience of the players whole and safe. Six months later, *Journey* allowed the audience in, if indirectly, via Matthew's translation of the story.

Over the last two years, I have been engaged in a gradual revealing of information – a building of trust, cautiously moving between play and *play* – between actual experience and the representation of experience. This partition between watching and generating endures; its seam not erased or hidden through so-called 'immersive practice'. In the context of this Masters research, the goal is not to elide but to galvanise – to make both sides hyper-aware of each other's existence, kept apart by the mirage of diegesis; their experiences simultaneous, but distinct.

In *The Emancipated Spectator* (2007), Ranciere questions the postmodern thinking, advanced by theorists like Boal and Artaud, that spectatorship as it has existed in the theatre is fundamentally passive and unproductive (Ranciere, 2007:272). This thinking is paralleled in Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, which imagines the position of watching, sitting, viewing, as one which exposes the viewer to ideological hypnosis, keeping them immobile in the sparkling trap of representation (In Ranciere, 2007:274). Ranciere proposes that to find it necessary to submerge the spectator into the participant in order to make their experience productive is in tacit agreement with the idea that looking and hearing are essentially passive and disempowered activities (2007:277). He also calls for attention to be paid to the relationship between

participation and viewership – to see it as a relation, as well as a separation. He says; “We don’t need to turn spectators into actors. We do need to acknowledge that every spectator is already an actor in [their] own story, and that every actor is in turn the spectator of the same kind of story.” (2007:279)

This theory is perhaps put into practice in works of immersive theatre such as Punchdrunk’s *Sleep No More* (Punchdrunk Theatre Company, 2011), a non-linear deconstruction of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* installed in a massive warehouse in downtown New York, totalling more than 100 intricately designed rooms and chambers (Worthen, 2012:82). In a single evening, *Sleep No More* runs from beginning to end three times, allowing audience members to revisit or seek out new scenes during each cycle. Viewership is self-determined – visitors may choose to wander alone, or to follow individual performers as they dart around the space, pausing to enact vignettes and performative tableaux. The eerie birdlike masks that audiences are asked to wear go some way towards delineating those who watch and those who act. This becomes a faulty binary, however, in a production which asks viewers to “be bold” – to make individualistic choices around what they want to see and how they want to shape their narrative and experience (Alston, 2013:133). This increase in agency and accessibility comes with a price; the flatness of traditional theatre – with its promises of totality and wholeness of gesture – is lost. Viewers have traded full, sensible narratives for broken, incomplete experiences – the production is far too expansive to be seen in one night<sup>7</sup>, and may leave people wondering what they missed as much as considering what they have seen.

*Sleep No More* influenced much of the logic of *CLOAKS*, my Major MA production (See Figure 5). In my conception of *CLOAKS*, multiple groups of participants are invited to play the same *Live Action Role Play* game in the same space, and asked to ignore other groups playing, or use them as part of their separate story<sup>8</sup>. Players form groups of three as they enter the space, each choosing a differently coloured cloak to wear which corresponds to the character they have chosen to play<sup>9</sup>. This work retains the subject matter, content and structure of *Journey from the Centre of the Earth*, but reformats it so that it is spatial, rather than only vocal and mental, letting the story live in three dimensions. These groups navigate, scene by scene, the game *Journey from the Centre of the Earth*, doing their best to ignore the other triads doing the

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<sup>7</sup> *Sleep No More* has developed a cult following, with fans returning multiple times, sharing detailed accounts of their experiences, posting viewing strategies, maps, discoveries of hidden rooms and secret performances on various blogs, forums and wiki’s. Such as this one: [http://sleepnomore.wikia.com/wiki/Sleep\\_No\\_More\\_Wiki](http://sleepnomore.wikia.com/wiki/Sleep_No_More_Wiki)

<sup>8</sup> This dynamic of *not looking*, of parallel but peripheral existences, has been influenced in no small part by China Miéville’s *City and the City* (2009), in which the inhabitants of two different cities exist in the same geographical space, compelled by some quasi-mystical convention to completely ignore the people, buildings and activities of the other city, existing in almost perfect separation.

<sup>9</sup> *The Ventriloquist* takes red, *The Mentalist* takes blue, and *The Spiritualist* takes green

same. They are joined by a glittery-cloaked facilitator (or *Game Master*), who responds to their improvised storytelling by embodying various world elements or invented characters.

Its participants are no longer sitting down, but enabled to walk around and embody their characters. Its spectators, too, are acknowledged in their physical occupation of the space, able to follow groups of participants around, pursuing their discrete narratives at will. Entering the space, viewers are obliged to don black cloaks, bringing them into aesthetic and atmospheric cohesion with the performance games unfolding. I think of this dynamic as a mutual haunting – individual game-groups and audience members hang in parallel to each other – close enough to touch, each existing in their own realm of interpretation, experience and interiority.

*CLOAKS* is to be performed together with two other of my MA Projects – my one person show *The Harrowing*, and *Journey from the Centre of the Earth*.

*The Harrowing* will be the first performance on the programme. In *The Harrowing* (See Figure 7), the audience watches a projection screen as I stare mutely at my laptop and create an avatar in *Dragon Age: Origins*<sup>10</sup>(a half-elf mage), after which I begin to play the opening quest, summarily dying at the hands of a low-level sprit wraith. Here, an inscrutable performer pursues a private fantasy, allowing spectators to watch their progress, seemingly with complete disregard – each side of the stage doing their best not to properly acknowledge the other. This play is, as Blau says, “staged in the mind” (Blau, 2006:236). This is the only work in which I directly perform, and the only one in which there is any predetermined narrative. I’ve put this work first in my final series of productions to ground the themes of the others in a more concrete, reliable way – a moment to have ideas pinned down before entering a space of chaos and uncertainty. It also has the most explicitly theatrical framing, and, perhaps, the most straightforward relationship between performer and audience.

Thereafter, audiences are invited to watch *Journey from the Centre of the Earth* (Figure 6), and then *CLOAKS*. While these two works use exactly the same plot and characters, their individual iterations produce vastly different opportunities for viewership, play and participation, variously facilitating and/or blocking access to their performance processes. After watching a distilled, contained telling of the story of *Journey*, *CLOAKS* attempts to blow it open, moving from one hidden game to seven porous, simultaneously unfolding ones.

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<sup>10</sup> Created by Electronic Arts/BioWare, 2009



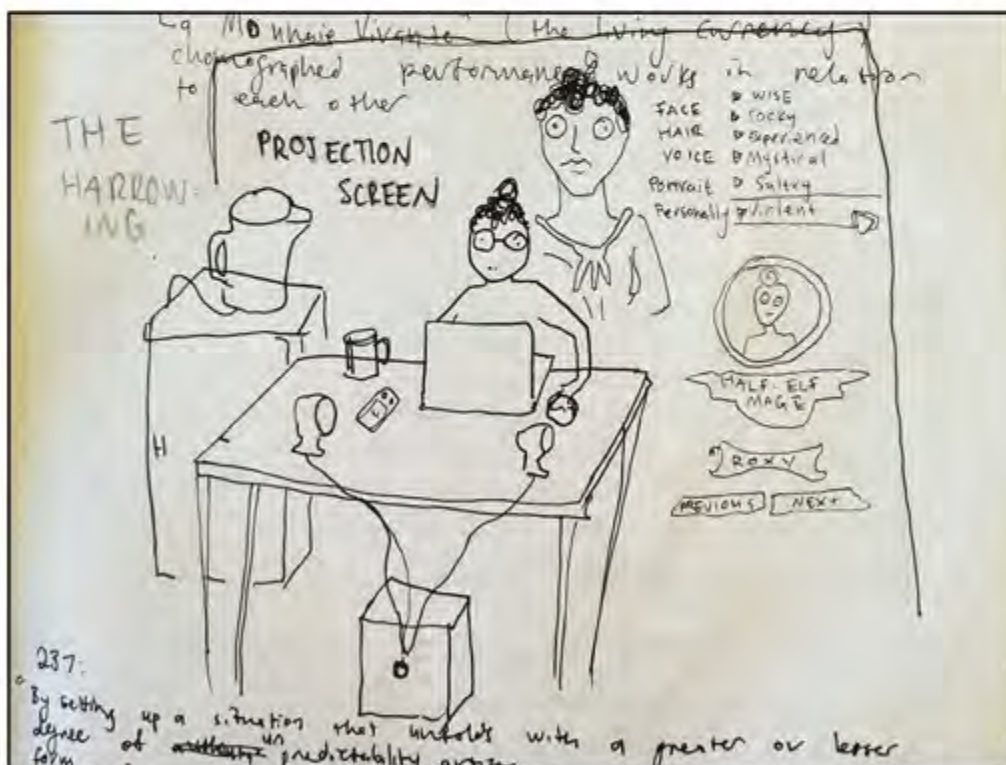
[Figure 5]

Working diagram for *CLOAKS*, part of my proposed final MA production



[Figure 6]

Working production diagram for *Journey from the Centre of the Earth*, my Medium Project to be performed as part of my final MA programme



[Figure 7]

Working production drawing for *The Harrowing*, my one person show to be re-performed as part of my final MA programme

## 7. Conclusion

*Expression is relieved of its accidental character by thought, on which it toils as thought toils on expression. Only an expressed thought is succinct, rendered succinct by its presentation in language.*

(Adorno, 1966: 18)

The prevailing curiosity driving this research has been around how to handle and communicate interior worlds. When a person is deciding whether or not to say something; whether or not to externalise a fragment of their interior world; these parts, floating nearest to the surface, change from being unconsciously kept ideas to consciously withheld ones – they are changed from incidental thoughts into secrets. Momentarily divesting ‘secrets’ of notions of shame, I mean to say that the formation of a secret is a thought or experience being prepared for the possibility of communication, whether or not this communication is realised. It is positioning a thought in relation to other people – imagining how it may be received, and what the consequences might be for divulging it. Once externalised, a thought enters into a space with social, political and cultural implications; is given weight and responsibility.

In negotiating this transformation, worldly characteristics are assigned to the emerging secret – decisions which impact what it could look, sound, feel, or seem like to others, and how the world might manipulate or capitalise on it. Though the choosing of how a thing will be spoken, physicalised, written, and so on, may be made on the spot or only after lengthy consideration, it is always done through a mediation between self and situation. When and if this fragment is communicated, the primary expressive faculties are rallied (as roughly portrayed in the three central chapters of this paper) – the body, mouth and brain must come together to produce an approximate; to help make this thought comprehensible to others (Bailes, 2011:20).

This is as true of personal expression as it is of creative media like fiction, theatre, and performance, which I have tried to utilise as a slightly more concrete manifestation of this process of articulation. Here, the carrying of an invisible idea through into form, and into an explicit engagement with the minds of others, represents an extension of the innumerable decisions and micro-secrets that sustain normal interpersonal interaction. The act of deciding how to express an idea in performance becomes consciously systemised, much like the components of art, philosophy, music and mathematics are used and systemised by Hesse’s privileged scholars in *The Glass Bead Game*.

And so, in Modernist drama and metadrama, where the trap of representation is being interrogated, this interrogation simultaneously becomes codified, folding back into a development of technique, and making the trap anew. Responding to these kinds of problems, Ionesco, describing *The Chairs* (1952), asks the following question on behalf of his work; "How do you represent the nonrepresentational and *not* represent the representational?" (Ionesco in Milutinovic, [1964]2006:342).

Attempts to solve this contradiction within Modernist theatrical practices have worked towards ways of becoming openly self-aware or self-referential – in Ionesco with characters like the Orator in *Chairs*, and in Stoppard with existential bit characters Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, 1966). The tools of story and character are used against themselves, eroding their fittings within the performance machine, and in coming loose, setting the whole system jangling; inviting chance, chaos and failure. In heightening the existential concerns of theatre and undermining of the integrity and authority of meaning and narrative (even while remaining tethered to narrative, as these playwrights are), a space is made for the possibility of real wobbliness to join rehearsed wobbliness – for the multitude of creative choices and splintered conventions to invoke the void as well as to illustrate it.

This paper (as well as the practical works produced as part of my Masters degree) has been concerned with the moment of choosing – fanning this moment out in space, time, and purpose to reveal the tenuous links and gaps which result in the eventual form of the object expressed. As these moments are knitted together, the relationship between the origin and the teller of a secret becomes increasingly unclear. I wanted to push this lack of clarity and synchronicity, where multiple authors simultaneously conceive of and tell multiple secrets – some their own, some borrowed and changed. The normal sequence of representation is scrambled – roles and responsibilities usually assumed by performers, technicians, and storytellers are cross-wired. Theatre is uniquely positioned to act as a blueprint or prototype for this kind of process (Bishop, 2012:49); its elements of chaos, ephemerality and collaboration intersecting with principles of aesthetics, design and efficacy. It is precisely through the experimental activation of these elements that new forms of creative communication can be discovered and established.

Through this most recent research, however, I am becoming increasingly cautious of depoliticising these processes of creation and expression, especially with regards to participatory art-making, which co-opts the cognitive abilities of other people. This mode of working skates by on promises of inclusiveness and democracy; of respect for and acknowledgements of the secrets and subjectivities of its participants, all the while weaving these subjectivities into pre-formed ideologies and structures. It makes use of people who may not be familiar with the social and economic codes of exchange within arts and drama, who may be drawn in on a favour, by novelty, curiosity, or payment (though proper compensation is a rare enough

occurrence). That is not to say that this way of working is inherently more exploitative than any other, only that its potential for exploitation, and its framing within the discourse of the performing arts, requires attention (Read, 2013:154-155). It is in these kinds of scenarios that performance tools face the greatest risk of misuse.

The concealing and revealing of thought and knowledge is inescapably loaded and political, though it may be put in neat, clean, abstract terms. Social and creative systems emerge out of particular dynamics of power and influence, and an examination of these systems as though they are 'natural' products of human interaction is dangerous and limited. As my final project, *CLOAKS* is a practical attempt to tease out and perhaps destabilise these insidious power relations in its broad-spectrum democratisation of participation and play, though its strategies are by no means conclusive. Further research continuing along similar lines might look at ways of pursuing these ideas while holding them (and myself) more accountable for their positioning within larger socio-political contexts, with a special interrogation of art making and systems design.

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## THE ADVERSARY

### I

In cold spring, a bird of passage, species  
You don't recognize, precedes you, just as  
The hills retreat into dusk or fog, blurring  
Towards the last color. What I might have said –  
But the heart's gone out of it, so that  
Late footprints only fill with mud, blunted  
Purpose. Removed in the house of your thoughts  
You hear nothing. A word falls from parted lips  
Revealed in the dim light as almost half  
A world; though you by force of being everywhere  
Never appear. Who believes he follows his own  
Intentions, if all of them end with you? Again  
The city ranges its trophies among the clouds,  
A final myth. Nothing left but the desire  
To speak the truth. This is yours, the silver  
Cord is severed, and the case reopens

### II

You survive, you have accommodated  
The miracle, and nothing was transfigured.  
Your mind, the cold day,  
The hills  
Flatten to scenery, just as expected,  
For only to appearances are you wise.

Alfred Corn