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**On the 'thesis by performance': a
feminist research method for the
practice-based PhD.**

N SINGH

PhD

2016

On the ‘thesis by performance’: a feminist research method for the practice-based PhD.

Nicola Singh

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements of the University
of Northumbria at Newcastle for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Research undertaken in the Faculty of
Arts, Design and Social Sciences

October 2016

Abstract

This doctoral project challenges the conventions of academic enquiry that, by default, still largely shape the procedures of practice-based PhDs. It has been submitted in the form of a 'thesis by performance' - a thesis that can only be realized through live readings that present knowledge production as something done in and around bodies and their contexts. The aim has been to reposition institutional and educational knowledge in an intimate, subjective relationship with the body, particularly the researchers own body.

The ideas gathered together in this 'thesis by performance' address the body and its context using material that was sometimes appropriated, sometimes invented and sometimes autobiographically constructed. From the start, these approaches and sources were used to directly address those listening in the present, the 'now' in which words were spoken. An approach influenced by feminist thinkers in the arts, Kathy Acker, Chris Kraus, Katrina Palmer and Linda Stupart. The methodological development of the research has been entirely iterative – developed through the making and presenting of performance texts. Each text was presented live as part of mixed-media installations, experimenting with how language and voice can be visualised and choreographed.

Consequently, the resulting 'thesis by performance' is a doctoral submission unimpeded by a printed script - only an introductory statement and two appendices are available outside of a live reading. In this way the process of performance can inspire new terms of reference in the field of postgraduate practice-led research entirely on its own terms.

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Thank you to Oliver Beck and to my family for their unwavering support and to all the friends who have supported and inspired me throughout the project.

Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval was sought and granted by the University Ethics Committee on the 25.02.14. No changes have required a further submission.

I declare that the Word Count of this Thesis is 30, 866 words

Name: Nicola Singh

Signature:

Date: 10.10.16

Introduction

“Out of North Shields fish quay, an uncle on my mother’s side still works a trawler. Here mutuality occurs between people and the sea. Fishers know their bodies as sites of apprehension of the happenings there. On a hard chair sat in a gallery, my experience here is that of being positioned in movement. Not at sea, but some sort of water place. There’s a feeling of bordered lapping; like a low lipped bowl. ‘Sea legs’ refers to balance – as our bodies’ response to handling movement. On the seat is my body; my site of apprehension. The most evenly spoken passages denote the place. When inside the words swell to push. To stay in the drift, I stretch to the end of my leg and take off one shoe for balance.”

‘A low lipped bowl’ by Julie Crawshaw (2017), written in response to my ‘thesis by performance’ (with reference to Maurstad¹, 2010).

This thesis takes the form of a text for performance in the context of a PhD viva; a text that speaks directly to the listener as a discursive, physical and subjective entity. The thesis does not privilege a certain type of knowledge but creates a kind of ‘being human situated-ness’ for the listener. It is through this mode of exchange that the meaning of the research is communicated, through the event of a performance and the performative nature of the context. I have used this method as a device to situate knowledge production as something that is done in and around bodies and their contexts.

¹ Maurstad, A. (2010). Cultural Seascapes as Embodied Knowledge, in (Eds. Grønseth, A.S. and Davis, D. L.) *Mutuality and Empathy: Self and Other in the Ethnographic Encounter*. Herefordshire: Sean Kingston Publishing.

My research, this 'thesis by performance,' has been the core 'finding' of my PhD. It directly addresses notions of knowledge production; creating scenes of bodies in contexts through writing as a performance, in relation to institutional contexts, educational procedures, in relation to a subjectivity and an intimate relationship to a body or one's own body.

The thesis was written iteratively over a two-year period, through the making and presenting of performance texts, and composed by combining appropriated text, cultural and theoretical references, ideas and objects, with lived experience. A definition of appropriation here includes practices through which original material is copied, re-written, written into, punctuated, interrupted, translated and absorbed – all with the intention to incant/recite/make audible. Appropriation was a less straightforward way of processing the information I consumed and experienced over the course of my research. It is a way of conflating the processes of reading and writing, where performance becomes a kind of citational practice through reading aloud.

Moments of the text - a text written for performance, for reading aloud - also reflect on the act of writing itself and the action of speaking writing. The text recognizes the momentary mutability of language: edits can be read 'live' to an audience, punctuation becomes a gesture or choreographed movement, and slippages between narrator/subject/object are, in effect, experiments with direct address and the process of writing from the body.

Autobiographic material in the text comes from personal accounts of bodily functions and emotions. This content speaks directly to the physical and emotional presence of the listeners. This is the fundamental aim of the 'thesis by performance', to prioritize practices in which our bodies physically traverse and

negotiate knowledge, both thematically and conceptually. I propose that this positioning of our bodies in relation to knowledge production should be at the centre of development in practice-based postgraduate research.

In relation to the established practice-based PhD process, a 'thesis by performance' poses questions about what kind of relationship is required between examiner and research/er to enable examination and defense. My 'findings' speak back to this process by demonstrating a live, real-time mode of knowledge production for my examiners. A mode of engagement (or ontology) that was based on presence and the inter-subjective nature of criticality – the idea that we all bring our own subjectivities to bear on circuits of meaning in relation to others. The examination of my research embraced this idea, producing a way of knowing that was based on a listeners experience and presence.

It is because of this - this live, situated, chemistry between bodies in real time and space - that the 'thesis by performance' has not been included here in the final submission of my doctoral project. It remains a text for performance, which is only accessible in the act of performance. The 'thesis by performance' as a printed or 'read' document does not represent the knowledge attained.

Julie Crawshaw removed one shoe while listening to my thesis. She said she wanted to feel the heat of her foot against the gallery floor, almost like tethering her body in the lapping movement of the performance. Julie's gesture should, I suggest, prompt practice-based researchers to think about how bodies physically respond to, or are attended to, in our research.

Being together, the presence of other people's - especially other women's - voices within the dialogic of institutional research space, is the theme of my primary

appendix that accompanies this introduction. This is a transcript of a conversation between myself and my close friend Harriet Plewis, who is also undertaking a practice-based PhD at Northumbria University.

I get this mad thing with Harriet, when we're having a conversation; I feel that somehow she does this really great thing where she listens with the whole of herself/her whole body which makes me feel like I can give out in a way that I can't with other people. There is this intense possibility for listening and speaking, for honest frankness and intimacy in these conversations.

I have offered this transcribed dialogic space I developed with Harriet as a demonstration of the deliberations, uncertainties, antagonisms and hopes that led me to write a thesis that would only ever be performed. It was important to me that this account was captured in the moment of conversation, which is kind of 'unguarded' or un-institutionalised space; where I feel confident to use my own register of language and terms of reference outside of academic, philosophical or contemporary art vernaculars. This transcript was given to my examiners prior to the viva voce examination of my 'thesis by performance'; to set in motion their involvement with the acts of speaking, listening and reading, and to foreground my emphasis on duration and temporality ahead of the submission.

The dialogic spaces in my research, generated amongst my friends, between predominantly women artists and practitioners, represents the ethical dimension of my research. It realizes the feminist position of my research. Where I have focused on being with women through the experience of writing, making art and performance, these processes become a matter of embodied thinking. And whilst the term 'friend' does not feel quite sufficient, it does suggest a kind of 'being with' someone that generates an ethical-ness of wanting to speak together. A kind of

friendship that acknowledges and recuperates the voices of other friends, through one's own language and knowledge, refusing the formalities that regulate bodies, speech and feelings. It is a kind of friendship that creates spaces in which it's okay to take off a shoe and feel the heat of your skin against the floor. With this friendship the possibility of practice-based research is directly brought to bear on the body.

Conversation between Nicola Singh & Harriet Plewis (2016)

The following document has been designed as a primer for the experience of examining the thesis/script or 'thesis by performance'. The document precedes the thesis, which will be excerpted and presented through performed reading to the examination team in advance of the viva voca examination.

This text is a transcribed conversation between two friends. It explores their shared experience of undertaking a practice-led PhD at Northumbria University. In this conversation, they discuss and position their research through their encounters with other practices and texts. The format of an intimate conversation - recorded, transcribed, edited and made public in this document - places their experience of researching, their emotions and feelings about their own research, within the context of the PhD examination. This emphasis resonates with the thematic content and conceptual focus of thesis/script.

This text has not been punctuated in order that the immediacy of putting thoughts into words in an intimate conversation is consciously felt by the reader.

Conversation One

N yeah?

H yeah it² was okay

I haven't digested it all yet though like I've no idea what it was really but yep I did feel really conscious that the Barad³ text⁴ was so dense and I don't know man I was just very aware that I was imposing a text that's really dense on people and I didn't like that so I was hyper aware

you know when you're in a workshop situation that you're responsible for and you tend to be really aware of what you're doing to others like I was quite aware of that and it only made it worse cos of the text I think and so I was hyper sensitive to sort of sighs or people looking on their phone

N in a way that stopped it that meant it wasn't so productive?

H maybe and maybe also cos it kinda felt like

I don't even know if it's okay to say this or even if I think this I dunno if I feel okay with saying this but it felt quite class divide it felt classist the thing a little bit or at least it did for me it just felt like that Barad text precludes people and I feel like that's not even about education it's about being it's about being able to rest in uncertainty and not freaking out do you know what I mean?

² Harriet Plewis, *Adorn* (Newcastle: Protohome, 2016). A performance made with Grace Denton, Alice MacKenzie and Melissa Macpherson. On Thursday July 14th, Protohome's interior was decorated in response to Karen Barad's text 'Nature's Queer Performativity'. Four readers attempted to create an environment in which this deep 'n' dense text could be experienced and felt, as well as read. PROTOHOME is a self-build housing project, which is temporarily sited and open to the public at Upper Steenberg in the Ouseburn, Newcastle upon Tyne, from May-August 2016. *Adorn* was commissioned by Newcastle based arts organisation Wunderbar.

³ Karen Barad, *Feminist Theorist* (1956)

⁴ Karen Barad, *Nature's Queer Performativity* (Copenhagen: KVINDER, KØN & FORSKNING NR. 1-2 / Women, Gender and Research, 2012)

N and you feel like that's a middle class thing to rest easy in that?

H I do think so like I think it's a privilege thing I dunno about a class system but definitely a privilege it's a privilege like in the same way that to have a good easy relationship with authority is like

you know like if someone is pulling their authority on you and you're able to rest in that grey area and be like "I don't have to do what you say" to like question that well I kinda feel like it's the same with this text it's like you're gonna have to stay in the dark for a bit and not worry that's where you are and I do think that is a privilege and it sounds strange like contradictory to say it's a privilege to stay in the dark

one of the interesting things that did come out of it though was the difference between cos at one point we had a microphone and an amp and were reading the text and that was as it always is quite shitty you know you introduce a microphone into that kind of situation and immediately it becomes like performance art and immediately that association means so many things right so when the generator went out and there was no amplification then it became like someone trying to read something like they just happened to be reading it aloud but they were trying to understand something as they went along so like repeating sentences repeating words going back over things and that's what I wanted to try and get out of it the sense of a group trying to work something out together like a laboratory atmosphere

N like a reading reading group?

H yeah exactly

N they did that do you know that Dora Garcia⁵ project for Finnegans Wake⁶ I saw the film at the Venice Biennale one year it was really great they read

⁵ Dora Garcia, Artist (1965)

like a line a session or something something like that and they've been going for like twenty years it's an amazing protracted way of reading and understanding the text as a group

H wow that's really interesting I was thinking about that project I remember we had a Dora Garcia book in Crossley Terrace in the bathroom like a toilet book I remember being on the loo and reading it like years and years ago

but anyway how was your reading group project⁷ what happened what went down?

N ah bit shite I thought really

H ah really?

N yeah I think so

H shite

N I mean I was really into the idea of thinking about the way in which the clay could have represented or stood in for a critical engagement with a text and you know be read and I guess I had this weight though a bit like what you were saying about the Barad text project of offering a text to a group of people and then feeling really self-conscious about it

H was it your text?

N no no it was Eve Sedgwick⁸ *A Dialogue on Love*⁹ so it's

⁶ Dora Garcia, *The Joycean Society* (Venice: Venice Biennale 2013, 2013). A film that documents the collective efforts of a reading group that have met every week since 1985 to read James Joyce's novel, *Finnegan's Wake* (1939). Commissioned by Foundation Prince Pierre de Monaco, XLVeme Prix International d'Art Contemporain.

⁷ the reading group at Northern Charter, initiated by Nadia Hebson, is an open reading project that explores the work of women writers and the subjective female voice. Nicola proposed a project to the reading group for their July 2016 meeting. She suggested the group read Eve Sedgwick's *A Dialogue on Love* (2000) and that they collectively sculpt a thumb pot/bowl together whilst discussing the text. Nicola wondered whether the pot could stand in as an embodied representation of a critical engagement with a text. Could the pot be 'read' in this context?

have you read it?

H *Touching Feeling?*¹⁰

N ah no it's *A Dialogue on Love* and it's her conversations with her counselor cos she goes and sees a counsellor for depression after breast cancer treatment she goes and sees this guy Shannon who's like a real person I checked it online the book is a mix of her reflections on the therapy his notes from the therapy session and haiku

she's sharing memories about her life and her friends and family through this account of her therapy

I was into the bits about female friendship and her relations to other women

she talks about masturbation about how she masturbated madly through her late childhood and early teens cos it was the only way she could feel at ease with herself or try and understand herself it's like she has this idea of like erotically knowing something in like an Audre Lorde¹¹ way that's very much part of her relationship with herself and with her friends and towards her work but actually not in her sex that she has

H that relation that's not present in her sex?

N no so she doesn't feel any of that like self-knowing when she's having sex with someone else but she feels it in terms of handling knowledge or handling friendship she positions masturbation as a kind of important activity of self-knowing for her as a woman

⁸ Eve Sedgwick, *Academic and Writer* (1950 – 2009)

⁹ Eve Sedgwick, *A Dialogue on Love* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000)

¹⁰ Eve Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002)

¹¹ Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The erotic as Power," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984)

I felt nervous about going to the reading group though cos of inviting everyone to do this clay thing and having picked the book the thing

the session just became us trying to piece the book together from memory instead of a process of reflecting on or working through the text and maybe it was cos we didn't have our book or notes or whatever with us like we usually do cos we were all handling the clay so you know maybe the clay exercise was too much of a distraction and maybe like our focus and our energy was too fractured

it felt fucked up though cos we didn't or we couldn't maybe cos of the clay we couldn't engage with the point of the reading group or at least like my idea of what the reading group is which is like to read highly subjective texts written by women and to reflect on our experience of reading them and to share our own experiences in relation to some of the ideas and themes and to generate knowledge in this way

I don't know if we've ever actually achieved that though actually like in other meetings with different texts but and you know the group isn't like my thing or whatever so I shouldn't rep

I don't know I just felt really frustrated

H so it just became a practice of recall?

N yeah I mean I transcribed it and basically it was all recall apart from one section when someone spoke about the way they emphatically feel towards other women and that was interesting

I wonder though clay aside if there are just too many vibes going on in that reading group though for it to be the kind of space where everyone is up for you know

like when we were talking about the masturbation scenes I got a bit like you know “we read that Kathy Acker¹² text last time and all the masturbation scenes in that are all really fucking aggressive and I felt like that was an important depiction for that text but how can we think about masturbation like the way it’s referenced and positioned in this text” and I think I got a bit like you know and then I had the urge to talk about this thing cos we’ve just put mirrors up in the bedroom and when I was rehearsing for that performance at the BALTIC¹³ Book Fair¹⁴ I did it laying on the floor in front of the mirrors and then I masturbated in front of the mirror and I felt like I wanted to share that experience with the reading group you know in relation to the Sedgwick text and to her account of masturbation in a like expanded sense

it was interesting I would have liked to have had that conversation but I totally felt like I couldn’t and maybe that’s all just my own shit though like my insecurities in that group of women

I’ve transcribed it though the conversation from the reading group and I’ve adapted it into a script where the performer is moulding clay whilst she’s speaking so it’s kind of like a conversation between the clay and the reader speaker but I’m not sure whether to do anything with it cos it’s not very good like

H what makes it not good?

N well there’s not really any content cos the conversation that came out of the reading group was quite slight

H would it not even be interesting as a piece of recall of piecing together a book by memory a text via memory like thinking about what’s present and what’s not present?

¹² Kathy Acker, *Writer (1947 – 1997)*

¹³ BALTIC Centre For Contemporary Art, based in Newcastle and founded in 2002.

¹⁴ Nicola Singh, *All The Girls Together, and what they really really want* (Newcastle: BALTIC Artist’s Book Fair, 2016). Commissioned by Foundation Press, a Risograph press and publishing facility run by the Foundation Art and Design Programme at the University of Sunderland.

N I dunno really I mean not yet anyway

I was gonna show it back to the reading group but I've been thinking of how to like balance acknowledging the process like that this text started as like a book and went into a conversation into a pot and then into a performance and like how to balance that with like the actual content with what the text is expressing to the listener

at the moment the text feels quite hostile I think like when people were recalling stuff from the book it was like "she did this" and "she says this" and then partly I just crudely turned that into the first person like so it's "I think this" and "I want this"

H what so the "she" become "I"?

N yeah so it's cos there's a bit at the beginning of the book where she's like interviewing this guy Shannon to be her new counselor she's saying "you know you have to be a feminist and I'm into queer theory and so you have to get that" and she's asserting that

she's struggling to know whether or not he's the right person for her until she

which I think is quite a tender moment

she falls down or like slips down a grassy verge as she's walking somewhere before her counselling session and there's like a clump of mud or whatever from the verge that she puts out of place as she falls and then later when she's coming back she sees Shannon walking down the same verge where she fell and like he's floating like he is weightless like a balloon that's how it's described and he notices the mud out of place and puts it back in its place he's tending to it and she sees it as like a moment of intimacy

H yeah absolutely

at a remove

N yeah right and after that things become quickly like fused between them

H that's so interesting I mean I would feel that I've always wanted to talk or think about the therapist and analysand relationship I mean I think that my therapist voted Leave cos we had our session a few days after the Referendum¹⁵ and it sort of came out I mean she didn't divulge she doesn't do that but some of the stuff she was saying I was like "fuck she voted Leave" and now I'm not so sure whether I can go back I feel a bit like sort of unreconstructed whether I should get over that or not

if you've seen somebody replace a bit of mud into a hole as like a care a tending exercise sort of thing not an exercise but a gesture I can really see how that would repair a cut like if you needed it to or repair a schism and that's really interesting to talk about

N yeah and outside the therapy space right this guy Shannon feeling the need the impulse to

his natural reaction to pat that piece of mud in place

H yeah right and not under the microscope where we're acting and I mean to me that relates to masturbating in front of a mirror to a certain extent cos like masturbating in front of a mirror freaks me out a bit cos I think that I think I've probably done that but I would be so aware that I was

ach you know cause it has that kind of porn throwback hasn't it in terms of fucking in front of a mirror and that the mirror would represent a camera or an outside person it would be very difficult to be with yourself in front of a mirror right?

N yeah okay sure although I mean I wasn't feeling that like that wasn't my experience I wasn't looking for someone to be looking back at me it was more like I was looking at myself but from a distance and you know I really

¹⁵ EU Referendum (2016)

don't like looking in the mirror but it felt a little bit like a way of dealing with my body

H okay yeah so just for you?

N well yeah like or something

H a situation that turned into a situation?

N yeah okay

H I mean I feel a bit shan a bit shitty about automatically thinking that masturbating in front of a mirror would relate to a therapy situation in terms of when you're in therapy but when you're in the room it always feels like you're performing that's why people go like once a day or all week isn't it

like the whole idea of psychoanalysis is to go every morning or whatever apart from the weekend so you stop performing so you become this kind of so you're just bleating on cos it does feel like you're performing to each other to a certain extent and you know I feel that with my therapist and for me that relates cos it's like we're performing for each other but there's no camera or outlet to the outside world beyond the audience of each other

in the same way that masturbating in front of a mirror could be that cos you know I would worry that if it was me I wouldn't be enlightened enough to turn off the cop you know to think "this situation is just for you" there's no CCTV or anything but in the same way there's no CCTV in the analysis room but you feel like you're still posturing to a certain extent

N yeah the cop him

the thing that sticks up in my head

I mean some of that the bleating and the are you or are you not performing stuff that reminds me of those Robert Bresson¹⁶ cos he would get his actors to repeat and repeat and repeat so it loses all effect right

H yeah totally I wonder about that who else does that

also someone was telling me

and that's a really tough one cos it feels fucking autocratic that would be awash with difficulty for me I would want the same thing though for someone though to repeat and repeat and repeat almost like an automaton and stripped of any effect I can understand wanting that

it's a bit like me saying "you know you can't just put a text to someone without feeling heightened and aware of what you're putting onto a group or onto an actor or a reader" and I really felt that yesterday with that Barad project I was really aware that I was coming with a suggestion or set of suggestions and like thinking "is this okay" and like ethical is a tricky word but like is it ethical to I mean that's a shitty word in the situation but then if you were like Robert Bresson you don't even think about that and this guy that I met he did the same thing he wasn't talking about Bresson but he said "ah yeah I rehearsed this film again and again and again and again and I noticed on the film when I watched it back that the actress was turning blue and I noticed that cos the actress got progressively more blue cos she got so cold and by the end it was a continuity problem cos she was so blue" and I was so shocked I was just like

N uh cause he wanted that flat effect from her?

H yeah he wanted some you know nothing flat flatness a 2D ness that kind of bro-ambition for flatness I was like "ah but her body rebelled" it's like fuck

I don't know it takes a certain autism I suppose to not to not think about the effect that you're having on another being another person

¹⁶ Robert Bresson, Film Director (1901 - 1999)

N totally

fuck that flat effect

I do that though

H what when you talk when you perform?

N when I perform

H yeah that's true

N I don't know if it comes from I don't know how it could but maybe it comes from singing training?

H do you think?

N no probably not

I was asked to do this paper for this research group¹⁷ between Newcastle Northumbria and Durham that's about working with autobiography I did that thing I did in that poetry conference type thing¹⁸ the paper¹⁹ I did with the vocoder and this guy said to me "did you notice or do you always read in that way" cos he said I was reading that like all my phrasing was in like seven beats or something

I don't know I guess it must be like a natural phrasing that I write and speak in

I hate that though the measured flat flatness

¹⁷ Biographical Narrative Research Network Regional Meeting, (Newcastle, Northumbria University: 2015)

¹⁸ SHIFT: a night of performance & poetry, (Newcastle: Northern Charter, 2015)

¹⁹ Nicola Singh, *Where and when is whose voice uttering whose thought through whose mouth and what for?* (Newcastle: Northern Charter, 2015)

H hmm yeah it's super desirable in a way for some people though

N yeah sure but I think I just like wanna express ideas actually in the way that they make me feel maybe that sounds stupid to say and you know I tried to be more alive with this script for the Book Fair like actively more alive with it to the point that when I finished the reading I thought "ah shit, did I just rap that?" I had to ask someone I had to say "did I just rap that?" they were like "err no you didn't"

H phew oh god that's brilliant but you know rap it's quite mono it does occupy one frequency it's just rhythm rather than tonal shifts not that I'm like a rap expert but it does just seem to have this one bandwidth and that's partly why it's so great I had the same thing not the same thing with Gus and obviously he comes from a totally different world like from the world of musical theatre which is a totally different world obviously but he saw a performance I did in Hackney which it was really bad but so Gus said afterwards "why is it that everyone who does performance art talks in that way?" he was like "why don't you just talk normally Haz?" I was like "I really thought I was trying to talk normally" and he was like "no you're talking like someone that does performance art" he was really interested to know what happens and I said genuinely "I thought it was cos I was trying to go for neutral" and he was like "you should just talk like yourself" and I said "we both know that's impossible you know I would just end up performing a version of myself which would then make it theatre"

N right cos then you'd be seeking to represent yourself cos you can't really just be yourself

H exactly nur nur I dunno

we're really different aren't we though cos I guess I'm really quite animated when I speak and like dyspraxic and sort of fidgety and you're like really quite calm or mostly it feels do you know what I mean ha like a sloth

N a sloth?

H sloths are the best

N it's just an exterior of calm it doesn't go deep

I do like that possibly though like that potential of being like energized or fueled on by nerves or from panic or anger right you know like owning it

H yeah I like that idea

I like that that energy could be like a rubber ring or floating device around your body that's used for good and not for evil and that you could be like "I'm gonna use my nerves for me and they're not necessary gonna transmit to the other people" and essentially that's control right I guess that's kinda what it's about whether it's a public relinquishment or not of control

I think that a lot when I do performance work if I'm the performer which I am trying not to be but when I do I feel like it's always abject abject abject abject and yeah I can't I can't marshal those things for good

N in a way that's to do with shame?

H yeah shame yeah definitely when I perform I'm like "what the fuck am I doing standing up sit down" I'm like an apology an apology for the action for standing and talking in front of people

N yeah I totally know that feeling like strongly but yet I still never really feel like I have that precarity in my voice even when I'm totally freaking out even that time I really almost fainted in that performance²⁰ for Musee Imaginaire²¹ like not unless I'm crying I don't think I have that middle ground

²⁰ Nicola Singh, *High Density Reconstituted Foam* (Newcastle: Northern Charter, 2014). Presented as part of *A Mixed Bill*. Curated and commissioned by Musee Imaginaire.

²¹ Musee Imaginaire arts organization, based in Newcastle and founded in 2013.

H yeah but you don't really have so much of a middle point between crying and not crying right you just cry right it's very clear

N okay yeah that's true although did I tell you about losing my shit at the yoga training thing?

H oh yeah I think so remind me though

N so when I was doing that pre and postnatal yoga teacher training thing this woman came in and spoke to us about chanting it was proper interesting she was speaking to us about different energy points and chakras in the body and what yoga Asana you can do to counter balance blockages or invigorate certain chakras and then she started to talk about blockages in the throat chakra²² she was talking about it and I just totally banshee-like started to cry out loud in front of all of these fucking women that I didn't know

it came out of nowhere I had to put my face inside my jumper cos I thought I was gonna have a fucking panic attack the women to my left and right rubbed me till I stopped I scared myself by having such a volatile reaction to her description though you know and I think like I know what some of that stuff is related to and where it's coming from but I was just surprised by the immediate

H the force of it?

N yeah right but then I was reading that in Chinese medicine a blockage in the throat chakra has to do with sexual repression

H ah yeah I was thinking about that in terms of your script and your description of the relationship between your jaw and your cervix

²² The Throat Chakra is associated with communication, expression, freedom, responsibility, and leadership. If the throat chakra becomes unbalanced, you may feel you are unable to communicate verbally, physically, and emotionally. The throat chakra connects us to our ability to express ourselves, therefore creating a number of issues if this chakra is blocked or unbalanced, particularly from subconscious attitudes or feelings becoming trapped and unable to surface.

I've been noticing and I've been thinking about it a lot recently cos I'm finding it impossible to relax my jaw so I'm getting a kind of I'm noticing that my jaw is getting bigger and bigger cos I'm not I feel unable to let go of it and it's affecting my lips and mouth I really feel it is but then I saw a photo of that guy I was sleeping with in Greece

he showed me a photo of him as a young boy and then him recently there were two photos and his jaw was the most pronounced thing between the two like the jaw seems to get so much more pronounced and sort of more locked in as we get older and that really sort of that's the thing that really changes your face shape

I was just wondering in a shitty I dunno quite dramatic way whether that is something that happens as we get older as we get more bigoted and as we get more sort of clinging on to our beliefs and unable to let go of things we hold in our jaws

N we lock down

H yeah we lock down we hold it in our jaws and then I just wonder for women what that means for the cervix I suppose just kinda a refusal a tight lipped refusal to take things in whether it's food or whatever it freaks me a bit that you sort of see it in a kinda frame by frame over time

N yeah as you age and yeah right I think that's true or like I do think that happens as we get older we get goblin chins and I recognize that moment when you actually realize how much tension you're holding in your jaw like when I realize it and stop when I stop and release my jaw and the tension in the corners of my mouth it makes a real difference to like my whole body

have you been grinding your teeth as well?

H no I don't grind no but that grinding your teeth thing huh I've never it's always freaked me out a lot that that would be your night-time activity

N yeah it's really frightening like what the fucks what's going on in your mind that you're grr grr grr when you're asleep

H yeah cos your body is supposed to be in relax mode right

N yeah uh and that noise is so big like when you're sleeping next to someone
and they are

H yeah it's so loud it sounds like rats

N uh Haz stop

 that is rank

 that gives me the willies

 I'm changing the subject

 have you done that commission²³ for Rhodri Davies²⁴ yet?

H no have you?

N no and he emailed me about it to ask when I'd be able to do it and stuff we
agreed end of August

H is now the time for you to be doing it?

N he did say that but I mean the film it doesn't have to be a massive thing
right?

H no I know but I mean you wouldn't be you would be forgiven for not doing
anything that wasn't related to or directly related to the PhD at this moment
or to self-care

²³ Commission to produce a music video to accompany a track on Rhodri Davies album 'An Air Swept Clean of All Distance' (Newcastle: Alt Vinyl, 2014)

²⁴ Rhodri Davies, Musician and Composer (1971)

N yeah but I don't know though cos it's like every time I speak to someone and they ask about the PhD and I say "ah yeah I finish in a month or so" and honestly like everyone's reaction is wild I think they're waiting for me to say yeah I'm really stressed and I'm losing my mind and

H and not leaving the house?

N yeah right but I haven't got to that stage yet and I'm not sure it's gonna happen but then you know I'm checking myself and thinking "maybe I should be doing that thing like seriously freaking out or feeling like that cos isn't that what it's supposed to be like" and you know I've seen it happen to friends so

H fuck that

it's apocryphal right it's just what people want to think it's what they want from the scholar or something do you know what I mean and I dunno why maybe fucking hell like people project their idea of what it is onto you and they can't bear it if it wasn't really hard cos you know it's actually a really cushy thing to be funded for three years

N right yeah totally and I have felt really spoilt these past three years but also it is still hard work but you know I'm not going to lose my fucking mind

H it's weird though isn't it cos it's only one year longer than a masters and people aren't like "you must have gone insane you must have gone insane" when you're doing a masters and you know over the course of another year nothing much will have changed it's just another project you know I'm not going to be fucking anal cored by the academy just so I can say I've done it

I wonder though if I dunno if the intensity of what you're taking on board the intensity of what you're searching for warrants that anxiety and angst but you know for me the thing is that at Northumbria that would be impossible there is not enough at stake in terms of research I don't feel any sense of having to up my game or push it

I know that's shite and maybe it's complacency and you have to kind of assume that could be it but

N so you don't feel like anything to do with the culture here is pushing you to strive?

H not even remotely on a personal level or on a macro level and I know I'm not up here in Newcastle so it's my fault but it's also to do with a lack of rigour and those research conferences are bullshit it's like paying lip service to the idea of research like why the fuck would you sit in the room where the only thing that happens is lip service what is the point like it's insulting I find it insulting to knowledge and to art I find it totally insulting

N I know they're rank right

I decided not to engage with them as part of my PhD

H yeah but you're good at that and I feel like I need other pressure like I can't pit myself against myself like you do

N I guess I am pretty stubborn

H yeah exactly that's it but I think I can only have stubbornness with other people watching

N and you're and you don't feel like your supervisors

H no I haven't got on a level with them and it's not their fault we're just not in that place and you know that's the reason I'm not gonna fucking lose my shit in the last year cos it would be totally compensatory to be like "okay I'm gonna lose my shit now"

N no totally and I really just think that if you can get to the end and be like you know "I worked really hard and"

H exactly

N and then that's enough

H totally which I really think you can do

N we can

H hmmm I mean I know I'll work hard in the last year but you know there's been a lot going on

when do you have to hand in?

N sometime in October but all I'm handing in is that conference proposal I wrote for that conference²⁵ I don't want to go to and then a transcript of this conversation that we're having now although actually that might not be all cos I was talking to Chris²⁶ about it the other day and he was saying that I have this peculiar way of going around things so instead of just writing an explanatory document that says what I've been doing and why I've been doing it I'm picking it out or suggesting it through conversations and proposals

H that's okay though right?

N it is okay but I think he just wants to make sure that these documents say enough and speak enough about the research so that the examiners can feel prepared going into the viva cos that's all they get in October those documents and then I go to Boston to show some work in that exhibition²⁷

when I'm back it's the first bit of the viva the performance bit and then after that they come back for the second bit of the viva for like the questions and stuff cos they wouldn't let me the University wouldn't let me do it all in one go in the one viva cos they said that the examiners had to take the thesis away

²⁵ *Performing, Writing: A symposium in four turns*, (Massey University, New Zealand: The College of Creative Arts, 2017). Conference proposal included as postscript p.97

²⁶ Chris Dorsett, Artist/Exhibition-Maker and Professor of Fine Art at Northumbria University. Chris Dorsett is Nicola's primary PhD supervisor.

²⁷ *Obstacle Course* a group exhibition, (Boston: New Art Centre, 2016)

with them they were concerned that the examiners wouldn't be able to develop a rigorous relationship to the research if it was just performed and spoken aloud to them so they have to take it away in their hands but it's frustrating right when I am trying to offer an alternative a different relationship to the research a different relation to knowledge a different kind of knowledge or rigour whatever

so after that first viva they receive the thesis script after I've performed it and all the previous iterations of the scripts then all the other relevant stuff that I've done as a performer for other artists and stuff about workshops I've done and set up so there's different elements of it and so hopefully that's enough evidence of how much work I've done and in different ways you know

H yeah I was gonna say it's gonna be quite a big back catalogue what's the script then have you written it?

N yeah kind of it's pretty much done it's like an amalgamation of all the previous scripts so like I'm bringing together elements from all the different scripts into one final script to show the development of the practice and thoughts and research and I've written in between these sections to bring it all together

I've been trying to imagine all of us in this space at BALTIC in the viva though and like you know like visualizing how it will be and actually I spoke to Chris the other day about how it's going to be three men and me and he said "you could have someone else there if you wanted" and he meant a woman I was like "I'm just calling it out cos I want to talk about it not cos I'm gonna feel uncomfortable"

H or threatened?

N yeah not at all I don't feel vulnerable

like I just wanna like talk about it that thing

H that's interesting though that that was his response that it was that you could have like a chaperone

it's strange it's very like and I'm not saying that it's malicious or deliberate but it's interesting that he would be like "don't worry you can have a body guard rather than"

N a female bodyguard

H exactly so you've got some oestrogen in the room rather than "oh yeah you're right it is going to be three men in the room" it's more of a defensive thing rather than "oh yeah maybe that's something that comes up or then maybe yes you're right that will bring about a certain nature" that it's like you might need protecting

N yeah I know right and especially when I think I've really already given thought to that like in the work already

it's a big part of the work you know who is gonna be in the room so the use of direct address with the thematic content and by addressing notions of intimacy I feel that already like that's highlighting the situation the set-up and how gender intersects with that so I kinda feel like a lot of that's already there and it's not about feeling vulnerable

H totally totally

N actually Chris said I could have you there I guess cos he knows we've been doing this together but you know I would actually feel really way more nervous to have you there

H yeah right I kinda know what you mean and maybe I don't know why but that reminds me of a Hannah Black²⁸ thing I read an interview not an interview

²⁸ Hannah Black, Artist

but like chat²⁹ she was having with someone and she was like “when a woman tells me when people tell me I’ve been mean and it’s a man I’m like I don’t give a shit but if a woman tells me I’ve been mean I’m like ah fuck” like that’s sort of

obviously that’s kinda like it’s quite facile what she’s saying in one way and in another way not you know that the opinion or the embodied contextualized opinion of a woman is more harmful or affecting

N or acute

H yeah or that you might just take more time to listen to it I’m not saying I’m not equating that woman with me in the situation but I wonder if there is this slight with your work a slight sort of positive lack of regard for an audience do you know what I mean there is a kind of

I mean you’re allowing yourself to go further than you would cos your audience is the one audience you’re going to have it’s the one you’re talking to in the text so in a way the men that are going to be in the room with you they are already equipped in my opinion they are already equipped to receive that performance cos you’ve written that into it like the context of being a man in this scenario is written in

essentially it’s quite sort of generous on one level cos I think that if they’re attentive enough to that in terms of listening everything they need to receive is both within them and in the performance and so in terms of contextualizing something that’s what I kind of feel your work does anyway and maybe that’s why it has been so difficult to provide a contextualizing document cos I feel like it does the contextualizing itself in the gap between the people you’re performing it for for these three dudes

in a way you’ve known that for a while and I sort of feel I’m not saying that they’re like Everymen they’re not standing for all the men but I dunno I feel

²⁹ Sara Black McCulloch, *A Thing Of A Thing That Is Just A Thing: Self-Care With Hannah Black*, (The Hairpin Online, 2015)

like you've been making a work that happens in the in-between so actually it's quite an audience-specific work

N I have been aiming for that but like I'm not sure it will be successful or not successful but like whether it will touch them in that way or not but I do think the work is like self-reflexive or aware of itself or whatever the research really has been like a kind of site situation specific response to the nature and culture of the PhD and the institution but then something came up at my second year review cos we were talking about the research and the way it kinda contextualizes itself as like a practice of citation but someone in the panel said that like maybe the research only works if you know who your audience are like certain people will get all the references in the script but if they don't then what's happening?

H were they asking that in terms of saying that it'll be a bad thing or as an open ended question?

N an open ended question I think but also saying you know if your external examiner doesn't pick up on things or recognize things then what are they going to take away from that experience does that make sense?

H yeah it does it makes sense but I think it's a null and void point cos that's what I feel like I was saying it's like cos of the examiner status I mean this is a quite crude way of putting it but these three males in the room and their status as white male academics some of them older white male academics

what I sort of mean is that I would agree and I mean I would be more inclined to deal with that point if the panel were like saying what would happen if you were also showing this work to an early career researcher woman you know what if she was also in the room then I could understand cos she like this women wouldn't necessarily have the wherewithal or context to actively receive and not need any situational or ancillary materials around the performance to digest it I feel though like the examiners who you've always known are going to be there cos of their essentially cos of their being in the world all of the material that they need to contextualize the work is within the performance and within the work and within themselves so I would more understand the panel's point if they were like

saying you know how about performing it in NewBridge³⁰ when anyone could come in

I mean I think I know what they meant but I kinda think I always get this feeling I get the feeling that your work is like a diamond or a gem or something that it's quite controlled the cuts you make so I kinda feel like in this instance yes it's smaller you're making it small you're making your world small but that's a defining feature that you couldn't do away with you know you're making it in this context and you're showing it in this context and so sort of how it talks to other audiences for me it's null and void that's why it's interesting to think how it might go down in Boston and in the places in Newcastle when you've done it I wonder is there a difference for you when you did that performance³¹ for your second year review and when you did for Mmmilk³² or whatever?

N entirely different yeah and that's the thing that feels exciting I guess about making the work for the viva context it's knowing the context the place and the audience the situation and like the objective

I feel like I can write and edit the conversations in a way that responds to that situation

when I've done these performances in public though I guess I just feel in those situations I guess I just feel more vulnerable more like I am performing myself rather than a set of ideas and that people really quickly read the performance as total autobiography right like the thing at Mmmilk you know people look at you differently

H was that the one "rip your muscles Michael?"

³⁰ The NewBridge Project artist-led studio and gallery space, based in Newcastle and founded in 2010.

³¹ Nicola Singh, *BITS FROM THE DIARY I WROTE IN GERMANY_I WAS JUST COPYING PORN NOVELS* (Newcastle: M I L K, 2015). Commissioned by M I L K collective.

³² Mmmilk artist collective, based in Newcastle and founded in 2016.

N yeah and the tiger circling that is a fucking brilliant scene from have you seen that film *Variety*³³ Kathy Acker did the screenplay Nan Goldin³⁴ did the photography the bit the tiger scene is taken from is like when the main woman her lover or boyfriend or whatever is playing pinball on a pinball machine and he's really staring at this pinball machine and she starts really softly to tell him this erotic story she starts speaking to him really softly and then steadily gets more and more agitated as the story heightens he's just playing and staring at the pinball machine and his playing becomes more aggressive as her story intensifies the rhythm of the pinball and her story it's like a really great scene oh and there's also a really great Savasana scene in it

H ah I've not seen it it would be great to see

N I'll get it you and yeah but editing that scene into the script and performing it at Mmmilk you know I think it happens a lot with performance like people don't really let there be a gap between the artist and like the expression of an idea so much maybe

H yeah totally I think you're right it isn't that possible although it seems at the moment not to be possible for something not to be biographical I mean I don't know if that's different for women or not I don't know I guess there is a lot more emphasis placed on biographical work from women which is why that dude the Norwegian dude³⁵ has had so much attention it's like whatever yeah

N yeah right makes me think about Giles Bailey³⁶ have you seen Giles perform before?

³³ *Variety*, a film directed by Bette Gordon (USA: Kino International, 1983)

³⁴ Nan Goldin, Photographer (1953)

³⁵ Karl Ove Knausgaard, Writer (1968)

³⁶ Giles Bailey, Artist (1981)

H once but not enough I've only seen that *I Bought a Little City*³⁷ at Northern Charter³⁸

N ah yeah I've seen that one I've also seen him do something in a workshop³⁹ I arranged with him

when I see him perform I think I always think about the way he has structured his work or like the presentation style his way of speaking not like

H look at Giles's life look at Giles's private laundry?

N yeah right it just makes me wanna have a conversation with him about how he's put the work together it doesn't like make me think "ah well Giles now I know about you"

H yeah like "I know stuff about you now" or

N or like "I like you more now" or I like you less now" or "I want to fuck you more now"

H or avoid your eye which is the thing

N yeah which makes you feel like

H like you've just done a massive shit in the room

N yeah totally and then I feel like there's a risk of self-censoring you know like with the work for the Book Fair I wanted to lie down to read the work cos that's where I felt the work was but cos some of that work was kinda erotic

³⁷ Giles Bailey, *I Bought A Little City* (2013)

³⁸ Northern Charter project space and artist studios, based in in Newcastle and founded in 2012.

³⁹ 'Art Writing Workshops' - a series of workshops Nicola arranged with another Northumbria University PhD researcher Kate Liston. The workshops drew on the culture of experimental writing through, with and in response to art practices. The programme aimed to feed into PGR discourse concerning the relationship between practice and writing in the course of the practice-led PhD.

so I was wary of exaggerating that or pushing that energy in the wrong or unintended direction by the way I was gonna choreograph it cause like I guess I was worried what people would think about me which is shit that I let that be like that

H yeah right but I mean I wonder

were you prone for that or face up?

N I was face up

in the performance I just sat down and then lay down yeah but I did experiment lots with ways of lying down but it was too affected so I just lay down

H so then how did you read was it with your head on the floor totally on the floor so not lifting your neck to see the page?

N no totally on the floor but I bought the paper up to an angle at which I could see the page

H ah right okay to the side?

N yeah

I'd like to work on that position more though to like resolve it for myself or something but it's problematic it's like wanting to be somewhere in between lying flat and being active and like giving out but like not giving it up

like my crotch it's like cos I've included this idea of like smooth space⁴⁰ in my writing cos it's something I've been thinking about like that account of

⁴⁰ "...smooth space is directional rather than dimensional or metric. Smooth space is filled by events or haecceities, far more than by formed and perceived things. It is a space of affects, more than one of properties. It is *haptic* rather than optical perception. Whereas in the striated forms organize a matter, in the smooth materials signal forces and serve as symptoms for them. It is an intensive rather than an extensive space, one of distances, not of measures and properties. That is why smooth space is occupied by intensities, wine and noise, forces, and sonorous and tactile qualities, as in the desert, steppe or ice." Deleuze

smooth space being like a space that is expressive that is for affect and translation and for things to move between and in all directions and like that Irit Rogoff⁴¹ text⁴² where she describes knowledge being like more left and right than up and down

I've likened this idea of a smooth space to the vulva a smooth space and to this situation the viva I've also tried to draw some parallels in thinking about the relationship between a pregnant women and a midwife or like a female birth partner cos I'm really into thinking about the kind of intimacy here and the dialogue between a women and a midwife and how partly the vulva is the locus around which that language is acting all the somatic energy and knowledge

like anyway though I worried about the attention that might be drawn too much to my crotch when I'm lying down though

H um yeah I can imagine

when you're talking you're talking about the interior of the vulva right cos I wonder about the difference of whether signaling you know like that Brazilian 'fuck you' thing that you do like cha cha I mean that to me is edgy that gesture like literally it has edges

N right like it's got a frame around it

H yeah exactly but the sort of voidy spherical sort of slipperiness or wetness of the vulva or the womb doesn't feel indicated in any kind of way like you know

and Guattari, "The Smooth and the Striated" in *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Bloomsbury – Academic, 2013)

⁴¹ Irit Rogoff, Professor of Visual Culture at Goldsmiths University of London (1963)

⁴² "How can we think of "education" as circulations of knowledge and not as the top-down or down-up dynamics in which there is always a given, dominant direction for the movement of knowledge? The direction of the knowledge determines its mode of dissemination: if it is highly elevated and canonized then it is structured in a particular, hierarchical way, involving original texts and commentaries on them; if it is experiential then it takes the form of narrative and description in a more lateral form; and if it is empirical then the production of data categories, vertical and horizontal, would dominate its argument structures even when it is speculating on the very experience of excavating and structuring that knowledge." Irit Rogoff, *FREE* (e-flux online, 2010)

by just framing it your crotch so I'm just thinking if you're lying on your back and there's some sort of

I'm not saying you're gonna do this but if there's any kind of framing or indication or anything like that might feel too much like an arrow or a frame and that doesn't indicate sphere-ity

N yeah totally I know what you mean also like I really don't want them to actually look at my crotch

H yeah yeah I mean it's gonna be quite erotic right?

N yeah right it will be erotic and like tense and I mean I'm really interested in how the conversation is going to be I'm interested to know how they feel about the performance how it made them feel and like how the archive will fit in cos like I'm not sure that that is generally part of a viva though like whether I could ask them to describe to me how they engaged with the materials?

H yeah it's a bit like making a present for someone and being like "did you like it have you used it?"

N ha totally

H but like in a way you know maybe there won't be that back and forth and that's gonna be interesting cos you know the power is going to be held up by the people who are interrogating and examining you and so it might be a bit like the lip service at interviews like "do you have any questions for us?"

N yeah okay sure there is that potential and that worries me cos I know I'm gonna feel real uneasy leaving that conversation without having had some kind of reciprocal exchange you know right and also like I really wanna hear all their reflections on the work their ideas about it

H and right yeah cos you know you have made something that implicates their subjectivity

it will be interesting to see whether they go into defensive reflective mode where they bolster up all their knowledge acumen they have and throw it at you that's a possibility right?

N yeah sure and I guess all I can try to suggest is that those aren't the terms upon which I want them to examine the research and I feel like I've tried to make that quite clear you know

H oh yeah totally I know you have but there's always that space to look away like if they return your gaze then great but I feel like it's always possible that people might not be able to hold that space with you in which case it will be really interesting to see what other responses they have like whether it goes power trip or whether it's like "oh Nicola you tell us" or whether a conversation a live conversation is possible and that's what's interesting right in this situation where you have proffered a set of conditions it's interesting whether they are gonna be met and accepted

N but then I guess partly I have to tease that engagement or like set that expectation out via the materials I give them before the viva which is this text this is gonna be doing that work

H yeah you know I was just thinking that I was thinking that maybe we need to retract this whole conversation cos otherwise they've got it in a way or too much insight maybe it's interesting not to give people a get out or a clue like I would be okay with that if it was something about my subjectivity as a white middle class woman I wouldn't want a heads up I would want to react I would wanna know if I managed to set aside my shit to receive something properly

N yeah right for sure but I've got Chris in my head though and him stressing to me that I need to I need to give them a clue to give the examiners an indication of like how to examine the work you know but it's a bit weird talking about people like this isn't it

H yeah I'm finding it very weird but I'm trying to think I'm trying to think about the thing we've started to talk about of feeling hyper sensitive or hyper aware of the wrong you could do I'm thinking about that man who didn't realize his

actress was going blue and just realizing that I would like to find more ground like real ground a kind of spectrum of like “I’m not going to give as much of a shit about what the possibilities might be of offending somebody”

N or failing

H yeah exactly I’m not going to care as much as I might do cos you know you could build your whole being and research on being fucking careful

sometimes I do think that in terms of philosophy or what I’m trying to think of as philosophy like the more I think about it philosophy is about being a good lover and being aware to choose your words fucking carefully and that no one

I mean this is just in response to that philosopher I’ve been working with cos I know he doesn’t choose his words very carefully for sure I know that he thinks of himself as having like a kind of higher level of intelligence or like not a higher level but like a particular enlightenment which means he thinks he doesn’t have to choose his words carefully and that for me makes him a bad philosopher it’s not just cos he is a hack and he goes through philosophical history and doesn’t make anything new but cos he isn’t sensitive to things and I feel like after all that learning and knowledge that should equal out but I feel like

so yeah in a way there is a case to be made for being hyper aware and sensitive to your environment and not doing evil on people and wishing evil on people or putting it on them but at the same time I don’t wanna I don’t want to you know when we’re talking about Mark⁴³ Chris and the other guy?

N Jerome⁴⁴

H yeah presuppose that they might do it shittly

⁴³ Mark Jackson, curator, lecturer and artist (1976)

⁴⁴ Jerome Fletcher, Artist and Associate Professor of Performance Writing at Falmouth University (1955)

I guess it's a bit shit to describe it like this but do you think the focus will be on examining form or content?

N yeah okay I dunno cos how I mean and this keeps coming back like when they give me corrections like how will they give me corrections cos I mean will they say to me like in the fourth minute when you said this or like can they even?

H that would be interesting if they did

I mean although they won't be able to pin point will they or no actually they will won't they cos they will have the scripts I think that's interesting the corrections

N I'm anticipating that the corrections will be something additional though right

H yeah like "you will need to contextualize this" or "you need to add this"

N yep like a fucking literature review that reviews the sources that have gone into it I would freak the F out

H yeah and be frustrated right that it hasn't reached them enough I feel like it would be indicative of this thing you're striving for if they could give a correction or a minor correction on something live that would be kind of engaging with it I feel like reviewing literature would be like a refusal like in a way

N yeah it would go around the point

H yeah and you know if we imagine that knowledge or that time and space aren't that linear and the fact that someone would have just received or witnessed the reading the performance of the script the fact that they can't go and like name check something doesn't mean that

I mean they have still got that knowledge they have still received something it still lives in their body in their head or whatever without them lassoing it via or hunting it via checking it whatever

I mean that idea of how knowledge is passed on like obviously this is not a legitimate way of passing knowledge on academically but it is a way so there could be no references at all if you wanted

N yeah totally I know but in a way though you know like with the Variety film thing I wanted to pass that on you know

H yeah so it's like an homage thing?

N yeah partly it's that it's like gathering these women these people around me whose work resonates with the flow of my research and drawing them into a conversation drawing them into a practice of speaking aloud I feel like it's important to name those women those people and also to give an insight into like my research flow like of like my reading and writing and choices here

I decided to incorporate some references to Wittgenstein⁴⁵ to his philosophies through appropriation of the script for that film⁴⁶ about him that Derek Jarman⁴⁷ made I chose to do that rather than reference him through his logics

the film is so beautiful so fucking mega and vivid and when I can grasp Wittgenstein's ideas that's what they feel like too when they are out in the world

H ok yeah definitely nice and I do I think it does that like it leaves a trail of your reading and like your writing of that part of the research

it's like a trail

⁴⁵ Wittgenstein, Philosopher (1889 – 1951)

⁴⁶ *Wittgenstein*, a film directed by Derek Jarman (Japan, UK, USA: BFI, 1985)

⁴⁷ Derek Jarman, Filmmaker (1942 – 1994)

N like a slug

H yeah although it isn't translucent it is a nice trail though but it is also like that hashtag thing "say my name" that thing of calling people you're invoking you're using their words

N uh huh have you seen *Lemonade*⁴⁸ Beyonce's⁴⁹ new one that's like a practice of invoking women from Black History

H oh God I really wanna see it I wanna see it on a big screen though I refuse to watch it on my laptop

N yeah right I know what you mean my little sister wanted to show it me so we looked at it on her laptop she's so into it she's been really moved by it I think it's partly cos she's followed up all the links and stuff the references she's done her research

H yeah amazing

N so basically I'm just trying to do what Beyoncé does yeah

is any of this has anything we've been talking about been useful for your stuff or do you not feel like?

H ah no I think I have um

N sorry

these strawberries are so sweet

H I like them do you not don't you like them?

⁴⁸ Beyonce, *Lemonade* album (USA: Parkwood Entertainment, 2016)

⁴⁹ Beyonce, Singer-Songwriter (1981)

N no I do I just can't get over how sweet they are

H me too I was also just about to interrupt our flow to say they're really nice

umm I don't think you know what we were saying about that like you're good on you like you-on-you

N masturbating in the mirror?

H yeah exactly I can't do the PhD version of masturbating the mirror I need CCTV in the form of collaborators it's really bad but that's kinda true so I sort of feel that I'm blocked from moving any further forward before getting a team together

N right but I mean it sounds like you're doing yourself like you're being shan on yourself by saying that

H yeah I am it's maybe cos you know there's something I mean there's two things maybe on one level cos it's seen as promiscuous do you know what I mean that thing of moving between all these people the idea of like a promiscuous person is like someone who isn't to be trusted and that idea is connected with someone who collaborates widely or who needs

N why are you equating collaboration with

H with promiscuity

that's just a leap that I feel that unconsciously people do make on one level it relates back to sex or shame of sex and multiple partners and the other thing it relates to is a lack of content and your ability your learnt ability to propagate research you know I look at people who only work as part of collaborations right and even I think "ah it's cos you're not very good can you not do this on your own can you not get it up" but I sort of feel like that

maybe that is why I chastise myself but also cos of the dictator thing I think there's something ethical and okay to get women in a room to make a thumb pot and read Eve Sedgwick but I'm not sure there's something okay about

getting women in a room and basically asking them to make your research

N cos you're asking them to go into that unknown space?

H yeah right the dark room yeah that could be traumatic for people right especially if you don't have the privileges of having been in that space before I don't feel cool with that also though the other thing is that I don't feel cool about is the slutness you know that need to be watched I do have ten years background to why I would feel hard on myself and I imagine it is justified but much of it just leads from just wanting to like to like call it out

N right but you don't feel impotent without other people right?

H no like I'm not totally impotent without other people there although I sort of am but not totally but ultimately I am but

N but all of these are ideas are germinating in and from you

H true definitely

N also whenever I am in a workshop space with you you're like you're very thoughtful and you have a close attention to the words you're using and to the way that you listen and that's crucial right so you might think that you're like putting someone in a dark room but you know I think generally you guide people you support them I mean Dance School⁵⁰ that is like an amazing example like I didn't feel like "fuck" I mean we were all doing it together

H yeah totally I mean Dance School really worked that was the only the only iteration of something or instance of something that worked I felt like for everything it was it was okay like it was what it was and I didn't want it to be any more or less

⁵⁰ Harriet Plewis, *Dance School* made with Mark Bleakley, Yaron Golan, Arnaud Moinet, Adam Parkinson, Beth Ramsay, Nicola Singh and Paula Turner (Newcastle: The NewBridge Project, 2013). *Dance School* was commissioned by The Newbridge Project.

N and you were happy with your position in it?

H yeah but that's cos I feel that so much of my way of working is about making a party if you know what I mean not that that's a fucking new idea I don't mean that

I mean it's about choosing the right people to work with I suppose a little bit like Marvin Gaye Chetwynd⁵¹ I do like her work but actually maybe I don't particularly like want to say her name in a way maybe like Oreet Ashery⁵² is someone I better want to recognize but then you know it always feels a bit sick and it's partly like aesthetics and partly ethics and that makes me feel shit though you know

but then if you could use it for good and not for evil

but then you know why do I get to choose do you know what I mean I know it's cos it's my research and that's my choice but more broadly or ethically why do I get to choose who gets to speak and about what that makes me feel a bit like I dunno just a little bit like

N how do you feel about the decisions that you make like when you are in front of people with a project?

H hmm I feel okay about that cos I feel better about calling that out rather than you know saying it was something else you know like saying "this is my research and it's made with other people but it's an extension of my responsibility" in that Thomas-Hirschhorn⁵³ way of taking responsibility for it

if it fucks up it's my responsibility and if it goes well it's my responsibility too then and there's also the somewhere in between so yeah you know if that

⁵¹ Marvin Gaye Chetwynd, Artist (1973)

⁵² Oreet Ashery, Artist (1966)

⁵³ Thomas Hirschhorn, Artist (1957)

fucking Deleuze Monument⁵⁴ gets vandalized I take responsibility for it

N maybe it's like that S&M thing that you were describing before we started recording that thing with that guy from Greece

how S&M partly is like equal measures of trust and risk or even it's about laying the ground preparing the ground and tending to it

H yeah right which involves patience and tenderness even in a weird way like prep before you go in any deeper that was what was kinda off about that Greece guy

N that his funk came out of nowhere?

H yeah exactly that's true I think that's actually true or right rather and that fucking metaphor of the dark room it's a bit like that like in a deprivation like way of saying "you know it's okay that you're in this dark space cos I've"

N of saying "I've got you I'm holding this space for you"

H yeah I know though but

N nah it's okay I'm into holding space

H yeah I know right and I was thinking something something about the dark room and the trust and the trust yeah and S&M and Thomas Hirschhorn nah I've lost it I've just started to overlap Thomas Hirschhorn into an S&M situation now

N ha "does this own energy does this own energy?"⁵⁵

H ha yeah

⁵⁴ Thomas Hirschhorn, *Deleuze Monument* (La Beauté, 2000)

⁵⁵ Thomas Hirschhorn, *Energy = Yes! Quality = No!* Workshop (London: Southbank Centre, 2007)

I dunno I mean but what's the difference between what you do and what I do in terms of bringing women together?

N I guess the thumb pot thing that wasn't about inviting specific people it was about the framing act of doing an exercise in a reading group that was identified as a reading group for highly subjective feminist texts that was important cos it situated a practice of reading

the text was taken away absorbed and digested by these women who have chosen to be part of this group and then reconstructed

H ah so it wasn't about whose work you like or who you think you might work well with in that situation so there wasn't that disappointment of like "ah shit I thought we were going to"

N no it was more about the context but then I was still disappointed by the exchange I mean but maybe that's shit of me to have had those expectations

H but it was about that holding form that was already there the reading group was already there

cos I was just wondering what happens when it becomes more than one you know

you know how you can be full beam with one person

you can be sort of right now we can sort of be shining full beam on each other but then that becomes diffracted with more people

and for someone like me that becomes a fucking nightmare cause I feel like that I have to be attentive I'm not saying like I'm a saint I just really need to tune into other people and how people are feeling what they're doing and actually that takes away from my ability to have a conversation although you

know like it makes me think cos I was in a LUX⁵⁶ meeting the other day this guy was talking about how sensitive he was and how he has synesthesia and you know how he sees all these words and colours and he's like saying "I'm very sensitive to the world" and I was I just sort of laughed he looked really hurt and I was like "ah Haz that's horrible that thing that you just did to shit on this guy's honesty" but I mean he's a dick so I shouldn't mind that much really he's a dick

it made me feel though like when I hear myself saying stuff like this I think it's really important to say that I don't feel like being so aware of people's needs is a super power do you know what I mean like it's definitely a bad point cos you can become too aware of it and actually that becomes really difficult for other people

N cos you think you're being there for other people but you're not?

H yeah and you think it comes from a good place but it doesn't and that's why I find it difficult to be in a group cause I'm like thinking "are you okay are you okay" and it's just like I'm spread there's nothing left so yeah I dunno maybe that's why I can just about keep together if I'm in charge of the room

N quite a lot of the projects you've done are in groups would you not then think about like structuring things in a different way?

H yeah no it's cos I think that that's like the masochist drive in me wanting to challenge like wanting to do the thing I hate it's almost like the thing I need the most and hate the most is to do work with a group

N yeah I get that and I get what you're saying about being too self-aware of how people are feeling too it's like it goes too far

you like not you but one or whatever like that person just ends up responding to themselves and it's not about the other people

⁵⁶ LUX agency for the support and promotion of Artists Moving Image, based in London and founded in 2002.

I do that a lot with my family

H really?

N yeah I feel like I'm really careful about wanting to make sure everyone is okay and checking in with everyone and I'm like hyper aware of how am I making everyone feel and actually I'm just thinking about myself like in a self-pitying way

H ha yeah me too but you know like every project has a different set of conditions

so yeah that's why I wasn't sure about the Barad text that we were using yesterday it was super dense and it's mind blowing totally mind blowing on a cosmic level really brilliant but it worries me cos I was trying to think about it and I thought "I'll talk to Nic about it cos she'll understand it" but I was thinking about marginalia and you know notes how to get between rock art and the land cos it's pretty rock art

N uh geo art?

H yeah exactly and so I was like "I think I'm with the enemy with this text" but I'm not though cos it's written by an older lesbian writer so it's not totally we're not totally in the geo art camp

there is an element of it though I was like "I need to find a bridge between this and something that I vibe off" I don't think I can make a reading room to Berlant⁵⁷ I think I might try but cos for many reasons but I think that cos Barad is talking about space but in very in a metaphorical way she is talking about translating gender into space but whereas with like *Sex, or the Unbearable*⁵⁸ and texts like that

⁵⁷ Lauren Berlant, *Writer* and George M. Pullman Distinguished Service Professor of English at the University of Chicago (1984)

⁵⁸ Lauren Berlant and Lee Eldenman, *SEX, OR THE UNBEARABLE* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2014)

I dunno I can't see it I can only hold it in my head as an idea but I can't see it and then I was thinking well maybe I'm not totally behind the material yet

N and it's quite a specific set of materials you know going in with a published text right?

H yeah exactly and one that requires a certain amount of prior things

N why did you choose to do it like that in that way?

H well partly cos I felt like I'm a bit fed up of those texts being inaccessible but then you know I just reified that yesterday I just kept thinking basically like I've read this text and I sort of understand it and then we read it out or we read out the edit we made yesterday and it didn't make any sense it was just words in space

I was like "I have un-understood it I've gone backwards cos I know this text quite well but now I'm listening to it in this room and I hear it in this room now the room holds it I've got no fucking idea"

N cos you ate it up and spat it out?

H yeah totally and so what I'd originally wanted to do was to have was a really discursive anti-intelligent experience but like

and I know some people would say "why do you always have to talk about feelings and the experience of things it will go out of vogue in the same way that anything does" but I wanted to experience the text as a feeling rather than as a reading I also wanted to try and bypass what it is necessary to possess before you can read a text for it not only to be that a person walks into a room and experiences a room like you would experience a text but that they would experience it instead of experiencing a text

for me that was the desired outcome it was about a deeper understanding of something that's available to everyone I felt like that was the opposite yesterday though you know I felt like there were a couple of people who were sitting there who were just like

I was aware of so much of the art speak in the environment I was just like “ah wow” and it’s fine to have failed it doesn’t bother me at all to have made something that doesn’t work

N what about the actual space that you made?

H hmm I realized how much the work is time-sensitive like there’s no way we can do this in a day you know it’s gonna be weeks and weeks of revision and decision about the space and you know the space was nice but it was just like any old space that you would make if you let four artists in a space with a range of materials that you’d gathered from the environment you know there’s splodges of paint there’s cellophane there’s whatever there’s things that I’ve never let go of just objects all about the room and it’s interesting but it looks like so much art and it’s not important but yeah the space wasn’t that interesting it didn’t signify the text but that’s okay I didn’t expect it to

N I wonder what would happen if you deal with only one material?

H I know that’s what I was thinking as well but then I was thinking “who makes the decision about that material?”

N well you do

H I know I know but then you’re boxing yourself in you know?

N or you’re giving yourself more scope to refine something like if you have to really push and pull at one material so it does lots of different things

H uh huh yeah I think it’s just that I automatically have a problem with unilateral decisions I feel like a mean average is needed like you know the more opinions you have then the closer you’ll get to the right one rather than me saying “I really like plaster at the moment” which you know I do I really like plaster at the moment

it’s just like in my opinion and loads of people would disagree with me but I think it’s less likely that I would be right like on my own with that decision so I think the choices for material should come half way through the process and

then it would be something we would discuss and decide on together you know

N yeah okay sure either way like it is really interesting to think about what suggestions would come forward from a reading of a text like a texture a colour or whatever

H yeah I'm interested in it even in that like childish way like if you were a vegetable what would you be like if this text was a

N yeah totally it reminds me of that that workshop⁵⁹ I did that I told you about that one about hearts and assimilating those feelings and experiences and memories into like in a shape into a form into a colour and a texture like to make that leap

H yeah right I was thinking about that workshop and you know I just think that you have to have like a blank space up until then do you know what I mean

you know you need to clean your mind a bit

N like to have a palate cleanser?

H exactly

N just play everyone loads of gabba and make them eat melon for like four days

H ha like a detox

N yeah give them all colonic irrigations

⁵⁹ A workshop Nicola delivered for BALTIC Busy B's programme, creative sessions for 4 – 12 year olds. The workshop invited the group to think about the human heart as a symbol of our feelings, relationships and expressions. We imagined our hearts in our minds eye and then formed/illustrated these ideas. Nicola encouraged the group away from standard depictions of the heart and into subtleties that might represent different understandings, definitions and representations of our feelings.

H make them shit in a sieve

how clean can I get them

I wonder what the mind version of that is?

N it's weird actually cos I wrote about that just the other day when I was sending some stuff over to Boston I wrote about that performance⁶⁰ I did at the bookshop when Oliver played the drums so in between each reading I did he played a drum roll but only on the cymbal parts of the drum kit so it was really dazzy and really really bright

the idea was that it would like wipe the audience's memory of the previous reading so I wrote or I said in this text for Boston I said "it was like a palate cleanser for the mind" and then I thought what a fucking twat phrase

H ha that's brilliant yeah Adorno⁶¹ writes really nicely on that

on punctuation

N ah really?

H yeah I could give you that text⁶²

N I-do-no-read no Adorno

H you don't wanna did you say?

⁶⁰ Nicola Singh, *She's Writing Her Scenario, Mass-Produced Fantasies For Women* accompanied by Oliver Beck (Newcastle: NewBridge Books, 2015). Commissioned by NewBridge Books, a shop and social space that provides a platform for artist's books, zines, art writing and design magazines.

⁶¹ Theodor W. Adorno, philosopher, sociologist and composer (1903 – 1969)

⁶² Theodor W. Adorno, *punctuation marks* (Ohio: The Antioch Review, 1956)

N I-do-no-read no Adorno

H ha yeah nor do I actually fucking douche but the stuff about punctuation and palate cleansing and exclamation marks and that

N ah yeah right

are you making yourself read stuff you don't want to read?

H no no I'm not know I don't have a huge amount of

I dunno I can't really see where my desire is at the moment for reading though it's like I'm not really getting a hard on for texts or the prospect of reading texts anymore or at the moment anyway

N fiction though fiction right?

H yeah fiction's fine I'm just reading bloody Elena Ferrante⁶³ I know everyone's reading them and they're not going to rock your world but they are insightful

N I've just read Maggie Nelson⁶⁴ that Argonauts⁶⁵ book

H ah yeah how was it?

N reading it from the position of the research I've been doing it's cool like her way of like drawing information in her methods of citation is interesting

the content is like the content is kinda intense

H yeah I thought so I think that's why I've been wary of it

⁶³ Elena Ferrante, pseudonymous novelist (1946)

⁶⁴ Maggie Nelson, *Writer* (1973)

⁶⁵ Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts* (Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2015)

it's intense like cos she has this relationship with this person who is gender fluid and a child with them right?

N yeah right although the book's not really about that so much it's more about her pregnancy the body and labour and so some of the intensity is in the gaps like you read the intensity into the gaps like the space for questions and questioning assumption as a reader about that situation like that's in the gaps if that makes any sense?

H yeah yeah it really does make sense it's just for some reason I've got a mistrust of her and I don't know why

N do you?

H yeah it's really itchy

N oh yeah right you are pulling a right face

H I know I don't know what it is I mean I'll read it definitely I've got to get over my shittyness about it and yeah you know Maggie has done this thing a podcast⁶⁶ with Chris Kraus⁶⁷ it's on the Guardian I'm pretty sure it's worth checking out they did it when Chris Kraus was over I think

N ah right yeah did I tell you about Chris Kraus in Edinburgh?⁶⁸

H ah yeah did you go the next day?

N yeah it wasn't so good

H ah why but like neither was the thing in Glasgow⁶⁹ I thought

⁶⁶ *Maggie Nelson and Chris Kraus on confessional writing*, books podcast (The Guardian online, 2016)

⁶⁷ *Chris Kraus, Writer and Filmmaker* (1955)

⁶⁸ Chris Kraus, *I Love Dick* a reading (Edinburgh: The Collective Gallery: 2016)

N it was a lot better in Glasgow then Edinburgh cos Edinburgh was really short she had like 45 minutes before she had to get on a train to the airport so it was a piggy back thing they'd piggy backed on Glasgow

H ah man

N Maria Fusco⁷⁰ introduced her I think they've done stuff together before but you know if I'd just come up to Edinburgh for that I'd be well pissed off I didn't get a lot from it in terms of the talk

we went to the pub afterwards it was well awkward cause you know not everyone there or some of the women there not all of them get on with each other

H oh God yeah totally and in some way and in a brilliant way some of the most awkward personalities in Newcastle's art scene were there right and yeah good for them who gives a fuck but it's tricky all in one room tricky to eat a whole one

that's what was actually useful in terms of choosing party goers

N like the expectation like in terms of knowing what you get from a person or a friendship right and not letting it be a problem to say like I get this from you and I don't get this from you but you know that's okay?

H yeah right but you know I'm really judgey though cos like I'm so judgmental I think I do myself out of possible good friendships cos I sort of call it before it's you know

I should give people time before I like dismiss them and say "you're not coming to my party"

it's shitty to think that you can get everything from like

⁶⁹ Chris Kraus, *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula: A 20th Century Fable* a reading (Glasgow: The Glasgow School of Art, 2016)

⁷⁰ Maria Fusco, *Writer & Art Critic* (1972)

N from one person?

H exactly

N I kinda had that conversation with that counsellor I was seeing the other day

H really?

N yeah we spoke about friendships female friendships and she gave me an example from her own life which she does quite often it was about how she realized she has different intimacies with people they're all different she said and she said realizes she can't expect to get everything from everyone cos there's different exchanges going on and that lets different parts of her being like be you know

I do it I really do it though and not to like blow smoke up your ass but I can talk to you in a way that I can't really talk to other people

H yeah right me too

N but then I was like "well why the fuck not why can't I have those conversations with other friends you know friends" it started to freak me out but what this woman was like saying to me though is like "don't look for that kind of intimacy from everyone though cos it's okay right"

H yeah right but does it ever make you feel like beyond schizophrenic that you're like different people with different people that's what freaked me out like thinking "if I can't be like how I am with you with Adam then fuck fuck fuck" like if I can't get a nice balance to be like okay with that then it's fucked up I think I have got to start being a bit okay with that though like about how the different facets of you come out with different people and you know we all know that's right we all know that's true?

N it is hard to reconcile though isn't it the disjoint cos it's like if we can't be the same people

but then like with Oliver I feel like this connect that makes me want to cry
right like the way I feel like we're connected

H right yeah sorry it's just I'm thinking about that

I mean I have that same thing with Adam the connection that makes you
want to cry but I was thinking about when you said that you and Oliver had
that bust up about the script for the Book Fair thing I guess you could
probably tell that I was feeling pretty angry about it cos I was thinking "it's not
fair on both levels to expect Nicola to be all for you she needs to have those
bits about herself that she keeps for herself that are about her and her
research and even though it might manifest itself in a way that makes you
feel uncomfortable cos she is talking about intimacy and details about lives
but you know she needs to be allowed to have that" he has to know that it
doesn't have to do with him and that's okay although on the other side
though I was also thinking

on the other side of that same coin I was thinking he needs to be able to
understand those bits of you as well do you know what I mean he needs to
do a sleight of hand which is to make room for them whilst not having to
question you about them do you know what I mean so it's like allow them
allow that but not like censor you you know or to be like "what does that
mean what does that mean for us or what do you mean when you say that is
that to do with me or with your feelings about sex or are these even your
feelings or someone else's feelings have you taken someone else's words"
do you know what I mean like questioning you about it but then I kinda
thought well that's tough but I'm really glad that's come up cos I don't think
that would even ever have come up with Adam and that's cos he would have
got so freaked out by anything like that you know that I'm pretty sure he
wouldn't have even been able to even like say to me that he was feeling
uncomfortable

so like even though I have that connection to him that makes me want to cry

N do you think he wouldn't have been able to address that or like would have
felt so uncomfortable with it cos of feeling like you know like that your
relationship or your intimacy was so implicated cos I mean I guess that's

what was going on for Oliver you know some of that was also him putting pressure on himself

some of that was about him not feeling like he was able or equipped to talk to me about the work and then feeling shitty about himself cos of that and I don't think I put that kind of expectation on him I do just really want his thoughts on the work and you know I did draw a comparison I said like "you know you wouldn't be able to have the same conversations with me about your work like you do with other makers or other sculptors and that's fine right" but it was like cos I'm talking about intimacy he wouldn't let me make that direct comparison he was like "but we're talking about a thing that's shared in a relationship" but I was like I said you know "it's about intimacy like as an idea and as a construct and something that isn't just romantic or sexual it's familial and in work environments and you know in a viva" but you know thinking about intimacy in an expanded way or like intimacy as like an ideological construct or as a set of different attachments that is speaking from a privileged position

yeah and part of it though I think for Oliver was that cos I am questioning or prioritizing ideas of intimacy he thought that I must have felt like there was a lack of intimacy between us

H and is there any truth in that?

N no not at all but and you know me and Oliver we've had this conversation before that I don't expect to get everything from him or like want everything from him

H huh interesting and that's good for you cos you know I want everything from Adam

I've just read this book called *The Telling*⁷¹ it's adult science fiction it's like another take on religion it's this outwards religion that is happening on a planet and it's called the Telling and it's basically like there is a text but it's

⁷¹ Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Telling* (Boston: Thomson Learning, 2000)

not like the Bible or whatever it's just like a book of stories and you go into a room and they play a little drum and then they read a story a different story each time but the people that do it the Priests that perpetuate the stories they're couples either same sex or opposite sex couples but they're together for life their whole being and person and world-making is about the Telling so they're sort of Priests but pairs of priests in pairs and there are so many of them and you become one of them when you reach a certain amount of knowledge

I was like "ah that's what I want in a partner I want I want someone to work with you know like when your fucking MO is like something you share and that's like want I think I want that partner in crime to adventure with build a house with" but actually that's fucked up actually like I might want to do with what you're saying you know

I think like "I have my rooms and I have my pockets and not everyone is in the same room or the same pockets and actually it's those things that enable me to do things" and I think that's pretty sane actually but I mean I don't think there's anything I can do about it like I could try and make in like a self-care sense to really try not to put too much on one person

N I mean I understand that promise thing though like the union I'd like that and I would want that with Oliver

H exactly and like one thing is that

so then it would be like "how could you ever leave me?"

N how could you leave me?

H exactly

so I'm sure that's what it's partly about you know "you would have to sever yourself from me to get away cos I've got half of your being" do you know what I mean so maybe it's more to do with that

N I wonder if it's something like you know like when you're in a relationship and you can kind of be very much like very much in the past of the relationship or in the future or in the moment of the relationship so you can either be thinking

H it was good then or what will happen next?

N or like "don't leave me" or "you're gonna leave me" or like in the past you

H yeah you did that thing

N like "you fucked me over you fucked me over you fucked me over" or you can try and be somewhere in the middle in the present tense which I don't actually know what it's like to be like in the present-ness with a relationship

H I don't think I've ever done that maybe we're like only in middle with like I dunno with friendship maybe cos as friends you're never thinking that really are you you're not like thinking "you did this thing"

evocative – “vast and sticky empire ... oozing along in the muck” – and the imagery, held in colloidal suspension right there on the surface, is ripe with the musty odors of fear. One doesn't have to read very far beneath the surface to witness the merger of political anxieties and scientific curiosity in to a more complex multi-cellular organism:

Though amoebas would seem unlikely to coordinate interactions with one another over much more than microscopic distances, the discovery of such a massive clonal colony [Kevin Foster, a Harvard evolutionary biologist] said, “raises the possibility that cells might evolve to organize on much larger spatial scales.”

... In fact, like the colony of social amoebas, the giant amoebas could be everywhere underfoot without anyone's noticing.

“I used to joke,” Dr. Schlieff said, “that there might be a giant organism in the soil spanning the entire continent and whenever you dig up a shovelful you get a piece of it. So where will the next giant amoeba be found hiding? Dr. Schlieff points out that the original discovery of the amoeba-roid-all amoebas was made in the 1940s by a researcher named Ruth N. Nauseef. She discovered the species in a New York City park.

Drawing back the curtain on the workings of her own dramatic rendering, the author of *The New York Times* article presses one of the article's subterranean imaginaries to the surface, outing the thinly veiled ghost of the 1958 horror classic, *The Blob*, a Cold War movie about the creeping threat of communism. The anti-communism theme percolates through the article and creeps into the (presentation of the) scientific details: “Only an apparent oxymoron, social amoebas are able to gather in organized groups and behave cooperatively, some even committing suicide to help fellow amoebas reproduce.” The sacrifice of the individual self for the good of the whole fits the red-scare theme like a glove,

and “suicide” – an interesting term given all that it implies about intentionality and the metaphysics of individualism – is in fact a common way that scientists and science reporters speak of the fate of “individual” amoebas in the process of aggregation. But is it not a rather peculiar reading of the behavior of an organism initially named after the shape-shifter god Proteus – *Proteus unimacule* – “a blob with no defined shape, bits of which could break off to take up a life of their own”, an organism that morphs from a “seemingly uncoordinated group of genetically identical single cells to an aggregate “slug” with an immune system and other organismic functionality characteristic of multicellular species with different roles played by identical cellular units”? As Professor John Tyler Bonner, who has spent a lifetime studying slime molds puts it, slime molds (of which social amoebas or cellular slime molds (*Dictyostelium*) are classified as one kind) are “not more than a bag of amoebae encased in a thin slime sheath, yet they manage to have various behaviours that are equal to those of animals who possess muscles and nerves with ganglia, that is, simple brains”.⁴ What is or isn't an “individual” is not a clear and distinct matter and that seems to be precisely the scientific sticking point: the question of the nature of identity is ripe here – it's what's so spectacularly exciting from a scientific point of view. No wonder that social amoebas are taken to be model organisms in molecular biology and genetics for studying communication and cell differentiation. Social amoebas queer the nature of identity, calling into question the individual/group binary. In fact, when it comes to queering identity, the social amoeba enjoys multiple indeterminacies, and has managed to hoodwink scientists' ongoing attempts to nail down its taxonomy, its species-being defying not only classification by phylum but also by kingdom.⁵ Nonetheless, the rhetorical bias favors the story line of the individual sacrifice for the good of the whole. No

degeneration from diseased tissue.

* when we stumble over words there is a reason.

PROTEUS = old Man of the Sea

- elusive sea change -

Proteus can shift shape & does so in order to avoid exercising his gift: clairvoyance

Proteus in Jung

PHYLUM = a gp of organisms that have the same body plan

↓ Symmetry, segmentation & limb disposition

revolutionary organising

cf. Lindsay's Soil Sample

The bridge (human bridge) between 'rock art' and Public Feelings, Between Bennett & Berlant

Conversation Two

H what I was thinking what the fuck was I saying o yeah the anxiety thing that we weren't gonna get everything that you needed if you know what I mean and that's weird isn't it cos it's like what does that even mean cos I don't know what that would even be what you need but it was making me think

I wasn't censoring myself or anything I just felt a bit like "shit I hope this is gonna be useful"

N yeah I know me too I've felt really aware of that that I do need this conversation to do something to explain or like unpack some of the research for the examiners before the viva to set the tone or the expectation you know so they're pumped

I totally didn't want it to be like an interview though you know so the way that we were just doing it yesterday I didn't actually feel super aware that we were recording I did at some points think "ah I wonder how that bit will be read or received" or like "that bit's definitely not going to be included" so I dunno if we should

H no we don't have

N let's

H&N not

H unless like it's weird did you go to that conversation between Flora Whitley⁷² and Paul Smith⁷³ for her exhibition⁷⁴ do you remember at Vane⁷⁵

⁷² Flora Whiteley, Artist (1977)

⁷³ Paul Smith, Musician (1979)

⁷⁴ Flora Whiteley, *Present Continuous* (Newcastle: VANE Art Gallery, 2016)

⁷⁵ VANE art gallery, based in Newcastle and founded in 1997.

N hmm I definitely went to Flora's workshop but I don't think I went to the conversation bit

H I just wondered cos I was thinking yesterday that I really liked our conversation it's such a nice place to be in in the chat yesterday and I was like "God I wonder if you could ever share that with people" like whether you could do a thing where you do it for people if you know what I mean but then that's a bit sick at the same time in the bad way

I was thinking "I wonder if Flora and Paul's talk cos they're friends was at all like that"

N hmm I don't think that a conversation can ever just be that that it can just be a conversation when it's in front of people

I guess for Flora's thing I mean I would just assume that as it was Flora's exhibition that probably Paul was there to like have a genuine conversation totally but also to lead the conversation with more of an awareness right?

H yeah right totally that's true that's true it's just it reminds me of that thing when we were deciding whether or not to write down words or whatever like to pre-empt our conversation it reminds me or makes me think that if you were to put a conversation into a more performative or staged shared platform would you kill it in the same way as we could kill it if we said "we're gonna cover these words" do you know what I mean if it's like killing something off

N yeah right totally that actually makes me think about the project⁷⁶ with the Berliners that I did at NewBridge cos that piece was totally improvised we

⁷⁶ Nicola Singh, Timothy Murray, Wojciech Kosma and Yunuen Rhi, *there is world sometimes* (Newcastle: The NewBridge Project, 2015). Two new performances made with a collective from Berlin. The work was entirely improvised, as the content was generated by rendering our (the performers) relationships public for an audience. These relationships had evolved in real time, through a shared rehearsal history. We deliberately set out to create relationships that do not and could not exist in the same way outside of the perimeters of performance. The performance was influenced by each performer's private experiences of friendship and intimacy. Commissioned by The NewBridge Project.

didn't like have areas or like topics we planned to cover it was just like our flow our conversations

things did come up in rehearsals though in these fucking weird rehearsals where we're kind of rehearsing the relationships between us

things came up which were like touchstones moments of verbal or physical communication things that recurred these became like things you knew you could like rely on things that you knew you could go back

you knew you could hit on a certain thing with that person cos that's where you'd made those connections in the rehearsals so like with Tim I always ended up licking him cos that was something that happened at rehearsal I always knew I could go to that with him there were moments that stood out like something to grab on

H some kind of scaffold?

N yeah otherwise it's like talk about dark spaces

H and was that a dark space?

N yeah I mean not all the way through the performances but the beginnings were they felt like that moment just before you have a panic attack

at the beginning when the audience were coming in and before anyone had said anything I'd be like thinking "OK so where's the mood now do I feel like I wanna be the first person to say something probably not who is gonna speak first how's it gonna begin who is gonna be the first person to say something into this space" after which everything is gonna be improvised

that silence that would just feel like it was getting bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger

H sounds a bit like the silence before either of you speak in a therapy situation eh pretty weighty

were other people talking the audience members?

N no no but it did I thought at least the performances did feel quite inclusive there were moments when the action broke out kinda and the audience were explicitly acknowledged points when we kind of tapped out separately and went and sat in the audience stepping back for a minute but also like acknowledging the space of the audience

the other performers though they could just come and tap you back in again and you'd just wanna be like "no I'm out fuck off"

it was a pretty complicated project it stresses me out thinking about it

H it's really fascinating I find it really fascinating cos I've only ever heard about it only ever sort of anecdotally

N you've got friends that saw their performance⁷⁷ at Chisenhale⁷⁸ though right?

H yup and they said it was super weird

N the final night right I only saw the final night but that night was really it wasn't like good

H not good cos not safe?

N not safe no way there was a lot of insider politics but then you know I knew most of the performers there so I wonder what it actually felt like for a fresh audience

H people that I spoke to said that it just felt um

I know this is a bit like what we were talking about yesterday and I was thinking we needed to define what we meant when we said 'performance art'

⁷⁷ *Dwayne Browne, Wojciech Kosma, Timothy Murray, Llewellyn Reichman, Yunuen Rhi and Jessica Lauren Elizabeth Taylor* (London: Chisenhale Gallery, 2015)

⁷⁸ Chisenhale Gallery art gallery, based in London and founded in 1980.

or just 'art' or whatever but they said that it felt very arch like arch-art you know sort of don't give a shit nothing no touchstones no sort of very disingenuous very complacent

N right OK

H like detached and not sort of as if it wasn't for real

I think people felt like it didn't have any reference to anything outside of itself if you know what I mean that would make it less a sort of

N in-joke?

H in-joke yeah exactly like an exclusive thing that you were eavesdropping on but that you had no right to be there

also though like fuck you anyway I'm not saying I don't get behind that the whole fuck the audience idea like I don't necessarily definitely think that's fucked up at all but I wonder whether the problem is you're working against a really potent set of things aren't you like 'Berlin-based' you know what I mean?

N yeah "we're too cool for you"

when the guys came up here which was like two days after Chisenhale I wasn't even sure if we were gonna be able to make the work or not people were really upset it was difficult cos Chisenhale had kinda fucked up a bit

it was to do with ownership really someone was taking the work on as more their own thing even though everyone was contributing themselves like you know

H totally

repping themselves right?

N right yup

it seemed like one of the guys was like riding it the guy who had made contact with the gallery and organized certain stuff but for something of that nature you know you have to be really fucking careful

H totally you're shitting on peoples' actual beings

it brings up a lot of stuff right though even when it's bad even when the chips are down it's like how do you manage to share that

how do you manage to be present with a pain that you're feeling or an anxiety that you're feeling in public as well

I suppose wasn't it at Chisenhale that they decided to fake it which is like the ultimate revenge

N yeah on themselves but also on the audience right also it's like putting two fingers up to the actual thing the construct of the performance

on the second night of the thing we did up here that performance happened just after things had come out about me and Oliver

H fuck

N I was crying in the back like properly just before we were due to perform trying to work out whether I was gonna be able to do the performance or not

I spoke to the other performers and they were like well they had their own opinions on the situation they were like very European about it you know I think they were taken aback at how upset I was

in a way and this is the way I tried to think about it at the time anyway I decided to think about it like as a way of processing or like dealing with the emotions I was having like in a holistic way but heightened right so I could like acknowledge the situation and be present with the emotions and whatever and be like live but yeah in public cos these like moments they had collided

I'm worried that that all sounded like jive and actually like I'm not sure if it did do that if it did do that for me but at the time I thought like "I could get behind thinking about performance in this way" does that make sense?

H yeah but I mean it's really high stakes

N I know it's pretty brutal

we didn't take like the stuff the stuff that was happening into the performance though right I didn't acknowledge it and neither did the other performers I guess that was just kinda understood

I guess that performance I just used it as like an extension of like dealing with myself and the fucked up situation

H yeah right I guess so and for healing maybe but it's just that that was so quickly after

healing always seems to imply some sort of time element like over time doesn't it

did you feel like physically

did you feel kind of able to speak or sort of

N I mean I felt like shit and I also felt like mad like crazy mad already cos I'd just come back from swimming in the sea with one of the other performers she took her clothes off and we spun around in the sea together holding hands it was a pretty intense moment she is pretty intense like

I was already feeling high from that and then as we were travelling back to do the performance I got a text and realized all this stuff was out about me and Oliver this situation I was trying to like control and manage just fucking imploded

weirdly though you know out of like all the stuff that I've probably done in Newcastle it probably had the most positive feedback most people seemed

quite into it

H ah interesting

as an idea ideologically I can really see why it would

actually no I can't really see

N no I didn't think you would I was just thinking "you don't think that"

H I was gonna say I can really see why people would get behind it but I can't cos I don't

I mean it's hard to explain cos that would suggest to me something about selves and the self and whatever and 'performativity of the self' is kinda hot stuff at the moment or like maybe it was hot stuff in 2007 or whatever but maybe maybe there is something going on in the ether of performance or of the self or whatever that we're gradually kind of becoming cognizant as a populace of human beings

that's what we're doing a bit more now so like in a zoological way we're fascinated to see people perform their selves for us cos we're more and more aware that that is what we're doing

I just wonder whether that's like the reason it sort of went down well cos it's a bit zeitgeisty in a local way like I'm not saying cos like obviously with Butler⁷⁹ and the whole idea of the performativity of gender or whatever that's been around for a long time

I just wonder whether it's kind of reached peak or it's filtered down into the bedrock rather than just the arty sphere you know that idea that we actually that we create our conditions

⁷⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006)

N yeah right

it reminds me of that Spångberg⁸⁰ text⁸¹ that we've spoken about before isn't it where he's calling out performativity and for like interactions between bodies and bodies

H yeah right

I suppose I mean maybe the performance going down so well is that

do you think it's partly cos of it being spoken out you know the idea of speaking truth to power or whatever it's a bit like it's a weird catharsis as if like seeing this thing happen that it's like a release or it's like "thank fuck this is being spoken about" you know cos we don't speak about it really like in a vernacular way like maybe you and I might speak about it sometimes but I'm not gonna chat about it to someone like "o the performativity of the self"

N yeah sure and then maybe

or you could say it's a bit like some therapy isn't it or something about that situation is cos I suppose some of what I speak to the woman about when I see her it's about it's like about how to check in with yourself to like check in with your subjectivity

H totally and I suppose that's what I mean

that performance with the Berliners it wasn't in a therapeutic arena cos you put it into a public but then I know that people think that's what performance art does they think that it does therapy

I don't think it does that though not at all

⁸⁰ Mårten Spångberg, *Choreographer* (1968)

⁸¹ *THE BODY UNDERSTOOD AS AN OBJECT* an interview by Filipa Ramos & Mårten Spångberg (Spike Art Magazine online, 2013)

all the sort of suffering of performance art like the bloodletting and the licking and all of that but I just don't think that's therapeutic it's really

I don't know I feel like that's one of those tricks that we fall into of thinking that's therapeutic but actually that performance sounds to me it sounds to me

like if you were to take away the healing element of therapy which is sick for people isn't it like people use therapeutic as an insult obviously and that's understandable I'm totally down with that but if you were to remove the idea that you could make something better and that therapy was about healing then actually that work could be therapeutic cos of the form it's taking and not cos it's seeking to make you better it just stands for itself you know rather than it being "o we're gonna heal the social bond or we're gonna solve you or fix you" you know

I just feel like it's removing the didacticism from therapy if you know what I mean which is shit cos the whole idea of therapy again is that it happens over time so like how could Franko B⁸² or other performers that are doing that sort of thing how could they ever

even if you make your work durational it's not gonna last longer than a fucking day really

therapy one of its coordinates I'm sure is time

N totally

like I agree

that thing about relationships about intimacy that was another thing about working with the guys from Berlin thinking about friendships and these different appearances of intimacy and the way you engage with other people friends lovers family therapists that was really interesting for me

⁸² Franko B, Performance Artist (1960)

I was like going into the rehearsal space and feeling actually aware of myself of like my limits like what I did and didn't want to share about myself how I did and didn't want to be touched

I wonder if some of the reasons why it was interesting or appealing or whatever to people is cos they could relate in the gaps like to how they manage their friendships and their lives with other people but again outside of like a therapy space

H totally

you could maybe map onto people

I wondered about that though in terms of you saying about sitting in the audience that you hoped that it was gonna be a relief for the audience or like a positive acknowledgement cos I was like "God was it" cos I can imagine you know it's like when someone that's been performing then goes and sits in the audience space and obviously these delineations still occur it's like "fuck how can we get over them" and we probably can't but the fact is it's happened

I always imagine it like the person the performer or whatever that's gone to sit in the audience that there's this massive light around them and they're like like "ahhhhh"

N and the person to their left and right like tenses the fuck up and they're like "oh my God"

H totally or they just shrink and the other person becomes like trying to be really normal like "I'm just one of you" I mean I was just thinking like was it alright when you did it that time?

N well I mean I thought it was but I mean I dunno no one like recoiled from me but also and I think this was significant cos I pretty much knew everyone in that room and it must have been a really different thing for me to go and sit next to someone than it was for those guys from Berlin cos they didn't know anyone and maybe it was harder for the audience if it was me I dunno

I guess I hoped I thought about it as like a gentle way of drawing us all in of like acknowledging the audience and the situation that we had gathered in cos with that performance especially there is this risk that the audience would feel really alienated

this thing of improvising yourself improvising with yourself for an audience though I mean you're working out how to be as authentic or whatever as you want to be in that space with yourself and with these people

I guess everyone to a different extent more or less performed themselves

not more or less sorry

like more or less performed themselves

as far as I could feel I think we all performed like a part of ourselves like people decided to leave parts of themselves out does that make any sense I find it really hard to talk about this work

H a conscious decision to edit?

N yeah whether that was about like actual personal facts like that they didn't want their relationships mentioned or whatever like only giving one facet of yourself over in that space

I think I probably did that cos you know you find the bit of yourself that you're able to give over in that space of improvising

improvising yourself with yourself

H it's a bit like dancing in the club right like it's the same in a way cos you're being watched

like a lot of the time in my fantasies like I'm I am improvising a dance I'm like high as fuck and improvising not on purpose though I just mean the way you improvise in a club

in this fantasy there's like a really good male dancer dancing as well but then in the fantasy I'm always like "that never happens" people never let it hang out in that way you know like it's the line between interpretative dance like the good bit of interpretative dance I know there's no good bit but it's more like

I was thinking about it on my way up here like dancing about collapsing your limbs and letting your limbs collapse and be shitty you know like or breaking the line of your body so that you're tabletop or you're contact lens or your limbs are all splayed out

the thing about improvising though and being like with others I mean I suppose you're not being full-beam watched like you were in that performance cos that performance is like dancing in the club plus plus in a way it's the movie version of dancing in the club

N but isn't it I mean isn't there this delineation between performers and audience members in a performance right whereas dancing in the club you're all kind of on a level?

H you're all performing kind of thing yeah I guess but the thing is I suppose you're not are you like in terms of the people who stay by the side and who don't want to cos I suppose the thing that designates that you're performing is that you're moving do you know what I mean which is a horrible way of thinking about it cos obviously you can dance and not be throwing loads of shapes or whatever but I dunno

you self-select don't you and then you dance that's why I kind of feel like and I know it is shitty to think about dancing in a room as being like an improvisation to a certain extent but I suppose that's what art wants or what a certain type of art wants it wants to take those situations to take dancing in the club and make it hyper real or profitable

N visible

H yeah exactly like to commodify it to a certain extent I mean commodify isn't the right word but to control perhaps that situation and I suppose sometimes

that's what theatre also does but it pretends that it doesn't you know what I mean like you might sort of think "o yeah we're just in the club we're just in the club we're just letting things happen" whereas art's obviously like "no we're not don't worry we're not we're in the gallery"

N "we're in the gallery but we're doing what we do in the club but we're doing it in the gallery" which means that we're going to look on it

H differently

N differently

H and people would say more honestly quote unquote but I don't know

N I don't think so

H no me neither

N and that

the physical part of the thing I did with the Berliners I mean everyone's physicality different physicality was really defined like one of the guys does Internal Martial Arts and another comes from like a dance background and does lots of Tino Seghal⁸³ performances and so like everyone's way of moving or their presence was quite defined

H pronounced?

N yeah like everyone had their own way of incorporating their physical movements into their improvisation and letting that become part of the dialogue

we all kind of went in and out of these physical moments or improvisations with each other and they functioned like part of the conversations

⁸³ Tino Seghal, Artist (1976)

like in terms of the gaze between like moving in the club with people I feel like the gaze is doing something quite particular it wants something particular

H in the club?

N yeah whereas the gaze in the gallery and I mean like the gaze from an audience not the 'gallery' gaze as like that construct and I mean especially for the Berliner work cos I didn't know what the fuck was gonna happen cos it was all improvised

I didn't quite know what the gaze was looking for apart from that it was another pair of eyes does that make sense?

H yeah definitely

I dunno I suppose if I'm in a club I kinda feel like I hope that the gaze or whatever is fuel if you know what I mean it's a fueling gaze like in that exercise when you've got a torch and you shine it on a person you know and you follow that person round the room and I kind of feel like it's that but only in the good times not if it becomes predatory then it's not cool but I feel like there's a symbiosis to that relationship like the more that someone wants you to carry on and they're vibing off like the dance you're doing or whatever

I'm not talking from personal experience of both being the gazer and the dancer I suppose

N you're not talking from personal experience?

H no I am I am I just mean

I just feel like I'm not trying to make out like I'm some sort of shit hot dancer and everyone's like looking at me I'm not at all

I just feel like if there's a good relationship a good vibe that happens between two or more people

like I find it funny when I've watched videos of Dance School NCL like a lot of the time I'm watching the audience it's funny watching the audience cos I think that I'm quite perverse in that way but I think to a certain extent Dance School was quite awkward it still had my trademark fucking awkwardness in it like pretty sure pretty sure

like I'd have to show you the videos to see what you thought

did you not pick up on an awkwardness?

N yeah but I didn't

maybe it was awkward to begin with like any performance right but I felt like it softened quite quickly

H yeah no definitely and like I don't chastise myself for it at all cos I feel like an element of awkwardness is not always a bad thing and it's like

N inevitable

H inevitable exactly like a gas that's released like when you're doing an experiment or whatever

I feel like in a way though that there was no way that piece could have not been awkward cos of the starkness of the green walls that really buzz and the way the green really shows people off against them cos of the very designated area of the dance floor that people aren't really allowed on you know that sort of courtyard area of the dance floor where people were only allowed round the sides and then just the sheer sort of brilliant embarrassment of watching people dance you know

especially bodies that aren't necessarily bodies

people

God I hate it when I call people bodies it bothers me

so people dancing and then for example with Yaron you know when you watch him you know that he is not trained and I mean Paula is a professional dancer and Mark's obviously got his hip hop background and you and Beth as well to a certain extent you have a training that's different like that's quite a vernacular training cos of all those places your bodies have danced through have passed through you know and also cos of like cos you two have more of an awareness of your body through different other practices

I did sometimes think for Yaron "is this ok is this ok" and in the end I was like "it's fine"

I dunno though when you look at the people round the edge I think there's definitely some awkwardness there was that in that performance

N but is some of that cos of

and I guess I felt this with the Berliners is it that when you know the people when you know the bodies the people maybe there is more at stake?

H I think so but I think that it's very revelatory

obviously the Berliner work is gonna be more revelatory but maybe not cos there's something so revelatory about your body doing a move that it wants to do and taking obvious pleasure in it as well like in the first dance we did

N Annie Lennox?⁸⁴

H no Booker T⁸⁵ so you're like there and then you were doing the jumping back and forth like you're doing Rosemary Butcher⁸⁶ it was you Paula and Beth yeah?

⁸⁴ Annie Lennox, *Sweet Dreams* (USA: RCA Records, 1995)

⁸⁵ Booker T & The MG's, *Time Is Tight* (USA: Stax, 1969)

⁸⁶ Rosemary Butcher, Choreographer (1947 - 2016)

N yeah o that was lovely

H it was really lovely and I'm really glad you say that but I know that people are looking at you and just being like wow it's quite sort of in your face you know and I think that in the same way as with the last one with that what the fuck's her name Sonique⁸⁷ Shaddique

so then there's all the different things that we're all doing there's jumping

I'm jumping really trying to get quite high

N I love that photo of you⁸⁸

H I know me too it's great but you can tell that people are finding it difficult to watch for sure and I was just trying to work out what that is like why would that be embarrassing

well maybe not embarrassing but awkward-making to watch that kind of obvious pleasure in the movement you know cos like you're not supposed to

it's like you're supposed to have a dance face on when you dance and in a way that's sort of what I feel some of the task of Dance School

there is an obvious pleasure going on which isn't normally present in dance performances like your body isn't supposed to be displaying pleasure and I was thinking about that in terms of the bubbles when we were each gonna bring some bubbles some themes and suggestions to cover for this conversation to guide this conversation cos I was thinking like I'd wanna think about blocks blockages to things access to things and the gulfs that exist you know the spaces between the audience and performer or whatever but then I feel like that's been so traversed that ground I don't think anything new or interesting can necessarily be said about it but I definitely think about it when I imagine you doing that performance the viva in BALTIC

⁸⁷ Sonique, *It Feels So Good* (UK: Phantom Sound, 1999)

⁸⁸ *DANCE SCHOOL NCL* [documentation image](#). Photo Credit: Thomas Whittle

in a way I do sort of think and obviously I'm not your bodyguard but I do feel like I will be sending a bit of myself out there to that space to try and be somewhere in-between like it's the same way as I try and look after everybody in the room but I would want to try and bridge the gap that I know is gonna exist between your prone or whatever body and the three dudes on the seats do you know what I mean there's gonna be such a gap right?

N yeah sure and I don't think I'll fully feel that till after the after effects the side effects cos I feel like it's asking a lot in the same way that Dance School and the thing with the Berliners did it's like asking for a different kind of intimacy between the performer and the audience and that's hard for both right?

H totally I suppose that's to do with holding a space like you were saying earlier

what hold do you use what knot?

N yeah it's like trying to be more open and honest like without your performer's face on but that becomes

it's too real and that's the thing that actually makes it more difficult or awkward or embarrassing in those spaces

H or fatiguing and you know it's that 'less is more' thing in terms of the less filters you have available the more knackered you are the more drained you are

N yeah right and maybe it's like about asking for a different level of attention

I think about that in terms of the viva that I'm asking for a certain level of attention and I'm trying to provoke that by presenting my body in a certain way and by speaking the words that I've chosen directly and from a first person point of view and live obvs

I'm asking for a certain attention from them I think also like Dance School and the Berliners they do the same in their own way

H yup yup

and like would you ever do it more than once?

N for the examiners you mean the script

yeah well actually when I met with Maria Fusco last year⁸⁹ I was stressing about how long I was going to have to make the performance cos I was thinking in terms of word count like 30,000 words 40,000 words and that it would need to be well long like durational

I didn't want that endurance aspect really

H cos you needed an equivalent right?

N yeah but that was before I decided that I would include previous scripts to make up the word count cos you know I'm really not behind being driven by word count in terms of making a piece of work but at that time I was pretty worried about that

when I saw Maria and we spoke about it she said "you know you mustn't do that cos if the work needs to be two minutes long maybe you just need to perform it 10 times for them over a certain number of days" but I mean like seriously the logistics of working with this University

everything is so fucking difficult like I could organize a few performances with three other people really easily if it wasn't for the University it's all like cos the examiners can only be contacted a certain way by certain people in the University cos there's a whole series of things that have to happen so it's legit

H wow

⁸⁹ Nicola had a tutorial with Maria Fusco at Northumbria University (2015) which followed on from her selection to take part in Maria Fusco's Masterclass 'Art Writing and Non Division', Aarhus Litteraturcenter, Denmark (2014)

N but I mean say the examiners asked for another performance of the thesis I wouldn't have an issue with doing it again

H I don't mean to ask it in terms of "is it reproducible is it sellable can you do it again" but if it's a certain type of attention that's required then whether that attention whether the demands that you're placing both on yourself and on the receivers like whether it would be useful actually and I probably do mean useful

like whether it would be useful to see it again in the same way in the same way that we can read a script again I just wonder

it's nothing to do with making up word counts or like "you must be able to do it again in order for it to be legitimate you must be able to print it"

N no I see what you mean like doing it again as a useful exercise like to engage with it again on that level?

H yeah yeah cos when I think about Dance School or the Berliner stuff maybe the nerves are so palpable in the audience

watching the video of Dance School I can see the faces and it's like you can see people are nervous about it and nerves are a killer for critical faculty they're useful and interesting I'm not saying we should dismiss them but I don't think they can coexist too calmly with a receiving mode do you know what I mean and it's gonna be interesting right cos you're gonna know two of them and maybe you know Jerome a bit as well or?

N no I mean we Skyped last year

I was really hungover it was just after I'd come back from India after all that shit happened I was in a state real messy but like the Skype was really useful and I think he's really right on with how he thinks about stuff conceptually he taught at Dartington College of Art when I was there but I studied the Experimental Music Performance degree and he taught Performance Writing at MA level so I didn't have anything to do with him

H in a way that's already a prior relationship though right I mean to a certain extent in terms of knowing something about him whereas when you went to see the Berliners for the first time presumably you didn't know them at all and so it's gonna be

in a way I wonder whether the calm the bliss peace thing of being able to be there to be present is cos

and that's also what's funny about NewBridge as a venue isn't it cos of Newcastle being so fucking small because of the arts scene being so insular I mean it's not Newcastle's fault but you know the faces you can see all the faces you know all the faces in the same way as transferring that to the viva you're gonna know the faces you know?

N yeah sure and I guess the other thing or the other element of the work is that it is a mix of autobiography and appropriated material and I guess that makes me think like how will people relate to that

like these people who like all know me to a different extent how will they relate to that

I mean I think about that sometimes when I show work to Chris I think like "what's he thinking" if he does think particular bits are like disclosure-y but I guess the examiners they'll be asking themselves really really different questions than an audience would at NewBridge

I guess we spoke about this yesterday a bit and maybe like maybe it would be inappropriate for them to start thinking about the work in terms of like confession or disclosure or of like trying to reconcile it in terms of or against me as a body or like maybe it's okay to do it with like my body but not with like me myself as they know it or know me but that's really hard right

H totally but it's a good question that though is it appropriate

that word means so many things as well doesn't it

I was thinking about that in terms of um

I remember when

this is a bit tangential

I remember when Una was born and Holly said what she found really amazing was that Una would have all of her eggs in her ovaries that she would need to be a mother herself like when she's born like they're there already you know in their little sacs they don't grow you know they're just there in the same way

I was thinking you know about what we were saying yesterday about all the conditions and all the knowledge that those three men

that in a way they have all of the knowledge and equipment to deal with the thing that you're doing within them and you could also argue in a freaky cosmic way that they also had that when they were born too you know if time isn't linear blah blah blah

that made me think in a way I feel like that's a bit like what you do that even though you have referenced far and wide and you do call people out and say their names and appropriate etcetera it's different maybe cos it's that you're advocating or representing for a different type of knowledge and I suppose that embodied idea has been a bit kind of shat on now embodied knowledge or whatever but if you thought of it in terms of like that you have all the wherewithal within you already that you don't necessarily need ancillary props and books and bibliographies and literature reviews that it's all within you already like your eggs are for a woman when you're a baby and that's quite

you could pick holes in it I mean obviously they would like be people would like say "bullshit the books I've read obviously contribute to the fact of what I know like knowledge is not this fucking situated-in-the-body-thing it comes from outside"

I suppose it's about what sort of knowledge you're appealing to though like what sort of knowledge you're triggering cos I guess part of that is like you're seeking to trigger the kind of knowledge that's about being in the world and

being in the world as a man as opposed to being in the world as someone that identifies as a woman the gaps between those two beings in the world are salient significant and in a way it doesn't really matter if you've read a lot of Derrida⁹⁰ you know

N totally totally but like unless the content of the scripts doesn't get it right if it doesn't provoke that or trigger that if the tone isn't right

but you know like when I showed some work to Oliver it was like there was no space for him to feel his presence I guess or his being he was like essentially "these words aren't for me" do you know what I mean?

H yeah true good point yeah so actually you couldn't just say it's for Everyman or any man it is actually for those three men

N I mean it's for academics or artist academics or for academia and to call out some of the like conditions of that of like this

I mean I'm just trying to go back and think about the performance at the Book Fair I should have tried to seek out feedback you know but no one

I might have said this to you at the time but like everyone spoke to me about the printmaking and the set up and the install and no one at all spoke to me at all about the language that was used

H but that's just avoidance tactics right it's nothing to do with the words it's not their fault right?

N no but you know it feels really hard to not have a conversation about a performance after you've just done it right like afterward

the viva is gonna be so artificial I'm not gonna get to have a conversation about it with them till afterwards until we can have like this staged conversation the second viva

⁹⁰ Jacques Derrida, Philosopher (1930 – 2004)

H are you gonna do the work again before the conversation do you think?

N nah I'm gonna set the room up exactly in the way it was when I did the performance like to reference it but I wasn't planning on doing it again

I am interested though to create like a through line for them between like the different moments of the research though you know from their experience of this text to their experience of viva hashtag one and two

I'm well intrigued about how that conversation will begin though right

H yeah it's gonna be a bit like the Berliners or the therapy session like who the fuck speaks first and what do they say?

N yuk yeah

although it will probably be Chris although but actually though I don't think he's allowed to speak

in a way I feel like this work it's all been like a response to the structure of the PhD like a way of working towards the viva in a productive way like positively

it feels important like in a truly positive way of being able to conceptualize both the process and

but you know in my opinion this stuff is not discussed enough in research communities or here at Northumbria at least you know stuff about the final stages and about how to communicate with other experts in the field and how to like really interrogate this idea of having to defend yourself

actually I've felt really defensive about that and the way I've been working especially over the last year like whenever anyone asks me about what I'm doing I'm like "do you want a fucking fight this is what I'm doing" that makes me feel uncomfortable

H yeah sure but the thing is that's the gist as well of what's going on in your proposal right do you know what I mean

if the punch bag were removed or if the door that you're punching against were a hole then something else would happen you'd be falling through so in the same way that you can't perform this work to Oliver and be like "you've got all the wherewithal to digest this you've got all the digestion chambers" cos actually what I'm realizing is he hasn't

the door that you're punching and I'm not saying you're doing a violent thing by the way

these three dudes their wherewithal their digestion chambers that they're using to process that does unfortunately include the fact of all the books they've read

N right and yeah I agree and you know I picked them cos of that you know you kind of curate that space for yourself

H well you do I don't know if other people do I think it's more haphazard

N I think it's so shortsighted not to

I've been really into this idea of thinking about the way that they do it in some parts of Europe that your viva is public and you have an audience

I thought about that

I'd be so interested to go to one of those to open it out

H I was thinking of doing that to be honest

in France it's a combination of a lecture and an interview kind of thing I think

it's public and published sometimes

I don't actually know if they'd let me do it here though I don't actually know if it's possible

N I don't know

I think it would have to be a two-part thing so maybe there'd be a moment a private moment

H yeah like a wedding like we did get married before in that little room over there but now we're gonna have another ceremony and a party

N yeah it would have to be slightly

I mean it goes back to this thing of having a conversation in front of an audience the thing we were speaking about before but that would be so interesting to try like if there was an audience around a fresh fresh fresh viva

so really so like the performance of the examination was also really present I'd love that

totally go for it though right try and do it

make a fuss

H totally I'd really like to do that definitely

I wonder whether the gladiatorial nature of it whether that would

I wonder whether you can keep your cool in that situation cos it is so high stakes whether you would be able to carry on with your track and not get upset or get sort of angry or defensive which is strange cos you're supposed to be defending it but you're not allowed to be defensive

N but it's like at least

I mean some of this process for me anyway has been about training myself up to have that conversation so I don't freak the fuck out or get really upset

or defensive but to like try and maintain the right energy and also not just to slip into those dominant ways like automatically you know

It's like how to be upfront and find that balance between like not being apologetic or defensive but owning the space and being honest about the experience of making the work and doing the research

I think that should be enough you know for us all to get on a level with each other and have a conversation about it without all these bullshit ideas about a 'defense'

H yeah all that posturing

that's interesting isn't it cos I really feel that you've done the energy reps you've done the training almost in an energetic way so you can hold your own and I feel like I just think it's gonna be really interesting what response is triggered like do people pull rank cos this is what I've been thinking about a lot yesterday we can pull rank in so many ways right

it makes me think like when we're doing Sisters Uncut⁹¹ meetings there's the Safer Spaces Policy right that thing we read out at the beginning of the meetings it's a super nice document it's like "we're here to call out privilege and if you get called out that you've been acting oppressively try not to be defensive we can understand that it's upsetting but try and think first and foremost why that person might have said that they're feeling oppressed try and react with understanding rather than defense"

it's saying cos things are so intersectional and oppressions elide and they elide for certain groups of people and not others it can be very difficult to call it out and the ways in which we oppress each other are myriad and insane so let's not get defensive

if someone does say something it sort of makes me think that once that's in the room it's actually a bit easier to deal with each other I think

⁹¹ Sisters Uncut is a UK wide feminist direct-action collective campaigning for better domestic violence services for women.

I was thinking that for the viva cos there are gonna be so many ways of pulling rank so many top trump ways of pulling rank available to those guys as older white male academics so many

they have quite a few of the reins you know like the knowledge one the “I’ve-read-more-books-than-you” one the “I’ve read certain authors” one the “I’ve got certain knowledges and certain sorts of angles on things” or “I’m older than you” or “I’m whatever”

N yeah right and like I do want to hear about that like their responses and angles for it to be a productive conversation to like carry on its learning

I just need to be able to make sure I don’t just accept something as a final judgement call if I feel like I’ve got something to say back to that

in terms of generosity not like a defense

H exactly and then maybe that is about that Martial Art training like “I’m gonna maintain my vibe here and I’m gonna hold the space” like it’s a super super power thing like I’m holding the space

N it’s making me wanna vomit thinking about it

H it makes me excited

I just think you’ll manage cos actually I do think you have been practicing like you say like I agree with you

N yeah I think I’ve been practicing but then I wonder

I mean for me this research or PhD or whatever has been like a continued training in performance just like using your body to communicate something and thinking very carefully about the language that you choose and how you communicate with an audience

there’s a part of me that’s like I mean I think you have to have a really concentrated idea of how you might go into that space for debate and

discussion I feel concerned for like if someone is less aware of that and like to take care of their like authority and position their agency

H cos then they're very vulnerable?

N totally

like not being aware of all the power relations in the space and to try and safeguard your authority to let yourself speak and be heard that worries me

H yup no I totally agree

I think you've defended against that or you've sort of intuited that or known that so a lot of it is gonna be about making sure that doesn't happen not even making sure it's just not gonna happen cos the steps the progression the PhD-ness the progression of the idea has reached that point

it makes me think about cos I was chatting to Maz the other day and she said she was going on a cycle ride with some people I can't remember how it came about but she said this woman she was cycling with who's really lovely she said "o she's so calm she's so calm it's really lovely" and I was like "uh-huh" and she was like "I'm sure people always really fall in love with her cos she's so calm" and I was thinking right right she said "I'm not calm" and I was thinking "nah I'm not calm either" I don't think that's an attribute you could give to me or her to be fair even though we have moments of calm

I'm sure this sort of holding yourself together stuff and holding the space and this sort of calmness it seems to be desirable for women to have and in the same way that it feels totally not desirable for women to have the opposite cos that's like means that you're a witch mad woman and all those shitty binaries the arc hysterique or whatever

I think about the calmness that's required or the presence or strength of self that's required in that viva and I dunno it just makes me think about the calmness that's needed from women in order to defend something

N goes back to the desensitized voice the flat effect stuff

H yeah I was also thinking about that last night

I was thinking about what that would sound like if it wasn't that and then I thought you know when you said "did I rap that last bit?"

N genuine concern that I'd rapped it

H ha genuine question "did I rap that last bit"

I was thinking maybe you have found it in a way like I wonder

like obviously you're not gonna go into a full-on rap act but what if that is the beginning of it

what if whatever you found at the end there is the beginning of the next way of speaking cos it could be a clue it doesn't have to be like you go full rap

N yeah okay right uh huh

it feels healthy at least you know to think about the future of the research how this research could work for others in the future and in terms of a post-doc project

I think Chris was quite enthusiastic about the idea that I would continue with this kind of proposal or provocation to try and create a space where the defense of new knowledge could be entirely performed and spoken aloud in a moment and like away from the page

I'm interested in pushing that further like this way of working of researching and presenting knowledge as a practice of feminist pedagogy and I'd really like to do a post-doc project that included teaching as like a practice as like a study of a feminist pedagogy

I'm really hoping that the Let's Mobilize⁹² thing we're going to be right on you know

I'd really wanna bring some of that energy to Northumbria I think about as some kind of post-doc project

in terms of rap in terms of the rap stuff though and where this language is like gonna take my voice or how you can test language against the voice

I mean it's interesting like Katrina Palmer⁹³ her voice the precarity and instability

H yeah I was thinking about her that's what it was that I was thinking about
funnily enough

she doesn't do that she doesn't do the flat art thing right?

N no her work like prioritizes the untrained voice and letting the voice falter and show emotion and that is the quality of her voice right but the content of her work is like

I think the content of her work it's fucking strong the way she writes there is a lot of tension contained in there and so there is another extra level of tension created when she's reading her own work so like the quality and the timbre of her voice against the content

H totally

it's the absolute opposite of a poet reading their stuff which I hate which I think shouldn't be allowed like I feel like I don't wanna listen to anyone else but her read her work whereas I want to listen to anyone else but a poet read their poem personally

⁹² LET'S MOBILIZE: WHAT IS FEMINIST PEDAGOGY (Gothenburg: Valand School of Fine Art, 2016)

⁹³ Katrina Palmer, Artist (1967)

N yeah totally

there has been points throughout this research when I've thought I'm gonna get someone else to read this script but after I've actually finished writing it I always

it's like you write cos you know the way it's gonna sound when you speak it aloud and like the way that the shape of the words will sound in the shape of your mouth and the kind of phrasing and the lilting of it and the duration that you'll give to certain words

I think that you know or I know that when I write so it feels a bit like it's for

H definitely but then it would be interesting if you're thinking about like a life beyond the viva this idea of transference or passing on or something just as an exercise like would that Martial Art energy training that you've been doing

that's such a shitty way of referring to it but you know what I mean the preparation you've been putting yourself through in order to do this viva

if you were to write a script or if you were to give one of your scripts to someone else to speak would the process of developing that together like that transference would it necessarily involve an energy transfer as well

would it involve the training like not over time but would that be transferred as well or maybe the only way in which you can speak this script is if you've also got to this place to a certain extent

not that I'm saying this place is like a hallowed place but you know like that maybe it's inherent in the script that you might need to have a viable attitude that didn't kill it if you know what I mean

N I think it would be or it could be potentially quite like

it's different for someone else isn't it cos the stuff I've written

cos I guess you set the stakes for yourself I guess don't you when you write a script and you think "right hmm yeah I'm gonna say this I'm behind saying this" so in that way it might be conflicting for another person but not at all I'm not saying like "only I could do this"

H no no no I just wondered whether it's built in a like transference way whether something is built in that we couldn't pin point or separate

N I mean I'd like to think in a certain way and maybe this is only cos this is what it's done for me a bit

in a way it could be an empowering position to put yourself in to speak from the first person and directly address another person and deal with shit in front of people that it could be quite empowering

I hate the word empowering

energizing whatever for the reader speaker

was it last year or the year before when that artist asked me to read that text for that group show at NGCA?⁹⁴

H hmm but you didn't read it though someone else read it for him no?

N I was away yeah who read it?

H a young woman I dunno I mean yeah a young woman

N with flat effect?

H yeah

N yup

⁹⁴ *The Decorator and The Thief* (Sunderland: Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, 2015)

H yup yeah that happened

and I mean it was a really explicit text I mean you read it right?

N yeah I read it and it was

what was that about then?

H I don't know cos I don't know enough about it but like what the fuck went on there

it would be very very easy for me to be like "what a fucker why are you putting your words into the mouths of young women and why are you sending them out ahead of you as your avatar why don't you speak the words you wrote" but I know he's a very intelligent man so presumably he hasn't done that blind

I presume I mean I would definitely have to give him the benefit of the doubt

I've no idea whether he deserves it or not

N I would be interested to have that conversation with him you know as someone that he asked to read the work like "o so why" you know to know what it was about the thrust of what he'd written that needed a female voice to express the meaning

I should have that conversation with him

but who can or who could you bring to mind a performer artist male who has that flat effect kind of way of performing

who's the most flat-man you can think of?

H well I was just trying to think that actually

I was thinking of Tris Vonna Mitchell⁹⁵ he's not flat though he's like excited excitable to a degree

who speaks

who does that

a man who speaks

I can't think of a flat-man

N I was even like thinking about like I played some Allan Kaprow⁹⁶ at the BALTIC preview I was working at the other day and even thinking about all those 70s guys and Bruce Nauman⁹⁷ they were punchy not flat at all no way

H maybe thingy Alvin Lucier⁹⁸ *I'm Sitting In A Room*⁹⁹ maybe but then that's endemic it's to do with the fact that he wants his voice to come back and break down etcetera

N oh ah um Ed Atkins¹⁰⁰

H Ed Atkins that's true but he puts it through a bunch of effects right I mean in his videos and live so he speaks vocoder live mostly I think

N ah like that thing¹⁰¹ he did in the Serpentine¹⁰²

⁹⁵ Tris Vonna Mitchell, Artist (1982)

⁹⁶ Allan Kaprow, Artist (1927 - 2006)

⁹⁷ Bruce Nauman, Artist (1941)

⁹⁹ Alvin Lucier, Artist (1931)

¹⁰⁰ Ed Atkins, Artist (1982)

¹⁰¹ Ed Atkins, *DEPRESSION* (London: Serpentine Memory Marathon, 2014)

¹⁰² Serpentine Galleries, based in London and founded in 1970.

I fucking love that though

H so do I

I loved that piece

I hate the fact that I love his work

N why?

H I don't know I just think he's a cunt like jokes but I do I think he's a cunt

I saw him speak a few times and I dunno he just seems cunt to me and not cunt in a good way I dunno it's not legit it's just shitty shitty hackles rising and just being like "you fucker you fucker" it's terrible but I do feel that

N ha maybe cos you're hot for him

H probably

no but I mean I loved the Serpentine piece I really did

the thing is I wanna make a voiceover for a film that Mat and I did for the Swim-In film¹⁰³ that we're trying to make

I'm trying to like voice-over it but I was like "I'm doing it through a fucking vocoder or I'm doing it through a octaver so I don't sound like me so I'm gonna try and hyper every sniff"

I dunno cos I was just like "I want to be able to lower my voice too" I've already got a really low voice and I feel like so many dudes do it you know

¹⁰³ The 'Swim-In' was a direction action organized by Nicola in 2013, to protest the closure of Newcastle City Pool by Newcastle City Council. Harriet and another artist Mat Fleming documented the Swim-In protest with the aim of producing a short film.

Jesse Darling¹⁰⁴ right she did it for a Random Acts¹⁰⁵ that's not a very good film but she did put hers through an octaver or whatever

I dunno though I feel like there's something really petty and childish about "I want to be able to go that low as well that low and that flat and that beefy" cos I mean that line the thing that he says Ed Atkins "everyone says it's gonna get better well it fucking better"¹⁰⁶ at the end of that performance it's like that's really impactful partly cos of the effect he's putting his voice through

N but then part of me thinks if it is like whatever childish or whatever to wanna get that beefy and that low then it's like where are the other spaces of like the female voice the sound the voice that owns all its emotions

H yeah right you're right actually like why run to the beefy thing just cos you're fucked off you haven't been able to claim it when actually you could be looking for where

you could be looking for other fields you know other pastures

N there was this one event¹⁰⁷ at BALTIC once and I definitely can't remember her name¹⁰⁸ it was a woman who was reading her own work and she had

as I remember it she had

it was such a like particular set of things that came together she had on like a beige dress with a lime green V neck sweater pulled over it all quite peculiar and she had her hair tied back really tightly and when she read her lips were really quite close together and when she read I thought it was

¹⁰⁴ Jesse Darling, Artist

¹⁰⁵ Matthew Stone and Jesse Darling, *The Soldier's Tale* (Random Acts Film, 2016)

¹⁰⁶ Ed Atkins, *DEPRESSION* (London: Serpentine Memory Marathon, 2014) / 18 minutes in

¹⁰⁷ TARR; Fiction by Artists' live readings, (Newcastle: BALTIC, 2014)

¹⁰⁸ Audrey Reynolds, Writer

really great cos she kept pushing hair out of her face which was brilliant cos she had no hair in her face and it was like all these tiny tics that like broke her not broke but like interrupted her reading¹⁰⁹ and her presence and in a really like thrilling way

you couldn't quite get it like get her if you know what I mean like it was destabilizing

H totally

I wonder who that was

N I can search it and I'll send you her name but you know I don't know

it's funny when you just remember these one-off performances that you've seen and you have really no connection with the artist or seen their work again but there's something that really stays with you isn't it I mean I wonder if she was paying that much attention to herself you know I don't mean not in terms of her clothes or whatever

H but in terms of how she knows she's gonna be received?

N yeah it's a bit like when Will Holder¹¹⁰ came as visiting artist at Northumbria first he played a Robert Ashley¹¹¹ opera¹¹² at the beginning of his lecture and he played it for way too long you know like way after that moment that most people have started fidgeting and as the person presenting you start to get nervous and twitchy and you're like getting nervous and thinking "I'm gonna switch it off" well he left it on for much longer on purpose to push at people I guess to put them in a space

¹⁰⁹ Audrey Reynolds, *TARR: Fiction by Artist*, (Newcastle: BALTIC, 2014) / 55:15 minutes in

¹¹⁰ Will Holder, *Typographer* (1969)

¹¹¹ Robert Ashley, *Composer* (1930 – 2014)

¹¹² Robert Ashley, *Perfect Lives* (Channel 4 Film, 1984)

he was reading as well like he wasn't like reading reading reading but he had some notes with him and he would sit down then stand up then move the chair or sit the wrong way round on the chair or get up again and like actively tell us "o I've changed my mind I'm not doing that I'm not doing that" and I was like really you know into it like really really into it

I also fancied him but I was really into it

I was speaking to people afterwards friends of his and they were like "well yeah but it was all on purpose" and I was like "uh right"

H and you didn't think it was?

N at the time I didn't

it felt really live and like clicky but supposedly it was all planned I think yeah so he in the same way as with the twitches woman maybe he was like knowingly disrupting the format you know

it's critique it's embedded

H huh I'm trying to think of another

Cara Tolmie¹¹³ I think doesn't modify her voice too much and definitely goes to the outer reaches of it in terms of pitch

N Kathryn Giles's friend from up in Glasgow she's from Belfast I'll have to send you her name I really like her stuff she's on like the LUX artist thing

H Kathryn Elkin?¹¹⁴

N yeah I mean she doesn't modify either she does a lot of "you know you know and I was like and then and he and then I was like and" there's no silences

¹¹³ [Cara Tolmie](#), Artist

¹¹⁴ [Kathryn Elkin](#), Artist (1983)

really in her scripts at all and that makes me think about 'Life Without Buildings'¹¹⁵ Sue Tompkins¹¹⁶

H yeah she also doesn't modify and actually you might say like sometimes what I think stops women's voices it's maybe the irritation attached to certain types of female voices

N the sing-songy-ness?

H exactly like the sort of "hung up with a sharp click nah nah nah" like lots of people that I've played 'Life Without Buildings' to have been like "stop it's so annoying"

N same here and so yeah maybe

so like you saying maybe there is like an unconscious like leveling of the voice so you don't

H piss off

N yeah

H totally

I think so

N that's depressing

H isn't it?

N yeah really depressing

H shit

¹¹⁵ 'Life Without Buildings (1999 - 2002)

¹¹⁶ Sue Tompkins, Artist (1971)

H I think I better go soon Nic you know?

N o God yeah

H sorry love

N no

H no

N no

yes

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