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Citation: Taylor, Linda (2019) Towards a concept of inefficiency in performance and dialogue practice. Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance, 24 (3). pp. 333-351. ISSN 1356-9783

Published by: Taylor & Francis

URL: https://doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2019.1619449 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2019.1619449>

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Towards a Concept of Inefficiency in Performance and Dialogue Practice

Linda Taylor

Introduction

Nationhood? (2017) was a public performance that took place at Northumbria University at Newcastle-upon-Tyne (United Kingdom), on 25th May, 2018. This work is one of numerous iterations of my theatre-making practice, which I have called Operations of Dialogue. In advance of *Nationhood?* The following promotional material was issued to audience members:

> **Nationhood? What is it? What does it mean?**
>
> *Two weeks before you arrive, three actors walked into a space, sat down and debated these questions. We recorded it on camera.*
>
> *Two weeks before you arrive, a group of researchers were given the task to research these questions. They then shared and discussed this information with the actors.*
>
> *Since this time, they have had conversations over coffee, over dinner and over online platforms with a variety of people about this topic.*
>
> *One and a half weeks before you arrive at this event, three actors again walked into a space, sat down and, further informed by their dialogues with others, debated these questions. We recorded it on camera.*
>
> *In this event we present a live re-enactment of key moments from these recorded debates. In the final section of this event we will open up these questions to public debate with you and ask, what is nationhood?*[1]

[1] Publicity material for the event was created by Lyn Cunningham

In this article I offer a model of this practice, Operations of Dialogue (OoD), using *Nationhood?* as the main case-study. In addition to offering a detailed account of OoD and the methodology underpinning its construction, I will also place this practice within the context of the neoliberal university. I will argue for OoD as a form of theatre-making that stands in a critical relation to neoliberal subjectivity, and that this practice has the potential to critically inform our modes of teaching and learning. In doing so, I offer an account of how a concept of inefficiency in performance and dialogic practice can serve as a means to rethink the terms by which we engage in the collective re-shaping of identity within the context of the contemporary neoliberal university.

I first offer an account of the neoliberal university in terms of "efficiency," before positioning OoD as an "inefficient" form of practice. Crucial to understanding the dichotomy I offer between efficiency and inefficiency in relation to my theatre-making practice, is the concept of the Dialogical Actor. The Dialogical Actor is a performance concept which I developed over a number of years from my reading of Jürgen Habermas. Here, I offer this performance concept by way of exploring potential modes of resistance to the "efficiency logics" of the neoliberal university. Further consequences follow for reconsidering contemporary political theatre practice. Not only for considering the potential of Habmermasian theory for performance practice, but moreover I argue for the value of "rationality" to politically resistant performance forms at a time when non-rational and non-discursive approaches to theatre making carry considerable sway within our discipline.

The Efficiency University

In *Zombie University* (2017), Sinead Murphy, of the Philosophy Department at University of Newcastle, argues that the expectations of the fee-paying student and the market-defined target of student satisfaction combine to promote a turning away from, or reproduction of, what is "alien" in knowledge towards that which is more easily accessible and "relatable" to existing student experience. Murphy's explanation of the institutional context behind this intellectual malaise is stark indeed:

> It is hardly surprising that the NSS [National Student Survey, UK] is quite dramatically transforming the content of university curricula. Why teach the finer points and implications of Kant's third critique, when students will inevitably feel less satisfied with this than they will with yet another course on applying utilitarian ethics to the practice of female genital mutilation? (2017, 72)

If we take Murphy's critique of the neoliberal university to be sound, then we can see that the institution is saturated by a Weberian rationalism, a link which has been made elsewhere (see for instance Lorenz 2012). What this means in practice is that the university becomes governed by an institutional (formal) rationality which is guided by qualities such as measurability, predictability and efficiency – all key elements in a modern university's corporate strategy, and also familiar elements in Weber's lexicon of rationality. Thus in the quote above Murphy suggests that utilitarian ethics offer a clear set of knowable principles which can be measured and calculated for "success" by both the student and the teacher; this

offers an efficient route to grade success rather than the more open, non-goal orientated exploration of complex ideas in Kant's third critique.

Murphy's analysis, while drawing on her own discipline, has a wider application. What we find in the work of emeritus History professor John Smyth, for whom neoliberal rationality is interchangeable with economic rationality, is a consistent critique. For Smyth, the neoliberal university is a place where logics of "marketization, competition, audit culture, and metrification" (Smyth 2017, 5) have come to negate the hitherto assumed role of the university as a place where "social critique and criticism is incubated, nurtured, fostered, encouraged, and supported" (Smyth 2017, 3). In a similar critical vein Tai Peseta from Western Sydney University argues that in the pursuit of successful grades above open structures of learning, "Teachers and professionals in the neoliberal university are being invited to take up the desire for non-stop responsiveness to student learning, regimes of evaluation, limitless assessment […]" (2019, 199). While the observations made by Murphy, Smith and Peseta are to a large degree echoed in my own experience of teaching in HE, working within the discipline of Drama still allows for and necessitates a continual negotiation with collaborative working processes and collective creativity. While teaching is becoming increasingly instrumentalised in ways indicated by these and other authors, I shall argue in this article that the discipline of Drama gives a unique opportunity to thematise an opposition to neoliberal structures through the ways we work together.

Wendy Brown, one of the most significant theorists who has undertaken an analysis of how neoliberalism has shaped/is shaping our subjectivity in new ways, asserts in *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* that "neoliberalism constructs subjects as relentlessly economic actors" (Brown 2015, 21). Her analysis echoes that of Foucault when she suggests that:

> When the construction of human beings and human conduct as *homo economicus* spreads to every sphere, including that of political life itself, it radically transforms not merely the organization, but the purpose and character of each sphere, as well as the relations among them. (2015, 34-35)

Thus, Brown emphasises that neoliberalism should not be understood purely in abstract economic terms as a manifestation of late capitalism which orders the social in particular ways. Neoliberalism, more than this, is part of the air that we breathe; it is a lived experience of contemporary life and conditions our appearance to others and to ourselves as subjects. According to Brown, neoliberalism is characterised by "investment and competition" and thus it remakes the human subject as "a speck of capital"; individuals invest in themselves as if they are "small firms" in order that they may better compete in the marketplace (2016, 3). Rosalind Gil further develops this idea that contemporary universities increasingly marginalise a sense of collective citizenship, arguing that the university fosters an environment in which its members "remain locked into a profoundly individualist framework that turns away from systemic or collective politics" (2015, 92). If, as economist Paul Heyne asserts, "what we value determines what we will consider efficient and inefficient" (1994, 24), then what is efficient in the neoliberal university are the processes which lead most directly and transparently to high grades, a marketable self (both in the private and public

spheres) and monetary gain. In discussing OoD as a critical response to this neoliberal paradigm of subjectivity, I position the *in*efficient construction of inter-subjectivity (via Jürgen Habermas) in opposition to forms of subjectivity defined through instrumental measures.

Creating OoD: Working Through Habermas

The catalyst for the creation of OoD was not, however, theoretical reflections on the ills of neoliberalism, but a more concrete experience: an impasse reached during a devising process with a group of students in 2005. I was leading the group towards a performance dealing with the theme of immigration, and I found myself having to negotiate with some strong reactionary views from many of the students involved. While this impasse led to a dialogue with the group in which I employed ideology critique methodologies[2] to shift and develop perspectives, I felt that my methods had failed to instil a genuine process of reflective learning. This perspective was confirmed by the students' post-show reports, which suggested less a process of reflective learning and more a capitulation to values which had been revealed in the process of ideology critique and which they assumed rightly were held by myself and others who would be grading the work. Following this experience, I shifted from performance and educational practices centred around notions of ideology critique to an exploration of dialogical forms designed to encourage a different mode of critical self-reflection. On the recommendation of a colleague I turned to the work of Jürgen Habermas, which clarified that my work with the students had been "strategic," guiding the performers towards a critique I had already foreseen, rather than aiming to work with them to develop their own learning through rigorous dialogue processes.[3]

Habermas' formulation of communicative action performs a movement away from ideology critique to a discourse model of truth. This approach differs in that agreement and truth are secured intersubjectively between dialogical participants, in contrast to ideology critique where an expert holds the truth, which is then imparted to the dominated subject in order to lift the mist of false consciousness and reveal the true facts. Habermas abandoned ideology critique, arguing that it was a hierarchical model of truth displaying an instrumental or goal-orientated use of power that lacks the learning processes necessary to enable either the emancipation of the subject (beyond recognising their own domination) or their sustained growth. This is not to suggest that Habermas understands ideology critique as problematic in itself. In his earlier career, Habermas championed ideology critique in its ability to make

[2] I develop the notion of ideology critique in more detail below.

[3] It has been outside the scope of this paper to situate this practice in relation to Jacques Rancière's concept of the "emancipated spectator." It should be noted that there is clearly much in the practice of OoD that resonates with the democratic impulse towards an equality of "ownership" of ideas and interpretations within the space that Rancière speaks of, as well as the dissolving of boundaries between actor and spectator. (Rancière 2014). However, Habermas, I argue, gives us an important set of conceptual tools for thinking about how to create the space in which an equality on the basis of rationality might be achieved.

explicit the meanings that are codified, naturalised or falsified according to the will of the powerful (Habermas 1983, 6).

However, the claims within ideology critique must themselves be continually contested through the rational process of claim and counter-claim. The Habermasian approach moves the speakers beyond ideology critique (as an uncovering of concealed truth) towards a focused testing and development of their own particular statements and ideas. The limitations of ideology critique as a means of opening up learning processes that are not already strategically determined further reveals the relevance of Habermas in my understanding of the impasse reached with my group of students.

Operations of Dialogue is the practice that emerged from the work that followed my experience with my students in 2005, and my critical engagement with Habermas. In seeking to avoid the strategic impulses inherent in ideology critique, OoD aims to orientate away from pedagogical practices that dictate truth (however progressive) to the facilitation of intersubjective and collective learning processes. The analysis and reflections in this article are extensions of this originary moment when the method was created, together with an urgent (re)situating of the principles of this practice to address a wider impasse: how might inter-subjective creative practice be situated in relation to the "efficiency university"?

Inefficiency (a): the Practice of the Dialogical Actor

Habermas' theory of rational dialogue is known as communicative rationality or communicative action. From the point of view of a (dominant) neoliberal rationality, communicative action can be understood as "inefficient" because it is non-teleological. Rather than being solutions-orientated, communicative action understands dialogue primarily as a linguistically mediated site for learning and understanding one's actions in relation to one's responsibility towards others. Habermas has made it strikingly clear that whilst achieving consensus is the aim in rational dialogue, it is rarely achieved in practice. Rather, consensus acts as a guiding ideal, through "which different participants overcome their merely subjective views" (Habermas, 1984, 10) to move towards understanding through the careful testing of others' ideas in dialogue. The heart of communicative action therefore is not the solution arrived at or the agreement reached - there may not be one – but rather the maintenance of an open space in which claim meets counter-claim, underpinned by a mutual "deep listening." It is a process that is time-consuming, non-teleological and inefficient, one that does not and cannot guarantee an answer. Communicative action is sharply opposed to the efficiency of goal-orientated strategic action that holds sway in politics, in the media and in everyday communication today.

Strategic action, in contrast to communicative action, does not rely on the force of the better argument but rather on "strategies" of containment and persuasion. Examples abound, such as the withholding of information so dialogue partners can only make decisions based on partial information; using strategies of charisma, charm, self-effacement and impatience; or refusing to hear and answer calls to validate one's claims in argument. It can have the appearance of

rational argument, in the sense that the strategist will adopt the appearance of listening to the rational claims and counterclaims of others, when in fact there is a prior commitment to a position, argument or claim. Whilst all of us have the capacity to practice rational argument, it is commonplace to fall into strategic action, not least because it is very much in line with the normalisation of communication practices within neoliberal institutions as well as society at large.

Importantly in Habermassian terms, what can be understood as a particularly fertile context for the production of strategic action is the practice of "governance," which Wendy Brown points to as the key administrative form of neoliberalism. Brown argues that governance has a particular way of suppressing deliberations of the good and stunting the development of critical citizenship through its ongoing practice of depoliticising language. Thus, she argues:

> in 'governance speak', 'guidelines' replace law, 'facilitation' replaces regulation, 'standards' and 'codes of conduct' (disseminated by a range of agencies and institutions) replace overt policing and other forms of state coercion. Together these replacements vanquish a vocabulary of power and hence power's visibility, from the lives and venues that governance orders and originates. (Brown 2016, 5)

This soft form of management, as Brown refers to it, powerfully subjects the individual to what we might call the 'neoliberal sphere', to which there is no 'outside': no alternative space which can be taken as a vantage point for criticism.

"Governance speak" in Wendy Brown's terminology becomes "econobabble" in John Smyth's writing. (2017). Drawing from the work of Richard Denniss' Smyth suggests that we confront those who employ econobabble:

> 'Listen carefully, and get them to clarify what key words mean' like 'efficiency', 'effectiveness',' competitive', being asked to go beyond their scripted mantra will be very unsettling indeed (Smyth 2017, 180).

Without directly evoking Habermas, therefore, Smyth draws on the processes of rational dialogue as a means to make visible and call to account the non-rational vocabularies of neoliberal rationality.

Neoliberal rationality, we can now see, is a form of instrumental rationality through which the subject exists in a strategic relation to the world. Habermas argues instead for an understanding of the subject as dialogically formed. In this sense he argues that meaning is the product of "linguistically established intersubjectivity" (1984, 397) in that it results from the active, and interactive, negotiations between people, mediated through language, rather than from an isolated contemplation of the world, as will be discussed further below. The obscuration of meaning through the use of technical language, as referenced in Smyth above, is anathema to Habermas for whom dialogue must involve "the negotiation of definitions of the situation" (Habermas 1984, 1987, 1990b), which are to be explicit and agreed upon. From

this starting point, communicative rationality takes precedence over an individual speaker's "agenda" in pursuing their own line of thought or argument.

As Rosalind Gill has argued, Neoliberalism has been extensively theorised as a political and economic rationality which is orientated towards individual success and away from the production of critical citizenship. This does not mean however that we should turn our backs on all forms of rationality as an antidote to this state of affairs. Since the postdramatic turn there has been a tendency to associate rationality with realism , with the singular vision of a privileged (often white, masculine) vantage point which needs to be eliminated if we are to nurture progressive, democratised art forms. In the consequent critical embrace of theatre forms, which privilege identity politics and 'the politics of perception', there is little incentive to create theatre and performance that explore an alternative form of (intersubjective) rationality based on collective learning. Yet, as Judith Butler has insisted in a very different context where she has reflected on the development of her own thought:

> "One political point probably has remained much the same even as my own focus has shifted, and that is that identity politics has failed to furnish a broader conception of what it means, politically, to live together, across differences, sometimes in modes of unchosen proximity, especially when living together, however difficult it may be, remains an ethical and political imperative" (Butler, 2015, 27).

For Butler, the creation of a shared public space is crucial to the development of progressive political struggles, even if that space comprises of a plurality speakers, bodies and identity positions. Habermassian rationality, which involves seeking the better argument and collective learning, excites the potential for alliances with others outside of our immediate interest groups. Through this approach as Seyla Benhabib has observed;"we can appreciate otherness without dissolving into it" and "respect heterogeneity without being overwhelmed by it" (Benhabib, 1996, 337).

Butler is certainly not Habermasian in her approach, however she does open up a space for thinking about the possibility of a consensus-driven politics as a viable strategy for a resistant politics. If, as Butler points out, we must find ways to overcome differences in order to "live together", then with Habermas we might think about how rationality becomes a performative task, a particular mode of relation that plays a decisive role in overcoming the individualised ideology of neoliberalism by insisting on the definition of self through the creation of inter-subjective contexts.

Inefficiency (b): The Theory of the Dialogical Actor

In OoD, there is a blurring of the boundary between theatre actor and social actor. In his conception of the social actor, Habermas follows Max Weber who distinguishes actions from observable behaviour: "Human behaviour – be it external or internal, activity, omission or acquiescence – will be called 'action' if and insofar as the actor attaches a subjective meaning to it" (Habermas, 1984, 279). Thus, social actors are identified by the consciousness of the subjective meaning which they attribute to their own actions, informing their relations with

other acting subjects. The theatre actors in OoD similarly attach their own subjectivity/sense of agency to their own dialogue processes, while also drawing on their skills as theatre actors in subsequently re-presenting dialogue material to an audience. I discuss this process in more detail in the following section. First, I shall outline in more detail my conception of the dialogical actor, which I draw once more from Habermas' communicative action.

Phillip Auslander has argued that in theatre, the "grounding concepts" which function as "logos" include "the playwright's vision, the director's concept or, more interesting, the actor's self." It is this latter concept that Auslander sees as the predominant form of logos within the major European approaches to dramatic acting. He notes (1986, 64) that "Stanislavsky, Brecht and Grotowski all implicitly designate the actor's self as the logos of performance." Thus in Brechtian acting, "the actor must be present herself as well as in character and her own persona must carry greater authority than the role" (Auslander 1986, 63). This theory of the actor's self as logos is problematized in OoD. This is because in communicative action logos, as the pre-defined identity of the subject, does not exist. Rather, the subject emerges through the communicative action itself and is the outcome therefore of linguistic dialogic exchange. Habermas argues that a

> testable critique of the Western emphasis on logos starts from an attack on the abstractions surrounding logos itself, as free of language, as universalist and as disembodied. It conceives of intersubjective understanding as the telos inscribed into communication in ordinary language, and of the logocentrism of Western thought, heightened by the philosophy of consciousness, as a systematic foreshortening and distortion of a potential always already operative in the communicative practice of everyday life, but only selectively exploited. (Habermas 1990a, 311)

Thus logos is not the property of a single vision, as Auslander argues, but is conceived intersubjectively through a process of rational dialogue. This understanding of the logos is co-existent with the notion of intersubjectivity as the production of the self in relation to others through rational dialogue. For Habermas, intersubjectivity replaces the notion of the subject and as such there is no coherent theory of the subject in his writing. In contrast, neoliberal rationality produces the subject as necessarily framed through the competitive quest for success in the economised private and public spheres. As Brown argues: "The model neoliberal citizen is one who strategizes for her or himself among various social, political, and economic options, not one who strives with others to alter or organize these options" (2005, 43.) Thus, neoliberalism entails a de-democratisation of the subject. The subject is no longer formed through rational dialogue and the deliberation of the good, but through investment in the self as *homo entrepreneur*.

There is a comparison here to be made with Chantal Mouffe, who has frequently evoked the Habermassian model of the public sphere in order to distinguish her own by comparison (see for instance Mouffe 2013). For Mouffe, positions of identity and political affiliation always precede and mitigate against the possibility of direct consensus-driven communication. To

ensure against a state of “antagonism” between multiple hegemonies, Mouffe proposes an “agonistic pluralism” whereby various parties of interest can collaborate and co-exist within a pluralistic public sphere. These hegemonies may “contaminate” each other as Mouffe puts it, but the possibility of rational dialogue between them is not addressed (Mouffe 2000, 10). In divesting the sphere of rational dialogue, Karpinnen et al. argue, Mouffe's theory of antagonism “suggests that we are trapped in our own imagined worlds and perspectives, and that there is no way we can fully understand other people, other groups and their claims.” (2008, 7).

In this context it is important to note that Habermas modified his original (1960s) concept of the public sphere insisting that

a different picture emerges if from the very beginning one admits the coexistence of competing public spheres and takes account of the dynamics of those processes of communication that are excluded from the dominant public sphere (Habermas 1992, 425).

Habermas’ recognition here came from his dialogue with feminist philosophers such as Nancy Frazer and Seyla Benhabib. Whilst sympathetic to a public sphere critical to the State, these thinkers have externalised the hidden processes and structures of access which have standardised the privilege of white men in Habermas’original model.[4] In this context, the apparent opposition between Mouffe's and Habermas' conceptions of the public sphere might be understood as greatly exaggerated. Both understand democracy as an unceasing struggle between a plurality of interest groups characterised by difference, competing for power and recognition and seek the modification of terms to reflect their claims. We may find a clearer gap between Mouffe and Habermas by noting the emphasis that Habermas places on learning from and understanding the other. Rather than a delimited public sphere in which tensions are held in balance by regulatory institutions, Habermas would have us contend with the relatively messy, inefficient yet highly creative potentialities implicit within listening to and working towards an understanding of the other.

I will now turn to a discussion of OoD as a Habermasian practice of critical citizenship-building in the space of the Drama classroom. Of the various iterations of OoD that have taken place to date, I will focus on one primary example. *Nationhood?* was staged at Northumbria University in May 2018, and brought together teaching practice, public performance and public debate. I offer the OoD framework here for others to adopt and adapt in constructing collaborative, interdisciplinary practices where targets can be sidestepped in favour of the inefficiency of open-ended dialogical learning.

<u>An Overview and Commentary on the making stages of Operations of Dialogue</u>

[4] See Fraser (1985), (1992); and Benhabib (1995).

Preliminary Preparations: Time, Space and Roles

The duration of an OoD (Operations of Dialogue) project is two weeks, which includes the making and the performance of the resulting work. As time and space are particularly efficient economies for holding unspoken agendas in place, I try to find ways of challenging the "systematic identity" of time and space in student-led projects like OoD. I do this by, for example, beginning work at times irregular to the university timetable and more suitable to the student participants. (For example, in *Nationhood?* the students elected to begin at 11am and work until after 6pm in order that their work on the project would fit in better with their part-time jobs.) The intention here is not only to challenge routinized relations to place and to learning but also to ensure that the daily patterns of work are determined collectively by the participants, rather than anonymously by 'timetable'. It is important to note here that *Nationhood?* took place as a two week "summer school" with second and third year Drama students after the academic year had formally ended.

In order that dialogue can develop through the consistent testing of each other's claims, a minimum of three and a maximum of six actors are required, with the option of several researchers working alongside each actor. In *Nationhood?* there were two actors, Ella and Abbie, who had just completed the first year of their Drama BA program, and a third, Dan, who had just completed the second year. Participants not wishing to work as actors have the option to work in small teams of researchers conducting their own research and meeting face-to-face with their dialogue partners before feeding back to "their actor." Participants can also work as assistant directors, helping the project leader (me) to find appropriate dialogue partners, and helping the actors in their process leading up to the final performance event.

It is a pre-requisite for OoD that the actors have some experience of theatre-making. Without this experience, our focus on developing awareness of the skills required for understanding through rational dialogue would become diluted through the necessity of developing concurrent skills in performance. For this reason, in OoD we see the reverse of preparation of the "non-actor" in Boalian theatre. Boal perceives the non-actor as already equipped for engagement in the dialogues required by Theatre of the Oppressed, but less equipped to participate in theatrical forms. In *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* he presents a series of exercises designed to open up theatrical engagement by reconfiguring our bodily and sensory relationships with the world. The plasticity being developed here understands in part that ideology and experience of the world is physically habituated. The "training" of *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* equips the non-actor to experiment with new forms of bodily experience as a method of rehearsal inside theatrical frameworks. In other words, Boal is offering the non-actor elementary methods of performance already familiar to student actors.

In OoD, alternatively, dialogue is not conceived as a preliminary process that determines subsequent action in the real world, but the form of action itself. The learning of OoD will concern the actors developing their own awareness and dexterity in the skills required for dialogue. While Boal presumes his non-actors to be already equipped to engage dialogically but yet require theatrical development, OoD requires its actors to develop dialogical expertise

while being already skilled in elementary approaches to acting, skills that will act in service of enhanced dialogical learning.

Stage 1: Opening Dialogue and Its Performative Reconstruction

On our first day together, without warm-up or discussion, the project leader brings the actors into a studio, chairs positioned ready for dialogue under theatre lighting, and asks the actors to discuss the topic they've been given to prepare. The project leader, researchers and directors on the project form the audience. A fixed camera records the session.

Often the most noticeable characteristic of OoD opening dialogue is a shared atmosphere of discomfort, and the opening dialogue of *Nationhood?* was no exception. The dialogue itself lasted, without a break, for an hour and a half before the actors brought it to a close. In the edited verbatim section of *Nationhood?*'s final performance event, the actors chose to re-enact a degree of this discomfort through hesitant pauses and stilted interaction; in the original dialogue, the pauses were more protracted and the awkwardness persisted for the duration of the exchange. Such discomfort may be provoked by the actors' lack of familiar strategies for dealing with the task at either the theatrical or social levels. In discussion afterwards Ella said: "well we usually chat and do warm-ups, don't we? This felt like something real was happening". When I asked Ella to qualify what she meant by "real", she said "it was like we were being asked to be more than actors, to talk about nationhood as ourselves." The tension established within the task confronts the actors immediately with a significant challenge they face within the making process: how to resolve the conflict between the real dialogue they are invited to participate in and the on-stage performed dialogue invited by the theatrical conditions in the studio. Implicit within Ella's comment is a recognition of the blurring of the boundaries between the theatrical actor and the social actor that will persist up to and including the final performance, when the actors will negotiate the shift between the representation of themselves in dialogue and participation in public debate.

Hesitant pauses, the strain of trying to find the right words, of picking up a point to extend the flow of an idea before running out of steam, and the protracted awkwardness punctuating speech all point to an affective substrate to the dialogic practice in the beginning of OoD. To identify affect is significant here, since the term affect tends to point us toward experiences that are in excess or outside of discourse. Indeed, Margaret Wetherell (2013, 351) suggests that "To attend to affect is to stress the limits of reason and the limits of the immediately knowable and communicable." This understanding of affect is consistent with the experience of actors in OoD; the affective discomforts pointed to here all manifest as a tension between the actors' presence with each other in the space – without script or rehearsal to fall back upon – and the attempt to bring thought into language in a coherent way. However, one of the central features of this practice is to acknowledge the effect of affect: as the dialogues develop those pre-cognitive vocal and gestural nuances and behaviours are carefully imaged and reproduced. The aim, then, is precisely to bring affectivity into the knowable and the communicable, to shine a light on these invisible excesses of embodied thought.

It is worth noting that while the first dialogue in *Nationhood?* demonstrated a drive towards consensus, the strategies that the actors pursued were not necessarily orientated towards the pursuit of rational understanding. For example:

> Dan: If I exercise my right to vote ermm…. then you know...then you know I'm not, I'm going to vote for whoever I think is right for the job and I'm not going to, I'm not going to take their gender into account.
>
> Abbie: yeah, that makes sense
>
> Ella: Women shouldn't be put in power because they're women, that doesn't make any sense, but sometimes, ermm, gender can get in the way of who people vote for regardless of their beliefs. That's where I'm coming from anyway. I don't just mean put women in power because they're women.
>
> Dan: Yes, I know.
>
> Abbie: But I sometimes feel as if men have something against women, even if they were better than the man that they were up against they would still go for that man just because they have some sort of vendetta against women.
>
> Dan: mmm.

Dan's responses to Abbie and Ella, in both cases, accept the implications of the statements without any clarification, qualification or testing of the proposition. In one sense, this suggests a will towards a Habermasian notion of consensus. However, in the above excerpt differences of opinion are elided rather than rationally tested. As such, it also marks Dan's engagement at this point as lacking in attentive listening.

Such strategic approaches to dialogue are commonplace and frequently self-identified by the actors during the early process of reviewing their recording of the opening dialogue, something that begins on the afternoon of the first day and is repeated, amongst other tasks, over the next three days. At this point, the aim of the actors, researchers, and assistant directors (if any) is to collectively select a twenty-minute edit of the material to be reproduced verbatim by the actors in the final performance. The task which guides the edit is a discussion amongst the team to identify the individual focus pursued by each of the actors in the opening dialogue. The project leader briefs the actors on this task but is not involved in the subsequent discussion, in order that the actors are not inadvertently influenced by their understanding of the project leader's perspective. Through this discussion actors may also choose to re-orientate their individual focal points if they wish. Consequently, this task can be understood as a continuation of the initial intersubjective process that began with the opening dialogue, in that the actors do not simply identify their own primary points of focus but reach them dialogically with others. This approach requires embracing an inefficiency in the communicative act, a will towards exploration through speaking and listening, rather than a will to "get one's point across" to the other.

Although studio space is booked for the duration of any given OoD project, watching and selecting from the recordings takes place in a venue of the actors' choosing, which reduces

the formal authority inscribed in the environment by moving away from the reserved, dedicated space to a space over which the participants have more control. During this stage of the process for *Nationhood?*, students moved to a common room with a large screen where they could eat and drink while they played back the recordings. Later, the focal points of interest to the team are fed back to the project leader in order that she may initiate the search for expert and non-expert dialogue partners appropriate to each actors' areas of interest – the introduction of these dialogue partners marks the third stage of OoD's process. (See below.)

The areas of interest identified by the team for *Nationhood?* were as follows:

- Ella is predominantly concerned with a feminist or female experience of nationhood.
- Abbie is predominantly concerned with how other countries might view the question of nationhood.
- Dan is predominantly concerned with his own anti-nationalist perspective.

Once these points of interest are determined, the actors begin to construct a verbatim re-enactment of their chosen, edited material through the precise imitation of their own vocal and physical texts as they observe them on the recording.

The following stages of the OoD process, though represented sequentially here, ultimately overlap in practice, as from this point forward the actors (with assistance from student directors and researchers) continue to edit, re-enact, and rehearse sections from the opening dialogue through to the dress rehearsal and final performance.

Stage 2. Examining Dialogue Strategies in Detail

On the second day actors participate in a workshop, where they are asked to work both self-reflectively and observationally, presenting the tactics that they personally adopt in argumentation, and also presenting the strategies and methods employed by friends, colleagues and family members. The basic guide for the workshop is as follows:

- The re-production/self-imitation of three of your vocal and physical habits from the opening dialogue, which exemplify common aspects of your own dialogical approaches.
- The re-production of three vocal and physical habits used by someone you know (outside of this workshop) to win an argument.

Although the operation of emotion and the use of body language are not discussed by Habermas they clearly have an impact on dialogical situations. In *Nationhood?* this was illustrated in our second-stage workshop by Dan, as he recognized (and repeated in the final performance) that his engagement in the opening dialogue was influenced by nervousness, which manifested itself in jokes. Ella identified two responding strategies of her own: her laughter at these jokes was a strategy for forming an alliance with Dan, which would encourage his support for her position; and she also intended to foster Dan's nervousness, shifting the balance of power in her favour, regardless of the validity or rationality of her

position. This aspect of the practice points back to the overriding notion of inefficiency; rather than the dialogues continuing to move forward in linear fashion towards resolution, the dialogic practices fold back upon themselves. This crucial movement backwards allows the actors to see how the operation of rational argument can (and must) be divorced from the specific forms and strategies through which given claims are made.

It is important to foster a sense of fun and camaraderie in this workshop; the guiding principle is that we all fall into non-rational dialogue strategies. The challenge of the workshop is to recognise our own strategies and to investigate their place within a wider cultural currency.

Stage 3. Meeting with Non-Expert Dialogue Partners, followed by the Second Dialogue and its immediate performative reconstruction

Dialogue partners selected by the project lead for OoD are "non-expert" in that they do not have a professional perspective or engagement with the political subject at hand, in this case "Nationhood." As "non-experts", they therefore meet the actors on a relatively equal footing, in order that the first dialogue between project team and partners is not imbalanced nor intimidating for the actors. Further, the partners are selected by myself and the assistant directors because their dialogical approaches are anticipated to complement those observed in each particular actor in the opening dialogue. For example, Ella was paired with solo performer Zoe Murtagh whose feminism I hoped might nurture self-confidence in Ella's dialogical engagement. As a rule, I find that the selected "non-experts" are interested and willing to participate as it is an opportunity to test their knowledge in an unusual form. This principle of complementary matching is the reason Dan was paired with senior lecturer Cormac Power, a respectful yet challenging and direct dialogue partner, and Abbie was paired with trainee teacher Alice Copeland, who could offer a detailed engagement with Abbie's arguments.

An actor's first meeting with their non-expert dialogue partner often takes place away from the working context of the university campus. Again, spaces are booked for actors and participants to use if they wish, but the actors often prefer to meet in a café or bar, and expenses are provided. The same brief is given to the actors and their partners: to engage in an open conversation about the subject matter with a view to testing the boundaries of each other's perspectives and furthering understanding together. The Habermasian focus on testing claims and orientating towards consensus is implied here. As with some of the earlier stages, beyond the initial briefing the actors engage independently in this stage of the process and there is no formal requirement for them to feed back or reveal any details of their meetings.

The next day, the actors are asked to decide on a starting point for their next dialogue together. In *Nationhood?* the actors agreed on this prompt: "Do we believe in Nationhood?" The actors are also required to create a series of rules to guide their second dialogue. The rules decided in *Nationhood?* were:

- Focus on the argument, not on how it is being said or who is saying it.

- Don’t make assumptions. Ask questions to find out specifically what the differences and similarities are between your arguments and other people’s.
- Actively listen to understand what is being said rather than waiting until someone has finished to make your own point.
- Fully understand all points of the argument before letting the discussion move on.
- Don’t interrupt.

A common characteristic of the rules created by different OoD groups is their concern to understand others’ viewpoints. From a Habermasian perspective this might be understood as evidence that communicative rationality is a reconstructive practice (Habermas 1987). This means that linguistic practices always already embody the capacity for collective decision making and understanding the viewpoint of the other, but these propensities tend to be obscured through our adoption of strategic action – persuading to win the argument – as the norm in institutional environments. It is this unveiling of the strategic through reconstructive practice that requires the continual embracing of an ethics of inefficiency: ‘slow down, wait, let’s go back’. By carefully addressing and reflecting on strategic action in the last stage of the process, OoD actors are more easily able to access and explore properties of rational dialogue.

To facilitate a strong and consistent focus on their rules, the second dialogue must be an intensive one and so the actors are restricted to a concentrated time frame of twelve minutes, which is again set in a stage area demarcated by a lighting state. An example from the *Nationhood?* second dialogue is as follows:

> Ella: So an example that springs to mind for me is gender because 50% of the population if not actually a little bit more are women and if 50% are somehow held back or somehow on a lower level I don’t see how that can be a strong nation.
>
> Abbie: So as we were talking about political leaders, I think if it was an equal gender split so women and men could contribute I think it would change the whole dynamic of a nation it would give a different voice, well look at Theresa May - that may be a bad example, however it still gives a different voice and it gives girly talk.
>
> Dan: I see what you’re saying and we have had two women, we’ve had Theresa May and we’ve had Margaret Thatcher but two women don’t represent all women. People may not agree with how Theresa May does things but that is not necessarily because she is female. It is really interesting how you used the word girly talk there.
>
> Abbie: I didn’t mean girly talk

> Dan: It's fine. it's ingrained in us in society. But what did you really mean when you said that?

The second *Nationhood?* dialogue unfolded in a much more rational and careful way than did the first. In the above example, Abbie was asked to clarify and refine her statement in a way that was clearly not intended to mock or undermine her point but rather to reach better understanding. All three actors listened actively, investigating each other's points and observing a kind of lightness of care enshrined in their own rules. There was no temptation to use humour to foster divisive and strategic allegiances.

Having completed this second, twelve-minute dialogue, the actors are then asked to recreate it from memory immediately. Using the technique of immediate recall, actors are often surprised at how accurate their reproduction is, and they work collaboratively to correct errors and direct each other where needed. It is important to emphasise that the actors do not watch a recording of themselves in the recreation or rehearsal of this dialogue. Consequently, there is no self-observing/objectifying analysis of their own strategies, as there was in the first dialogue's reconstruction. The focus here is on repeating and embodying their own agreed approach to dialogue practice. Following this session and throughout the rest of the OoD process, the reproduction of this second dialogue is frequently repeated, acting effectively as a daily warm-up for the actors and enabling them to embed, through repetition, the principles of Habermasian dialogue at an instinctive level as they prepare for the final performance event. As such, their approach to dialogue at this stage prefigures and sets the tone for the final performance event, in which there will not be a fixed, pre-existing agenda to be either revealed or strategically pursued, but rather the encouragement of a mutual drive towards the collective testing of ideas. Thus, a governing inefficiency is maintained towards unveiling strategic communication in order to open up the way for communicative action.

Stage 4. Meeting with Expert Dialogue partners

Before constructing the remaining material for the final performance, actors have one meeting with an expert dialogue partner, specifically selected to serve the actors' learning process around the topic at hand. For *Nationhood?*, Ella was partnered with a London-based community activist whose specific area of expertise is engagement with National and International forms of feminism – a choice intended to complement Ella's concern with a feminist or female experience of nationhood. Abbie was partnered with a University lecturer from the Midlands who has British citizenship but was born to Palestinian parents and is a Palestinian sympathiser – an expert dialogue partner intended to be sympathetic to Abbie's interest in how other countries might view the question of nationhood. A local historian was partnered with Dan, as it was hoped his expertise might shed some light for Dan on the more positive aspects of Nationhood from a British perspective. Again, the actors are expected to make their own arrangements for this meeting, which should take place, if possible, in a social context away from the university campus.

As before, the actors are not required to give formal feedback from these external discussions, although the actors are often keen to informally share their experiences with each other. This process continues to enhance their learning, and it prepares the groundwork for these meetings to be discussed during the final performance event.

After meeting their expert partners, the actors are asked to create a narrative framework for the performance event that will give spectators an insight into their making process. This framework is required to combine the two prepared re-enactments of the earlier dialogues, and to prepare for the final debate with the spectators at the end of the performance event. At this stage of the process I introduce the notion of the "hypothetical spectator" to the actors. The "hypothetical spectator" anticipates the real audience, and the actors are asked to keep this figure in mind during the process of composing their material for performance. I originally developed the term the "hypothetical spectator" from Habermas's term "hypothetical attitude" (see Habermas 1987, 109; Habermas 1990, 104) to indicate that this imagined figure is defined by their rational perspective rather than emotional or other forms of engagement. Habermas draws from G.H. Mead's concept of "ideal role taking" which "compels each participant to take the perspective of all others" (Habermas 1995, 129). This is not to be confused with empathic identification with the other's feelings, but suggests instead a careful engagement with the other's reasons for action.

The political dimension of the hypothetical spectator emerges from the critical distance it interjects between the speaker and the "absolute certainties and intuitive presence" (Habermas 1990, 138) of their lifeworld experience. For Habermas, the hypothetical attitude, which makes the normative values of others available for critical consideration, allows the social actor to engage when necessary in reasoning beyond the everyday roles they inhabit and their attendant values. Inviting actors to compose their own material for performance with these "hypothetical spectators" in mind is intended to create a distancing effect between the actor and their own arguments, to encourage speculation on the kind of questions the spectator might have regarding the subject matter, and implicitly to prepare the actors to call the reasoning spectator from the real spectator in the forthcoming performance event. Once again, actors are required to think about communication onstage as inefficient. Their task is not to 'play the action' as clearly and directly as possible, as it might be in many character-based acting contexts; rather it is to maintain the primacy of intersubjective dialogical relation within the performance space. By imagining the forthcoming and intersubjective relationship between themselves and the hypothetical spectator, the actors are invited to anticipate a future dialogue which is outside of the control of the project lead and cannot itself be known by any party until the point at which it arrives. In other words, the hypothetical spectator is a mechanism for ensuring that the logos of the work resides only with the actors themselves in their capacity for open and intersubjective negotiation.As I have argued above, this identification of logos as intersubjectivity is at odds with Auslander's critique of logos, which identifies the actor's individual self as the centre of performance.

Especially within a university context and working with student actors, this turning of attention outwards towards a hypothetical spectator with a rational capacity brings us crucially back to one of Murphy's main arguments about the culture of the neoliberal university. Using the hypothetical spectator as a performance tool, the student actor is prevented from remaining within their own "relatable" sphere of experience; to complete the work of OoD they must take account of a sphere of experience not occupied by any specific individual, and which exists in an "alien" relation to them.

The project lead should advise the actors that the performance will take place under houselights, in order to foster dialogical relations with spectators. Beyond these guidelines, the intention implicit within the method is that the choice of form, style and content of the performance event that the actors devise for the final presentation and debate is their prerogative.

Stage 5. The performance event

In the final performance event the actors present the work they have compiled which includes a re-presentation of two of their self-edited dialogues and a description of their making/learning processes. This is created in a format of the actors' choosing. In *Nationhood?* after performing the material as they have ordered it there was a short break as the actors chatted to the audience, offered refreshments and re-set the space by placing the seats in a circle in preparation for the public debate.

A significant challenge to the actor in this final stage of the work is ensuring that the forms and principles of rational dialogue, which they have discovered and drawn out during the entire OoD process, should continue to be observed in the final live debate. The move from being a spectator of a theatre performance to a participant in dialogue with the actors and other spectators is not usual, even for spectators who are habituated in theatre and performance. As such, the actors are required to be particularly attentive to how they handle the transition into live debate, not only to ensure an environment conducive to dialogue but also to ensure the spectators are clear of the parameters of their engagement.

For *Nationhood?*, the actors chose to use some of our small budget to buy wine and hot drinks, which were prepared at the back of the performance space and offered to spectators before we moved into the open debate. We adopted the "fish bowl" technique of open dialogue: actors chatted to spectators, encouraging them to enter the circle to "start us off" after the break.[5] This gently merged the boundaries between performance and debate and spectator and participant without in any way undermining the ethos of rational debate established in the performance. The following, two-and-a-half-hour public debate predictably produced many areas of consideration which the actors had not touched upon in their process.

[5] Fish bowl technique involves the placing of four chairs in a small inner circle within the playing space, while chairs for all other participants are placed outside of this circle. Four people elect to start by sitting in one of the chairs in the inner circle. They can begin talking about any of the ideas raised in the work so far. They can leave at any point and resume their original seat in the outer circle, at which point someone else from the outer circle may take their place. Members of the outer circle can also request to join the circle by simply touching a speaker on the shoulder, at which point that speaker must leave the inner circle.

In this sense, whilst the final dialogue was inefficient in its untargeted exploration of ideas, it successfully acted as an open extension of the actors'/researchers'/assistant directors' learning processes, rather than as a finished presentation of their findings.

Conclusion

Operations of Dialogue resists efficiency and formal rationality as a theatrical and learning strategy aimed at fostering critical citizenship in a challenge to neoliberal techniques of strategic rationalism. Nevertheless, OoD can never claim to be entirely free of, nor entirely oppositional to, the latter. In the case of *Nationhood?*, student participants worked inside a context that situated them within the university's measures of value, while allowing them to become in some ways profoundly subversive towards the logic of the neoliberal HE institution. For example, public engagement, research, student engagement, and impact measureables were all evident in different ways in this work. However, as I hope I have shown, these markers of 'success' were ultimately subordinated to a complex exploration of communicative rationality, and its potential to oppose an all-too-familiar formal (instrumental) rationality. The processes of argumentation, self-critique, and verbatim encounters with dialogue partners of several backgrounds brings the OoD student participant into contact with experiences, perspectives, and logics that cannot simply be contained within familiar and pre-established points of reference. Instead, Operations of Dialogue brings the student, and potentially the audience, into a Habermasian rationality, in which identities are formed within the intensified sphere of intersubjective dialogue.

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