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Unsettling the Audience: Affective 'dis-ease' and the Politics of Fear and Anxiety in Contemporary Performance

> More than any time in history, mankind faces a crossroad. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness, the other to total extinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly…[1]

Introduction

We might argue that with the rise of new cultural media (such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, WhatsApp, YouTube, Vimeo, and Netflix), the material impact of plural cultural practices is becoming an increasingly important area for critical discussion. Through mobile technologies, we engage with representations of and about the world in increasingly virulent and immediate ways that are having profound impacts both on how we live our lives and how we encounter cultural discourses about the world around us. At the same time, the 'politics of fear' and discourses of anxiety have become commonplace as efficacious and affecting tools of (western) global politics, as well as in rolling news media outputs (including those that buzz as notifications in pockets via mobile technology).[2] Ernst Cassirer, a German philosopher of 'cultural sciences', has argued that

> Physical reality seems to recede in proportion as man's [sic.] symbolic activity advances … he has so enveloped himself in linguistic forms, in artistic images, in mythical symbols or religious rites that he cannot see or know anything except the interposition of this artificial medium.[3]

My contention in this article is that in the contemporary moment live performance encounters offer a means with which to attend to both discourses and politics of fear and anxiety and the effacement of reality with complexity. That is, performance seems to be attending to plural social discourses and working through the geo-political complexity of the social milieu in ways that go beyond the theoretical frames of analysis provided by, for example, psychology, psychoanalysis and philosophy. This essay explores the political, ethical and socio-cultural implications of two contemporary performances that deliberately attempt to unsettle their audiences through what I'm calling a performative aesthetics of 'dis-ease': Greg Wohead's *The Ted Bundy Project* (2014) and Action Hero's multimedia, immersive installation *Extraordinary Rendition* (2015). In analysing *how* these works might be seen deliberately to attempt to induce an experience somewhat cognate to anxiety

in the audience, I want to explore *why* they might be doing so: what does such a practice 'do' in the world with regard to understanding the politics of fear and anxiety?

Cultural practice as 'thinking through'

What cultural practices do socially and politically is at the heart of much of Raymond Williams' critical thinking. Indeed, in *The Sociology of Culture* he convincingly argues that cultural practices are 'social processes of a highly significant and valuable kind', worthy of being taken and analysed seriously.[4] In so doing, he suggests, we might come not only to understand cultural practices as a reflection and interrogation of the world around us but also to see them as precisely world-making (at least at a micro or personal level). That is, for Williams performance (indeed all cultural production) might be seen as a means through which to interrogate the world 'as it is' *and* a mode through which imaginatively to materialise a different one. This is not just a project of cold analysis but of coming to understand the knowledge-generating potential of affective experience. For theatre scholar James Thompson, calling on Deleuze, 'it is only in affect that the force of art can be understood' and as such, affective experience 'agitate[s] at the level of sensation' to 'produce a shock to thought'.[5] Although arising from different critical projects and at different historical junctures, this might be seen to coincide with perhaps Williams's most famous theoretical idea, that of the structure of feeling. For Williams, the social and cultural projects of a given epoch can be analysed as a means to identify and understand the prevailing or governing structures of given society and what we might think of as the 'atmospheres' (or social feelings) thereby produced.

Appealing for the importance of a continual, 'present tense' interrogation of the world around us, Williams proposes that each moment in history has its own social, political, cultural and artistic conventions, all of which braid together in a structure of feeling which is unique, but, importantly, influenced by and emerging out of the structures which have gone before it. In *Drama From Ibsen to Brecht* (originally written in 1952 as *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot*), Williams asserts that structure of feeling is a means of exploring 'the continuity of experience from a particular work,

through its particular form, to its recognition as a general form, and then the relation of this general

form to a [specific] period [of history]'.[6] Importantly, he goes on to state that:

> It is as firm and definitive as 'structure' suggests, yet it is based in the deepest and least
> tangible elements of our experience. It is a way of responding to a particular world in which
> practice is not felt as one way among others – a conscious 'way' – but is, in experience, the
> only way possible. Its means, its elements are not propositions or techniques; they are
> embodied, related feelings. (18)

So for Williams the argument or proposition of the art work is fundamentally bound to its structure

and form, and to the feelings – or affects – evoked by an encounter with that art work.

Williams is careful to acknowledge the difficulty of identifying the facets of any structure of

feeling (especially from 'within' it) because social structures and cultural discourses constantly shift,

change and develop.[7] Nevertheless, he demands that as cultural critics we engage in just such an

exercise because in doing so we might come not only to understand something of our structure of

feeling but also establish a frame through which to interrogate our social, cultural, political and

artistic experiences. That is, an analysis of cultural practices 'in our own time' can provide a means

through which we can interpret 'a very wide area of our experience' and so arrive at a means

through which to better understand and act in the world in which we live (61). This call to analysis is

thus more than a purely intellectual pursuit, it is politically expedient. In the context of what Frank

Furedi has called the contemporary 'culture' and 'politics of fear'[8], such analysis seems equally

urgent. As such, I am here concerned to analyse how contemporary performance practice might be

able to unpick discourses and politics of fear and anxiety, and contribute to more (politically)

nuanced understandings of them. In turn, the paper asks if and how such analysis might help shed

light on the contemporary structure of feeling.

To contextualise this task, it is useful to turn to Williams's seminal essay, 'Culture is

Ordinary'.[9] Here, Williams contends that when analyzing cultural objects to find out what they tell us

about ourselves and our society, we need to remember that culture is 'ordinary'. Culture is not the

preserve of the wealthy elite nor is it neatly compartmentalized. Rather, culture is a continual

negotiation of power via institutional and interpersonal interactions, art, media production, education and ideas:

> Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these, in institutions, and in arts and learning. The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment under the pressures of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land. The growing society is there, yet it is also made and remade in every individual mind. (54)

Thus, we are all involved in making and understanding 'our' culture; and, importantly, cultural meanings are constructed and understood at subjective (individual) and objective (collective) levels. Meanwhile, it is by now something of a commonplace to understand that cultural practices do not exist in a vacuum and that culture is contextually influenced and politically constructed. It is perhaps less ordinary (especially outside of academia) to understand that cultural products – art, theatre, film, TV, literature – are both fundamentally modes by which a society thinksitself through in various different ways *and* are precisely world making, or 'performative' in J. L. Austin's sense.[10] Thus performance might be seen both to reflect its socio-cultural epoch and to propose new possibilities. As Della Pollock persuasively argues:

> performance is a promissory act. Not because it can only promise possible change but because it catches its participants – often by surprise – in a contract with possibility: with imagining what might be, could be, should be.[11]

As an art form of bodies in relation to each other, theatre and performance create a space in which we can begin to consider the world, our position within it, and thus our position in relationship to others. In doing so, theatre and performance brings 'us' (makers/thinkers/ audiences) into an ethical relationship with one another, both with the 'staged' images and those represented in them, as well as with the concerns raised by those representations. This live exchange of gazes and responsibilities, alongside theatre's complex mimetic structures and the long history of anti-theatrical prejudice that arises out of such complexity, seems to me to be particularly worthy of attention in the contemporary moment.[12] This seems particularly heightened when, as in the case of both *The Ted Bundy Project* and *Extraordinary Rendition*, a central dramaturgical desire of the work

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is to unsettle the audience by throwing into question their position as 'safe' spectator by eroding the mimetic conditions of the performances they are encountering.[13]

'Dis-ease'

In 2009, Lyn Gardner suggested that 'anxiety kills theatre'.[14] Gardner's suggestion is that while audiences are happy to take risks as long as they feel safe and that the performance is 'taking them somewhere interesting', they 'don't like to be made to feel anxious… [because] Anxiety in audiences is not a positive force; it saps our energy and creates a brittle tension in the auditorium, announcing that we all know that the bargain has been broken' (ibid). That is, in the context of theatre (as opposed, say, to live or performance art), audience anxiety about safety, or participating in the right or wrong way, makes the event cease to exist as theatre and, therefore ceases to entertain or hold political potency. Although discussing the then new (and broad) area of immersive theatre, and from a journalistic perspective, Gardner's proposition is an interesting point of departure here because her claim is that anxiety erodes or even destroys the representational matrix of a given performance. However, I want to argue that it is the deliberate unsettling of the audience in these and analogous ways that *makes* the performances I am discussing so politically interesting. In both pieces, I found myself confronted with anxiety (my own or that of others) that left me asking: where are we, what is this and what is it for? Far from feeling like any bargain had been broken, I found myself unsettled, taken out of place, and seeking more fully to understand the experience I had just had. This unsettling followed me out of the theatres and complicated any simple reading of the pieces both in terms of their phenomenological impact on me and in terms of mining their socio-political signification. I *was* sapped of energy but this was the point.

We might argue that the notion of being 'unsettled' is one that is common to our contemporary moment wherein we are confronted with the problem that, what I am calling, our current 'culture of dis-ease' combines psychological and emotional impressions and expressions with aesthetic as well as ethical questions. Paul Virilio has pointed in this direction when he posited a close relation between fear and the creation of environmental structures defined by exclusion:

> Fear not only creates its environment, with its ghettos, gated communities, communitarianism, it has also created its culture, a culture of repulsion. It relates to racism and the rejection of the other: there is always a reason to push out, to expulse the other.[15]

Accordingly, performances and representations of fear and anxiety do not restrict themselves to one disciplinary field that can sufficiently analyse them, but operate on medial, aesthetic, and emotional levels at the same time and have mental, psychological, and moral affects. In this regard, Arne Öhman points out that while fear and anxiety are 'obviously overlapping, aversive, activated states centred on threat', they have definably different qualities:

> Fear denotes dread of impending disaster and an intense urge to defend oneself, primarily by getting out of the situation. Clinical anxiety, on the other hand, has been described as an ineffable and unpleasant feeling of foreboding.[16]

So while fear is most commonly said to have an identifiable object (spiders, heights, clowns), anxiety is considered to be a pervasive sense or affective atmosphere ('something terrible is going to happen'). Although nascent, the idea of *dis-ease* tries to figure a third state, one that might be seen to take fear and anxiety together rather than separately: in a state of *dis-ease* the world is not rendered meaningless, as Simon Critchley contends is the case with Heidegger's 'anxiety', but it becomes othered, distanced, and shimmers in and out of readability in an encounter that makes one feel disoriented *in* it and perturbed by the experience *of* it.[17] Unlike Heidegger's anxiety, *dis-ease* is not a sudden experience of something being *unheimlich* but exposure to a constant threat of being ripped form a state of normalcy and as such it pervades or persists in the everyday.[18]

Although 20 years old, Linda Grant's essay 'Violent Anxiety' is surprisingly pertinent to our current moment.[19] She argues that '[h]alf the population of the world is running away from violence into refugee camps and the other half is paying good money to watch it at the multiplex. We have managed to separate the real from the imaginary into such watertight compartments that we can laugh at heads being blown off at the cinema while requiring trauma counselling if we arrive home to find we have been burgled' (21). This is an intriguing if problematically dialectical supposition and my contention here is that contemporary performance works such as *The Ted Bundy Project* and *Extraordinary Rendition*, have developed means through which such a dialectic can be worried

towards a more fulsome and politically nuanced integration of 'entertainment' with interrogation of contemporary social politics concerned with fear and anxiety. Meanwhile, we might also ask if 'fear' and 'anxiety' and their associated discourses (popular, cultural, and theoretical) offer satisfactory conceptual frames with which to think about contemporary culture and in turn late-capitalist society. In very material ways, these terms (fear and anxiety) and their political deployment have been reduced to ideologically loaded, ill-defined means with which to discuss anything from terrorism to immigration to political difference. This has arguably denuded these ideas of their potency and reduced them to a near bankrupt status in their overuse, especially in their news media and popular uses.

UK performance artist Greg Wohead's *The Ted Bundy Project* (2014) at once produces anxiety in the audience by presenting a disarmingly charming representation of the serial killer Ted Bundy and at the same time calls into question the ethics of witnessing such a representation. This is further complicated as the audience is implicated not only through direct address but also in being brought on stage to 'be' Bundy. As we shall see, the complexity of the performance is bound to its productive use of markers of authenticity (such as those borrowed from verbatim performance practice[20]) and then a deliberate undercutting of that authenticity. Similarly multifaceted in its representation and politics is Action Hero's multimedia, immersive installation *Extraordinary Rendition* (2015). This piece exposes a sole audience member to an experience structured around 'enhanced interrogation' techniques in order to stimulate an 'intentional loss of agency' through an encounter with 'pop songs used for torture, war films and military and civilian air traffic communications [that appear] on three screens, implanting images which we are unable to distinguish as real or fake.'[21]

In arguing for a theory of 'dis-ease', I want to suggest that in the contemporary moment concrete instances of fear or abhorrence gradually transform into a more general and lasting state of fearfulness, anxiety and unease. This is dis-easing, and it is within this dis-easing territory that both *Rendition* and *Bundy* find political efficacy.

Yet this efficacy is not tied to a determined political agenda, though each performance is undeniably implicated in particular political discourses, but to an indeterminacy about what the experience is and is for.[22] The works are dis-easing precisely because their politics are complex: while each has clear political territory (power, war, sexual violence, iconography, fetishizing of violence, geo-politics), their engagement with those discourses is structured around a desire to worry at precisely how we read those discourses in the representational economies of each piece. In interview, both Wohead and Action Hero speak to the idea of evoking anxiety as a means to stimulate the audience to *question* their positions in relation to the content/context of the works. However, both are equally clear that they do not wish to *tell* the audience what to think.[23]

Indexing 'authenticity'

Both performances are structured around and play with semiotic markers of authenticity; that is, they develop a sense of being 'true' to the social-real referent they signify. In *The Ted Bundy Project* Wohead deploys techniques from both autobiographical performance and verbatim theatre. Greg Wohead performs as Greg Wohead; the author of the performance is its performer and while he takes on persona/characteristics of others throughout, Bundy in particular, the base 'character' is that of Wohead himself. Thus what Deirdre Heddon refers to as the 'visible presence of the performing subject' comes to structure the audience's encounter with the work.[24] In light of this, we might read this structuring principle – the use and return to the 'truth' of Wohead as Wohead – as a deliberate and strategically deployed attempt to lend a particular 'authenticity' to the work.

Interspersed with this is the performance of 'Bundy'. Here, Wohead dons headphones connected to an old cassette-tape playing personal stereo, presses the play button (which produces a reassuringly mechanical 'click-clunk'), listens for a moment to the tape that we have been prompted to believe is a police interview tape of Bundy (although he is presumably faking it) before mimicking what we are asked to believe is Bundy's accent, intonation and vocal cadence. The performance is compelling and, in comparison to video and audio recordings of Bundy being

interviewed, really quite convincing. The technique is borrowed from, and deliberately recalls, headphone verbatim theatre practices that speak to what Lucy Nevitt has described as an 'aesthetic of authenticity'.[25] Here, the performer listens to and immediately performs the playback they are hearing, including all of the splutters, coughs and hesitations of the original recording in order to effect a performance of 'truthful' representation: the actor tries to be 'just like' the interviewee.

Extraordinary Rendition deploys a scenography of authenticity. The box in which the installation performance takes place is constructed from the materials used in the construction of cells at Camp X-Ray at the Guantanamo Bay detention camp (and to their dimensions). A Styrofoam cup in which acrid instant coffee is presented recalls the only object detainees at that camp were allowed in those cells. The use of pop music, flashing words and images all invoke the 'ways in which the civilian domain is militarized and the ambient presence of warfare in our daily lives… [as well as] the ways in which popular culture and the military collide or collaborate, and the ways in which we might be implicated in the brutality of war through our participation in a media culture.'[26] In the documentation around the piece, as well as in the way that the company discuss the work, these structural and design strategies are intended both to provide a sense of the performance as grounded in, but also interrogating the material conditions of the practices and events of torture, warfare and extraordinary rendition that happen in the social real. This is not an attempt to torture their audience and the company are careful to articulate their desire to avoid banalising the politics of their topic. Nevertheless, they wish both to 'bring to view' the practices and politics of extraordinary rendition as well as to unsettle their audience in order to stimulate a more affective interrogation of the spectator's own politics.

However, what is perhaps most interesting about both of these pieces is the way in which this indexing of authenticity is deliberately undercut and then rebuilt to complicate how one reads and understands the theatrical encounter. In Bundy, Wohead interleaves video (both a genuine 'reaction video' and the beginning of a (fairly evidently) mocked up snuff film), use of 'theatrical'

props and costume (a long wig, tights to cover and distort an audience member's face), music and dancing, as well as personal reminiscences that seem to fit more readily within the theatrical narrative he is weaving than within the faux autobiographical style he is working with. All this serves to complicate a single mode of engagement and seems designed clearly to amplify the theatricality of the work. The use of audience participation (or more accurately, audience selection) is ethically complex: someone is set up to 'be' Bundy and to 'have a moment' with one of his victims, performed by Greg, who 'locks eyes' with him and dances. But, as Wohead says, the scene 'might [also] be a little sexy' and it is certainly humorously grotesque. Although contained within a roughly postdramatic aesthetic, the layering of different modes of representation ('autobiographical', verbatim, theatrical, participatory, film, reminiscence, music, movement) serve to complicate how one engages with it.[27] The content of the piece is undoubtedly unpleasant – descriptions of violent rape and murder, and imaginings of further violent acts perpetrated between children – but in and of itself this is not fundamentally dis-easing. We have after all been used to violence in the theatre since the Greeks. What tips this into the affective territory of dis-ease, is the relationship between that content and the ways in which its representations are constructed and the ethical questions raised by both form and content. That is, the performance affect is such that the phenomenological experience of the work makes the meaning of it shimmer in and out of readability. Meanwhile, the subject position of the spectator is disrupted and complicated with the intention of being disorienting and perturbing. For James Thompson, this might thus be seen to be an artistic experience and practice that is designed 'to agitate at the level of sensation' so as to '[propel] a demand to know more' because the 'affect is what compels the participant to thought and to be engaged at every level' (125).

Although underpinned by a desire to embed and work with materials of authenticity, *Rendition* is explicitly theatrical in its construction. The single spectator is greeted by Gemma Paintin in an flight attendant costume. She firmly requests you remove and give her all your jewellery, keys, coins, wallet and mobile phone; she is neither friendly nor aggressive but the request is demanding.

The interior of the box is sparse, the only objects are a plywood chair that is bolted to the floor and three screens suspended from the ceiling, side-by-side. The performance of the flight attendant is controlled and authoritative but is deeply incongruous with the space in which it is unfolding. The low rumbling hum of a muffled aeroplane jet reverberates within the wooden box to further complicate the sense of place for the spectator. The room is hot, claustrophobic and unpleasant but is uncannily familiar and the processes of entering it quotidian to anyone who has flown in recent years. While the political content is clear (especially in terms of the piece's framing/publicity) and the goals of the work equally so, the *experience* itself is anything but. The layering of representational strata is deliberately complex, intentionally making it hard cognitively to decode and understand the work beyond its immediate experiential affect. For while there is a settling familiarity to the everydayness of the airport-aeroplane set up, almost everything else is intended to agitate. Photographs, snippets of film, and written text flash up on the three screens to evoke and provoke the imagination to picture and recall situations of isolation, violence and inanity. This is coupled with the mundanity of headphone-piped pop songs and crackling pilot's announcements to produce an intensely oppressive mix. A wooden tray-table is slotted into the chair in front of the spectator, presenting a physical barrier to exiting that feels natural yet also violent. The unspeaking, plonking down of a steaming hot (Styrofoam) cup of instant coffee is unnervingly aggressive and while the smell is familiar it is so strong as to be acrid. Everything is recognisable from traveling, news and social media, pop culture and everyday life but in placing these things together within the representational ecology and scenographic context of this production they become dis-easing because the overall experience is phenomenologically disorienting.

Moreover, both pieces deploy what might be seen as an unsettling proto-*Verfremdungseffekt*. As Williams outlines, Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* is the idea of deliberately 'making strange' so as to elicit an *engagement with* the ideas contained within a performance, rather than an unthinking *consumption of* those representations. This is done by

> show[ing] the action in the process of being made: that is to say, to confront an audience with a performance, a deliberate action in a theatre, often with the machinery of effects visible… [highlighting] a continual and explicit contrast with all those means to a suspension of disbelief before an illusion of reality (Williams, *Drama*, 319)

Extraordinary Rendition does this by making visible some of the 'stuff' of extraordinary rendition that has become background noise in our highly mediated, over news-saturated epoch. The intention is to make it unfamiliar again and to highlight the fact that it is neither natural nor inevitable. *The Ted Bundy Project* operates similarly but in the opposite direction, so to speak. It makes the unfamiliar seem familiar and natural and then turns that back on itself to reveal the terrifying politics of such constructions. For example, the performance asks the audience to consider the ethical implications of engaging with Bundy as 'normal' and how that might reconfigure the highly mediated images of him as 'psychopathic killer' to 'human'. But these *Verfremdungseffekt* are so pronounced as to offer more than an unfamiliar – or 'strange' – view; they are radically unsettling and, coupled with the dis-easing affects noted above, they operate as a 'shock to thought' and ask us to look again at contemporary discourses that make us anxious or fearful by means of dramaturgies that attempt precisely to evoke those phenomena.

Conclusion:

Attending to the social politics of the criminal justice system in the UK, Susie Orbach has convincingly argued that a policy of violence countered with violence is 'doomed to fail'.[28] Contending that 'harsh sentencing, brutal prisons, an army-trained probation service, punitive parole officers, speak to a desire to contain and separate out the problem from society' (163). While Orbach is writing about a different context, the supposition that a more nuanced engagement with acts and systems of violence is needed if we are to understand and counteract them, resonates with Action Hero's desire to 'attend to the politics of power' and to 'show how prevalent and present' structures and mechanism of war and torture are in everyday life.[29] For the artists, the piece works by playing with the 'interior landscapes of imagination' as a means to turn one's imagination back self-reflexively so

as to make visible the mechanism and politics of violence. This is to deploy anxiety as a principle of the encounter. The piece tries to explore the territory of psychic 'occupation' because nothing is shown but is rather implied and evoked through an affecting encounter which is only later available to analysis. The texts displayed on the screens present images that are clear and simple to imagine, to bring to mind, but the information is so quickly presented that one cannot quite be sure why the images come to mind nor if the words on the screen correspond to the thing image or scene imagined. In this regard, the company articulate that they are 'interested in the ways in which you can't quite fully buy into the fact that we're at war' (ibid), and this becomes part of the aesthetic strategy of the work. There is a deliberate lack of clarity about what it is that we are witnessing that is deeply unsettling: at one level we physically occupy a space that recalls the spaces of Camp X-Ray, and at another we are absolutely exposed to the theatricality and fictional nature of the encounter through the flight attendant character that Gemma Paintin plays. The space reverberates with the drone of jet engines, and is claustrophobic like an aeroplane, but yet is evidently not in flight. Pop music plays through headphones while we read flashing words that recall images of violence and news coverage. Thus, the structure of meaning making is deliberately unclear, or at least multimodal; there is a conscious playing with representational structures in the work that make the experience of it unsettling.

The political interventions made by *Extraordinary Rendition* and *The Ted Bundy Project* are precisely bound to the capacity of performance to dis-ease its audience. The dis-easing affect of these works refuses the audience the opportunity to place the them into what Williams calls the 'past tense' and so to solidify the experience as a 'fixed form'.[30] The unsettling experience is designed to keep the audience's attention in the present, attending to the conditions and structures of representation currently being deployed. In this way the works participate in an interrogation of what we might call a contemporary 'aesthetics of dis-ease' because the they seek to expose the mechanisms and structures by which society is (deliberately, politically) exposed to and encounters narratives of fear and anxiety. Put differently, and returning to affect theory, these pieces offer a model of practice

that uses representational complexity fused with politically charged, 'difficult' content, to produce

what James Thompson has called 'aesthetic intensity' which can be 'the propellant of political

action' (128). This might be seen precisely to counter what cultural critic Henry Giroux has called the

rise of a 'politics of disimagination' in which the 'disimagination machine' ('a set of cultural

apparatuses extending from schools and mainstream media to the new sites of screen culture and a

public pedagogy') deploys

> 'images… institutions, discourses, and other modes of representation […to] undermine the
> ability of individuals to think critically, imagine the unimaginable, and engage in thoughtful
> and critical dialogue. Put simply, to become critically informed citizens of the world.'[31]

Rather, these pieces produce Massumi's 'shock to thought' (ibid) in ways that are precisely about

engaging in critical dialogue about contemporary discourses of fear and anxiety.

As such, we might consider that these performances are concerned with understanding

what Williams described as 'meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt, and the relations

between these and formal or systemic beliefs' (*Marxism*, 133). This accords with Giroux's call for a

cultural pedagogy and 'radical imagination' that 'both informs the mind and creates the conditions

for modes of agency that are critical, informed, engaged, and socially responsible' ('Disimagination',

265). Indeed these performances deploy their aesthetics strategies precisely as a means through

which critically to understand and articulate 'structures of feeling which as living processes are much

more widely experienced' than represented or concretely understood (*Marxism,* 133). In light of

this, I would argue that in relation to the contemporary politics of fear these works operate as 'a

mode of social formation, explicit and recognizable… distinguishable from other social and semantic

formations' (135) because of their foregrounding and articulation of the presence of anxiety as a

socio-political *structure*. Williams and Herbert Marcuse have argued that the congruence of meaning

created at the intersection of form and structure is where the potency and political agency of

performance (all art) lies.[32] Thus we might contend that it is in the dis-easing structures and

aesthetics of these pieces (both of which are precisely *about* contemporary fears and anxieties) that

their attention to our dis-eased structure of feeling lies. That is, these works offer a means through

which to interrogate (one of) the contemporary structures of feeling in a way that mirrors its

operation. Moreover, and more importantly, this is also where their importance as a means for

political intervention in the social and political discourses surrounding that structure of feeling can

be found.

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[1] Woody Allen cited in Sarah Dunant and Roy Porter, 'Introducing Anxiety', in *The Age of Anxiety*, ed. Sarah Dunant and Roy Porter (London: Virago, 1996), ix - xviii

[2] See, for example, Frank Furedi, *Politics of Fear*, (London: Continuum, 2005); Frank Furedi, *Culture of Fear Revisited*, (London: Continuum, 2006); Paul Virilio, *The Administration of Fear*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2012); Sarah Dunant and Roy Porter, eds., *The Age of Anxiety*, (Longon: Virago, 1996); Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, (London: Penguin, 2008); *The Power of Nightmares: The Rise of the Politics of Fear*. Directed by Adam Curtis. British Broadcasting Corporation, October – November 2004.

[3] Cassirer cited in Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Fear,* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 28 – 9.

[4] Raymond Williams, *The sociology of culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 126.

[5] James Thompson, *Performance Affects: Applied Theatre and the End of Effect* (Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 124 - 125

[6] Raymond Williams, *Drama From Ibsen to Brecht* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1987), 17.

[7] Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), 89 - 90.

[8] Frank Furedi, *Culture of Fear Revisited*, (London: Continuum, 2006). Frank Furedi, *Politics of Fear*, (London: Continuum, 2005).

[9] Raymond Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary', in Imre Szeman and Timothy Kaposy, ed., *Cultural Theory: an Anthology* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 53–9.

[10] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, ed. by J. O. Urmson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962).

[11] Della Pollock, *Remembering: Oral History Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 2.

[12] Anti-theatrical prejudice, a phrase coined by Jonas Barish, refers to the historic negative associations of 'theatre' or 'theatricality' that have been bound to the art form since Plato admonished poetry as imitation thrice removed from the truth in The Republic. The prejudice is linked to a historical mistrust of mimetic performances (social or aesthetic). At a quotidian level, this can most readily be seen when 'theatrical' is regularly deployed pejoratively to mean making a spectacle of oneself, being overly flamboyant, malingering, or 'faking it' for personal gain.

[13] I use 'encountering' advisedly because in both pieces the audience member's position as (mere) spectator of representational practice is deliberately worried. The artists deploy a series of tactics to position and reposition the viewer in different subject positions in relation to the work, such as being made an active 'on stage' participant, set up as an implicated witness or even complicit voyeur to the action, or being positioned as perpetrator and/or victim of violence.

[14] Lyn Gardner, 'Anxiety is a death knell for theatre', Guardian Online 'Theatre Blog', www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2009/mar/02/anxiety-theatre (accessed 30 September 2016)

[15] Paul Virilio, *The Administration of Fear*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2012), 58 – 9.

[16] Arne Öhman, 'Fear and anxiety: Overlaps and dissociations', in *Handbooks of emotions* (3rd ed.), ed. Michael Lewis, Jeannette M. Haviland-Jones and Lisa Feldman Barrett (New York: Guilford, 2008), 710.

[17] Simon Critchley, 'Being and Time, part 5: Anxiety', Guardian Online, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2009/jul/06/heidegger-philosophy-being (accessed 14 July 2014).

[18] See Patrick Duggan, ''Dis-ease' and the Performance of Radical Resistance in the Maze Prison', in *Performing (for) Survival: Theatre, Crisis, Extremity*, ed. Patrick Duggan and Lisa Peschel (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 222-240.

[19] Linda Grant, 'Violent Anxiety', in *The Age of Anxiety*, ed. Sarah Dunant and Roy Porter (London: Virago, 1996), 21 – 40.

[20] Verbatim theatre is a form of documentary or fact-based theatre in which a performance is created from the exact words spoken by people interviewed about a particular idea, event or situation (such as Alecky Blythe's 2008, *The Girlfriend Experience*). Techniques include performing interview transcripts or testimony and can include reproducing all hesitations, syntax and cadences of speech. In some instances, actors listen to interview materials through headphones while on stage and re-performing the speech live (for examples see www.recordeddelivery.net).

[21] Action Hero, 'Extraordinary Rendition', Action Hero, www.actionhero.org.uk/projects/extraordinary-rendition/ (accessed 30 September 2016)

[22] This might be seen to accord with Rancière's idea of 'the aesthetic cut' in which art has the capacity to disrupt dominant discourse or the idea of received wisdoms. Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 82.

[23] It is perhaps interesting to note that in both performances, there is a sense that the works are deploying the uncanny as part of the politics of representation, in the sense that, as Nicholas Royle argues, the uncanny is about encountering (even briefly) something that should have remained hidden (2003:2). Meanwhile, Freud of course argued that 'an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced' (cited. in Royle 2003: 13). Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

[24] Deirdre Heddon, *Autobiography in Performance: Performing Selves* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 5.

[25] Lucy Nevitt, 'Review of *Theatre as Witness: Three Testimonial Plays from South Africa*', *Research in Drama Education*, Volume 13, no. 3 (2008): 377

[26] Action Hero, *Extraordinary Rendition* (Performance programme essay: no date).

[27] 'Postdramatic theatre' was argued by German theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann to describe performance practices that so not principally focus on the drama in itself but rather puts the 'text' of the performance in relation to the material condition of production (including staging, theatre space, performance style etc). As such, a 'postdramatic aesthetic' is that which attempts to produce particular effects amongst the spectators rather than abeyance to a given text. Lehmann argues this is a reaction to the (historic) primacy of the written text and that it produces a 'multi-perspectival form of perceiving' (p.16). Such an aesthetic is constituted, in part, through the 'use and combination of heterogeneous styles' (p. 26), incorporates the 'performer as theme and protagonist' (p. 25) and is often not concerned with dialogue or (linear) plot. Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*. Translated by Karen Jürs-Munby (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

[28] Susie Orbach, 'Couching Anxieties', in *The Age of Anxiety*, ed. Sarah Dunant and Roy Porter (Longon: Virago, 1996), 163.

[29] Gemma Paintin and James Stenhouse (Action Hero) in discussion with author, 26 May 2016.

[30] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 129.

[31] Henry Giroux, 'The Disimagination Machine and the Pathologies of Power', *symploke*, Volume 21, nos. 1 – 2 (2013): 263

[32] See Williams, *Modern Tragedy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), and Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Towards a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).