Contents

List of Illustrations ix
Acknowledgements x

1 Introduction 1
From the inside out 1
Performing proximity 5
An overview 18

Part One Proximity and Performance

2 Interior I: On the Scent 25
The performance 25
Olfactory performance 39
Remembrances of things past: experiencing On the Scent 44

3 Interior II: the moment I saw you I knew I could love you 62
The performance 62
Making ‘the moment’ – the inside story 75
In the moment – audience reactions 78
Below the surface: skin 85
Below the surface: screen 91
Endings 94

4 Landscape I: Out of Water 97
Introduction, by way of a detour to Exotic World, Barstow, California 97
The performance 98
Journeys of proximity 108
The leaving 118

5 Landscape II: Lost & Found 122
The performance 123
Locomotions at 35 mph 127
Byway(s) of a conclusion 131
Contents

Part Two   Proximity and Process

6 In the Lab and Incognito: Research in Profile   139
   Lost Property Department, London   139
   In the lab   149
      National Centre for Biological Sciences   149
      Wingate Institute for Neurogastroenterology   156

7 In the Studio: A Case Study in Performance-Making    162
   Methods   162
      The inside story   167
      Yoga   167
      Interviews   170
      Automatic writing – fight, flight, freeze   170
      Body memory   171
      Gut manifestation   173
      The invisible body   174

8 In Situ: Extended Conversations   179
   Essences of London   181
   Lost & Found   185
   (be)longing   189

9 Before You Go   194

Appendix   Curious Selected Works and Collaborations 1997–2013   199
Notes   205
Bibliography   213
Index   220
I Introduction

From the inside out

This book considers the relationship between proximity and intimacy in live performance. It looks, quite literally, at the distance in physical space between performers and audiences and how that distance or proximity impacts our encounters with one another. In the chapters that follow we write about close encounters between performers and audience members from our unique vantage point as performers of works for small audiences. This project, like our years of work as performance makers, is about paying close attention to people in the moment. We write at length about creating, sharing and witnessing small, delicate encounters and exploring the various alchemies created in works and processes that feature face-to-face encounters. Writing this book is our way of synthesizing and sharing our experiences of performing to audiences in close physical proximity, sometimes close enough to reach out and touch each other, sometimes close enough to see the patterns in each other’s irises.

In writing to you now we can’t see your eyes, let alone the patterns in your irises, nor do we know anything about your age or gender, if you are inside or outside, if it is late at night or early in the morning, what season it is, what country you are in or any of the individual details we would appreciate about our audience members through shared proximity. In this regard you, dear reader, are much farther from us than our audiences. Still, through writing we hope to convey some of our most acquired thoughts and reflections on performance, offering a different kind of intimacy, one that shares a longer story, a life’s work, a series of contemplations rather than a face-to-face encounter.

This book traces the artistic trajectory of our personal quest as makers for meaningful exchanges between audience and performer, for different ways of creating and performing up close. We discuss processes by which we attempt to create experiences that are carefully authored and performed, yet remain open to some level of two-way communication with the audience. In a nutshell, this book is about why we, as makers,
value close proximity to audiences and what we have learned through performing to intimate audiences over many years.

This book is performer-oriented in its approach to ideas and experiences. It’s about the impact of space and proximity in relation to actual performances rather than abstract or virtual notions of proximity and spectatorship. It deals with specific performers, specific performances and sometimes specific audience members. While this is not exactly a collection of writing that adds up to a methodology for ‘proximate performance making’, we hope it will provide food for thought for scholars and inspiration for makers in terms of the ways in which they think about audiences and space. The performance works we describe and analyse in this book are not the product of a set form or method. We don’t consciously follow formal axioms or rules, nonetheless patterns emerge that we think will be of value to scholars of immersive, participatory and small audience work as well as to performance makers interested in thinking deeply about spatial relationships to audiences. One of our early readers, Michael Peterson, said that he found reading the ‘Interior’ section useful in relation to a performance he was making at the time. This was a dream readership moment for us, to hear that the writing about specific projects (ours) can be read in fruitful conversation with a host of other ongoing projects (yours).

In terms of situating the work in an artistic, geographical and temporal landscape, the productions described in this book can most comfortably be seen as part of a UK-based Live Art milieu of what is often called small audience or ‘one-to-one’ performance. Personally, we tend to use the words ‘experiential’, ‘sensuous’ and ‘intimate’ to describe our works for small audiences. In this collection the word ‘proximity’ is central in talking about the expanding and contracting distances between audience and performer, which we are so interested in exploring.

This book draws from what can be described as ‘practice-based research’ or ‘practice-led research’, though we think it important to clarify that the performance works we write about here were not conceived of as research projects. We are artists first and scholars second in terms of chronology – the order in which we approach ideas. We usually work from the ‘inside’ of our performance-making practice ‘out’ into investigations of what other artists and scholars have written about related topics and how their work connects (or not) with our ideas and our experiences. Admittedly there may be more two-way exchange
between theory and our artistic practice than we are conscious of when we are creating work. Having said that, what was most important to us in making the performance work discussed in this book was the contact and communication between the audience and the performer. In other words, in making these works we weren’t trying to prove a theory about proximity and performance; we were trying to make good performances. What is important to us now, in writing this book, is connecting insights from an art practice to the ideas and insights of others in the field and putting them into conversation with each other. After creating many works since 1997 that explore the possibilities of audience-performer dynamics, our collective experience of performing in close proximity to audiences leads us to writing this book as a way of sharing some of our insights and experiences from the performer’s point of view.

Although the performance work discussed in this book was not undertaken as ‘research’ per se, recurring questions run through it which lend themselves, dozens of projects later, to discussion within the context of practice-based research. All of our projects start with a question or a series of questions. We are curious about the world we live in – thus the company name: Curious. Many questions we delve into are project-specific, such as ‘What is the relationship between the sense of smell and memory?’ (On the Scent) or ‘What are “gut feelings”?’ (the moment I saw you I knew I could love you), but the questions we find ourselves returning to time and time again over the years, across multiple projects are:

- What forms of contact and communication are uniquely possible between audience and performer in the live moment?
- What types of experience are only possible in the live moment? What are the textures and temperatures of these moments? How do they feel? How long can they last?
- How can we as performers incorporate the intimacy of ‘one-to-one’ moments within performance works for larger audiences without rupturing delicate connections between audience and performer?

In this book we muse on what years of performing intimate works has taught us about audience-performer relationships and the value of close physical proximity. We reflect on the intense labour of small audience performance and how this labour impacts directly on the quality of experiences for audiences and performers. We think of this type of
performing labour as ‘shift work’ in that we perform about eight hours a day, repeating performances several times in order to keep the performer-audience ratio intimate while making the work available to larger numbers of people. ‘One-to-one’ or small audience performance pays attention to the audience in a very particular way and this effort is rewarded in the quality of the experience, both for audience and performer.

Some of the questions explored in this book are:

- How does proximity enable different modes of performance?
- How close is too close for the performer... for the audience?
- Are there ‘ideal’ densities of audience for particular performances and how do we as makers find the friction points?
- How might we bring the ‘intimate senses’, the haptic, thermal, taste and olfactory, into more performance experiences and how might this change the nature of the art form?
- What are some of the ways technology enables proximity in live performance?
- How does the extension of our social distance as a species (through communication technologies) diminish or increase our appetite for situations that occur in personal space?

This book also contributes to the current surge in publication about immersive, participatory, intimate and interactive performance, such as Josephine Machon’s Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance (2013), Maria Chatzichristodoulou and Rachel Zerihan’s edited collection, Intimacy Across Visceral and Digital Performance (2012) and Gareth White’s Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation (2013). As autoethnographers of theatre practice, we offer insights and analyses as well as our passion and hope for the future of performance. We offer these insights from either side of the performance, from before, after and from within. We offer these reflections as a duet, as individual remembrances and experiences.

In Utopia in Performance, Jill Dolan considers, from a critic’s point of view, the performative nature of writing about performance:

Writing, like performance, is always only an experiment, an audition, always only another place to practice what might be an unreachable goal that’s imperative to imagine nonetheless. Writing, like performance,
lets me try on, try out, experiment with another site of anticipation, which is the moment of intersubjective relation between word and eye, between writer and reader, all based on the exchange of empathy, respect, and desire [...] Trying to capture something of performance itself – even if it’s those inarticulate, ineffable, affective exchanges that are felt and gone even as we reach out to save them – is also a ‘doing,’ a kind of performative that attempts to fill the ‘aporia between logos and the body,’ the gap in which performance inevitably, spectrally swirls.

(Dolan, 2005, p. 168)

To us, the project of experimenting through writing with alternative sites of anticipation and encounters, of trying to capture something of the performances themselves, to attempt to fill the aporia, is a project that performance makers should contribute to. In writing this book we see our roles as front-line correspondents, reporting from the scene of audience-performer encounters and offering our reflections. The writing, however, isn’t just a reporting after the fact on the project; the writing is part of the project. We take inspiration from our intimate encounters with audiences. Over and over, our audiences teach us how precious shared spatial-temporal experiences are, today more than ever. Dolan searches for utopia in performance; we search for utopia in audiences. In Dolan’s utopian spirit, we wish to share the inspiration of our experiences with you.

Performing proximity

Not so many years ago, the word ‘space’ had a strictly geometrical meaning: the idea it evoked was simply that of an empty area. In scholarly use it was generally accompanied by some such epithet as ‘Euclidean’, ‘isotropic’, or ‘infinite’, and the general feeling was that the concept of space was ultimately a mathematical one. To speak of ‘social space’, therefore, would have sounded strange.

(Lefebvre, 1991, p. 1)

Notions of proximity are central to this project, so it seems useful to begin by thinking about different ways of measuring and sensing distance or closeness between people. As part of this project on performance and proximity, we would like to reconsider some of the
concepts of proxemics within the context of contemporary performance studies. In 1966 anthropologist Edward T. Hall published *The Hidden Dimension*, a landmark work introducing the ‘science of proxemics’, still widely quoted across many disciplines in relation to the norms of the physical proximity between people in different cultural interpersonal contexts. Hall’s model of human proxemics, which draws upon Heini Hediger’s work on territorial behaviours in animals, looks at the distances between people in terms of public, social, personal and intimate space. Part of Hall’s contribution to anthropology, applied in many other cognate fields, lay in recognizing the central importance of sensory factors beyond the visual in the human perception of space and spacing. He explains that:

Man’s sense of space is closely related to his sense of self, which is in an intimate transaction with his environment. Man can be viewed as having visual, kinesthetic, tactile, and thermal aspects of his self which may be either inhibited or encouraged to develop by his environment.

(Hall, 1966, p. 63)

Hall’s humans have much in common with Hediger’s animals in their use of multisensory cues to negotiate territory and maintain ‘personal space’. Personal space is Hediger’s term for the normal spacing patterns that members of a like species maintain between themselves. This personal space exists as an invisible bubble around each organism, with dominant animals having larger ‘bubbles’ than submissive ones. Likewise, dominant humans, such as public figures, are accorded larger bubbles, so that the more important a person is in your culture, the less chance you have of being physically near them. For Hall, ‘[…] the realization of the self as we know it is intimately associated with the process of making boundaries explicit’ (1966, p. 12). These boundaries are defined by both somatic sensory information and by psychologically and physiologically internalized, but often unconscious, cultural norms.

Hall’s work was also significant in terms of his interest in uniquely human cross-cultural and inter-cultural patterns and codes (though some of his examples make slightly jarring reading decades after it was the norm to talk about husbands spotting arrowheads in the desert while wives spot cheese in the refrigerator, or to write broad-stroke chapter
subheadings such as ‘Germans and Intrusions’). Despite the presence of these 1960s race and gender ‘time bombs’, Hall’s basic concepts of proxemic zones divided into public space, social space, personal space and intimate space have remained current in many fields (Illustration 1.1). Hall’s work can be seen as related in spirit to some of the philosophical projects gaining currency in the 1960s, such as Merleau-Ponty’s work on the primacy of perception in human experience and cognition and Lefebvre’s work examining the cultural production of social space.

Let’s work from the outside in, starting at the outside edge of ‘public space’ and zooming in towards ‘intimate space’ as we go. ‘Public Distance – Far Phase’ for Hall is a distance of 25 feet or more, with a perimeter of 30 feet being the distance automatically set around important public figures. Hall illustrates the concept of this zone with two examples. The first example looks at space from the outside in – the force field that developed overnight around John F. Kennedy when he became the Democratic Party nominee, and therefore possibly the next President.

**Illustration 1.1 Proxemic zones**

[Sketch by Angrette McCloskey]
of the United States. From this moment, others were no longer free to approach Kennedy for a handshake or a few words, but had to wait at the edges of an invisible 30-foot perimeter to be invited into his now public-sized personal space. Interestingly, Hall’s other example of the far phase of public distance is from the inside out, looking at the distance divide from the perspective of an actor who, by virtue of their training, knows that ‘at thirty foot or more the subtle shades of meaning conveyed by the normal voice are lost as are the details of facial expression and movement’ (Hall, 1966, p. 125). In the first example it is the responsibility of those around Kennedy to respect and perpetuate his stature by keeping their distance. In the second example, it is the actor’s job to exaggerate or amplify expression, movement and voice in order to bridge the perceptual gulf between performer and audience. The example from the outside in is one of social deference; the example from the inside out is one of specialist training and skill. Actors have a unique cultural role in relation to space in that they must frequently adjust for distance by modifying behaviour in order to create the illusion of being closer than they really are.

To continue a bit further with the Kennedy and actor pairing, let’s take the theatre at the Kennedy Center in Washington DC as an example of the kind of distance an actor might expect to work with in performing a play. The ‘Ike’ theatre is the smallest building in the Kennedy complex, with a seating capacity of 1100. Even in this mid-sized venue, an audience member would be very hard-pressed to get a seat within 25 feet of the actors and so would experience the play far outside the rings of Hall’s proxemics zones – in fact they may well be ten times that distance from the stage. So the actor’s job of bringing intimate moments to life for the audience involves a learned ability to connect with people across the physical chasms of theatre architecture. Most of the actor’s work is done in the no-man’s-land of what Hall, with almost humorous simplicity, calls ‘not close’. Beyond the 25-foot threshold of the public distance far phase, ‘not close’ isn’t so much a zone in Hall’s proxemic model, as it is everything that lies outside the zones, from 30–40 feet to outer space. Outside the radius of Hall’s proxemics zones, naturalistic expressions, voice and movement are impossible for audiences to interpret with anything like the precision with which humans can read each other at closer distances. Much of what we think of as theatre acting, in fact, can be seen as an art form developed in response to a type of architecture in
the ‘fixed feature space’ of theatres. As artists, the theatre shapes us as much as we shape the theatre.

The cavernous size of theatre buildings has always been a challenge for actors, many of whom prefer smaller houses, but also for writers and directors who aim to convey situations and emotions in their work in closer-focus modes. Artists and producers a hundred years ago felt many of the same push-pull conflicts experienced today between the artistic and financial demands of theatre. August Strindberg, a leading figure in the Naturalism movement, longed to escape from grandiose Victorian theatre architecture: ‘If first and foremost, we could have a small stage and small house, then perhaps a new dramatic art might arise’ (Strindberg, 1955, p. 73). The Royal Court, managed by Harley Granville-Barker at the turn of the century and with a reputation for producing innovative new writing (including Henrik Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw, Maurice Maeterlink and Granville-Barker’s own work), had a smallish capacity at 841 in comparison to Henry Irving’s 2000-seat Royal Lyceum Theatre. The Royal Court was later redesigned to seat only 380 in the downstairs theatre with a smaller 85-person theatre upstairs for even more intimate or experimental possibilities. The remodelled Royal Court kept its reputation for cutting-edge new writing, producing the ‘angry young men’ John Osborne, Edward Bond and Arnold Wesker and later works by authors such as Caryl Churchill, Martin Crimp and Sarah Kane. As in everything, size is relative: for a London theatre, the Royal Court is pretty small; for a theatre producing experimental contemporary work, the Royal Court is fairly large. In spaces such as the Royal Court’s proscenium theatre much of the audience remain in ‘not close’ space, but a critical mass of spectators have seats within Hall’s 25-feet radius, enabling them to pick up on complexities and subtleties in the performances, as well as allowing the performers to have a closer sense of the audience.

In London today the large Victorian theatres tend to be used for long runs of distinctly non-naturalistic forms such as blockbuster musicals, while writers, actors and directors looking to create more intense psychological dramas may seek out smaller spaces like the 250-seat, publicly subsidized Donmar Warehouse. The thrust stage design of the Donmar means that audience members and actors are not forced into the proxemic badlands of ‘not close’ endured by audience and performers in larger venues. Instead, they encounter each other in what Hall would
call ‘Social Space’ (4–12 feet) and ‘Public Space’ (12–25 feet). Although working in a small venue isn’t a guarantee of producing exemplary theatre, it’s probably not coincidental that in its short history, Donmar productions have received an unprecedented number of awards.\(^1\) The opportunity to be closer to the audience is obviously a huge draw for the many talented writers, directors and performers who could easily be earning much more and playing to larger houses elsewhere.

For Hall ‘Social Distance’ occurs in its close phase at between 4 and 7 feet and in its far phase at between 7 and 12 feet. Both close and far phase social distance is frequently used in the workplace, with close phase more common in social gatherings. At this distance people can use a normal rather than a raised speaking tone and people’s faces still appear round whereas in ‘public space’ people’s features flatten out and appear less expressive. In social space people are just out of reach of each other, but can pass an object if they stretch towards each other. In more intimate theatres like the Donmar or the black box spaces of many experimental theatres, some members of the audience will be seated within a ‘social’ distance from the performers, enabling them to receive more finely tuned aural and visual stimuli without feeling vulnerable in their proximity to the actors – they are still at a ‘safe’ distance. Depending on the production, one might argue that a ‘social’ distance from the performers makes for a very good, if not the best, audiencing position.

‘Personal space’ in Hall’s classification system, is 1.5 feet in its close phase and 4 feet in its far phase. Within personal space the aural and visual powers of perception are further heightened; we can hear a whisper or see fine facial details such as eyelashes or freckles. We are able to read much finer distinctions of emotion in each other’s faces and body language. Olfaction comes into play in this range as well as kinaesthesia; we can smell someone’s perfume or breath, we can reach out and touch someone or be touched. Our vision is acute at the far edge of this zone, beginning to distort at the near edge.

It is relatively rare for theatre audiences to share personal space with performers, especially for a significant length of time. The most common experience of this kind of proximity between audience and performer is when the performer enters the audience and singles out one or more people for a brief exchange or some kind of special attention. This is the type of attention so many audience members dread – an attention that turns the focus of the rest of the audience onto them.

\(^1\)
this situation an audience member may not experience a particularly ‘personal’ moment with the performer because they are too hyper-aware of being watched by the rest of the audience. Some performers, perhaps by virtue of sheer charisma, seem to be able to create less angst-ridden or self-conscious personal moments for audience members within larger shows by engulfing or shielding them within their own personal space ‘bubble’. We have seen Peggy Shaw move into an audience in the middle of a show and serenade audience members one by one, taking their hands in hers as she sings. The recipients of her serenades didn’t appear worried about the rest of the audience; Shaw’s aura seemed to encircle them, offering a kind of magical protection. This type of moment can, of course, go horribly wrong in the hands of a less skilful or charismatic performer, and a truly panic-stricken audience member can sink the most seasoned performer. Either scenario is ghastly to witness and surely collective memories of such incidents are the source of much fear and loathing of audience participation.

Within the close phase of ‘personal space’, between 1.5 and 2.5 feet, Hall notes:

> The kinesthetic sense of closeness derives in part from the possibilities present in regard to what each participant can do to the other with his extremities. At this distance, one can hold or grasp the other person.

(Hall, 1966, p. 119)

Interestingly, it is the possibility rather than the actuality of closeness that defines the close phase of personal space; the frisson of the almost but not quite intimate. The flipside of this frisson is, of course, tension and anxiety, a mutual fear. Performers and audiences have long been wary of each other if not outright afraid, even from ‘not close’ distances, so of course with increased proximity comes the risk of an elevation in fear. Hall defines 12 feet as the amount of space needed for an alert subject to ‘take evasive or defensive action if threatened. The distance may even cue a vestigial but subliminal form of flight reaction [...]’ (Hall, 1966, p. 123). If a performer crosses this 12-foot threshold, the nearest point of public distance, the audience are more likely to freeze than flee if approached further. Perhaps this is why some audience members prefer the back row and the aisles, which offer the greatest possibility of escape. A performer who comes
into the social or personal space of the audience may engender feelings of closeness and contact, but their nearness may also cause fear and/or a feeling that there is ‘no way out’. Different types of venues and festivals, of course, have their own unwritten codes and expectations about relationships between performers and audience members, so a Donmar audience member, for example, might appreciate being close enough to see Jude Law's dirty fingernails in Anna Christie, without feeling any particular anxiety that the performers will try and interact with them.

The centre of Hall’s proxemic model is the radius of ‘intimate space’ that starts with our skin and extends 18 inches outward all around our bodies. In this zone the visual is often overloaded or distorted, as it becomes hard or impossible to see someone this close, sometimes creating a ‘cross-eyed’ look; hearing is acutely focused on breathing or other low-level sounds that are inaudible from a distance; the olfactory stimulation is at its peak; haptic and thermal receptors come into play as we feel the heat from each other’s bodies, the moisture from each other’s breath or direct physical contact. In Hall’s words, ‘This is the distance of love-making and wrestling, comforting and protecting. Physical contact or the high possibility of physical involvement is uppermost in the awareness of both persons’ (Hall, 1966, p. 117).

It is very rare that theatre audiences share intimate space with performers, though, as many theatre scholars have pointed out, it is interesting that the audience members in a conventional theatre are seated within personal and even intimate distances from each other. If seated next to a stranger, however, this distance isn’t normally perceived as ‘intimate’ or ‘personal’, but instead simply as close or crowded. Hall explains how humans have special defensive devices for taking the intimacy out of proximity in public situations like the theatre or the subway that force people closer together than they would naturally arrange themselves. Strategies include being as immobile as possible, withdrawing upon accidental contact (if possible), and keeping eyes fixed on infinity to avoid eye contact beyond a passing glance (Hall, 1966, p. 118).

Large theatres, in particular, are challenged both in the crowded distance between spectators and each other and in the remote distance from stage to auditorium. Long distances between performers and audience can be a negative in terms of appreciating nuance or details, but within the auditorium, the acute lack of distance between hundreds of audience members can be claustrophobic, obstructive and distracting.
In their psychological study of theatre, Lenelis Kruse and Carl Graumann point out that conventional theatre spaces are actually designed to stifle or mute audience responses with rigid seating, all facing in a uniform direction, where audience members are expected to sit silently in the dark without moving. For audience members, then, there is a distinct challenge in zoning out everything around you, making yourself as still, invisible and inaudible as possible, and focusing in on a performance that is occurring at a distance.

For audience members seated in orthodox seats, cultural conventions serve to safeguard us from unwanted intimacy. But if a performer approaches an audience member within 18 inches, there is no convention to shield either party from an acute awareness that they are in the intimate zone of ‘love-making and wrestling’.

At intimate distance, the presence of the other person is unmistakable and may at times be overwhelming because of the greatly stepped-up sensory inputs. Sight (often distorted), olfaction, heat from the other person’s body, sound, smell, and feel of the breath all combine to signal unmistakable involvement with another body.

(Hall, 1966, p. 116)

I (Leslie) remember seeing Tim Miller’s My Queer Body at the CCA in Glasgow in the 1990s and really being taken by surprise when Miller, stark bollock naked, came and sat on my lap and talked directly to me for a few minutes of the show. In those few minutes the audience shifted from watching him talk to them from on stage to watching him talk to me on my lap. I shifted from listening to a plural address (to us) to a singular one (to me) that triggered a personal response, a feeling of closeness, but was still essentially plural in that it was intended to be witnessed by the rest of the audience. I don’t remember feeling terribly self-conscious of the rest of the audience in the moment, as Miller’s body more or less shielded me from them. I do remember a sense of balancing and fine-tuning in the eye-contact communication as Miller approached me – I would paraphrase the eye-contact conversation as something along these lines: Tim, ‘I know this is strange, but if it isn’t going to panic you I’m going to sit in your lap now...’ Me, ‘... okay.’ Although my participation was unplanned and unknown to me in terms of what it might entail, I did feel as though the encounter was
consensual; in a moment of eye contact I felt that he asked and I gave permission.

What does it mean to be so close to a performer or an audience member inside a piece? Thinking back to Hall’s rule of 30 feet being the distance automatically set around public figures raises the question of whether or not a performer is a public figure during a performance. I’m thinking here of a ‘public figure’ status that resides in the moment of performance, rather than the ‘public figure’ status attached to celebrity. If we take it as an anthropological ‘given’ that a performer in a piece is usually accorded a certain ‘public figure’ status by the audience, though this will vary in degree, how does this status change (or not) when performers collapse the normal proxemic boundaries between themselves and members of the audience? Does coming nearer to the audience decrease the status of the performer? Does it burst their ‘public figure’ space bubble, rendering them more ordinary? Conversely, does it decrease the status of the audience members? Do audience members have more spatial status when they remain at a distance that serves to underscore the financial relationship between the performer (worker/entertainer) and the audience (customer/patron)? Does moving out of public space into social, personal and/or intimate space humble the status of the performer or the audience or both? Or can coming closer reinforce and magnify the status of the performer or the audience or both? We believe any and all of these power shifts are possible as the distance between audience and performer contracts.

As performers, we have experienced doing shows for small audiences as humbling, which is a different issue than experiencing humility through actually being close to them; an issue of quantity (audience numbers) in the service of a type of quality (audience proximity). To perform a show for one person at a time, for four people at a time or for 20 people at a time rather than playing to one large full house is humbling. Performing multiple times a day in order to keep the audience close is definitely a labour-intensive experience rather than a ‘star turn’. For the audience, a small audience-to-performer ratio may have the effect of elevating or promoting them to VIP status, having a performance given ‘just for them’. It may also, consciously or subconsciously, result in the audience downsizing their idea of the performer’s status, for aren’t traditional theatre audiences conditioned to think that commanding an audience of 2000 is more impressive than telling a story to four
people? If an audience is allowed within four feet of the performer, the performer's status is hardly dominant by proxemic standards.

As a performer, sharing personal or intimate space with the audience feels like entering each other's gravitational fields. If the audience members are close enough to touch if we both reach towards each other, then we experience their reactions, their witnessing as exerting a kind of pull over our performances. If they maintain eye contact, then they exert a stronger force and we can feel ourselves calibrating to the type of energy or mood they are giving off, making a performance slightly more humorous, more reflective or darker in relation to their responses. Normally we experience this as a positive interplay of influences, one which gives a vibrancy to performances, making them feel less rehearsed, more authentic, more conversational. The relativity of such encounters also makes them less predictable, edgier and more fallible. Very occasionally an audience member exerts a strong negative influence, which can make getting through a performance in close proximity feel like riding out a turbulent air-pocket, never knowing quite how long it will last or if, perhaps, you are all going down. In a small audience group, a negative audience response also clouds the experience for the other audience members to a much greater extent than it would in an orthodox theatre setting, where fixed seating and lighting states encourage the audience to tune each other out. In our experiences this is rare; close audiencing generally begets greater intersubjectivity and communitas than 'not close' audiencing.

We'd like to draw a parallel for a moment with these close encounters in live performance and the close-up in film. Film theorist Mary Ann Doane points out that whilst in Russian and in French the term for close-up denotes largeness or large scale, in English it is nearness or proximity that is at stake (Doane, 2003, p. 92). The close-up in film created new performative geographies, surfaces and texts, zooming in on fragments of human life, fragments that become full body worlds in their own right. Although not enabling a magnified or disembodied image, nonetheless the performative close-up elevates the intimacy of the encounter. French filmmaker and theorist Jean Epstein writes, 'The close-up modifies the drama by the impact of proximity. Pain is within reach. If I stretch out my arm I touch you, and that is intimacy. I can count the eyelashes of this suffering. I would be able to taste the tears' (Epstein from ‘Magnification’, as cited in Doane, 2003, p. 109)
What are the qualities of the performative close-up? What are the qualities inherent in the nearness and in the quality of the encounter, in the pitch and shift of it? What are the textures of proximity? In writing for our performances our desire is to present clear images that move us close to our sensate condition, to what it is to be human. There is a desire in that moment to elicit a sense of making the absent body (following Drew Leder) present. Writing is part of the performance of proximity, imbuing works with physicality and agency. In tandem with this there is a desire as performers to enact a poetic presencing of sorts through the delivery of the text, such as through eye contact, timbre of voice. In this way the delivery enacts a ‘getting closer’ through how we pace, pause, hold the text and give it to the audience as if we were talking not at them, but to and for each of them individually.

As performers we have noticed an interesting phenomenon in terms of the way we remember traditional theatre performances versus intimate performances. (Though this book is about work in close proximity, we have made many shows for conventionally seated theatre audiences.) Over the years we gradually realized that we remember intimate performances in significantly greater detail than theatre performances. Performances on stage go by in a bit of a blur, leaving us with only general impressions of the experience from one performance to the next. In performances to small audiences, however, we retain very clear memories of the audience members, how they reacted, what they looked like, what they laughed at and when they looked thoughtful, and so we also remember ourselves and what we were doing in those moments more distinctly. We have two theories as to why this might be. The first relates to the nature of the three kinds of memory: episodic memory is remembering an event that actually happened to you; generic memory is memory of general knowledge, such as the alphabet; procedural memory is memory of skills and procedures that one has learned, like playing a musical instrument. Our personal memories (or lack thereof) suggest to us that we experience theatre performances as ‘procedural’ and intimate performances as ‘episodic’. This implies two very different cognitive states for a performer in these two types of work: in conventional theatre we are in a skills mode, performing something we have learned in the same way the musician performs a song; in intimate performance, even though we have memorized lines and rehearsed a sequence of actions, we are engaged in an experience with the audience.
members and remember the event in the same cognitive manner that we process episodes in our lives. Procedural modes are by nature more automatic, a kind of autopilot made possible by rehearsal, so it doesn’t seem particularly surprising that we wouldn’t remember the distinct differences between performances in a run or a tour of a theatre show in great detail. (Though if you give us the first line, we could probably repeat the entire text of any of these shows, calling on our procedural memory.)

The thing that we think is significant about the contrast in how we remember the two different types of performance is that it suggests that we experience intimate performances in a cognitive manner that is much closer to a lived experience. In proximate performances we still experience what we are doing as performance – it is choreographed and scripted and composed in a way that real life isn’t – and yet we remember these encounters with the audience through our episodic memory. Significantly, and this is the second part of our theory, intimate performance is multi-sensory in a way that real life generally is and performing in a theatre generally isn’t. Theatres are audio-visual by nature and performers are used to operating with much less sensory information than we have in ‘real life’. Theatre lights make us extremely short-sighted – on stage we are sometimes lucky if we can see our hand in front of our face. If we are amplified, we are usually behind the sound speakers, which also makes us slightly deaf to what the audience are hearing. The stage operates as something of a black hole – it swallows in order to create. In providing a blank slate for endless possibilities it erases many sensory particulars. The word ‘blackout’ is used for theatres and cinemas and in the process of making these spaces conducive to images that can be seen by large crowds simultaneously, it’s worthy of note that we blackout a great deal of sensory stimulus. Intimate performances employ the haptic and the olfactory much more than conventional theatres, but the auditory and the visual also operate much differently in close proximity than in conventional theatre venues, giving us more information, more nuances. From the performer's point of view, there is a much richer sensory palate to work with, and a much richer field of sensory feedback for us to work from in terms of being able to ‘read’ the experiences of our audiences. So perhaps performing to small audiences is more experiential or ‘episodic’ for the performer in part because they have more sensory input, which is of course directly
related to their proximity to the audience, a proximity that leads them to experience the encounter more as a lived event than a skilled recital.

**An overview**

Our company has produced over 40 projects since we formed in 1997, and many of them have explored expanding and collapsing audience-performer distances. We find it more helpful to the analytical concerns of this project, however, to focus in depth on a handful of specific performances rather than skimming and talking about proximity across the work generally. The first part of the book, Proximity and Performance, presents four case studies in two sections. The ‘Interior’ section looks at interior performance spaces as well as the interior of the body, with a focus on the ‘intimate’ senses of smell, taste and touch. In this section we write first, in Chapter 2, about our piece On the Scent (2003 ongoing), one of the works in which we are physically closest to the audience throughout, as the piece is performed in houses for audiences of four at a time. The audience experience is designed around sensory stimulus that relies on close proximity, particularly smell and taste, so there is also a particular physical interiority to the piece. We have performed On the Scent hundreds of times in 14 different countries and many more different cities, so we have several hundred hours of performance experience with this show, which adds depth and breadth to our reflections on performer-audience dynamics. The second case study in the ‘Interior’ section, Chapter 3, is *the moment I saw you I knew I could love you* (2009 ongoing), a piece performed to audiences of 24 at a time seated in three eight-person life rafts on the stages of black box theatres. The subject matter of the piece – instinct, impulse and gut feelings – as well as its intimate staging made it an obvious case study for ‘Interior’ where we explore proximity in relation to cognition and the senses and literally look into the interior of the body. The audience in *the moment I saw you I knew I could love you* are held within a theatre building as well as cradled in the interior of a small raft. As with On the Scent, we have hundreds of hours of performance experience with this piece, which helps us to know and reflect on the audience-performer dynamics more deeply.

In the spirit of spatial perspective, we switch in the next section of Proximity and Performance from an interior focus to an exterior or
landscape perspective. In the ‘Landscape’ section we analyse two site-specific projects that play with shifting performer/audience proximities within urban and natural landscapes. In ‘Landscape’ Chapter 4 we discuss *Out of Water*, a collaboration between Helen Paris and Caroline Wright commissioned for the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad, which took place on Holkham Beach, Norfolk, and later at Fort Funston Beach, San Francisco as part of PSi19. In this section we also look in Chapter 5 at *Lost & Found* (2005), a project which was set in three different urban centres of regeneration and transformation, Shanghai, the Black Country and East London. These projects encompass significant contrasts in physical distances between performer and audience, from hands touching to miles apart. The two pieces provide temporal contrasts in terms of the pace at which gaps widen and close between performer and audience, with *Out of Water* taking its rhythm from a walking pace and *Lost & Found* employing the more urban velocity of a city bus. We are also interested in looking at these works as landscape pieces, where the audience experiences a heightened sense of the world around them through being both inside the performance and outside in the natural or urban environment.

Where the first part of the book looks at proximity in performance, the second part of the book explores proximity in relation to different types of process. Chapter 6, ‘In the Lab and Incognito’, looks behind the scenes at some of the research processes we have undertaken in proximity to other work/research cultures exploring our subject matter through different means or methods. It includes descriptions of collaborations with olfactory scientists in the making of On the Scent, with neurogastroenterologists in the making of ‘the moment’, as well as a behind-the-scenes look at quite a different research process, as Helen describes her experience of working in London’s Lost Property Department as part of developing her script for *Lost & Found*.

Chapter 7, ‘In the Studio’, discusses how we share performance-making ideas and techniques in the studio and classroom, focusing on a creative workshop series we ran called Autobiology (2008 ongoing). Throughout the months we were working on making the performance piece ‘the moment’ and the companion film *Sea Swallow’d* (2010), we explored working with consciously physical prompts in the rehearsal studio, such as body memory and gut feelings. In the Autobiology workshops we shared many of these generative techniques with other artists and students as ‘open source’ methods to use in their own
practices. In this case making a show in a particular way opened up a new line of classroom exercises and methods. The workshop students weren’t engaged in research for our performance, but rather our performance-making process generated new teaching methods for the workshops.

Chapter 8, ‘In Situ’, examines our ongoing practice of asking a project-related question across a range of people outside the frame of performance events. In asking these project-specific questions, such as ‘What smell reminds you of London?’ for Essences of London (2004), we invite a cross-section of people to consider a question that we are asking in our performance practice, such as ‘What is the relationship between smell and memory?’ Like people in any field, we are interested in the ways in which other people approach the same questions, what they think and how they arrive at their opinions, hunches or conclusions. For us, the invitation to consider a shared question is a way to get closer to a wider range of people than would attend a theatre or live art event. This chapter discusses projects of questioning across different communities that developed into their own short film outputs: Essences of London, Lost & Found (2005) and (be)longing (2007).

In writing about our own performance work and processes, we have been inspired by sociologists Phillip Vannini, Dennis Waskul and Simon Gottschalk in their use of the term ‘sensuous scholarship’.

[...] We should use a subjunctive mode to capture the uncertainty, complexity, and plasticity of interaction, to convey how sensations and their expressions unfold and produce one another rather than pinpoint what causes them, to acknowledge the tentativeness, situatedness, and ability of fieldwork and somatic work, and to evoke a sense of emergence. We believe that these four strategies of sensuous writing (indeterminacy, performativity, contingency, and emergence) are key characteristics of all forms of embodied representation.

(Vannini, Waskul and Gottschalk, 2012, p. 76)

In our own field of performance studies, of course, many writers, such as Sally Banes, Jill Dolan, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, André Lepecki, Peggy Phelan and Richard Schechner, have also advocated and practised sensuous writing, sensuous theory and/or sensuous scholarship. Our aim here is to contribute to this growing area of writing. While writing for a reader is a very different project than performing for a live audience,
we hope that the ‘sensuous scholarship’ of our embodied experiences as performers comes through in these pages and transports you, if only for a moment, to some of the performance interiors and landscapes we have created and inhabited with audiences in our work over the years.

Our overall aim throughout the writing which follows is to make an analytical contribution to the field from the experience and intellect of performance makers engaged in different ways of creating and performing works with a keen attention to proximate relationships with audiences. We hope that this writing about our performance experiences finds resonance with artists and scholars as they continue to think about the ways in which performers and audiences can draw close to each other.
Index

Anderson, Laurie 116
Anker, Suzanne 75
Arnolfini 163
Artangel 117
Artsadmin 206, 208
aura 11, 94
Austin, J. L. 43
Australia 84, 85
Autobiology 19, 52, 76, 157, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 167, 170, 174, 177, 211
autonomic nervous system/ANS 75, 157
automatic writing 76, 132, 165, 167, 170, 171, 177
Aziz, Qasim 157, 161
BBC Shipping Forecast 99
Banes, Sally 20, 48, 44, 49
Bangalore 139, 149
Barba, Eugenio 57
Barton, Claudia 63, 90, 95, 207, 208
Battersea Arts Centre 85
Beachy Head 68, 69, 77, 207
Beattie, Theresa 79
(belonging) 20, 139, 180, 181, 189, 190, 191, 193, 212
Ben Chaim, Ruth 46
Benjamin, Walter 92
Bennett, Susan 45, 55
Bhalla, Upinder S. 149, 150, 151, 153, 154, 155, 157, 184
‘big brain’ 76
biofeedback 154, 164, 167
Blau, Herbert 55, 92
body memory 19, 48, 89, 162, 164, 167, 169, 171, 173, 174
Brazil 47, 55
Calderón, Sebastián 109, 111, 116
Cambridge 25
Cappelli, Renu 113, 121
Cardiff, Janet Her Long Black Hair (2004) 116
Carlson, Ann 81, 96
Carlson, Marla Ways to Walk New York After 9/11 130
Carlson, Marvin 44, 78
Chakrabati, Sukanya 118, 121, 117
Chaleff, Rebecca 109, 119, 121
Chalmers, Jessica 44, 45, 50, 51
Chatzichristodoulou, Maria 4
Chaudhuri, Una 44, 45, 50, 51
Chimayo 29, 30
Classen, Constance 39, 41, 54
communitas 15, 59, 66, 114, 196
Curious 3, 52, 88, 97, 114, 167, 179, 180, 196
Di Benedetto, Stephen 43, 44
DIY (Live Art Development Agency) 163
Doane, Mary Ann 15
Dolan, Jill 4, 5, 20, 88, 96, 114, 117, 118, 196
Donmar Warehouse 9, 10, 12
Drobnick, Jim 47, 54, 55
dysfamiliar 86, 87
East End 122, 183, 184, 187, 189
emotions 9, 52, 55, 64, 66, 80, 87, 156, 161, 167, 169, 184, 194
Engen, Trygg 53, 55
tenteric nervous system / ENS 62, 75, 87, 92, 156, 157
Index

Essences of London 20, 180, 181, 182, 184
Evans, Dixie Lee 97, 134
Exotic World Museum 97

Family Hold Back 139, 180
FIERCE! Festival 122
fight, flight, freeze 65, 76, 78, 81, 167, 170, 171
Fort Funston 19, 98, 115

Garner, Stanton B. 48, 49
Goffman, Erving 43
Gornick, Lisa 79
Goulish, Matthew 179
Greenham Project 180
Gressett, Salette 78
gut feelings 3, 18, 19, 62, 66, 75, 76, 77, 78, 80, 81, 90, 95, 96, 139, 156, 157, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 169, 170, 173, 174

Hall, Edward T. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 41, 51, 81, 82, 86, 194, 195
Hediger, Heini 6
Henshaw, John 41
Hill, Leslie 25, 63, 76
Hill, Sue 209
Hippocampus 48, 57
Hirsch, Marianne 130
Hofer, Johannes 157
Holkham 98, 115
Homesickness 47, 57, 59, 67

I never go anywhere I can't drive myself 131, 132, 180, 181

Kattwinkel, Susan 46
Kawash, Samira 82
Kelly, Marina 49
Kennedy, John F. 7, 8
Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara 20
Kötting, Andrew 76
Kushner, Tony 48

Leder, Drew 16, 42, 52, 58, 86, 87, 88, 90, 91, 159
Lefebvre, Henri 5
Lepecki, André 20, 44, 48, 49
Levinas, Emmanuel 53, 82
‘little brain’ 76, 87
Live Art 2, 20, 131, 162, 148, 185
Live Art Development Agency 163
London 2, 9, 19, 20, 50, 55, 122, 123, 139, 114, 145, 148, 149, 154, 161, 163, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 189, 190, 191
Lost & Found 19, 20, 122, 127, 130, 132, 139, 141, 146, 148, 180, 181, 186
Lost Property Department, Baker Street 123, 139
Love, Heather 79, 80
Low, Kelvin 43

McConachie, Bruce 114
Machon, Josephine 4, 52, 88, 111, 117, 195
Madison 49, 163
Massey, Doreen 115
Massumi, Brian 116
Merleau-Ponty, Maurice 7, 42
Miller, Graeme 63
Miller, Tim 13
Minton, Emmy 51, 190
Monroe, Marilyn 97
Morris, Michael 117
Morse, Margaret 79, 91

National Center for Biological Sciences (NCBS) 149, 150, 153, 155, 156, 161
National Endowment for Science and the Arts (NESTA) 155
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) 190, 191
neurogastroenterology 75, 156, 157, 159
New Mexico 29, 32, 181
New Territories Winter School 163
Norfolk 19, 98
nostalgia 47, 57, 58, 129, 130, 131, 184
olfactory 7, 41, 42, 52, 57, 58, 87, 151, 182, 183
On the Scent 18, 19, 25, 40, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 87, 153, 154, 156, 180, 181, 184, 185
Out of Water 19, 97, 98, 108, 110, 116, 118, 121, 132, 180
Paris, Helen 19, 25, 63
Peña, Guillermo Gómez 194
Peterson, Michael 2
Phelan, Peggy 20, 40, 82, 194
PICA 85
Pocha Nostra 194
Powers, Sarah 167, 169
Read, Alan 40
Route 66, 97, 131, 132, 133, 181
Royal Court 9
San Francisco 19, 98, 108, 115
Savarese, Nicola 57
Schechner, Richard 20, 43, 59
Sea Swallow’d 19, 157
Shanghai 19, 25, 50, 55, 56, 122, 185, 186, 187, 189
Shaw, Peggy 11
Sifuentes, Roberto 194
site-specific 19, 49, 111, 131, 132
smell 3, 10, 13, 18, 20, 25, 31, 32, 33, 36, 37, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 87, 91, 139, 149, 150, 151, 153, 154, 155, 173, 174, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185
Smith, Barbara T. Feed Me, (1973) 195
Smith, Caroline 117
Smoking Gun 180
Solnit, Rebecca 115
Spitzer, Leo 130
Stanford University 163
Strindberg, August 9
Tacata, Ryan 53, 59
Taiwan Women’s Theatre Festival
The Day Don Came with the Fish 139
the moment I saw you I knew I could love you 3, 18, 62, 75, 76, 84, 87, 92, 96, 110, 139, 157, 162, 174, 180
Three Semi-Automatics Just for Fun 180
Tolentino, Julie 122
Toynbee Studios 114, 163
Tramway 163
Tuan, Yi-Fu 52, 53
Turner, Victor 196
ultrasound 70, 74, 76, 80, 81, 83, 84, 85, 161
University of Wisconsin-Madison 163
Vannini, Phillip 20, 42, 43, 57, 58, 87
Vena Amoris 114, 180
Viola, Bill 194
Vroon, Peit 40
Weaver, Lois 25, 44, 47, 49, 54, 57, 58, 122
Weisskopf, Victor 179
West Bromwich  98, 123
White, Gareth  4
Wingate Institute  75, 76, 139, 156, 157
Wilson, Louise Ann  111
Women's Library  189, 190
Wright, Caroline  19
Wright, Laura  105
yoga  163, 165, 167, 169, 173
Zerihan, Rachel  4