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Audience

There is a running joke in our house – well, actually, it's not a joke as much as a song that gets sung in particular circumstances. In the 1969 film *Sweet Charity*, Stubby Kaye, the manager of the Dance House in which Shirley MacLaine's eponymous heroine works, sings on the evening before her nuptials 'I Love to Cry at Weddings'. Well, in our house the lyrics have been changed to 'I Love to Cry at Trailers'. This is because of Lee's unerring ability to burst into tears when confronted by a particular type of movie trailer. Usually the film is action packed, with explosions, destruction and wide-ranging peril. There comes a point in the trailer when it all just gets a little bit too much, and he begins to cry. We have always been sort of aware of these outbursts, but it came to a head when we were sitting in a cinema and a trailer for *Transformers 2: Revenge of the Fallen* started to play. If you were to watch the trailer (and why not? It's easy to find it on YouTube), you can get a sense of the destruction on offer.

It started when the first missiles hit the aircraft carrier; but really began in earnest when a single tear runs down Megan Fox's cheek. For some reason, the combination of explosions, heroics and the mild sense of peril really affected Lee, and he started to cry. Not the gentle waterworks displayed by Ms Fox, but big, wracking sobs, complete with geysers of snot. From a cold and analytical perspective, there is no sense why this would be the case. The work of Michael Bay is not famed for its opportunities for catharsis; in fact, his work tends to be dismissed as disaster porn, with an eye on spectacle over emotion. And yet . . .

This is exactly the sort of trailer guaranteed to make Lee cry. There are lots of trailers like this, but it was *Transformers 2: Revenge of the Fallen* that made us realise that there was absolutely no correlation between quality, narrative and the resultant emotion provoked.

Why this might be the case is something we have, as yet, been unable to figure out.

Why then do I bring this up now, at the start of an extended piece of writing designed to encourage you, dear reader, to think about the role of the audience? I think it is because tears are a strange thing. Sometimes they are infectious, sometimes inexplicable, but rarely are they unremarkable. Tears are so incredibly bound up in what is and isn't acceptable in a variety of social contexts, and they are heavily gendered. The next section, which deals with affect, considers the gendering of emotion, so know that we will consider this – just not here. I think the main reason I am reminded of Lee's *Transformer* tears is because of my own dry eyes when sitting opposite Marina Abramović for *The Artist Is Present* at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York.

Sitting across from her was not my first 'live' experience of her practice. Prior to this, Lee and I spent the duration of *Marina Abramović Presents* (2009 – Manchester International Festival) watching her and the thirteen artists she chose to work with occupy the Whitworth Art Gallery for eighteen days. After our engagement with *The Artist Is Present*, we returned to her work, visiting *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović* and *11 Rooms* (both 2011 – Manchester International Festival) and *512 Hours* (2014 – Serpentine Gallery, London). Although questions of our spectatorship were raised, and specifically what was being asked of us in all of these pieces, it was *The Artist Is Present* that crystallised something of the performer/audience exchange and therefore the work that has exercised us the most.

Perhaps it was the fact that *The Artist Is Present* was positioned as 'a new elaboration on her landmark durational work with Ulay' (Giannachi, Kaye and Shanks, 2012: 21) that peaked our interest; certainly *Nightsea Crossing* has been the subject of great many articles and op-ed pieces, and arguably both pieces have been over-theorised within the broader context of presence, absence and issues of spectatorship. As a result, perhaps our visit to MoMA was overburdened with expectation.

As I begin to reflect here on the experience, I worry whether another account of an already over-theorised piece is entirely necessary. I am anxious that the addition of my voice to the existing clamour around *The Artist Is Present* will simply reinforce the sense that this is a piece designed to be written about, and that much like the ouroboros, it is eating its own tail. I'm not certain how much I want to be involved in making such a meal. However, I am emboldened by the observation made by Patrice Pavis, who reminds me that

[t]he work, once performed, disappears for ever. The only memory which one can preserve is that of the spectator's more or less distracted perception. (1992: 67)

And this is what I can offer. My 'distracted perception' is filtered by the specifics of my singular expectations, life experiences and concerns. Certainly, my experience differs vastly from Lee's. He spent the whole time sitting opposite Abramović counting, worried that he was taking too long, informed by the snarky comments of the security guard who stood at the head of the queue, monitoring behaviour and explaining the rules of engagement. I heard no such comment and was unconcerned that my forty-two minutes was too long an encounter. Ultimately, I have decided that it is fine for me to offer my account precisely because it is mine and no one else's. If memory alone can preserve the experience of the spectator, then perhaps capturing my experience goes some way towards offering a way into a performance to those who weren't able to be in the room with it.

Taking up Pavis's claim for disappearance is Peggy Phelan, who reminds her reader that the 'only life [of performance] is in the present (1993: 146). This, in turn, led to a counter from Philip Auslander and a resulting two decades of back and forth, with two further significant edited texts being published in this field over the past two years. I'm not trying to contribute here, just recognising that inevitably any account of a thing now past will be subsumed by the wider debates. Given that this project by Abramović has been somewhat traduced, it might appear that my late addition is in some way commenting upon recent scholarship. For example, Amelia Jones suggests that

The Artist Is Present exemplified the politically dangerous trend towards reifying precisely that which is still being claimed as 'authentic' in its supposed transfer of unmediated emotions and energy. In short, *The Artist Is Present* exemplifies what is lost when performance is institutionalised, objectified, and, by extension, commodified under the guise of somehow capturing the ephemeral. You can't 'curate', plan in advance, or otherwise present 'presence'; it is something that happens of its own accord through interpersonal encounters. (Jones, 2012: 160)

This critique is fascinating, but not part of the landscape of my memory. My thoughts, and those that follow, are less concerned with conversations around curatorship and the institutionalisation of art than they are with the experience of the exchange. I intend to offer my 'more or less distracted perception' as a means to move in towards a consideration of what might open up between a performer and a spectator; which is in itself a significant enough place to begin.

Sitting opposite Abramović in the atrium space of New York's MoMA was a disconcerting experience. My memory doesn't begin at the table,

but in the queue beforehand. Joining the queue offers no guarantee of an audience with Abramović. Depending on which of the seventy days of Abramović's installation attended would impact heavily upon waiting times, but even then those hoping to sit opposite her were at the mercy of the people further ahead in the queue. Initially, there were no time constraints placed upon those who chose to sit opposite. Audience members were advised that they could stay as long as they felt that the 'conversation' was ongoing. In practice, as long as eye contact was held, the conversation was considered 'live'.

There are six floors to MoMA, with the Marron Atrium occupying the second floor and visible from floors two through six. Abramović's installation of *The Artist Is Present* filled the atrium for seventy days, and as a result the potential for engagement with the piece was multilayered. Anyone entering the gallery and visiting any of the various galleries would have seen the work. This first level of engagement might be compared to the 'accidental' audience as defined by Schechner; an audience who are unfamiliar with the content and circumstances of the material, and thus come to the work without preconceptions. In the case of *The Artist Is Present*, this might not translate into a focused engagement, with the work potentially functioning as little more than background noise. The layout of the space was such that the floor of the atrium had a clear demarcation of what was considered to be the performance area. Those accessing the galleries surrounding the atrium had to navigate the reduced floor space and skirt the edge of the queue waiting for their turn in front of Abramović.

There was, of course, the possibility that those accessing the galleries might shift from an accidental engagement to a more intentional relationship to the work. Those queuing form a second level of audience, an audience that made the decision to engage with the work. By queuing they were showing a commitment to the piece, especially as there was no guarantee that by joining the queue they would find themselves opposite Abramović. The third level of audience is made up of those who made it from the queue and found themselves sitting opposite Abramović. Further to this were those who watched MoMA's live stream of the event.

I'm aware that I am forestalling the telling of my story, resisting letting you in on what it was like to sit opposite her, fully aware of the pregnancy of all the many levels of gaze present at the event. This isn't because I am trying to eke out as much from the experience as possible. I think it's because I'm a little bit embarrassed, somewhat ashamed. Or maybe I've just talked this all over with Lee too many times, and really I'm holding his anxiety in my body. But I promise, I am getting there.

The egalitarian nature of queuing gave the impression that all comers were meeting the work in relative equality. Of course, as with any such public event, the process was rigorously stage-managed, with celebrities and friends being brought to the front of the queue shortly before the opening of the gallery. But even with this fast tracking, once the doors were open, there was no way to exit the space without negotiating the crowds. Full disclosure: Lee and I jumped the queue. We had worked on a previous project with an assistant to Abramović, and in the process of trying to organise a coffee with him, he invited us to join the queue early one morning. We arrived half an hour before the gallery opened. At that point the foyer was full of people checking coats and bags, buying tickets and milling around, awaiting the opening proper. We stood in a crowd of about three hundred, watching the stairs to the atrium. Just before 10 A.M., Davide came to the top of the stairs and waved us up. Perhaps this was the first moment that I became fully aware of the weight of the gaze. Perhaps we were asking for it. We manoeuvred our way through the crowd and made our way up the stairs to join a group of four other people waiting. They were ahead of us in this pre-queue. All friends of Abramović, they were engaged in conversation but stopped to pass some brief pleasantries. We were all led into the atrium and brought to the area which had been designated as the entrance to the performance space. We were fifth and sixth in the queue as the rest of the public ran in, jockeying to be as near to the front as possible.

Evidently we felt a certain level of awkwardness as others filed in behind us. Questions were asked of the museum guards, along the lines of “What makes them so special?”, questions that the guards had little patience in offering a response to, perhaps equally irritated by the apparent subversion of the rules. Although we don’t wish to dwell on that initial awkwardness, it would be disingenuous not to mention the circumstances of our initial arrival. It informed the subjective position we occupied and impacted significantly upon Lee’s ability to engage with the work. That being said, any perceived elevation to special status was momentary, primarily because it was a distinction that didn’t last.

My experience was marked by a certain amount of intersubjective leaking, an experience that occurred as a result of following on directly from three people known to Abramović. It was this odd bleed over that reminded me of Lee’s *Transformer* tears, but I’ll come to that. The four people in the queue before me all knew Abramović, and as the time passed and each subsequent person sat in front of her, she became more and more visibly upset. By the time I sat down opposite her, she was crying

freely. In the aftermath of *The Artist Is Present*, much has been made of the tears of the sitters, but less of Abramović's tears. Sitting opposite her, watching her cry, was a curiously disconnecting experience. Sitting across from a woman who was struggling with her emotions, knowing that she was less than an hour into her day-long engagement, a day that was just one in a sea of seventy other such days, was deeply affecting. I felt for her – how could I not? Tears do that. I wanted to somehow be there for her in this struggle, to know that she was held.

And yet . . .

There was still that disconnect. I was fully aware that these tears were not for me. This emotion was not part of an intersubjective moment in which I was being witnessed; I was not being seen by this woman. In fact, it felt very much as if the opposite was the case. I was merely a quiet observer of her turmoil, experiencing something that was totally unconnected to my presence. Of course, it is hard to reflect upon this lacuna without sounding like I am complaining that I didn't get my money's worth; that I was somehow short-changed. I run the risk of sounding as though I understand the work only in the context of transaction. I have thought a lot about this, and I hope that this is not the case. Instead, my response was largely one of confusion. The script I had been offered by the security guard, in advance of sitting, was that I should imagine my exchange with Abramović as a silent conversation, that it was 'live' as long as I remained engaged. But being the recipient of tears intended for another sitter somehow undermined the much-repeated claim that Abramović was involved in a silent communion with each individual who sat opposite her.

When reflecting upon the experience, it is difficult not to move straight towards the critique and to foreground the analytic, but I want to try to stay with my experience. At first, I thought perhaps my experience of holding Abramović's empty gaze was an opportunity to reflect upon absence and presence in performance as I felt myself fade before her. I was reminded of Schneider, who suggests that

[i]f we consider performance as 'of' disappearance, if we think of the ephemeral as that which 'vanishes', and if we think of performance as the antithesis of preservation, do we limit ourselves to an understanding of performance predetermined by a cultural habituation to the patrilineal, west-identified (arguably white-cultural) logic of the archive? (Schneider, 2012: 63)

But this is the wrong order of absence and presence; Schneider is offering a debate on the ability to abide versus the ability to disappear. It is caught

up with a critique of the commercialisation of arts practice, and for me to get caught in a consideration of this is to occlude questions around *my* presence, and *my* perception of Abramović's absence. As I felt myself disappearing, I wondered what it meant to be present in performance – not as a performer, but as an audience member. What is interesting, at an analytical, but also at an emotional level, is that I experienced an absence in exactly the moment I was supposed to be experiencing presence. To be clear, I am not interested in framing this within the landscape of failure; I don't intend to suggest that my experience of *The Artist Is Present* invalidates the experiences of others. I don't even wish to position the specifics of *my* engagement as somehow failed.

As I stated above, the rhetoric offered by the museum guard in the moments before I sat across from Abramović was to position the exchange as a conversation without words. I was reminded to maintain eye contact throughout because to break eye contact is to signal that the conversation is over: I was reminded that it wasn't a staring contest (although it had been reduced to such in a variety of media reports), but rather an opportunity to really 'be' with someone. Thus, my experience, with Abramović crying and lowering her head to the table three times in the early minutes of our engagement, deviated immediately from the script I had just been prepared with. On a personal level (for how else am I to respond?), I wondered what exactly I should make of these glances away. At first I wondered if they were they an invitation to leave, after all I had just been reminded that to look away is to end the conversation. Were these rules also applicable to Abramović? I didn't think so, and so I stayed, waiting to find some way to assert my own voice within this conversation.

The result was that I set myself a very simple task. I would stay at the table and continue to hold her gaze until the moment I felt that I was seen. I have thought a lot about this decision since, worrying that perhaps it sprang from some petty desire to be important. I don't think that this was the case; rather, I believe that I was to trying to find some way to honour the idea of presence, of being present.

My experience was one of a slow coming into focus. At the start of my time at the table, I was witness to a woman who wasn't there. Actually, I think I need to be clearer here; I am not suggesting that Abramović was not engaged; there was no sense that she was 'phoning it in'. Rather, it felt to me as though she couldn't initially find her way to the table to 'meet' me. In terms of emotional exchange, I felt the weight of this absence at the outset, followed by a slow presencing as we made our way towards one another. I think that my initial desire to hold her in some way, to be

there for this crying stranger; was what kept me at the table. I think this is where Lee's *Transformer* tears come back. Those four friends, one after another; were like the explosions, the cars becoming robots, the soft focus distress of Megan Fox; they were simply too much to hold in one body in such a short time. Lee has seen *Transformers 2: Rise of the Fallen* all the way through. He remained dry-eyed throughout. There was nothing in the film as it played out in real time that moved him; it was merely another opportunity to sell tickets and toys, as calculated as one might expect. The tears of Abramović were not for me, but crucially they were not for her friends. Or at least I don't think they were *just* for her friends. They were the inevitable result of too much sensory input, an overloading of intersubjective exchange, resulting in a clouding of the 'real' moment – I wish I could think of a way to say that without recourse to the word 'real', but I'm at a loss. That her tears were misplaced, or perhaps a misdirection, does nothing to reduce their impact on the audience watching our exchange, any more than they reduce the impact of all those tears shed by those who had, and who would, sit in the chair I occupied.

Coda

On Thursday the 'No Photography' sign is facing Abramović, and she is wearing a red dress. At 5.15 P.M. a young man leaves the chair, looking shattered and dazed. He is replaced by another young man. It is a late-night gallery opening, and the mood feels mean. There is applause for the young man as he leaves his seat. In the brief respite between these two men, Abramović lets her arms hang heavy by her side, the weight of her hands and arms evident in the drooping of her shoulders. In this moment, I am reminded of what she said to a much smaller crowd in The Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester. She spoke about 'vampirism', about how sometimes the people you meet need too much from you, and they leech your energy, take too much out of you. Sometimes the demand is too much from you, it feels all-consuming. Abramović had a strategy to resist this happening. She suggested pressing your index finger and thumb of your right hand together, and then repeating the action on the left. Once you have closed this circuit, she suggested that you allow your tongue to rest against the roof of the mouth, pressing gently behind the teeth. The result is the creation of a closed circuit, a kind of 'feedback loop' which allows you to keep your energy intact. I let my gaze travel down her heavy arms, look at her gently reddening hands. They are soft; there is no circuit being formed. Perhaps he wasn't a vampire.

Tonight the guards seem more excited than usual. More agitated. The second young man holds eye contact for 22 minutes, and then he suddenly bows his head, like a full stop. The previous young man had done this same little punctuation with his head. At this I wondered if those waiting in the line had agreed to some sort of pact, either spoken or unspoken, to keep the engagement with Abramović short. Those waiting in line sway in anticipation, and I cannot decide what I want to call them. They aren't sitters; not yet. 'Queuers' doesn't seem quite right. Are they 'standers', 'waiters', 'plinthers'? Or maybe they become 'Ulays' in their urgent need to join Abramović.

A guard shouts, 'Five minutes . . . this area will be closed', and preparations begin for today's end. Davide moves in and greets the next waiting 'Ulay' at the edge of the square, I see her face fall as she understands and backs away in disappointment, suddenly embarrassed. Abramović has her head on the table, and suddenly there is applause. The atrium is emptied and guards ask the stragglers to leave. I am aware of the space as panoptic, and I look up to see the many windows on the floors above which overlook the atrium, filled with the smears of faces and hands. Marco moves to the front of the space, and as Abramović lifts her head for him, he takes her photograph. Davide steps forward, speaking into her ear, lightly touching her arm. He moves around the four corners of the space, switching off the stage spotlights one by one. She folds forward in her chair, head to knees. Whilst she is perched on the edge of the seat, Davide picks up the red cushion and replaces it with a cream one. And with the cushion under his left arm and Abramović under his right, he takes her weight and leads her away. Marco picks up his camera, his tripod, his bag, and also leaves. The space stands empty and still for a moment.

* * *

As we move away from the experiential and towards the analytical, it might be useful to reflect on what we learned from the experience of watching Abramović. There was something curiously exposing in sitting opposite her – not because you could be 'seen'; after all, the anonymity of the crowd was waiting for the moment you left the chair – but exposing in the sense that this seemingly intimate one-to-one exchange exposed the broader mechanics of the process of audiencing. The inherently uneven nature of the exchange between audience and performer seemed to be underscored, reminding us as audience that although we were visible, we were never really the subject of analysis, something we will return to later in this section.

In her introductory essay to the 2010 edition of *About Performance*, an issue subtitled ‘Audiencing: The Work of The Spectator in Live Performance’, Laura Ginters observes that despite the fact that in ‘all but the rarest cases, spectators are the largest number of contributors to the live performance event’ (Ginters, 2010: 7), audiences have been largely omitted from theatrical scholarship. In terms of writing specifically aimed at addressing theatre audiences, ‘spectators have historically been the least studied and the most generalised of all participants’ (Ginters, 2010: 7). For many years, the most detailed overview of the terrain came in Susan Bennett’s *Theatre Audiences*. At the time of Bennett’s writing, theatre audiences had not been the focus of much consideration. As she observes, this is perhaps because the role of the audience was seen as a given, noting that

[t]he extensive criticism of reader-response theorists has not achieved a codification of reading practice, but it has made us more aware of the complexity of a process once considered ‘natural’. (Bennett, 1990: 92)

Bennett’s text offers an excellent account of the shifting roles of the audience and how they have been pressed into service as a cultural force. Although her book does an admirable job of bringing to the fore the otherwise marginalised role of the audience, it nevertheless (necessarily) positions the audience as a mass. In recent years, scholarship has shifted somewhat, doubtless due in part to the fact that ‘[i]n much contemporary theatre the audience becomes a self-conscious co-creator of performance’ (Bennett, 1997: 21), a trend Bennett noted in the second edition of her book. Ginters offers an overview of the academics beginning to explore this terrain, and references the work of Bruce McConachie (2008), Dennis Kennedy (2009), Helena Grehan (2009), Rachel Fensham (2009), Alison Oddey (2009) and Christine White and Helen Freshwater (2009). These works on spectatorship are further supported by subsequent scholarship that has tended to offer a more focused consideration of audiences functioning within specific roles, exploring contexts in which the audience operates in some way outside of normative practices. An obvious example comes in the recent consideration of intimate and immersive practices evident in the writings of Martin Welton (2011), Maria Chatzichristodoulou and Rachel Zerihan (2012), Josephine Machon (2013), Gareth White (2013) and Leslie Hill and Helen Paris (2014).

In a variety of ways, each of these academics makes a response to Bennett's recognition of the shift towards an audience involved in co-creation, whether through considering implied participation in the generation of performance materials, which is to say focusing upon what might be termed 'postmodern' or 'post-dramatic' strategies, or through more explicit participation by discussing immersive and interactive processes. For our part, this chapter contributes to the debate primarily by focusing upon the complexity of audience encounters, and draws upon our experiences as performance practitioners, performer trainers and active audience members.

Since we began making practice together in the late 1990s, we have concerned ourselves with the assumptions made in the exchange between performer and audience. This chapter considers the potential significance offered through such exchanges as well as what is missed when they are overlooked. We hope to take up the implicit challenge laid down by Ginters when she states, '[I]t has become clear that we cannot and will not continue to ignore or deal summarily or merely speculatively with the spectator and the audience' (Ginters, 2010: 8).

Part of the issue with a sustained consideration of audiences seems to spring from some originary thinking on Western performance modes. In *The Republic*, Plato observed that

[f]ew I believe are capable of reflecting that to enter into another's feelings must have an effect on our own: the emotions of pity our sympathy has strengthened will not be easy to restrain when we are suffering ourselves. (Plato, 1930 [370 B.C.])

This starting point, the idea that an audience will be subsumed by a fiction and therefore cease to strive towards an understanding of 'truth', might thus be articulated as the part of the 'creation myth' of theatre; although other perspectives are offered, that original understanding of the audience as passive and disengaged seems to have somewhat infected many subsequent conceptualisations. This tension is explored in detail by Jacques Rancière, first in his article 'The Emancipated Spectator' and then in his book of the same name:

There is no theatre without spectatorship [. . .] but spectatorship is a bad thing. Being a spectator means looking at a spectacle. And looking is a bad thing, for two reasons. First, looking is deemed the opposite of knowing. It means standing before an appearance without knowing the

conditions which produced that appearance or the reality that lies behind it. Second, looking is deemed the opposite of acting. He who looks at the spectacle remains motionless in his seat, lacking any power of intervention. (Rancière, 2007: 272)

Perhaps it is not just the creation myths of theatre that are to blame for this, but also the inherited nomenclature. The language of theatre is the language of reception. The English word 'theatre' has its roots in the Ancient Greek *theasthai* 'to behold', which in turn informs both the Greek and Latin words which describe the buildings in which performances are staged (*theatron* and *theatrum*). 'Audience' and 'auditorium' both come from the Latin *audire*, 'to hear'. These two key linguistic markers make no account of the embodied. As Ginters elegantly asks, 'Why does this "corporeal presence but [. . .] slippery concept" (Kennedy 2009, 3) have an etymology based in the visual in the singular and the auditory in the collective?' (Ginters, 2010: 8). Both words foreground reception over generation or contribution. It is particularly interesting that the language of reception (audience) itself reinforces the idea of passivity and resists the potential for action. It is, at least in part, this inaction that Rancière is offering a resistance to in his call for emancipation. The spectatorial focus from which the audience member is seeking release is situated in the landscape of the external. As Rancière observes (*pace* Feuerbach and Debord), 'The spectacle is in the realm of vision. Vision means externality. Now externality means the dispossession of one's own being. "The more man contemplates, the less he is," Debord says' (Rancière, 2007: 274). The critique goes thus: visuality equates to externality, and externality is a fleeing of the senses from the body towards an imagined or projected other, an other which, certainly in Plato's terms, offers no potential for 'truth'. Whether or not it is a concern for the lack of 'truth' remains open to debate, but it seems likely that it is this sense of inactivity and the resulting loss of agency that has led to a consideration of interactive models of performance as means of resistance.

In her consideration of Jeremy Deller's 2001 multimode art work (taking the form of re-enactment, exhibition, film and bookwork) *The Battle of Orgeave*, Claire Bishop observes that

the binary of active versus passive hovers over any discussion of participatory art and theatre, to the point where participation becomes an end in itself: as

Rancière so pithily observes, 'Even when the dramaturge or the performer does not know what he wants the spectator to do, he knows at least that the spectator has to do something: switch from passivity to activity.' (Bishop, 2012: 37)

Through her invocation of Rancière, Bishop reminds the reader that the acceptance of the binary is to end in an unproductive stalemate, a position which does little to move the debate surrounding the audience/performer dynamic forward. What is interesting for us is how Rancière goes on to complete this observation:

[W]hy not turn things around? Why not think, in this case too, that it is precisely the attempt at suppressing the distance that constitutes the distance itself? Why identify the fact of being seated motionless with inactivity, if not by the presupposition of a radical gap between activity and inactivity? Why identify 'looking' with 'passivity' if not by the presupposition that looking means looking at the image or the appearance, that it means being separated from the reality that is always behind the image? (Rancière, 2007: 26)

In this respect, he is opening up the presumed binary to critique by asking how the presumptive link between visuality and passivity might be unsettled. Certainly, there is enough theory regarding visuality as a means of active agency that might allow us to unsettle the assertion that to spectate is to absolve oneself of all action. The most obvious (and some might say insidious) would be Laura Mulvey's conceptualisation of the male gaze; a visual touchstone that, despite critique, remains an active way of understanding the potential power that looking can hold. The gaze is positioned as an action that has the potential to remove agency from the object of the gaze while reinforcing the primacy of the subjective position doing the looking. Thus, to be engaged in looking is to have power; looking has an agency all of its own. And one need not only think of the problematic position of the scopophilic as a way in which the spectator is given agency.

The idea of witness offers a certain weight of responsibility, suggesting as it does participation in an action. In a variety of legal processes, from marrying to buying a house, a witness is required to allow the exchanges to occur. Indeed, within a marriage ceremony it is those who witness the event that allow the ceremony to be successfully concluded. It is by calling upon those present to witness the ceremony that it can be recognised by law. Thus, the witness is an active participant in the event. Similarly, the term 'witness' is used in Authentic Movement, an improvisatory approach to dance

which sees the practitioner finding movement from within. Started by Mary Starks Whitehouse and developed by Janet Adler, Authentic Movement sees the mover observed by a witness whose role is to contain the experience and to watch without judgement or intervention. Despite the apparent passivity, witnesses are actively engaged as they are encouraged to notice their own sensations and experiences at the same time as watching the mover. As within a legal process, the witness is positioned as integral and within a workshop these roles will be swapped. To witness is to be central to the proceedings, to be key to the functioning of the event. This imbrication of performer and spectator allows the roles to be seen as complicit in a way that reminds us that Bennett opens her study with Grotowski's question:

Can theatre exist without an audience? At least one spectator is needed to make it a performance. (Grotowski, 1968, in Bennett, 1990: 1)

In some ways, Abramović's *The Artist Is Present* takes Grotowski's question to its most logical conclusion. To return to Rancière, this question is answered through a recognition of theatre's roots as a community-engaged practice, with a renewed focus upon the importance of the 'reform of theatre [allowing for] the restoration of its authenticity as an assembly or a ceremony of the community' (Rancière, 2007: 274). Thus, the 'emancipation' of which Rancière writes does not refer to a freeing of the spectator as might initially be assumed, but rather a yoking of the spectator to the wider community within which she sits. It is difficult to know if that is what happened as we sat before Abramović; were we contributing to this return, in which Theatre is given back to the community that hosts it, or were we contributing to a further distancing in which spectacle and visuality replaced experience?

Perhaps an invocation of Edith and Victor Turner's *communitas* might be useful at this point. Through *communitas*, what is offered is an unstructured coming together, one that foregrounds equality, and for the Turners it opens up the potential for anti-structure, a place of transgression and sharing. What this might offer over and above community, is a recognition that through anti-structure the entire community is afforded equality, which doesn't simply mean those of low status are raised up, but also those of high status are brought low. Whether this is a concept that has any long-term potential within extant communities is not for debate here; rather,

it is the potential for emancipation of an audience that is being considered. In spectatorial contexts, *communitas* has the potential to open up lines of communication that might not be possible in other, more entrenched communities. Audiences are temporary, and as such there is less at stake in the renegotiation of cultural position, so any shifts in power are limited to the life of the performance. To return to Claire Bishop's discussion of *The Battle of Orgreave*, the potential for *communitas* in participatory art becomes evident:

The reason why Deller's *The Battle of Orgreave* has become such a *locus classicus* of recent participatory art [. . .] seems to be because it is ethically commendable (the artist worked closely in collaboration with former miners) as well as irrefutably political: using a participatory performance and mass media to bring back into popular consciousness 'an unfinished messy history' of the state crushing the working class and turning it against itself. (Bishop, 2012: 35)

In many respects, Deller's *Orgreave* relies on *communitas* to come into being, and it is through a parity of experience and ownership that the materiality of the artwork functions. Bishop is not blind, however, to the potential pitfalls of taking socially engaged practice and working it through for location within a high-art context: 'Of course, at this point there is usually the objection that artists who end up exhibiting their work in galleries and museums compromise their projects' social and political aspirations' (Bishop, 2012: 37). She goes on to offer a qualification of this critique, when she suggests the following:

The binary of active/passive is reductive and unproductive, because it serves only as an allegory of inequality. This insight can be extended to the argument that high culture, as found in art galleries, is produced for and on behalf of the ruling classes; by contrast, 'the people' (the marginalised, the excluded) can only be emancipated by direct inclusion in the production of a work. This argument – which also underlies arts funding agendas influenced by policies of social inclusion – assumes that the poor can only engage physically, while the middle classes have the leisure to think and critically reflect. (Bishop, 2012: 38)

Here, the spectatorial versus the embodied takes on another level of complexity. Embodiment is reduced to 'unthinking' or lacking critical engagement, yet another unhelpful binary that further reinforces the Cartesian error. The body becomes analogue for 'the people', and the people become material for the artist to manipulate and for the critically engaged audience to consume. In the context of Deller's *Orgreave*, this would result in an exoteric/esoteric

binary aesthetic. The exoteric refers that to which the majority can relate, or understand. It references a populist tradition, as opposed to the esoteric, which suggests understanding from a limited, particular group. Broadly put, the exoteric encompasses the majority of the participants and ‘live’ witnesses, ‘first-hand participants of the event in 2001, and those watching them from the field (primarily Yorkshire locals)’ (Bishop, 2012: 37) and watching broadcast footage on UK TV station, Channel Four, whereas the esoteric speaks to the few, ‘those who read the book and listen to the CD of interviews; and those who view the archive/installation in the Tate’s collection’ (Bishop, 2012: 37). Such binaries, although intended to offer a critique of the apparent inequality between artist and participant, and doubtless intended to problematise the ‘ownership’ of such materials, further reinforces sociocultural positioning, rather than allowing for *communitas* and anti-structure, with Bishop observing in the case of Orgreave that ‘[t]he effect of this argument is to reinstate the prejudice by which working-class activity is restricted to manual labour’ (Bishop, 2012: 38).

Finding a way to resist the binary of active/passive, might be usefully explored through what has been articulated as ‘the affective turn’, a theorisation of complex social interaction which places emphasis on the bodily experience. Often connected to emotional states, although not positioned as synonymous with them, the field of affect studies grows out of the writings of Baruch Spinoza, specifically his *Ethics*. We will consider the landscape of affect in more detail in the next section, but thought it helpful to introduce the idea here, due to the following explanation from Brian Massumi:

The concept of affect that I find most useful is Spinoza’s well-known definition. Very simply, he says that affect is ‘the capacity to affect or be affected’. This is deceptively simple. First, it is directly relational, because it places affect in the space of relation: between an affecting and a being affected. It focuses on the middle, directly on what happens between. More than that, it forbids separating passivity from activity. (Massumi, 2015: 91)

The idea is that an affective state resists the separation of action from passivity because, like *communitas*, it has an explicitly political dimension which precludes a witness from being passive because the alteration of her bodily states are informed by the very act of witnessing. Although this doesn’t quite solve the politically divided viewership suggested by Bishop, it does remind us of our

own complicity in the act of watching. When we (and remember that by ‘we’ and ‘us’, we are not generalising, but referring to the two authors, Bob and Lee) watch performance, we are responsible for our responses. To reflect back on the way we began this section and our experience of sitting with Abramović during *The Artist Is Present*, this seems not only fraught with ideological problems but also offers serious issues in relation to the valorisation of the singular viewpoint, an idealised perspective that was never really available. If a focus is placed upon documentary accounts, what we might term the ‘politics of the body’ is lost, and we miss the potentiality afforded by performance, which Rebecca Schneider suggests offers

Towards the climax of Punchdrunk’s *The Drowned Man*, I found myself being taken by the hand, and led through the crowd in front of me. The young woman in the slip dress kept looking back at me, squeezing my hand reassuringly. We moved at quite a pace, dodging and weaving. She held me tightly, and I started to feel anxious about my palms. Were they too sweaty? Would she be grossed out? I didn’t want this to be the case. After all, we had a connection, we must have. She chose me.

We manoeuvred our way through a variety of rooms, her leading, me following. We went down corridors, past slower groups, heading towards the big open space I had been dozing in an hour earlier. The crush of bodies pushed us towards one another, and her grip on my hand tightened. With her other hand she clasped my upper arm, my bicep. Still holding my arm, she let go of my hand, and snaked her arm around me, sliding her hand into my lower back. We were pushed into a sort of embrace. She turned her gaze towards me, her neck craning. Suddenly I was acutely aware of my height. At 6’2”, I felt every inch. Big, sweaty, ungainly. Held by a woman probably young enough to be my daughter. And that realisation from nowhere, making me wonder if I had been thinking of this as some kind of romantic or erotic encounter, brought me up short again. I didn’t think I had been, but I realised that the script open to me was limited. The wider text of the piece was painfully heteronormative, with coupling after coupling filling the spaces. From the opening semi-orgy in the nightclub, the atmosphere had been libidinally charged. As this woman held me, guided me, gazed at me, I didn’t feel there was any other narrative available for me to fall into. Thankfully, just as I was beginning to feel more awkward as the sweat from my back made my T-shirt stick to me, the crowd swelled once more, and in the buffeting we were pulled apart.

a challenge to the 'ocular hegemony' that, to quote Kobena Mercer, 'assumes that the visual world can be rendered knowable before the omnipotent gaze of the eye and the 'I' of the Western cogito (1996: 165). Thus there is a political promise in this equation of performance with disappearance: if performance can be understood as disappearing, perhaps performance can rupture the ocular hegemony Mercer states. (Schneider, 2012: 64)

Although it is true that the presence we experienced in *The Artist Is Present* had one eye on the archive, with the omnipresent gaze of Marco Anelli's camera positioning each sitter as a literal photo opportunity, with each photograph offering a chance to claim 'I was there', it cannot overwrite the embodied responses of our spectatorship.

To some extent, this assumes that there is indeed something happening in the moment of exchange. Even our decision to articulate it as a 'moment of exchange' strongly indicates our bias towards the belief that the interaction is an active one. We consider those moments of obvious and explicit interaction throughout the course of this writing, but it is our belief that all performances have the capacity for some form of intersubjective exchange (a territory we explore in greater depth in the following section). In the early years of the twentieth century, Norman Triplett became interested in the effect executing a task in a group had on the successful outcome of the task. He noticed that those participating in a task together were more likely to successfully complete the task, and that the task would be completed more quickly. He referred to this as the 'social facilitation effect', an observation that would go on to have an impact upon social and sports psychology. This observation also became known as the 'audience effect' and continued to be explored throughout the twentieth century. Explorations of the audience effect led to understandings regarding the presence of an audience upon the completion of a task, and were considered as both positive and negative. These early considerations of the audience positioned it as a microcosm of society, and the presence of this group seemed to have implications for both improved response as well as social inhibition. For the purposes of this book, the success or failure and the overall impact of the audience on those executing the task is less relevant than the way in which experiments such as these have impacted upon how the audience is conceptualised. In these experiments, the audience is offered as a force, like gravity. Its presence

effects the execution of a task for better or worse, and the impact upon the actant is the focus of consideration and analysis. The exchange is figured as a one-way process; the audience can affect the performer, but there is no specific attention paid to the performer's impact upon the audience. This is not offered as a critique of the experiments; rather, it is to highlight the cultural assumptions upon which such experiments draw. Triplett, and those that followed him, saw the audience as a mass, a singular unified body that, because of its collective construction, has the power to stand in for society at large.

In order to make any headway in understanding what passes between the audience and the performer, there is a need to consider the physical space between and what might happen therein. This space has traditionally been considered through proxemics, reader response or a combination of both. Although we undoubtedly need to draw upon these filters, our intention is to also consider the intersubjective as a way in which to understand the experience of spectatorship and to consider how this might inform an affective response to performance materials. In his book *Performance*, Julian Hilton turned to the work of 1960s anthropologist Edward T. Hall as a means to understand the geographies and architectures of performance. Hilton foregrounds the importance of a proxemic engagement as a means to unpack the interpersonal exchange within performer/audience dynamics and how distance and proximity might impact upon potential readings. According to Edward T. Hall:

The proxemic relations between people [divide] into four main categories: intimate, personal, social and public. The exact dimensions of these zones is variable according to culture. (1987: 22)

Hilton's overview takes Hall's socially grounded concepts and applies these ideas to the field of performance practice. There is clear and immediate value in this approach. By taking the four striations offered by Hall, Hilton is able to begin to encourage the reader to think about her experience as a spectator. By offering some clear examples, he discusses the audience's relative distance from the stage and considers this through the lens of Hall's proxemics. This approach is developed by Leslie Hill and Helen Paris in their book *Performing Proximity*. Like Hilton, they use Hall's

conceptualisation of proxemics as a means to address what happens in the moment of a performative exchange. As performance makers and academics (they assert that ‘[w]e are artists first and scholars second in terms of chronology – the order in which we approach ideas [Hill and Paris, 2013: 3]), their writing focuses upon the specifics of their own performance making and as such is more interested in the intimate layer of Hall’s taxonomy. In an attempt to understand the significance of proximity in general, they quote Hall as a means to consider how the space in between individuals impacts upon selfhood:

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, kinaesthetic, tactile, and thermal aspects of his self which may be either inhibited or encouraged to develop by his environment. (Hall in Hill and Paris, 2014: 6)

For Hilton, and Hill and Paris, the proxemics of Hall are a significant way to understand the literal space in between the spectator and the performer and to consider how this might inform the figurative space and thus the subsequent opportunities for exchange. For Hill and Paris, the exploration of Hall’s taxonomy of proxemics functions as a means to drill down into the specifics of their own performance-making experience. In their introduction Hill and Paris state that

[w]riting 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. (Hill and Paris, 2014: 1)

This affecting image makes very clear the intimacies specific to the work of Hill and Paris – who perform under the company name Curious. They write from the position of the performance maker, and they look out towards the audience, even if the distance of the gaze extends only a few inches. Indeed, they are very clear that this is the focus and the direction of their concern:

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. (Hill and Paris, 2014: 2)

The intimacy they explore is grounded in their experiences and informed by an understanding of Hall's intimate space; the understanding of intimacy offered is one which is predicated upon close physical proximity. Their practice is offered in contrast to more normative patterns of performance exchange. They offer a distinction between their work and work presented in a mid-sized theatre where 'an audience member would be very hard-pressed to get a seat within 25 feet of the actors' (Hill and Paris, 2014: 8) – a distance defined by Hall as 'public-far'. Hill and Paris offer a detailed account of the varying sizes and concomitant experiential gaps that might open up in a range of London theatre venues through the application of Edward T. Hall's 'proxemic zones'. In the context of traditional performance practice, intimacy becomes more difficult to achieve, or at least it does if we are to align intimacy with proximity.

Evidently, Hall's approach to the proxemics of personal and social space is an invaluable way to think through the concept of intimacy; however, intimacy is only one way to think about the potential for affective shifts in audience/performer interaction. As Hall suggests, the human experience is one of complexity, drawing upon a range of embodied processes which in turn impact the cognitive and emotional aspects of the self. Relative proximity or distance evidently have the potential to impact upon experience and are part of the narrative of the intersubjective exchange. That said, there are other factors that mitigate against the exclusivity of proxemics. The para-social¹ allows for a deep sense of connection to develop between the performer and the spectator, a connection that might occur despite both temporal and geographic distance. This exchange can feel intimate for the spectator, even if the performer is unaware of her presence. As outlined in Bob's experience of *The Artist Is Present*, intimacy is not guaranteed by proximity, any more than it is denied by distance. Similarly, an exchange that might be typified as intimate when measured against the understanding of proxemics may well meet the requirements in terms of

¹ See the section on Qualia for a discussion of the para-social.

relative distance but offer little in the way of an affective moment. The intersubjective exchange is complex. This complexity is added to by the recognition that audiences have the potential to occupy different roles depending upon the material being engaged with.

When considering striations of audience interaction, Richard Schechner suggests that there are two distinct modes of audience engagement: the accidental audience and the integral audience (see 1994: 193–6). For Schechner, the integral audience tends to bring with it a certain amount of prior knowledge and is in some way part of the event. In a ritual context, this can impact upon the level of responsibility or the particular role that might be played by the integral spectator. In contrast is the accidental spectator, someone who is positioned more as a consumer of a cultural product. In mainstream theatre practice, the accidental audience is there for the experience, often following the ‘big ticket’ experience, rather than engaging in cultural exchange. Arguably, the accidental spectator is conforming to the two-step/multistep flow model, in which audiences are informed by opinion leaders (critics, etc.) and follow accordingly, responding to the material not because they are invested, but because it has been designated as a valued cultural product. Of course, any such binary model is inherently problematic as it suggests there is no place for slippage, resistance or retraining oneself in alternative modes of spectatorship. Often, as a spectator, we can hold varying degrees of ‘expertness’ in performance and experience of performance, oscillating through a range of positions in any given experience. Questions of expertness might perhaps begin to unpack the territory of exchange; being ‘in the know’ can impact significantly on our experience and the potential intersubjective exchanges that result.

In his 1987 essay ‘Dramaturgy of the Spectator’, Marco De Marinis considers shifts in spectatorship through the application of the term ‘dramaturgy’. This is typified by a move towards a more engaged audience, one that has more investment in the generation of the performance texts being encountered. De Marinis suggests ‘that we can speak of this dramaturgy of the spectator in two ways, both of which are already grammatically present in the double meaning (objective and subjective) of the possessive “of”’ (De Marinis, 1987: 100). This twofold approach positions the spectator as a central part of the dramaturgical approach (akin to text or scenography) and also as a co-actant in the generation of the

text. The dramaturgy of the spectator both *implicates* the audience and *belongs* to the audience, allowing it to function as a creator of the text and an element within it. Central to De Marinis's conceptualisation is the shift towards an active participation on the part of the spectator, something close to the reader Roland Barthes imagines in *S/Z* (1970). Drawing upon the writings of Umberto Eco, the concept offered by De Marinis positions his model spectator as implicated in the generation of meaning:

Naturally, in order to speak of an active dramaturgy of the spectator, we must see her/his understanding of the performance not as some mechanical operation which has been strictly predetermined – by the performance and its producers – but rather as a task which the spectator carries out in conditions of relative independence, or, as Franco Ruffini has recently suggested, in conditions of 'controlled creative autonomy'. (1987: 101)

This idea of 'relative independence' begins to frame the dramaturgy of the spectator as a means to empower the spectator, and thus shares territory with Schechner's integral aesthetic. Unlike Schechner, De Marinis offers a critical oversight of a text which requires the spectator to complete it. His concern is that a text which is too open can only be read by those with an expert perspective, which in turn limits the potential scope of its readership. Thus, the opening up of texts can result in a closing down of potential audiences. For De Marinis, this is a pay-off required to allow for a more empowered or emancipated spectator. It is these experiences to which De Marinis refers when he observes that

[t]he other side to the theatrical relationship, contemporaneous with the first, consists of an active cooperation by the spectator. More than just a metaphorical coproducer of the performance, the spectator is a relatively autonomous 'maker of meanings' for the performance; its cognitive and emotive effects can only be truly actualized by the audience. (De Marinis, 1987: 102)

Words such as 'co-creator' abound when discussing an audience's relationship to open texts. These shifts in understanding how an audience responds to the material presented to them or, perhaps more accurately, how an audience activates such texts inevitably lead to questions of democratisation and empowerment. As immersive and interactive performance practices become more familiar to mainstream audiences, what an audience is or perhaps

does, increasingly interests academics and cultural commentators alike. Helen Freshwater's overview of audiences helpfully considers such terrain in her discussion of interactivity and the move towards immersion. However, the idea that to be more involved is to have more control, or that the invitation to engage is tantamount to a democratic space, is to somewhat misunderstand the complex and shifting power dynamic in performance practice. As Roberta Mock suggests in her essay 'Experiencing Michael Mayhew's *Away in a Manger*: Spectatorial Immersion in Durational Performance', audiences do not necessarily come equipped to encounter performance practice, and they might need to prepare: '[t]o use Jacques Rancière's terminology, a spectator has to be taught (or else teach herself) how to be emancipated, to be free to find the ways inside a performance that an artist has left open' (Mock, forthcoming). Whether the experience is didactic or auto-didactic, the implication here is that the audience does not necessarily meet the work in a state of readiness, but instead a certain amount of preparation is required. Our own experience of spectatorship has led us to consider this idea of preparation, and we have written about the potential for spectatorial training strategies², a process which appears to reinforce the idea that the disparity between audience and performer necessitates a commitment from the spectator to find strategies to meet the work.

What is less clear is whether these processes of training, which can be positioned as a surrender of sorts, are actually empowering or democratising. They may well be instructive; they may result in a richer experience; but there is not any assurance that this is somehow an equal exchange. Freshwater begins her consideration of interaction by discussing 'the now infamous *Rhythm 0*' (Freshwater, 2009: 62) and reflects RoseLee Goldberg's account and Peggy Phelan's discussion of the audience as co-creators. Without wishing to seem dismissive of the generosity of exchange offered by Phelan, we feel that there remain significant questions around the principle of licence. Co-creation may well sound like an opportunity for equality, but there is not a concomitant sharing of prestige or profit, or indeed any sharing of the burden of loss – fiscal or reputational – that might emerge. The rhetoric of the co-creator, although

² See Whalley and Miller (2013) 'Look Right Through', in *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, 4:1, 102–12.

appearing to empower the audience, does so only within the limited scope of what is allowed. Even within a score as open as *Rhythm 0*, in which Abramović provided a series of objects from which her spectators could choose, it was always within Abramović's gift to allow her audience the room to define the process of engagement. Similarly, it was her power to cede that ultimately saw a loaded gun pointed at her. To be clear, this is not a claim that Abramović abnegated responsibility, any more than we accept the rhetoric that she 'asked for it'. Rather, the conditions she created allowed space for the experience to devolve into what is now remembered as a notorious *Lord of The Flies* moment or, to take a more positive view, an example of Rancière's politics and dissensus in action. What remains in question is whether the spectator is transformed through this moment of emancipation or whether the specific exchanges are contingent, tied to the room or the location in which they are enacted. If this is the case, and the emancipatory exchange is not portable to another experience, then claims for the democratisation of performance practice are open to critique. As a result, we would suggest that Freshwater's decision to employ the term 'empowerment' offers more scope in debating the shifts that might arise in interactive and immersive models of performance practice.

To return to where we opened this section, were we 'empowered' by our engagement with *The Artist Is Present*? It's difficult to say. Clearly Bob felt a responsibility to stay, to engage until the point at which the work became meaningful to her in some way. Is this empowerment or merely the product of the weight of cultural expectation? Did we feel responsible to the piece to complete it, responsible to Abramović to connect with her, or responsible to those audience members behind us in the queue? Or perhaps the responsibility is to our role as 'expert witness', as academics being supported in our viewing of the work. Judging by the number of question marks in the previous sentences, it is clear that a level of uncertainty surrounds the experience.

There are further tensions around empowerment, given that the exchanges entered into are heavily monitored. We have already written about the multiple possible audiences, viewing both Abramović and the sitters. At the risk of hyperbole, there was a sense of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon at play, an inescapable observation throughout the process of queuing. The multiple vantage points, the people waiting in the queue behind, the omnipresent webstream,

the windows from other floors overlooking the atrium – all contributed to the weight of the gaze(s). This sense of monitoring extended to the manner in which the guards ‘policed’ the environment. Any transgressions (and there were many) were shut down. The accepted behaviours of those sitting opposite were limited and in many regards scripted. The guards’ behaviours ossified around the performance, repositioning what was framed as a malleable interaction to a fixed, sculptural object.

Although Bennett, De Marinis and Schechner offer us ways to interrogate the role, function and ideological conditions of the audience, and immersive and interactive practices appear to offer resistant strategies, as we have suggested above, there remains an habituated tendency to consider the audience as a passive mass to be manipulated, as is evidenced by the MoMA guards’ scripted behaviours. Writing in the UK newspaper *The Guardian*, James McQuaid (National Trust, Visitor Experience Consultant), reflects upon the 2014 Arts Marketing Association conference. In his article he references the suggestion made by National Arts Strategies President Russell Willis Taylor that ‘we need to position audiences within our organisations as partners and consider very carefully the nature of our relationship with them’ (McQuaid, 2014: unpaginated). At face value this may well seem like a move on the part of arts organisations to find more and clearer strategies for audience engagement and to move towards a more integrated, even interactive, role for audiences. However, the move to position audiences as partners seems to be informed by the anxiety around arts organisations losing cultural relevance. Implicit within this is the sense that is within the gift of arts organisations to invite the audience in. It presupposes a them/us binary in which the power is held on one side. McQuaid’s argument is for the continued relevance of arts organisations in a context of twenty-four-hour news cycles, narrowcasting and the ‘YouTube generation’. McQuaid’s anxiety is that the technological shift which allows for a context of user-generated material muddies the distinctions between high, popular and amateur cultural product. In the landscape of user-generated culture (what we might have once deemed ‘amateur’), the accidental/integral binary is unsettled. The shift away from the two-step/multistep flow model removes the need for opinion leaders (in this instance curators, funders, etc.), allowing audiences autonomy and the space to create the product they feel is missing. With popularity of material easily monetised

through pre-existing models, the them/us, or even the accidental/integral aesthetic, are eroded. YouTube has proven how users can monetise their video output, and crowd sourcing is fast becoming a way for artists to remove the need to engage with Arts Council England funding processes and the structures they impose. Whether this is a move towards a democratisation or merely a different stage in the commodification of arts practice remains to be seen.

Although the debate is an interesting one, it is important that we do not become sidetracked here into a conversation around ‘worth’ or ‘value’. These debates are less interesting to us than what the interrogation of a them/us binary means for the spectator. Despite the theoretical claims made by Bennett, De Marinis, Schechner and others, McQuaid’s position would seem to suggest that the audience as passive mass remains the default perspective in current cultural dialogue. The ‘value’ or ‘worth’ of user-generated content is less interesting than the implication for a reassessing of the performer/audience dynamic. What is at stake in the shift that McQuaid is addressing is the potential for a different understanding of this dynamic. When the cultural capital of Bourdieu is challenged, then the potential for intersubjective exchange shifts dramatically. It would seem that in the attempt to make a case for the continued importance of arts organisations as a primary mode of engagement with cultural practices, McQuaid potentially overwrites the value of cultural pluralism and the multivocality that user-generated content affords. To be clear, McQuaid’s concerns are not driven by self-interest, but from a real concern over the potential implications for devolving all decisions regarding cultural activities to market forces. The unintentional binary offered by McQuaid reminds us of Bennett’s reference to Jill Dolan’s writing and her recognition of the cultural exclusivity of much theatrical practice with the assertion that ‘mainstream theatre addresses an audience which is white, male, middle class, and heterosexual’ (Bennett, 1990: 95), which in turn can be seen to support the integral/accidental behaviours addressed by Schechner. Each in its way seems to accept that there is (or, for McQuaid, should be) a certain level of exclusivity to the process of being an audience member. We are aware that McQuaid’s commentary is specific to a UK context, given that it relies on a subsidised system funded by central government. Of course, McQuaid’s concern offers a broader cause for concern too, in that it envisions a shift towards a populist landscape that will be

valued by the number of clicks, likes or re-tweets, which might call into question the potential for diversity, quite apart from what the implications might be for quality.

We opened this section by thinking about how a them/us binary in audience/performer studies might be resisted. This soon developed into a resistance of further split within the conceptualising of an audience as active or passive. As we draw this section to a close, how then might we resist the tendency towards all binaries in discussions of audience behaviour, and the attendant implication of hierarchical exchange? One potential strategy is to consider how shifts in the scholarship around performance have interrogated what performance is, and the concomitant recognition of a multiplicity of audience behaviours. There are many potential routes into this debate, but perhaps the most inclusive is through the work of Jon McKenzie. In his book *Perform or Else*, McKenzie avoids binary oppositions (that which is performance and that which is not) by offering three paradigms that form a large 'performance' site. The discipline and practice of performance is described by three models: organisational performance, cultural performance and technical performance. Organisational performance is defined by McKenzie through an analysis of the front cover of *Forbes* magazine (a business publication), and it is from this publication that McKenzie takes the title of his book: *Perform or Else*. This form of performance describes workplace activities which fit into the corporate structure. Whether looking at huge conglomerates or non-profit-making organisations, McKenzie defines a mode of performance management that is driven by efficiency and efficacy. Cultural performance is broadly defined as an area mapped out by Carlson, Goldberg, Schechner and other scholars working in the field of performance studies. The final area of technological performance is articulated through the application of science models and describes the functions of technical systems such as engineering or computer science. By offering this expanded consideration of performance, McKenzie opens up the term to include a range of disparate practices, and in so doing implicitly questions the role of an audience. His thesis echoes and builds upon Elin Diamond's observation that 'performance is always a doing and a thing done' (Diamond, 1996: 1). These multimodal understandings of performance can have significant implications for the audience, removing as it does the clean distinction between roles. Even without McKenzie's expanded model, shifts

in the understanding of what he refers to as cultural performance, have changed significantly the position of the audience. Scholarship in the broad field of performance studies has marked a significant shift in the cultural value of knowledge and in an increased recognition of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary practices. As Diana Taylor has observed:

Western culture, wedded to the word, whether written or spoken, enables language to usurp epistemic and explanatory power. Performance studies allows us to take seriously other forms of cultural expression as both praxis and episteme. Performance traditions also serve to store and transmit knowledge. Performance studies, additionally, functions as a wedge in the institutional understanding and organization of knowledge. (Taylor, in Schechner, 2002: 7)

This transmission of knowledge through more embodied modes has a direct impact on the role and importance of any audience. If, as is suggested by Taylor, the performance traditions might ‘serve to store and transmit knowledge’, the importance of reception shifts. A performance cannot transmit knowledge without an audience to witness it. Of course, the same might be said of written discursive strategies; the knowledge generated by this book is of questionable value if no one reads it. However, it is the means of reception that is open to debate. The reading of a book or article is primarily a solo activity; even if it is supported by reading groups and seminars, the initial work is done alone. Contrast this with the transmission of knowledge in performance, which for the most part is engaged with as a group. Even in one-to-one performance practice, there are two subject positions in the space at any given time. If we return to *The Artist Is Present*, the experience is shared and witnessed, even in the moment when the spectator sits opposite Abramović. Couple this with the recognition that the everyday can be positioned as a performance (a concept which found articulation in the theoretical writings of Erving Goffman as well as the dramatic performances of Allan Kaprow), and the exploration of cultural performance shifts significantly the understanding of the term ‘audience’.

In his exploration of the debate, Schechner suggests that performance studies utilises two modes of observation: the mode which allows some activities to function in the position of ‘is performance’ while allowing the mode in which other activities are positioned ‘as

performance’, as ‘there are limits to what “is” performance. But just about anything can be studied “as” performance. Something “is” a performance when historical and social context, convention, usage and tradition say it is’ (Schechner, 2002: 30). This distinction is useful for understanding the importance of the audience in taking ownership of their own experience. Although it takes cultural consensus to position something definitively as a performance (the ‘is performance’ category), anything that catches the eye of a spectator can be positioned, and subsequently read, ‘as performance’. In the terrain of performance art, these distinctions are in flux; contemporary news footage of *The Artist Is Present* positioned the work as a ‘staring contest’, but its location within the Marron Atrium of MoMA suggests a certain level of cultural consensus having been achieved. Since performance studies has developed as a discipline (and as a result informed the focus of such related fields as drama and theatre studies), its consideration of some activities ‘as’ performance has allowed these events to benefit from a shift in the cultural consensus, which has resulted in them becoming read as ‘is’ performance. As the ‘canon’ of performance art has grown, so too has an understanding of audience behaviours. This development of ‘canonical’ performance art texts is exacerbated by the suggestion that ‘[t]he relationship between studying performance and doing performance is integral’ (Schechner, 2002: 1), and this relationship sees many practitioners contributing to the academic writing informing both areas. As a result, the ‘as’/‘is’ binary becomes more difficult to distinguish, further contributing to the complexities of the term ‘performance’ and the implications for the term ‘audience’.

It seems necessary that conversations continue around what is meant by the term ‘audience’ but also what is expected of their behaviours. Although the engagement of audiences of immersive theatre such as Punchdrunk’s *The Drowned Man* and the interactive practices of performance art have begun to inform these debates, questions around the extent to which autonomy and co-creation are possible remain live. It is also necessary to foreground the potential ideological issues which stem from these developments. Evidently, performance art has found vocal support in the university sector, with many of the leading practitioners doing double duty as academics, teaching in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. For example, between 1973 and 1997, Abramović taught at the Academy of Arts, Novi Sad, Serbia; the Académie des

Beaux-Arts, Paris, France; the Hochschule der Künste, Berlin, Germany; and the Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Hamburg. She also holds honorary doctorates of the arts from both Plymouth University, United Kingdom (2009) and Instituto Superior de Arte, Cuba (2012) in recognition of her artistic and pedagogic practice.

It could be argued that much of the discourse around the development of audience interaction has been an esoteric debate which bears little relation to the engagement of the majority of audiences, a critique that we are well aware could similarly be levelled at this writing, coming as it does from two theatre academics working in higher education. Although Bennett wrote that ‘[t]heatre no longer remains the sole domain of the educated and economically-able few [. . .] democratisation is not only seen as desirable, but as a crucial aspect of new developments in performance and theory’ (Bennett, 1990: 10–11), the observation is nearly thirty years old, and one arguably not borne out in contemporary British contexts. The savage cuts to UK arts funding in 2011 continue to have implications as to who has access to theatrical product, not least because of the unequal distribution of Arts Council England (ACE) funding. Predicted ACE spend for 2015–18 suggests that £689m (43.4%) will be invested in the arts in London, with £900m to be invested in the rest of England. This would mean a per capita return of £81.87 per head of population (php) in London, with the rest of England receiving a per capita return of £19.80 php. Or if you prefer, a spend in favour of London of 4.1:1. The overall landscape of public funding for arts in the United Kingdom is encapsulated by Christopher Gordon, David Powell and Peter Stark thusly:

The Hard Facts report illustrates the absence of any strategic support of participation in the arts at local level and the proven contribution that such work can make to individual and community wellbeing. The longer term research framework of the report also reveals what appears to be an undeclared policy to shed smaller companies from the ACE’s national portfolio (a net loss of 352 since 2007/8), a continuing failure to address cultural diversity in the country and worrying inconsistencies in the operation of grant programmes. (Gordon, Powell and Stark, 2014)

As with the earlier questions of ‘value’ of ‘worth’ that emerged from a consideration of McQuaid, cultural capital and exclusionary social policies are not the primary focus of this section,

but nor can we be blind to the debate. As academics working in higher education in the United Kingdom, questions of accessibility (both fiscal and physical) are central to much of the teaching we are engaged in. We recognise that the ideological implications of exclusion speak (in the UK at least) to class positioning, ethnic background and regionality. All are of great import and worthy of detailed consideration and continued analysis. That being said, this book is not the place to offer a full-throated discussion of these concerns. Instead, we have ascribed to the idea that the personal is political, and hope that through the decision to foreground the experiential as a way in to debating the intersubjective exchange between audience and performer, we (and this includes you as reader) might be able to use our own experiences, our own cultural position and our own bodies as a strategies of resistance. These bodies we occupy will necessarily reveal themselves through the writing, perhaps allowing us to return to and unpick significant moments of cultural tension.

It is pertinent here to remind ourselves what we believe this writing is doing. Ultimately, we believe that we are writing about our particular take on how to be an audience. If this is indeed the case, it is important that we don't appear to be offering a 'how-to' guide. We are not offering you some definitive way to train yourself to be an audience member, in part because it would be a somewhat redundant task; the only real way to train as an audience is to go and watch things. Decide what you like and what you don't, and keep challenging your own expectations and prejudices. This is probably the closest we will come to giving you advice as to how you might become a 'better' member of the audience. Instead of advice, we want to offer you actions, tasks that will hopefully take you into a more mindful engagement with the process of watching.

As we move towards these tasks, we would like to consider some of the things we think have happened in the exchange. Although Bennett offers the term 'democratisation' to describe the shift in audience roles, we remain uncertain if this is something which can be achieved, or even if the aim is a valuable one. Certainly there have been attempts to offer resistant tropes for what is seemingly considered an established and understood engagement (Boal's 'spectator' (1973/2008) comes to mind), and even with early attempts from practitioners such as Marinetti, whose attempt to shift away from the passivity of fourth-wall naturalism towards a more evenly

distributed process of engagement does so through the device of the audience having something done to them. The use of itching or sneezing powder, glue on the seats or the deliberate double selling of seating (see Bennett, 1990: 5), at a fundamental level differs little from Meyerhold's flanking of the proscenium arch with large mirrors in an attempt to break down the fissure between the audience and the stage. Throughout these attempts the audience is merely reminded of its position as the passive mass who has these actions acted upon its members.

Thus, the position, and the role of the audience opens itself up as a site of contested ideological debate. Although there are doubtless significant shifts emerging out of higher education and scholarship, these might potentially exclude wider audiences, not by design, but by access. Similarly, the opening up of multiplatform creativity, with smartphones, tablets and laptop computers (a collection of words guaranteed to date this argument much more than its year of publication) containing apps and software which significantly aid and potentially 'democratise' the creation and sharing of user-generated content. At the same time this apparent democratisation might only be a further capitulation to a market economy where clicks replace cash. Interactivity and immersion allow for more active involvement, leading to the language of co-creation, but always within a predetermined set of appropriate responses. In all these instances, and more besides, we seem to be surfacing the recognition that to be an audience continues to be a political act, one freighted with significant social and ideological implications.

Ultimately, the idea of co-creation or the use of the term 'democratisation' opens as many areas of concern as it resolves. The idea that the audience are offered more autonomy as they step out of the mass and into the singular appears to make sense, at least in principle. However, it is helpful to reflect upon the extent to which this singularity requires a sense of policing. To return one last time to *The Artist Is Present*, the resistant strategies employed by spectators are the exception which proves the rule. On the final day of the installation, we witnessed three such interruptive engagements, each closed down rather than being subsumed into the larger project. During the last sitting, one woman who had been waiting in the line approached Abramović while pulling her dress off over her head. As she walked towards her, naked, this interloper was approached by multiple guards and removed from the space. We choose our words

carefully here because the engagements are already ‘high temperature’ without us offering descriptions such as ‘tackled by the guards’ or ‘forcibly removed’, but these might be closer to our memory of the event. Certainly, we wondered what was so transgressive about this woman’s flesh, when there were multiple interactions of previous work by Abramović being re-enacted on the sixth floor. In this room – no less accessible, no less busy – multiple nudes, male and female, re-performed work from Abramović’s back catalogue. The interruptive quality of this would-be sitter was thus lost, not just on the two of us, but on many of those whom we heard talking about the event in the atrium. Her attempt at meeting Abramović on her own terms was made more visible, more transgressive by the manner in which it was censored.

A less confrontational, but no less successful incursion came in the form of a simple leaflet drop from one of the bridges that overlooked the atrium. These leaflets, taking the form of much propagandist material, laid out a resistant manifesto of anti-art. As with the woman who stripped her dress off, the leaflets were quickly removed, with guards asking those who had caught them mid-flutter to hand them over. It was interesting to observe a certain level of compliance, with many people dutifully passing them to the guards.

Of a somewhat different order was the projectile vomiter. This was an attempt made by a member of the crowd to vomit at or on Abramović. Despite being in the atrium at the time of this incursion, neither of us saw the moment itself. We have no sense of who made the attempt, if it was a man or a woman, only that it was deliberate, and that the clean-up was swift. Understanding why this might be deemed transgressive is easier, but the action itself hardly lies out with the broader actions of performance art. Vomit has appeared in the work of Viennese Actionist Otmar Bauer, whose 1968 piece *Zeigt*, which saw him dressed in a suit while vomiting onto a dining table, through to performance artist Millie Brown, famed for vomiting on Lady Gaga’s breasts in the performance of their piece *Swine* at the 2014 South by South West (SXSW) Music Festival. While offering a certain level of cultural resistance, these are practices that are, if not exactly mainstream, certainly recognisable. The policing of the event is brought into stark contrast when one considers the back catalogue of Abramović playing itself out in the same gallery as part of the larger project of *The Artist Is Present*. These strategies or, more importantly, the atrium’s inability to

absorb them, allow us to ask questions about exchange, interaction and autonomy, and encourage us to reflect upon the apparent co-creative role of the audience member. True, the audience is required to activate the work, but is activation an activity of the same order of creation, and can activation allow for an autonomous engagement to be played out?

The sense that there is of a set of expected behaviours also emerges when considering the ‘special’ audience: those attendees who sat before Abramović multiple times. The idea of being somehow pulled out of the larger populace of sitters (themselves already made ‘special’ by the limited gallery attendees that made up their number, and the inclusion of their images in subsequent publications) and offered a unique status ties into the myth-making narratives central to larger aims of *The Artist Is Present* and to Abramović’s planned institute in upstate New York. This ‘specialness’ raises questions about what impact their presence might have upon the wider viewership. The repeated presence of Paco Blancas sitting opposite Abramović twenty-one times unwittingly reinforces the ‘correct’ mode of engagement. If you look through the twenty-one photographs of his interactions, you will see that he is often in tears. His crying does more than merely normalise the emotional response of other sitters; it almost demands it. He becomes audience to the power audience, or ‘audience (n)’, and his repeated presence contributes to the policing of the appropriate script to obey in all exchanges with Abramović. His tears serve in the ossification of the overall ‘eventness’; his tears function as cement. We negotiate the work through the fixity of his tears.

The position of ‘audience (n)’ differs from the ‘ur-body’, an idea which we offered as ‘an impossible body, an originary referent from which we might all attempt to draw an understanding, yet still being offered in the knowledge that it does not, it cannot, exist’ (Whalley and Miller, 2013: 103). We formulated the ‘ur-body’ as a means to consider the training potential for the audience, positioning it as a fiction from which we might begin to imagine how an audience might be ‘trained’ to watch. However, Blancas’s body is anything but a fiction; it is a real presence that repeats itself, and with each iteration comes into being with more clarity, more certainty. His is the border from which our presencing begins.

Of course, this reading runs the risk of diminishing the very real affective and emotional responses of those sitting

opposite Abramović. This is not our intention. The felt sense of the participants are theirs and theirs alone to navigate. Our position is that the script of the encounter is prescribed through the behaviours of the space, the guards in the space, the other users of the space and the tacit instruction offered by Abramović. We hope to qualify the oversimplification of the exchange that emerges when co-creation is offered as a means to explicate the transaction between the audience and the performer.

The uncanny valley, identified and used by robotics and CGI, illustrates how the human-animal representation of reality is transferred to non-human subjects who resemble human aesthetics. The uncanny valley describes a graph, created by Masahiro Mori, which is valley-shaped and where the dip refers to the comfort of the human animal compared to the human-like qualities of entities. The ‘uncanny’ section of the valley at the lowest point of the arc signifies the strength of a negative emotional reaction to an ‘almost but not quite’ human representation, which results in an abject response, and as Timothy Morton states, ‘In the uncanny valley, beings are strangely familiar and familiarly strange’ (Morton, 2013: 130). The zombie is a prime example of a subject with human-like qualities which is nonetheless rejected forcibly in its ‘almost but not quite’ presence.

My emotional response to Abramović dips into uncanny valley territory, in reading the tears shed by Abramović as not for me. She becomes my crying zombie, where I assume the ersatz nature of her emotional connection to me throughout our silent ‘conversation’. The fluctuations of strangely familiar/familiarly strange thrum through our brief encounter, bringing a sense of confusion which leads to my decision to wait until I feel the encounter feels ‘genuine’.

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