

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION AND
COLLABORATION:
A PRACTICE-LED STUDY
OF CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE

CAROLINE DUBOIS

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Abstract

This Master of Arts by Research project proposes the use of research through praxis, to reach an understanding of the subject of participation and collaboration in contemporary art through a system of making and reflection. The research evolved through my artistic practice, the application of theory, and the subsequent folding of both methods of enquiry into each other. The focus of the investigation was on the creation of two projects I was involved in as part of my professional creative practice. The first being *The DJ Who Gave Too Much Information / The Listening Party* produced by PME-Art from Montreal and the second *Autumn*. by Quarantine from Manchester. The commonality between the two works is an invitation to the audience to participate in a live performance and the subsequent generation of a collaborative artwork.

The research looked at the contemporary relevance of meeting and participating in a live context and the strategies utilized in making this happen. The deployment of hospitality as a strategy, in order to seduce and encourage the audience within the context of participatory art and the tensions related to it, emerged as the key finding.

I am looking at how the strategies (which focus around acts of hospitality and rhizomatic structure) invite a sense of agency from the audience that resonates with contemporary spectator discourse. The ideas explored within this research were informed by six primary written works: *The Emancipated Spectator* by Jacques Rancière (2011) on the role and idea of the spectator; *Artificial Hells* (2012) by Claire Bishop on participatory art and the politics of spectatorship; *Audience Participation in Theatre* (2013) by Gareth White on the aesthetic of the invitation; *Conversation Pieces* (2011) by Grant Kester on community and communication in modern art; *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) by Guattari and Deleuze on the concept of rhizome and *Of Hospitality* by Derrida and Dufourmentelle (2000) on the concept of hospitality. The methods used for this research consisted of reflective journaling, performances, photo and video documentation, questionnaires, and a literature review.

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Introduction

Over the past 6 years I have worked extensively as an associate-artist, collaborator, and performer with two established performance art groups – PME-Art (Montreal, Canada) and Quarantine (Manchester, UK). My research examines the work I have been involved in with both organizations over the last two years, which is the duration of this Master of Arts by Research.

Quarantine is a group that creates theatre, performance and public events. The work by Quarantine comes out of lengthy and intimate research with its performers, often working with non-professional performers who are rarely seen on stage. The performers are not treated as interpreters, but as individuals, each with their own story.

PME-Art is an interdisciplinary art group working in art performance, visual art, theatre and music. Through performance, installation, and theoretical/practical research PME-Art is deeply engaged with the ethical and political challenges that arise from working collaboratively. The performers do not take on characters, but remain in their every day identities. The performers are creating actions, speeches and conditions executed with a singular intimacy and familiarity.

As a professional performer, it is often not possible to take time to analyze your own practice. And, as an artist who only works collaboratively, it is difficult to understand what two different projects can have in common. For me, one project has followed another, one collaboration another, for years, without any time allocated to understand the meaning of my practice. This reflective and research-focused space is the opportunity this study gave me. Within this thesis, I have tried to understand how the participation of the audience can affect the pertinence of making performance at this contemporary moment. The projects involved in this research are difficult to classify as being ‘theatre’ or ‘performance art’. They fall between these two categories, as will become clear through the investigation. But to try to understand the practice, and its ‘in-between’ status, I have needed to look at both theatre and performance arts. This

is also why I have used the term 'contemporary art performance' in my title. The artworks that I have been involved in the making of over the last two years are hybrid performances that move between Experimental Theatre, Visual Art and Performance Art. The invitations to participate in the projects I have been involved with are not ones that invite volunteers from the audience to take part in the action on stage, as in pantomime or standup comedy tradition. They are also unlike what occurs in performance art, where spectators are free to stay and physically wander the environment. The projects involved in this research specifically invited the audience members (during the performance) to participate; the aim of the art project being to compose differing portraits of the audience.

The practice elements of the research consisted of two performances projects I was involved with over the course of the study. The practice elements were video and photo documented. The thesis comprises documentation of the practice elements of these performances and this written element. The textual part of the thesis, which presents an analytical commentary on the practice element of the research, is composed of three chapters. In chapter one, I look to the context of the research, considering what the two different companies have in common, what distinguishes them, and how they are situated within the milieu of contemporary art. Within this chapter I refer to relevant art and cultural theory about participation, collaboration and spectatorship in order to bring a focus to the main concerns and questions that drove the research enquiry. In chapter two, which concerns the methodology, I look at how my research unfolded and how the artworks involved in this research were formed - from creative process to performance. I identify the research methods used and attempt to make explicit the assumptions that underlay these choices. In Chapter three, I deal with the research findings. I attempt to understand what insights and knowledge came from this research. I identify what I could not have understood if this research had not taken place. The conclusion looks at how the two companies involved in this project continued their practice and how the findings of this research changed my own practice.

Chapter 1: Context

Introduction

This research sets out to study, through praxis, two projects involving the participation of the audience and professional performers in a live performance situation. The content of the work is generated by the participation of both the audience and professional performers. Quarantine is based in Manchester, England. PME-Art is based in Montreal, Canada. Despite geographical separation, both companies are part of the same performance circuit and both present in the same arts festivals, for example at Noorderzon Performing Arts Festival Groningen in Holland, 2011. Their work is also associated conceptually and through being part of a circuit that also involves other international established artists such as Rimini Protokoll from Germany, Jeremy Deller from England and Jérôme Bel from France. What both organisations have in common is the investigation of a set of social dynamics indicative of a recent methodological shift in art, theatre, and performance events. This new modality sees skilled artists and performers collaborate with participants, who have little or no arts experience, in order to examine the relationships, tensions, and realities of the world around them. The use of non-professional people in performance comes with the intention to expose a certain reality of the world we inhabit. This new modality of performance also inevitably raises questions about what constitutes an audience and the nature of their roles (in relation to the performers) in this new schema.

This research project is a response to my associations with Quarantine and PME-Art and to the contemporary shifts in the ways performances are produced; the latter enquiry also being reflected upon in *No More Drama* by Peter Crawley and Willie White in 2011. Both companies, PME-Art and Quarantine, participated in this book, in which Crawley and White identified a change across the world in the way of making theatre. This change occurs, when actors do not present us with characters, when the boundaries of the theatre space loosen and spill

performance into the world, and when the 'play' itself is no longer the main focus for the audience. The focus of Crawley and White's book concerns how theatre is trying to produce meaning of/from the world without making a drama out of it. *No More Drama* is a collection of descriptive and illuminating essays on artworks that explore the blurred boundaries between theatre and life. The fact that both Quarantine and PME-Art are featured is not a coincidence, because they both belong to this new modality of making performance. I worked on two projects during this study, *The DJ Who Gave Too Much Information / The Listening Party* produced by PME-Art and *Autumn*. produced by Quarantine. Both projects contained an invitation to the audience to participate. Both included the presence of professional performers and had written material previously developed as a part of the performances.



Figure 1. Documentation of *The listening Party*, PME-Art, Belluard festival, Fribourg, Switzerland, 2016. Featured, are Claudia Fancello and myself (professionals) helping audience member's (non-professional) as they search for a song on the Internet after sharing a story.



Figure 2. *Autumn.*, still images from video documentation, Lancaster Art at Lancaster University, Nuffield theatre, 2015. You can see one of the audience members (non-professional) telling something to me (professional) and the rest of the audience.

The way in which hospitality has been used in the process and results of Quarantine's and PME-Art's projects is also something that they have in common. For Derrida and Dufourmantelle (2000), 'hospitality' is viewed as a question of what arrives at the borders of communication; in the initial dynamic of contact with an 'other', a stranger, or foreigner. Using and extending this idea of hospitality is central to my work with both PME-Art and Quarantine. The audiences were conceived of, as groups of individuals that we met, and more than this, that we interacted with at a fundamental level of creation and production. It was important in both projects to create an inclusive and hospitable atmosphere in the performance space and right from the beginning of the project. For example, music was always playing when people were arriving into the space where the artistic team was situated. In figures 3 and 4, evidence of hospitality at the simplest level can be seen in the offering and consuming of soup, apples and drinks during both projects.



Figure 3. *Autumn.*, still images from video documentation, Lancaster Art at Lancaster University, Nuffield theatre, 2015



Figure 4. Documentation of *The listening Party*, PME-Art, NOVART festival, Bordeaux, France, 2015, Photo credit: Pierre Planchenault.

The projects involved in this research have apparent similarities to a lineage of theatre practice that aimed to encourage the audience to participate. *Forum Theatre* created by Augusto Boal operates in a way that encourages the audience or the actor members to stop a scene where someone appears to be getting oppressed and suggest different actions for the actor to carry out on stage. This is an attempt to change the outcome of what is going on onstage. Another example, *Playback* theatre, is where an audience member tells a personal story and chooses an actor on stage to play the different roles; everyone present watches the enactment. *Reminiscence* theatre is also relevant in its process. Orated real life stories were collected and a written script created from them. This was subsequently turned into a dramatic production. Actors then performed the written text. But while these examples show some similarities to the work of PME-Art and Quarantine, they differ in the fact the professional performer is not playing someone else, trying to be someone else, or enacting a text. The stories told are the tellers own, whether it's the professional 'performers' or the audience members speaking. Everyone who is present in the space is invited to participate by telling their own stories in the moment of the performance.

The projects involved in this research also have affinities with performance art practices that historically displaced the idea of spectatorship. The early and late work of conceptual artist Allan Kaprow provides a seminal example of this, from his creation of the *Happening* (1960), where the spectator was free to walk around and move in space while the performance art was happening, to his later period, where he was making performance for a very small group of people and even sometimes for just one spectator at a time. The lineage of his work is, in this sense, very relevant. It is relevant because, as with the work of PME-Art and Quarantine, it also creates an open space where people can move around, speak, listen, eat and drink.

Another of the things PME-Art and Quarantine have in common is the use, almost as a manifesto, of Jacques Rancière's *Emancipated Spectator*, published in 2011. This book explores a political and philosophical framework for spectatorship

that resonates with the gathering artistic trend that PME-Art and Quarantine belong to. For Rancière, spectatorship should not be and is not effort free, it is not a passive position. His thesis unsettles the established relations between *seeing, doing and speaking*. The agenda of the text identifies new configurations of spectatorship that replace what Lavender describes as, 'the relatively detached act of looking' with more overt forms of engagement (2012:03). In the work of PME-Art and Quarantine, the engagement of the audience is very important and everyone present in the room during the performance is perceived as a temporary community. Rancière writes that, 'it is high time we examine this idea that the theatre is, in and of itself, a community site' (2011: 16). Even though the concept and structure of the artwork involved in this research is preconceived, the content is malleable, depending on the influence of the temporary community in the space and their participation.

In this research, I wanted to understand how the participation of the audience effects the challenge of making contemporary performance art. Can the live experience of a performance somehow offer engagement with others that is different from the dynamics proffered via everyday lived experience? In the modern world, we are surrounded by mediated experiences: photographs, television, movies, music, Internet, advertising of every kind (Crawley & White, 2010). The face-to-face encounter of a live performance is what makes it interesting, given the pervasive culture we exist in, where many of our experiences are heavily mediated. This is an important factor in terms of what motivated me to carry out practice-led and participatory research; an investigation that attempts to reveal what it is exactly, that characterizes work foregrounding the presence and participation of the audience.

Between Theatre and Dialogical Practices

Thinking within art theory is helpful in understanding this shift in contemporary art practice. Writers like Claire Bishop (2012), Grant Kester (2013) and Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) helped to define how participative, collaborative and relational art is now known and recognized as a practice and as an aesthetic in

contemporary art. The same authors write about socially engaged art practice and explain this new way for artists to reach outside the art space and to collaborate and engage with real people. What I mean by 'real people' is those who are not professional artists/performers - the reasons to engage with 'real people' is for just this reason, the fact that they don't have professional experience in the arts. Some examples of artwork used in these books are about working in collaboration with different communities in the real world. This relates to my own interest because the work involved in this research aims to engage and collaborate with the audience in a live performance situation. The professional performers are not the central point of the performance, but perceived more as a host in ways that then allow something socially connective or agonistic to happen. As Bishop describes it: the artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of situations; the work of art as a finite, portable, commodifiable product is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term project with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a 'viewer' or 'beholder', is now repositioned as a co-producer or participant (Bishop, 2012:2). This relates to my own concerns because in the projects involved in this research, the audience is the main focus and their participation to collaborate in the artwork is essential. One of the key ways that PME-Art and Quarantine produce work differs significantly however from the model set up by Bourriaud and Kester whose main point of contrast is between the kinds of art they espouse and modern art in a gallery context. This difference relates to how the idea of reaching out, collaborating with a specific existing community is turned upside down. In the work of PME-Art and Quarantine the audience is perceived as a temporary community involved in, and essential to the artwork. The work is not about some assumed "outside world", but rather takes place "inside" the art venue. It is about who is present in the space at the moment and how they can engage in the performance. What is important to this research is to identify that there is a new way in contemporary art to engage with the audience, and there is an inclusion of real people in generating the content of the artwork. In this sense, this way of working does not readily fall into the category of socially engaged art practice as described in Grant Kester's *Conversation Pieces*, which all focus on engaging with

a pre-existing community. It is not about reaching outside the walls of the gallery as in the idea of relational art established by Nicolas Bourriaud. It is closer to the questions related to the binary dynamic of passive versus active audience or art versus real life as described in *Artificial Hell* by Claire Bishop (2012:8). In the projects involved in this research, the spectator is invited to be a participant in the project as someone who also has experience of the world in the same way as the professional artist involved. And the content of the work comes from who they are, their history, their memories and their experiences. In this sense, the conceptual underpinning of both projects involves inviting the spectator to be within, and take part in, the circumscribed space of performance.

Kester (2011) illustrates how the role of the spectator has changed since the 1960s by naming important art work that contributed to this change: 'From Vito Acconci's *Seedbed* to Dan Graham's video projects to Adrian Piper's "Catalysis" performances to Allan Kaprow's happenings to James Turrell's light installations, the viewer is called upon to participate in, move around, interact with, and literally complete the work of art in a myriad of ways' (Kester,2011: 53). In the work of PME-Art and Quarantine the audience is central to the work and also essential. Without the audience participation, there is no performance. The projects involved in this research set out to create a space where everyone could participate if they choose to. The audience was invited to reflect with the performers on a specific subject and the content of the work was expected to be different depending on who was in the room.

In *Conversation Pieces*, Kester explains how socially engaged art practice is not about a final art project that will conclude the relationship and time spent with a specific community but more about the process and relations established through the project. The projects involved in this research were perceived more as a process of engagement with the audience than as a fixed performance. The performances are never the same because the audiences are never the same. As I mentioned earlier, during this research, the audience was perceived as a temporary community, and because this community was changing every time we were doing the project, the content of the work was too. Claire Bishop, in *No*

Artificial Hell published in 2012 describes how this shift is related to the identity of the participant over the twentieth century. In her thesis she shows how the identity of the participant is reimagined at different historical moments:

‘From the crowd in 1910s; the mass in 1920s; the people in late 1960s/1970s; the excluded in 1980s; the community in 1990s through to today’s volunteers whose participation is ongoing with a culture of reality television and social networking.’ (Bishop, 2012:277)

Artists like Rimini Protokol, Jérôme Bel, PME-Art and Quarantine do not use fictional characters. People on stage are who they are and they address themselves directly to the audience, by speaking to them, by looking at them and by not being a fictive character. What they also have in common is bringing non-professional performers to the stage and building with them a dramaturgy based on their biographies and daily lives. They do not want the audience to believe they are somewhere else outside of the reality of the performance space. As you can see in Figure 5, the whole room is lighted.



Figure 5. Documentation of *The Listening Party*, PME-Art, NOVART festival, Bordeaux, France, 2015, Photo credit: Pierre Planchenault.

Choreographer Thomas Lehmann describes the situation like this:

‘We can call a scenic space metonymic if it is not primarily defined as symbolically standing in for another fictive world but is instead highlighted as part and continuation of the real theatre space.’
(Lehmann, 2006:100)

Following this definition, both companies perceive the performance space as metonymic - the reality of where the performance takes place is exposed. One means is through the lighting, there is no division - the whole room has the same lighting. Accepting that each performance is different because of who is present is very important and thus each performance can exist in a structure that is clear and exposed to the audience. It is also a way to not create borders between the performance space and the audience space. We are trying to eliminate borders and to open the performance space. The fact that the whole room is exposed and therefore each individual present is creating awkwardness. It is also important to acknowledge the awkwardness of the situation – a group of strangers in a space together, exposed for a limited time, expected to participate as a group and individually, creates degrees of uncertainty. Gareth White writes in his book *Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetic of the Invitation*:

‘The prospect of audience participation makes people fearful; the use of audience participation makes people embarrassed, not only for themselves but for the theatre makers who choose to inflict it on their audience.’ (2013: 1)

Through this research, I have been questioning how this awkwardness has been dealt with. I have also been looking at how participants engaged and were encouraged to participate.

Contemporary theatre

In the book *No More Drama* Jacob Wren questions why are we still making theatre today, as it is such an old form of art and many other forms might well have superceded it. He describes contemporary theatre like this:

‘The desire for theatre to be a contemporary art form may well have a paradox lodged at the heart of it. Cinema, television, video and the Internet are all more contemporary forms’. (Crawley & White, 2011)

The research set out to examine the significance of how in a specific amount of time and in a shared space, we, collectively, see if we can connect or disconnect with/from each other. What are the consequences in performance of reflecting on how my story is making you think about your own story? In this sense, the practice involved in this research is about intersubjectivity. It is trying to invite everybody present in the space to reflect on a specific subject proposed by the artists in a live context. In a sense, it is trying to suggest what Rancière proposes, the disappearance of the spectator:

‘What is required is a theatre without spectators, where those in attendance learn from as opposed to being seduced by images; where they become active participants as opposed to passive voyeurs’. (Rancière, 2011:4)

The intention of the work in this research is strongly influenced by this idea and debate around questions of spectatorship. My questioning of what PME-Art and Quarantine are trying to create in terms of performance through this research centres on the possibility that what occurs is a social event motivated by the ideas of hospitality where everyone is welcome to participate.

Chapter Two: Methodology

Introduction

In this MRes project I used research through praxis, including a system of making and reflection, to reach an understanding of the questions outlined in the previous chapter pertaining to contemporary performance. In particular: Can the performance experience offer engagement with others in a way that we rarely connect within an every day experience? How were participants engaged with and encouraged to participate? And how was awkwardness dealt with? By using my art practice as a mode of enquiry I set out to research practice itself. My research was constituted by an intertwinement of practice, reflection, contextual enquiry and analytical thought, all taking place within and throughout the creation of the arts projects that I was involved with. In terms of methodological underpinning I was drawing on the percepts of artistic research as proposed by artistic researchers such as Anne Douglas in her joint authored book *The Artistic Turn* (2009). She looks at the process of artistic research, the insufficiency of verbal and written material, the essential ineffability of creativity, and proposes a new paradigm with the artist at the centre.

The methods I used to carry out the research centred on keeping reflective journals of the creative process, performances, photo and video documentation, questionnaires and literature review. One of the motivations for this research is the fact that as a professional artist most of the work happens in the creative process and in the production of a project, rather than after the project has been made. There is no time and space to reflect on what has been realized. For professional and economic reasons, for many years my collaborative practice has involved one project after another. I spent time with a group or another artist, I tried to make something with them, I made and performed it but there was no time set aside to think about what had been achieved, what had worked and more specifically, what the two different projects might have in common. And for me, after year upon year of working in this way, I felt there was something missing. This research allowed me the opportunity to analyze and reflect upon what I had been doing. It allowed me to focus precisely on my practice and to

consider where it belongs in the contemporary art landscape. My approach was to use my involvement with two different groups, PME-Art and Quarantine and to create my own research focus from it. It is important to mention that both art organizations knew and agreed to me using the projects involved in this research for this MRes study. Each gave me the permission to reach the audience after the performance to answer the questionnaire designed for this research. Those who agreed to answer the questionnaire signed a release form (see Appendix 1 of the thesis).

I do not have an individual practice; my practice is collaborative and through years of experience I have observed the complex relationships inherent in notions of authorship, collaboration, participation, and hospitality. What was specific to this research was that it brought together the work of two different art organizations. The fact that I have worked with both companies but am not part of either's core team (I do not work or participate on every PME-Art and Quarantine project), afforded me a dynamic multi-perspective position; experiencing and analyzing their works from both inside-out and outside-in. I gained knowledge by using empirical research methods detailed above. I used the record of my direct involvement, observations and experiences with both projects. In this sense, the methodological approach of this MRes could be said to lie somewhere in between two research types, predominantly practice-led but also research-led (Andris Teikmanis, 2013:162) This research is based on my practice but the output is not just an artwork, it is also generating new knowledge as in a research-led practice, and the writing of a thesis. The methodology of this research has been developed through and focuses on three stages of the art production. Firstly the creative process, secondly the performance and thirdly, a reflection of my involvement in both projects.

Practice as research in the arts is at one level specific to the artist. Barrett and Bolt (2010) comment on the subjective dimension of artistic research. They cite Robyn Stewart who describes this method as a process of continuous discovery, correspondence, contradictions, intuition, surprise, serendipity and discipline (Stewart in Barrett and Bolt, 2010:12). Through the vehicle of the exegesis, my

practice can become knowledge generating by creating a relationship between the making and the writing. This is why I used the term praxis, to convey the specificity of using my art practice, reflection and theory together in generative way. The fact that the projects chosen for this research were not just case studies, and that my position was not just to observe, but also to make decisions and perform the arts projects involved in this research, gives me the opportunity to produce movement in thought itself.

The research affected the artwork, but not in a direct way, because of the collaborative nature of the projects. Both of the projects involved a lot of discussion and sharing of ideas as they evolve. I was reading and thinking and bringing my research to the table in a sense, but it's hard to measure how it impacted on the pieces because I am not the only author of the artwork. The work was changed somehow but the dynamic between the two is not direct.

Creative process

A key intention of both projects involved in this research was to use my involvement in the creation of a performance where the participant was the audience, in a live context and where there was space for them to express themselves and participate. The process was to conceptualize and prepare an environment where the participation of the audience was clear and crucial. In both projects we created a system where everyone (artist and audience) was responsible for what they said and how they said it. And we were looking at the way we connected with one another through our own subjectivity. This is true for the creative process and for the performance as well. We were trying to invite multiple points of views on a specific subject, for example with PME-Art, the focus was on our relationship to music and with Quarantine the focus was on our relationship to the history of the world. The participants were, in both works, responsible for their participations and the content of what they were saying. The way we were in the room with the audience was deemed by us, the companies, to be very important as well as the material we shared with the audience. We aimed to develop material that was clear and concise but not too

precise in the execution. It was part of the work to eliminate the idea that we were experts or better because we were the professional artists. Delivering our own stories *imperfectly* was in a way a strategy to invite and/or incite the audience to participate. In this way the presence of the audience and his/her involvement in the projects was perceived as 'subject.' Their subjectivity was our material and medium. The professor of philosophy Marcia Cavell draws on philosophy, psychoanalysis, and the science of the mind and describes the idea of subject in *Becoming a Subject* like this:

'By 'subject' I mean someone who recognizes herself as having an 'I', as having her own peculiar perspective; a subject is an agent who is able to be self-reflexive, and to assume responsibility for herself and some of her actions.' (Cavell, 2006:1)

This is exactly what we aimed to do, to give a space, a place for the audience to become subjects. I used the creative process in the methodology of this research to understand what exactly we were expecting and perceiving from the audience. I documented, in a personal journal, discussions between the creative team around the idea of the audience. What I also documented in my journal was the interest around the idea of hospitality in both projects and how it was discussed within the creative team. I used these specific two projects for this research because of their invitation to the audience to participate. The projects involved in this research would have happened without this research.

The projects: A description

The DJ Who Gave Too Much Information / The Listening Party from PME-Art was presented in various contexts, cities and festivals like: URB 16 Festival (Helsinki, Finland), Sommerszene Festival (Salzburg, Austria), Belluard Festival (Fribourg, Switzerland), Spielart Festival (Munich, Germany), Fierce Festival (Birmingham, UK), Contact Theatre (Manchester, UK), Experimentica festival, Chapter (Cardiff, UK) and Novart Festival (Bordeaux, France) in 2015-2016. The first part is at least 3 hours long, the second part 1 hour 30 minutes.

The DJ Who Gave Too Much Information / The Listening Party from PME-Art explored the idea of music and communal memory and was originally created in 2011 but has kept changing and touring since. *The DJ Who Gave Too Much Information* is the first part of the project and *The Listening Party* is the second part. The first part is a durational performance that can be anything from three to seven hours long and is a musical journey through art, politics, love and work. We have a turntable and a pile of records. For each record, there is a story. Each performer articulates a personal memory, anecdote or historical fact about a chosen record and subsequently plays a track from it. We have one hundred and twenty records in our collection, and stories about each one: facts about the bands, gossip, even some personal recollections. Each time we perform, we play the records in a different order, discovering new connections between the stories. The performance is very casual. We address ourselves directly to the audience and sit with them when we are not telling a story or playing a record. People are welcome to stay and leave as they want and they are also welcome to have a drink. Because of this relaxed atmosphere, it is easy for people to speak and engage with us at any time. Here is a video link to the documentation of the performance, and in it you can see the atmosphere created in the performance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6m476iXUkCM>

The first part of this project was created and performed by three professional artists, myself, Claudia Fancello (and in replacement of Claudia for a few performances, Marie-Claire Forté) and Jacob Wren. The second part consists of the audience members of the first project being invited to bring their own music to enact the same process so that a shared set of memories is literally 'played out'. *The Listening Party* always comes after *The DJ Who Gave Too Much Information*. We are inviting people from the audience to share their own stories with us. People could bring a record or CD, or their phone to play a song and tell a story about it. They could also use our collection, or we could use Youtube to find a piece of music on the Internet.

In the following images, you can see how who was present in the audience was participating.



Figure 6. Documentation of *The Listening Party*, PME-Art, Experimentica, Chapter, Cardiff, 2015. Photo credit: Warren Orchard.



Figure 7. Documentation of *The Listening Party*, Pme-Art, Experimentica, Chapter, Cardiff, 2015. Photo credit: Warren Orchard.



Figure 8. Documentation of *The Listening Party*, Pme-Art, Experimentica, Chapter, Cardiff, 2015. Photo credit: Warren Orchard.



Figure 9. Documentation of *The Listening Party*, Pme-Art, Experimentica, Chapter, Cardiff, 2015. Photo credit: Warren Orchard.

Autumn. was presented in Lancaster twice at the Nuffield Theatre in the UK in 2015. The duration of the performance was 2 hours and 35 minutes. The video documentation of this performance is available at: <https://vimeo.com/147515359> and the password is: leaf.

Autumn. was the second part of Quarantine's quartet ***Summer. Autumn. Winter. Spring.*** directed by Richard Gregory. It was an epic project about the human life cycle and change; framed by questions about temporality and our relationship to this current moment. Each work was about a different phase of life, from being very young to growing old. Exploring what it is to be alive, to be young, old, pregnant (in *Spring.*) and to be dying (in *Winter.*). I was part of the core team involved in creating the quartet and I was also performing and working in collaboration with the participants involved in the project. *Autumn* analyzed the ways in which we spend our present time looking backwards, thinking about what's gone before and what brought us here. *Autumn* established ways to invite its audience to be directly involved in the production. The invitation was made by three professional performers - myself, Sonia Hughes and Leentje Van de Cruys. We started by inviting the audience to have some soup and apples on stage, to move around in the space and when they returned to the seating bank, to play a game that we called the 'History of the world'. We were trying to tell the history of the world with the audience from the very beginning to where we are now. The project tried to relay the history of the world through the audience's personal memories. All three performers had written texts and played the game with the audience. Throughout the game the role of Lisa Mattocks was to transcribe what was said (as much of it as she could manage). This text was projected onto a screen at the back of the stage as she typed. This project was presented twice at the Nuffield Theatre, Lancaster in the UK in 2015.



Figure 10. *Autumn.*, still image from video documentation, Lancaster Art at Lancaster University, Nuffield theatre, 2015. You can see one of the audience members telling something to myself and the rest of the audience.

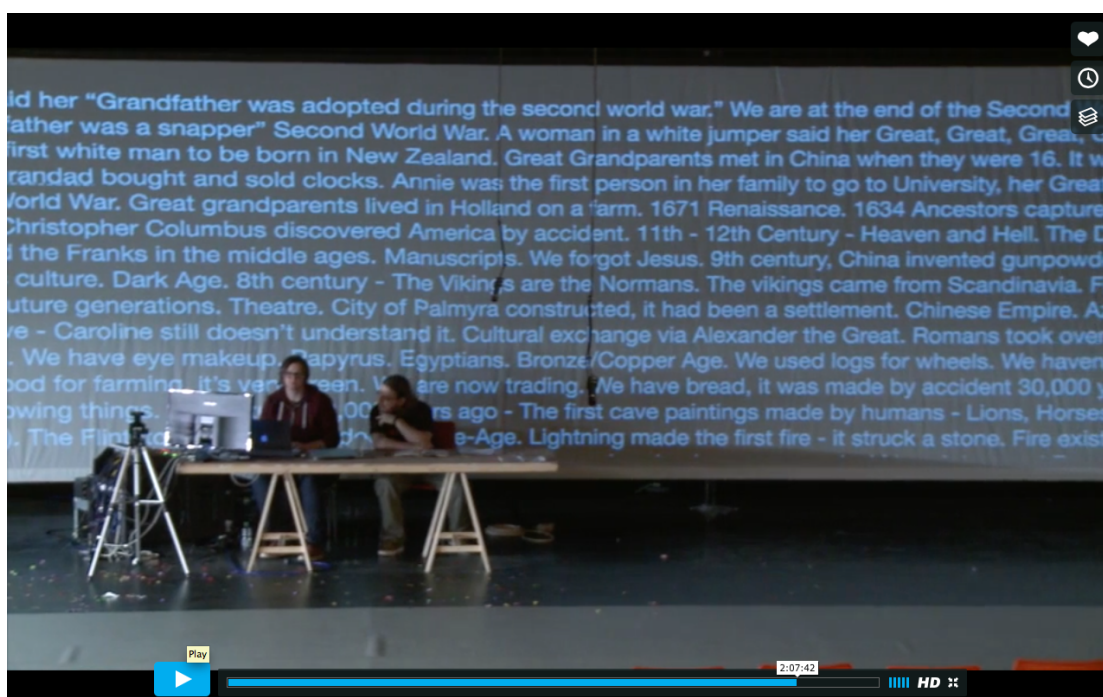


Figure 11. *Autumn.*, still image from video documentation, Lancaster Art at Lancaster University, Nuffield theatre, 2015. You can see the text written on the back wall.

Here is one example of the projected text at the end of the performance:

Gloria born 9 weeks ago. 1997 Good Friday Agreement. Lots of people in the room born by 1996. Spice Girls. John Major became prime minister. 1992 Freddy Mercury dies. Trident Demo - 14 mile long human chain. 1989 Hillsborough Disaster. Falklands War. 1984 I was born. 1981 Aids. 1981 Riots. 1980 John Lennon shot. 1980 saw The Clash. 1980 Caroline born. Bloody Sunday 72. Troubles in Northern Ireland. 1976 Punk Rock. Margret Thatcher leads Conservatives for "too long". Everyone loves ice-pops. 70's water shortage. 70's A.Smith born. Grandad supported women striking at Dagenham. Someone said her dad met Paul McCartney. 60's colonisation of South East Asia? Dr Who started in 1963. JFK, Martin Luther King assassinated. 1969 Lunar landing. Civil rights movement started. End of the Cultural Revolution in China. Queen arrives in 1953. 1955 - 1975 Vietnam War started. Loads happening. 1955 Elvis gets his thing on. 1954 Caroline's father born. Grandfather watched the Berlin wall go up. Foundation of the welfare state in Britain. We have worked out the bomb. 1945 Family members disowned in India. Cold War. in 1938 Ali's nana saw Hitler in a parade. Thighs. A scottish mans Great grandad bought over from India. Sonia likes the date 1936. Great Depression. Hitler arrives. 1930's Prohibition. 1928 Sonia mum born. 1926 mum was born in Dublin. 1919 End of the First World War. 1917 Russian Revolution. 1916? Grandfather from Belgium. Oyster sellers in the East-end. Renaissance. 1634 Ancestors taken from Africa to St Kitts. 1534 Someone discovered Quebec. 1492 Christopher Columbus discovered America by mistake, he was searching for India. Normans. Crusades. 9th Century - China invented gunpowder. Plague. Buddha. We have a class system in China. Apparently nothing happens in the Dark Ages. We have roads. Romans. Celts. Plato and the Allegory of the Cave - people are facing a wall and the light casts shadows onto the wall and someone escapes from the cave and is blinded by the light of the outside world. Hippocratic oath. Spiritual Medicine - like tea? Theatre. Democracy. Greeks. Egyptians invented beer and women could own property. The earth is round. Maths and science. Architecture. Beginnings of religions. Monetary systems have developed. Egyptians began to be interested in beauty. We can measure time. We have a calendar. A man from a family of farmers said "The human race started expanding, people were not hunting and eating what they needed and began to reproduce at a faster rate". With agriculture came the notion of land ownership and then war. We are gathering together. 32,000 years ago - we started having allotments. Oldest cave paintings had Horses Panthers, Lions, Deers (loads of different ones) Mammoths. Neanderthals - the Thinking Ape. Cave men. A comet hits. More than one Ice Age. The first fruit was an Apple (I told Caroline that). Birds. Dinosaurs The first mammal was a cross between a mouse and a dog, they have warm blood so they can moderate temperature. Mammals. A man with a nice beard said "Fish went on the land and had a little walk about". It started with a fish. All we need to do is reproduce. Survival of the fittest, the selfish gene. After Amoebas we have the next thing. Sex/reproduction. Single cell things. 4.5 billion years ago. 3 billion years ago Plate tectonic. Stone-fish (something that Sonia has just made up) live at the bottom of the sea. Oxygen develops. We have water now. It wasn't just sea at the beginning. We have the Earth. Planets are here. Gravity of different masses. We have stars. A man from Liverpool said "collision of matter". Things are

orbiting and rotating. Things are moving apart - a change. We have time, we don't know how to measure it. Galaxies. The energy was created from the Big Bang itself. Formation of Atoms. Gas.
The Big Bang.

The performance

So we, the artists who conceptualized these projects and invited the audience to participate, had no idea what people would say or not and how they would play. We were participating in as well as hosting the event. Our involvement was to explain and create examples of how people could participate, to follow the structure in a specific time and to be aware and listen to who wanted to participate.

This way of working was trying to create what Jacques Rancière describes:

‘Theatre should question its privileging of living presence and bring the stage back to a level of equality with the telling of a story or the writing and reading of a book. It should call for spectators who are active interpreters, who render their own translation, who appropriate the story for themselves, and who ultimately make their own story out of it. An emancipated community is in fact a community of storytellers and translators.’ (Rancière, 2007:280)

In this sense, my role was to share my own stories and to listen to how or what the audience members related to it by telling their own stories. To convey it simply: I am telling you something about myself, the way I tell my story is imperfect, so in return you tell me something about yourself in return - also in a casual way. Because mine was imperfect, yours can be too.

Reflections

To develop critical knowledge in relation to my research, I needed to distance myself from the work itself. It was essential to create a critical distance from the projects. To extricate myself from the subjectivity and performative experience of the projects I reached out to the audience involved in both projects and asked them to answer a questionnaire (see appendix 1). I gave out twenty questionnaires and got back five. I wanted to hear from them in their own words what their experience and point of view was. This questionnaire made me understand how being present in the moment was crucial for both projects and gave me input about how the subjectivity of the audience were connecting from one another.

The way the work was generated with both art organizations took the form of a rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:7). Each of us made his/her own investigation and links with the subject groundwork. With PME-Art this was our relationship to music and with Quarantine it was our knowledge of our own history. In a rhizome any two elements of meaning may be connected to produce meaning. Thus, 'any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:7). This is how it was perceived between the collaborators and specifically how our own subjectivity connected with each other. This is also how it was in the performance. It was, in a way, a strategy to incite the audience to participate. This is how a rhizome works:

Operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots...In contrast to centred (or even polycentric) systems with hierarchical modes of communication and pre-established paths, the rhizome is an acentred, non-hierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:21)

In both projects each artist was involved in the creative process and responsible for his/her own creation of content. And both projects did not have a single

underlying concern or perspective about how to create our bank of information to be used in the performance. The elements of meaning created were not hierarchically related, just as in a rhizome. Each person involved could connect one element to another and one idea to another and this, in their own choices. Any individual content did not have to be ideologically or logically cohesive to one another, like the elements of meaning in a rhizome. The way the material was accumulated was to create a bank of elements that can be connected with any other element.

For example, here are a few of my stories that I used with PME-Art:

Nina Simone gave her first concert of classical piano at the age of 12 years old. Her parents were sitting in the front row. The director of the room asked her parents to move in the last row of the room before the concert started. Nina Simone refused to start the concert until they placed her parents back in the front row of the room, the director did it and she gave her first concert.

Someone I know very well used to be crazy about Prince. He was collecting every piece of information about him. His obsession was confusing him because he always thought he was straight so he was wondering why he had such an obsession about a man. The other day we were watching a documentary on Prince and I was watching him watching Prince again with the same disturbance. He is my husband.

And here are a few of my stories that I used with Quarantine:

3 billion years ago

The beginning of plate tectonics

Continents form

Today, Earth's surface is divided into a few dozen plates of rock, one of which sometimes ploughs under another to be destroyed in the planet's molten heart. This process, called plate tectonics, is thought to have begun around 3 billion years ago.

200,000 years ago

The human race

The thinking ape

Our species, Homo sapiens, is ridiculously young. We have only existed for a fifth of a million years. In that time we have expanded from our African birthplace to reach every continent, and even outer space.

64,000 years ago

Bows and arrows are one of the earliest forms of weapons known to archaeologists, with the earliest surviving examples of arrowheads from the Natal, in what is now South Africa.

32,000 years ago

Chauvet Cave in southern France

Which contains the oldest human-painted images yet discovered. Typical of most cave art, there are no paintings of complete human figures, although there is one partial "Venus" figure composed of a vulva attached to an incomplete pair of legs. Above the Venus, and in contact with it, is a bison head, which has led some to describe the composite drawing as a Minotaur (in Greek mythology, the minotaur was a creature with the head of a bull on the body of a man). Along with cave bears (which were far larger than grizzly bears), the lions, mammoths, and rhinos account for 63 percent of the identified animals, a huge percentage compared to later periods of cave art. Horses, bison, ibex, reindeer, red deer, aurochs, Megaceros deer, musk-oxen, panther, and owl are also represented.

Pikes

1534

Jacques Cartier discovered Quebec.

1634

My first ancestor from my dad's mum's side Marin Boucher traversed the Atlantic from Normandie France to Quebec, New France. Apparently it was taking between 15-30 days to navigate and 7-10% were dying before getting to New France.

1671

My ancestor Anne Guillaume arrived in a boat along with 150 more King's daughter. She married François and together they had 10 children.

1663-1673

About 850 King's daughter came from France to New France.

At its start, New France was a man's world: the province of soldiers, fur trappers, and priests, it had little to offer women. In time, the colony became more agricultural, which allowed for more women, but as late as the mid-17th century, there was a severe imbalance between single men and women in New France. The small number of female immigrants had to pay their own passage, and few single women wanted to leave their familiar places to move and settle in the harsh climate and conditions of New France. The growth of population in the competing English colonies awakened concern among some officials about their ability to maintain their claim in the New World. They were predominately between the ages of 12 and 25, and many had to supply a letter of reference from their parish priest before they would be chosen for emigration to New France. The title "King's Daughters" was meant to imply state patronage, not royal or noble parentage. Most of these women were commoners of humble birth. As a fille du roi, a woman received the King's support in several ways. The King paid one hundred livres/pounds to the French East India Company for the woman's crossing, as well as furnishing a "bottom drawer". The Crown paid a dowry for each woman; this was originally supposed to be four hundred livres/pounds, but as the Treasury could not spare such an expense, many were paid

in kind. Socially, the young women came from different social backgrounds, but were all very poor.

The first stop of the boat was Quebec, then Trois-Rivière and then Montreal. A lot of people say that this is why women from Quebec are more beautiful than the one from Montreal, because men were picking up the most beautiful one from the first stop.

1763

Royal proclamation

Great Britain's acquisition of French territory in North America after the end of French and Indian/Seven year's war.

(English won over French on Les Plaines d'Abraham in Quebec city) This is also when Indians had been ripped off because for Indian people, the land belongs to every body.

1994

My brother killed his first moose at the age of 13 years old by Bow and arrow.

NOW

My dad is probably sitting at this very moment in a mirador waiting for a moose or a deer. The word mirador is not quite right, its sound way too French, I mean French French. In québécois we use the word "cache", which would be in English "a hide". My dad is waiting and preparing all year around for this period to happen. He doesn't use a gun, but a bow and arrow and a cross bow. He is seating in his "cache" each day when it's the hunting period in Quebec from sunrise to sunset. He takes like a hour for lunch break. You can't have your lunch break in the "cache", it would disturb the smell. When I grew up, we needed to be careful when we were opening the fridge. Because in the fridge, we had urine of a horse on heat. My dad was putting some every day at the feet of his cache. The only time my dad was picking me up from primary school was when he was killing something. We were going in the forest where the animal died and we were celebrating. A lot of drinking was happening... The Dubois family has a facebook page now called à la recherche du buck, in search of the buck, because in our family, we don't kill female.

The sister of my dad Nikole leaves in the country. Her house is next to a big lake and all around her house there's a big covered wooden terrace. She is quite close to the Amerindian culture. She collects bones from the forest of moose, deer and bear. On her terrace there's loads of different bones suspended and when it is windy they create music. One day she asked my dad if he was thanking the spirit of the animal for giving food to his family for the year coming. My dad never thought about that before. The year after, just before killing a deer, the deer looked at him in his eyes, in a face to face moment. Because when you are hunting with a bow and arrow or a cross bow you have to attract the animal near to you. Now when he is eating the meat he is really thinking about it.

In this sense, ideas from various and diverse fields or sources function with one another in the artwork part of this research, without explaining or representing one another.

‘Deleuze and Guattari suggest that all events, ideas, symbols and languages exist on the same level playing field and connect with one another.’(Stewart in Barrett and Bolt, 2010:49)

This is true for the creative process and for the performance as well. This was also a way to create space and place for the audience to participate with their own subjectivity. This way of putting things together, in terms of content, was also a way to not put too much pressure on the audience. It was offering things that could be connected to each other without a need to explain how and what the audience should/could say. By sharing this way of organizing information regarding my own subjectivity, it gave an example to the audience of how they could generate their own subjectivity. Again, as in the creative process, the artists were responsible for the elements of meaning they brought into the artwork and it was the same for the audience participation. This way of letting things coexist without giving any explanation or central place leaves space for the audience. This is the knowledge I gained by using empirical research methods. By analyzing how we were generating content in the creative process and in the live performance situation, I realized that we were organizing personal information like a rhizome and that is a way to create space to stimulate our own subjectivity.

Chapter 3: Finding(s)

Introduction

Chapter 1 of this research aimed to identify what this practice is, where it belongs and what its antecedents are. It also considered notions of art and collaboration and participation. Chapter 2, meanwhile, was focused on ideas about praxis, and identified what types of research methods I used. It also looked at how *The DJ Who Gave Too Much Information / The Listening Party* and *Autumn* operated in terms of the creative process and in the performance. Chapter 3 is about finding their value and possibly their challenges and problems. It is also answering a number of questions posited in chapters 1 and 2.

Literature review

As a result of my literature review I was able to identify differences between the artwork involved in this study and wider practices of socially engaged art and documentary theatre. Indeed throughout this study, it was difficult to find similar artwork to the kind involved in this investigation. I searched databases, as well as using less formal methods of discussions with academics, supervisors, collaborators, theatre directors and art curators, but no one clearly identified other artwork that used the same methods of engagement. Similarly, the key critical texts that I used: *Artificial Hell* (2012) by Claire Bishop, which focuses on participatory art and the politics of spectatorship; *Audience Participation in Theatre* (2013) by Gareth White, which focuses on the aesthetic of the invitation; and *Conversation Pieces* (2011) by Grant Kester, which focuses on community and communication in modern art, all allowed me to recognize similarities between the objects of their analysis and my own. For example, the idea of collaborating with non-professional artists and creating the content of the artwork from their lives and everyday realities was crucial. None of the texts, however, included artwork using the specific performance event for the involvement of the audience to create the content of the artwork that fully resonates with the projects I was analyzing. In addition to these books that

tackle art participation, I looked into the new form of documentary theatre described by the Argentine theatre director Vivi Tellas which focuses on the life of a living person and makes a performance with and about him/her (Brownwell, 2012). This was a mode of working that appeared to have an affinity with the practices described in this thesis. In this kind of documentary theatre a theatre director invites someone to perform themselves. For example in the work of Rimini Protokol and Vivi Tellas such as *Quality Control* (2013) and *Rabbi Rabino* (2011), the content of the work is generated from the life of the person involved via the creative process. From this process, a text and a structure is created by the artistic team and then used by the subject in the performance. And yet this is very different to the projects involved in this research where it is the *audience* participation that has an effect on the content of the work. What is different is the fact that we don't control, structure their level of collaboration in the content of the artwork, we don't know what the audience will bring to the performance.

I also looked at socially engaged art practice that develops relationships with participants mainly through process and sometimes over long periods of time. For example, Grant Kester (2011) refers to the artwork *West meet East* by Lorraine Leeson where the work is generated by the life and experience of the participants in relationship with the artist involved. What is different about this artwork and the projects I was involved in is that *West meet East* was a collaboration with an existing community and the project emerged from a long process of extended dialogue and personal interactions between the artist and the community. The projects involved in this research don't have any engagement with the temporary community created by the audience. The dialogue and the personal interactions happened in the live context of the performance.

So, in as far as it is possible to generalize about any large field of practice, I want to suggest that in both cases used here, documentary theatre and socially engaged art, while being the closest fields of practice to that which I have described in this research, there are still nevertheless, significant differences. In the examples given in the previous paragraph, by the time the performance or

exhibition takes place, the end of the process has been reached and this can be somehow the conclusion of the process. The experiential archive of participants is used as the content of the work, in the sense that it is their own history and experience (subject) that becomes the work's content; the structure is shaped and conceptualized before the performance by the artist/director in relation to the participants. The choices of what will be shown or shared with the general public are made by the artist, sometimes in collaboration with the participants, but not always.

This is not the case in *The DJ Who Gave Too Much Information / The Listening Party* and *Autumn.*, despite the fact that, as in socially engaged arts and documentary theatre, the participant is seen as a subject in the work developed in this research. The difference can be accounted for by the "liveness" of the project and in the use of hospitality: specifically in the ways the audience is invited to participate. I am referring to Peggy's Phelan concept of "liveness" here: "Performance implicates the real through the presence of living bodies" (Phelan, 1996:148). "Liveness" is about being in the 'here and now' of a performance situation and the performance is precisely experienced by the audience in the very same moment of its realization. In this sense by "liveness" I mean that the content of the work is generated during the performance itself. The audience does not participate in the creative process but in the live situation of the performance. There is no relationship developed previously to the performance between the artists and the audience. The artistic team can predict the professional performers' inputs, we previously meticulously developed our material in the creative process and the concept of the artwork, like the examples of the texts used in the performance shown in chapter 2 of this thesis. We can control the use of hospitality to create a welcoming atmosphere for the audience to participate. But, we cannot predict exactly how the audience will participate or their level of collaboration.

One of the reasons concerns the relevance of performance today as a means for people to meet and participate in a live context with others. I am looking at the strategies utilized to invite the audience to participate in a live context. There are so many ways we can participate these days on social media or online. By

commenting on an article, by tweeting, on our Facebook page, we can express how we feel, what we think and share information really easily. But it is very different to participate and express yourself in front of a group in a live context as it is not mediated by screen-based technology. In the work that I have been doing through this research, the audience was perceived by the artists/producers as a temporary community. Because this community was changing every time we were doing the project, the content of the work was changing as well. The projects involved in this research involve a process of engagement with the audience rather than a fixed performance. The performances are never the same because the audiences are never the same. Accepting that each performance is different because of who is present is very important and thus each performance can exist in a structure that is clear and exposed to the audience.



Figure 12. Documentation of *The Listening Party*, PME-Art, NOVART festival, Bordeaux, France, 2015, Photo credit: Pierre Planchenault. You can see in this image people dancing and singing during the performance, this was the only time that happened.

Performance: Tension

The invitation to the audience to participate was found to create a set of tensions. I felt the tensions myself while performing and this is one of the findings that was revealed through the use of a questionnaire (discussed earlier in the thesis, also see appendix 1 for a copy of the questionnaire). In this research, the participation of the audience, in both projects was always communicated to the public by the cultural producers before the performance. This information was shared on their website, in programs at the venue or festival and on social media like twitter and Facebook. Also, we started the performance by explaining to them what the project was about and then inviting them to participate. So in a way, everyone understands what the project is about and how we will realize it, with their participation and collaboration. No-one knows though, who will speak or what they will say. This caused tension to manifest because sometimes there was silence between each participation, or occasionally someone spoke for too long, or they didn't express their point clearly. In this sense, they are responsible for what they are saying and how they are sharing it. At the same time as being part of the potential spectacle, this responsibility was creating a palpable tension during the performances. I was able to feel the tension and awkwardness of the situation while I was performing but it is only through this research that I have been able to identify it. I have been questioning how this awkwardness has been dealt with. I have also been looking at how participants engaged and were encouraged to participate. One question that kept surfacing throughout the research period was how this participatory approach, used by PME-Art and Quarantine, purports to democratize the performance situation by inviting the audience to participate, or not, in a live context and to contribute to the content of the work. I believe that the fact that the audience is responsible for their level of collaboration leads to a form of hospitality in the performance experience. The idea of creating a space where everyone is allowed to speak, if they want to, however, there is no perfect way of achieving this ambition. This is what I discovered in chapter 2 when I realized that the way we were operating in the creative process and in the performance, which was using the idea of a rhizome in the methods of putting information

together. Therefore our imperfections as professional performers were revealed and used to encourage audience members to participate. For a specific amount of time and in a shared space, we, collectively, can see if we can connect or disconnect with/from each other in real time. So the work seeks to invite everybody present in the space to reflect on a specific subject proposed by the artists in a live context. In a sense, the artwork is trying to suggest what Rancière proposes when he refers to the disappearance of the spectator:

‘What is required is a theatre without spectators, where those in attendance learn from as opposed to being seduced by images; where they become active participants as opposed to passive voyeurs.’
(2009:4)

In this sense, this research is strongly influenced by this idea and debate around questions of spectatorship. What I came to understand of what PME-Art and Quarantine were trying to create in terms of performance through this research is a social event motivated by the ideas of a live situation where everyone is welcome to participate. I realized that this work is about subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Each person present in the room is perceived, by the artist, as an individual who subjectively experiences the world. Therefore, each subject might have a different perspective and idea of the world; sharing their comparable experiences intersubjectively might increase our understanding of the world collectively and individually.

Reflection: Hospitality

As a result of my enquiry I also realized that the idea of hospitality was used to create a specific environment to encourage the spectator to participate. As mentioned in chapter 2, allowing drinks and food, playing music, encouraging exchange between people, speaking to them during the performance, were all strategies to encourage them to participate and in a way, to seduce them. The fact that we are exposing imperfection and the reality of who we are, the space and what we are doing, is creating a system with cracks. We are not hiding

information from the audience and in fact we are actively trying to expose the reality of who we are and where we are. The cracks are the imperfection of the work and the exposition of it. They are there to create space for the audience so that they can insert their own personal narratives and ideas into the artwork. The fact that we, as the artists, are very casual in our way of being in the space and in the way we are telling our story is also a strategy to encourage people to participate and could also be considered as a manipulative strategy. I would like to even go further here and say that the fact that I have a French Canadian accent and make mistakes when I express myself because English is not my first language is somehow also part of the strategy too. I understand that the use of hospitality to manipulate and democratize the performance space is confusing and contradictory. But, as Derrida explains, the concept of hospitality is itself contradictory:

‘...the word for ‘hospitality’ is a Latin word, (Hospitalität, a word of Latin origin, of a troubled and troubling origin, a word which carries its own contradiction incorporated into it, a Latin word which allows itself to be parasitized by its opposite, “hostility,” the undesirable guest [hôte] which it harbors as the self-contradiction in its own body...’ (Derrida, 2000:3)

The invitation to participate was not just in the invitation and in the atmosphere in the room but more about small details of what was going on in the reality of the performance situation. By being present as a performer, and as host, a lot of what I needed to do was to try to understand and identify who was the audience was, as a group and individually. For example, I needed to: identify who will easily participate and make sure they don’t take too much space; make sure some people were not dominating the discussion or overwhelming the event by participating too much; observe who may like to participate but is unsure about it and create a place for them; and respect who does not want to express themselves and is participating by just being present and listening.

I needed to do this, whilst thinking about what it was exactly that we were looking for in terms of possible disagreement and complexity. Letting space occur for reasons of tension, with no pressure on where it comes and goes and no desire to hide from it. Listening, looking, leaving space, making space, stepping in, speaking, answering, and inviting. The tension also came with questions such as, how much participation is acceptable, what is too much, what participation needs to be controlled or not and avoided? The overall concept of the work involved in this research was to create a space to receive multiple subjective points of view on a specific subject. My job as a performer was to make sure this was happening during the performance.

This is the answer offered by someone who participated in the *Listening party* at The Whitworth gallery in Manchester:

How was the atmosphere in the space?

- *The atmosphere was relaxed and informal with audience members sitting around tables and chatting in between the songs and sometimes during the music. It was welcoming and offered an informality that isn't present in a traditional theatre space.*

How did you engage with the work?

- *I listened to people's reasons for playing particular songs.*

Did you want to participate?

- *Yes*

Did you participate, if yes, was it easy?

If no, why?

- *The informality of the atmosphere in the space made participation very easy. I wasn't anxious that the reasoning for my song choice would be disliked or questioned and I felt my contribution was welcome.*

What did you do or say?

- I played We Are Family and explained a tradition on my Mum's house to have large parties and dance around with tea towels on our heads whilst carrying wooden spoons. The song was relevant for me because our family consists of many people who are not our biological relatives.

What do you remember from the project?

- I remember really enjoying the eclectic mix of music that was played.

Did you feel any tension?

- At points there weren't any volunteers to play music, but the 'performers' always stepped in when this happened. I would argue that this didn't cause 'tension' as such but was just the nature of the piece as there was an ever-changing audience profile.

What did you understand from the concept of the project?

- It appeared to me as an opportunity to share music (and a love for music) with other people. I enjoyed the flexibility of the piece (due to the element of audience participation, the 'performers' weren't able to curate the music < the spontaneity of what might be played next was really exciting.)

Did you understand the invitation to participate as being part of the project?

- Yes.

By participating to the project did you feel you were becoming one of the authors?

- I felt as if I was helping the shape other people's experiences of the piece that night, yes.

Personal Findings

From my experience as a performer, it is somehow easier for me to perform when I ignore the presence of the audience but at the same time it feels somehow false to pretend that no one is in the room. When I ignore the audience I can feel as though I'm missing something - an important opportunity with many possibilities. I am interested in acknowledging that when I am performing, the audience is there, in the same room as myself. Things are not completely fixed and the nature of the situation is flexible and fragile. And yet, a lot of performing artists do acknowledge the presence of the audience in 2017 and there are many different ways that theatre and contemporary art have been considering the role of the audience during the performances. It is very common in contemporary theatre and art to have some acknowledgement of audience and a level of participation, but not to the extent that the audience is integral to the creation of the actual content of the work, as in these projects.

As a performance artist, because of the nature of these projects, you can easily be made to doubt your own level of performance qualities. These projects are not about delivering a 'personal' good performance, they are more concerned with the collective dynamics of exchange. After each performance, I was left with doubts and uncertainty. Through this research I understood that this dissatisfaction was an essential part of these projects. My role was not just about me, but rather was predicated on connecting, sharing, listening, and reflecting with others in a specific amount of time on a chosen subject matter. Like a rhizome, it is not centred, no one is the main focus. The unpredictable, the uncontrolled, the cracks, the not knowing, are somehow what motivated me to create and take part in these projects as they are the vulnerabilities in the 'finished art object/performance' that offer a new prism or perspective into social relations and their formation.

I came to realize through this research, that after the creative process and the performances, it is difficult to find artwork like the ones that I was involved with as a performer; in their way of organizing information like a rhizome; of creating

a system with cracks of imperfection to incite the audience to participate; in the use of hospitality to seduce the audience and encourage them to collaborate.

Conclusion

This research used two projects involving the participation of the audience and professional performers in a live situation performance. The content of the work was generated by the participation of both the audience and professional performers. Unfortunately, this is not a route that PME-Art and Quarantine carried on with. After the projects involved in this research, they both went back to a more traditional way of making performances. By traditional, I mean in the difference between the role of the audience and the role of the professional performer/artist and how it is made explicit during the presentation of the project. The work was still initiated by the personal biography of the performer but the audience were not invited to contribute to the content of the artwork at any level. The way of conversing directly with the audience remained, but the audience remained voyeurs and somehow passive. For a number of reasons, I believe this is a step backwards from the potential ways in which an audience can be invited to engage. Firstly, it is difficult to work with audience participation for the reasons previously cited, namely the uncertainty and doubts regarding the level of participation of the audience. It is impossible to predict, or control fully what will happen. Secondly, as a performer it is very difficult to judge your own performance quality because you never know how much space you will have to fill or to leave, even though you have prepared material. What I realized through this research is that this is the whole point; making something that is trying, imperfect, uncontrollable but inclusive. Going back to the known to get better results is not interesting. But I don't think they are doing it on purpose. They are both companies in search of economic support for new creations and to get this support they need to provide funders with results. It was not difficult to find artwork that used artists and performers collaborating with participants who have little or no arts experience, in order to examine the relationships, tension and realities of the world around us; or, the use of real people in performance with the intention to expose a certain reality of the world we inhabit. But it was very difficult to identify similar artwork that was using the participation of the audience in a live context to generate the actual content of

the artwork. During this practice-led research I developed an understanding of my collaborative art practice. I have a better conception on how I want to engage with the audience and why I want to perform. As a way to conclude, I would like to come back and answer the questions I started this thesis with: Can the performance experience offer engagement with others in a way that we rarely connect within an every day experience? I would like to think that yes it absolutely can and does, though of course it comes with a lot of contradictions.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Participant information sheet and consent form



Title of the Project: Audience participation and collaboration: A practice-led study of contemporary performance.

Name of Researcher: Caroline Dubois

Participant name:

1. I understand that my responses will be used for this research only: yes/no

2. I agree to take part of this research by answering this questionnaire: yes/no

Name of the participant:

Date:

Signature:

Researcher: Caroline Dubois

Date: 12 December 2015

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Caroline Dubois".

Each participant will have a copy of this consent form.

Appendix 2

Questionnaire

How was the atmosphere in the space?

How did you engage with the work?

Did you want to participate?

Did you participate, if yes, was it easy?
If no, why?

What did you do or say?

What do you remember from the project?

Did you feel any tension?

What did you understand from the concept of the project?

Did you understand the invitation to participate as being part of the project?

By participating to the project did you feel you were becoming one of the author?

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