Faculty of English

THE CONSTRUCTION
OF SKILL IN CONTEMPORARY
EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE

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Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

ABSTRACT
The construction of skill in contemporary experimental theatre
Giacomo Giuseppe Belloli

A concern with 'skill' – the embodied process of becoming accustomed to, and getting better at, particular practices – underpins the work of a range of recent experimental theatre-makers in the UK. While Tom Cornford has proposed that the theatre has not experienced a 'turn to the crafts' to match the concurrent one in the visual arts, I argue that theatrical practice is caught *within* this turn. The encounters that occur in theatrical auditoria become sites for the *construction* of skill, where the skilled practice of performers and audiences can be developed and celebrated, but also where the implications of what that means can be interrogated. Rather than illustrating Richard Sennett's and Tim Ingold's theories of skill, these performances develop a critical dialogue with them.

Chapters 1 and 2 compare the plays of Martin Crimp and Tim Crouch. Taken together, these chapters reveal how each author negotiates between two different understandings of playwriting within contemporary British dramaturgy: as a distinctive craft producing material with and on which other crafts work, and as one component of a more fluidly collaborative theatre-making ecology that the text documents. I associate these understandings, respectively, with the anthropological models of the trap and the gift. In the indeterminate worlds of these performances, a skill that is both regulated and spontaneous is as feasible as a gift which is both freely given and socially conditioned.

Chapter 3 focuses on productions by Forced Entertainment since *Bloody Mess* (2004), as the company have attempted to reconcile their commitment to avant-garde convention-breaking with a reliable, recognisable set of practices. I argue that they rigorously negate skill, by sustaining a practice in which the coupling of abstract reflection with embodied action continually breaks down. Their performances critique Ingold's phenomenological approach to skill, by drawing attention to those practices and atmospheres that humans are unable to understand through immediate participation.

Chapter 4 offers an analysis of METIS Arts' *World Factory* (2012-17), and the challenges of making an interactive performance about the unequally deskilled labour conditions of global capitalism. A dialectic of deskilling and reskilling operates across the labour conditions that the production explores, the company's production process, and actor-audience interactions within the performance. This dialectic offers a critical alternative to much contemporary immersive theatre, figuring performance as rehearsal for action within a networked, postcapitalist society.

My conclusion explores the political opportunities that the troubling, or the refusal, of a 'turn to the crafts' in the contemporary theatre might offer in the face of systemic financial and ecological crisis. In particular, I consider how a strain of modernist dissidence within my examples might come to be identified and enabled in a wider variety of theatre-making contexts.

Acknowledgements

> However satisfying writing is – that mix of discipline and miracle, which leaves
> you in control, even when what appears on the page has emerged from regions
> beyond your control – it is a very poor substitute indeed for the joy and the agony
> of loving.
>
> Gillian Rose (2011: 59)

Polten, Lotte Reinbold, Claire Wilkinson, and David Winters. The prospect of working with Al Barrett and the rest of the community in Hodge Hill, Birmingham next year gave me an incentive to finish. And I owe particular thanks to Julie Greenhough, for believing all along that I would do a PhD and for modelling how to do one.

As recently as 2014, I didn't expect to be writing a thesis dedicated to theatre. But it's a turn of events that has delighted and engaged my parents – and, once I got used to my mum recommending any new children's show that she thought might be relevant, I'm delighted that this project carries on some of the spirit of her life's work and my dad's more casual interest (and deeply serious playfulness). Moving back in with them made the final months of writing a pleasure. This thesis is dedicated to them, and to the memory of my *nonna* Teresa, in thanks for their love and sacrifice – even though I know they'll say it has felt like nothing.

Surely all of this living that has gone on that is ours is good in some way, though we cannot tell why: we know only that our sympathy has deepened, quickened by the onrushing spectacle, to the point where we are like spectators swarming up onto the stage to be absorbed into the play, though always aware that this is an impossibility, and that the actors continue to recite their lines as if we weren't there.

John Ashbery, 'The System' (2010: 309)

Contents

Introduction: experimental theatre without the studio

1. A new structure?: the case of Secret Theatre

On 17th June 2013, the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith launched its Secret Theatre season with a speech from its artistic director Sean Holmes. Speaking with a mixture of 'arrogance and humility', he described the season, in which the auditorium would be used as a flexible performance space while the rest of the building was being refurbished, as an opportunity to 'create new structure that might lead to a new type of work'. This new structure would provide an alternative to the existing 'corrupting', even 'corrupt', structures in which much British theatre is made, structures 'so ingrained that we [don't] even notice them anymore'. By keeping the cast and the creative team employed for the length of the season, designers could be present for the length of the rehearsal process, to create work with particular performers and interpretations of the text in mind. By maintaining a single company that contained an equal number of male and female actors, from a range of ethnic backgrounds, as well as one actor with a physical disability, the company would critique a theatre culture in which the male, white and able-bodied remain more visible onstage. The first of these alternative structures would reduce, and the latter prevent, what Holmes called 'literalism': a manner of approaching the text, suited to standard rehearsal periods of four to five weeks, in which design elements must be prepared in advance and there is 'no time to imagine anything other than what the playwright has written down' in the most literal way. The aim, throughout, would be to 'attack the world' by 'attacking the form' through which theatre represents the world; by changing the 'unconscious acceptance of those structures' that could be changed, the company might begin to change the larger 'structures forced by economic realities' which rely on that unconscious acceptance. To do this, Holmes proposed, was 'to truly treat theatre as Art' (2013).

Holmes's humility was grounded in the fact that Secret Theatre had a number of models to follow: the host of 'successful devising companies' that had worked at the Lyric; the particular historic example of Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop; 'the European ensemble', in which state theatres' sustained employment of actors and designers prevents those artists from having less authority than playwrights, a model which had become particularly apparent at the Lyric during a recent collaboration with Munich Kammerspiele and the Estonian company No99 (Holmes 2013). Another less immediate context for Secret Theatre's practice can be found in research by Tom Cornford, who would serve as an embedded researcher within the ensemble. Holmes's speech contains many points of overlap with the tentative 'manifesto' that Cornford offers as the conclusion for a PhD thesis submitted the previous year: a common emphasis on risk and failure, a resistance to a text-driven or 'literary' approach, and rehearsal conditions in which

artists and designers could become mutually responsive (2012: 351-56).[1] Cornford's thesis surveys the short-lived British theatre studios run by Michael Chekhov and Michel Saint-Denis, structures organised with the primary aim of generating 'new ideas' (qtd. in Cornford 2012: 17). A studio, following Vladimir Meyerhold's definition, would 'use both training and production as its means' to achieve this overall aim, incorporating the activities of a school or a producing theatre without being reduced to them (Cornford 2012: 17): in the case of Saint-Denis's Old Vic Theatre Centre, school, commercial theatre and 'experimental theatre' were envisaged as tiers of a single 'wedding-cake' structure (193). As a temporary vehicle for filling the Lyric's auditorium during refurbishment – and to fill it, as Cornford acknowledges, with an unusually intensive programme of shows (2015b) – the Secret Theatre project only filled one of these tiers, and could not itself recover the 'evolving tradition of practice' which studios aim to nurture (2012: 355). Nevertheless, the company offers one tentative instance of recent theatre-makers taking up a challenge that others have shown 'little sign' of engaging with, at least when compared to contemporary philosophers and visual artists: a 'turn to the crafts' in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis (2012: 358-59).

For evidence of this 'turn to the crafts' in Secret Theatre's practice, it is worth analysing how the rhetoric surrounding the company had changed a year into their (ultimately extended) season, now that they were speaking from inside structures rather than planning them. In interviews conducted by Cornford, the performers described the process of making one of their shows, *A Series of Increasingly Impossible Acts* (2014), as a 'dig towards some sort of end concept and, whilst digging, *almost unconsciously* filling the pack that's on your back'; 'everything we put into the show was *just the obvious thing* to do within the environment we were working in' (qtd. in Cornford 2015b, my emphases). Where, in Holmes's preliminary account, theatre structures had to be actively brought into consciousness so that their 'corrupting' elements might be reformed, here structures are valued insofar as they no longer have to be thought about, retreating to the obviousness previously granted to 'literalism'. Simon Stephens, who had an advisory role as the company's dramaturg, has described early rehearsals for this production, in which the company were experimenting with scenes from Shakespeare. The experience compelled Stephens to marvel at how Shakespeare's texts were products of a performance culture with no designated director and little corporate rehearsal – and how this capacity to rely on 'dry technique' had been rediscovered within Secret Theatre's new rehearsal structure (2016: 90). Again, a structure is acknowledged only to annihilate itself in an appeal to immanence: 'life [itself] comes from the technique', here specifically identified as an invitation to leave 'a small breath of silence at the end of a line' of verse (90); Stephens will go on to describe a performance

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[1] A monograph drawing on Cornford's thesis and subsequent conference papers, which will also include substantial coverage of Theatre Workshop, is forthcoming.

of a scene from *Romeo and Juliet* by two of the actors as uniquely 'raw' (158). Beyond the immediate context of Secret Theatre, Duška Radosavljević has offered an important study of how theatre-making since the turn of the century has been characterised by a desire, like Holmes's, to 're-configur[e] the existing structures as means of rediscovering an organic response to […] material' (2013: 192). One of Radosavljević's overall aims is to join the wider trend of deconstructing the assumed binary within British theatre between 'text-based' or literary work, in which the writer is the primary authority, and a 'performance' tradition which resists such authority and is institutionally associated with arts centres and visual art galleries rather than theatres, in favour of work which combines elements of both by being 'dramaturgy-led' (191).[2] Yet her emphasis on finding an 'organic response', like Stephens's on 'life', suggests a desire not to over-articulate any alternative structure that dramaturgy might provide. Drawing on her own experience with Northern Stage, she characterises the practice as reliant on her 'instinctive response to a piece of work' from years of 'absorbed and internalised' practice, rather than anything executed 'in a doctrinaire way' (99). '[A]nything goes, so long as the artwork being created – text-based or not – is crafted with rigour, intelligence, intuition and attention to detail', with this list of values being deemed enough to grant the work whatever vestigial structure it needs in context (107).

If the company members, Stephens and Radosavljević all value the experience of not needing to notice structures, or even of not having a structure at all, Cornford's application of theories of craft to dramaturgy retains emphasis on 'the relationship between process and structure' (2015b). Cornford argues that while the knowledge held by theatre-makers 'cannot be meaningfully extracted from the material processes of its labour', this does not make it simply 'tacit knowledge' on Michael Polanyi's model, becoming merely obvious or instinctive as soon as one attempts to express it. The process of developing and performing a skill always incorporates a 'reflective phase': when a skill is being executed effectively, these 'continual movements back and forth between action and perception' simply become 'blurred', particularly in a craft such as acting in which the relevant materials are both internal (the performer's own body and voice) and external (the text being delivered as well as more concrete design elements) (Cornford 2015a: 91-93). 'The relationship between process and structure' is thus specifically one in which 'process becomes structure', as moments of reflecting on and articulating structures are registered as contingent expressions of an unfolding relationship with material (Cornford 2015b). Cornford quotes Dewey's description of this oscillating mode of perception as 'not a matter of caprice, nor yet of routine' (qtd. in 2015a: 92). Skilled practitioners wish to impose their will and imagination freely on the material, but recognise that the material simultaneously sets limits on what can be

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[2] Further studies that deconstruct the British text-performance binary include Tomlin 2013 and Hoffmann 2009.

achieved and sustained, setting a limit on the sense that anything goes. In the theatre studios that he analyses, Cornford finds an organisational structure that maintains this balance, with experimentation always both generated and tempered by a foundation in technique. A contemporary theatre industry that prizes creative 'innovation', but only locates creativity at the level of ideas such that '[a] flash of inspiration would do the trick' (2012: 352), overemphasises hollow experimentation at the expense of the training 'which provides the means by which materials and ideas may be brought into a dialogue with each other and thereby generate an artistic form' (355). In Michael Chekhov's theory in particular, this desire to harmonise reflection and action becomes a philosophical or spiritual principle. He sought a theatre in which 'the power of gesture' could 'connect spiritual experience and physical form', transcending the boundary between them such that Karl Capek could say, reviewing one of Chekhov's early performances, that body and soul became equivalent within his acting (Cornford 2012: 53-54).

As Jacqueline Bolton notes, it is too soon 'to speculate upon [Secret Theatre's] potential influence or possible legacy' within British theatre, and I join her in seeking to contextualise its development within the landscape of 21st-century British theatre, in which it stands as one of a range of contemporary expressions of a desire to attack old structures and develop new ones (2016: 340). Furthermore, just as Bolton notes a number of ways in which the company failed, by its own admission, to challenge structures as fully as it could (343-44), I will explore how other contemporary theatre-makers carry out such challenges in an environment where the kind of studio that Cornford proposes is counter-cultural or unsustainable. In some cases, the absence of, or even resistance to, such a model itself becomes a virtue.

The four main case studies that I discuss all trouble, or explicitly reject, the text-performance binary. Chapter 1 considers the plays of Martin Crimp, a writer celebrated for his distinctive voice, who has largely refrained from other forms of theatrical practice, but whose scripts demand creative directorial intervention. Chapter 2 develops these concerns in relation to Tim Crouch, who has preferred to describe himself as a 'theatre-maker' than a 'playwright' (2015), but who is adamant that the texts at the centre of his performances are plays. Chapter 3 explores the work of Forced Entertainment who, particularly in commentary by their artistic director Tim Etchells, have placed themselves in opposition to a text-driven theatre: writing is 'just something that got done' in the rehearsal room (qtd. in Benecke 2004: 46). Yet, increasingly, this attitude belies a body of work that is substantially archived and frequently cites its own history, to the point that one scholar has traced a distinctive 'rhetoric of writing' within their practice (Smith 2013). Chapter 4 draws on the work of METIS, and particularly their show *World Factory* (2012-17), an interactive piece of theatre centring on a team game, a record of which was subsequently published as *World Factory: The Game* in 2017. The production's direction and design are credited to Zoë Svendsen and Simon Daw, and the creation of the game to them and a

longer list of collaborators. These production processes involved acts of original writing, the editing of interviews conducted during fieldwork, and the direct or indirect incorporation of a wide range of textual sources assembled during the research process.

All four are also united by tending, in various ways, towards an 'organic' principle which privileges a degree of spontaneity or instinctiveness, and trusts in 'rigour, intuition, intelligence and attention to detail' as the guarantors of their art as art, over particular organisational structures. This, for example, is how Crouch summarises his own practice:

> Tim works with a number of associates and collaborators to produce his writing. There isn't a formal company structure; things and people are brought together when they are needed. The starting process has always been a text written by Crouch. Early work was made in response to a self-generated impulse to tell a story or explore a form. This impulse is still the first motivation but, lately, it's become more formalized over the years through the involvement of commissioning theatres and organizations. ('About Tim Crouch')

Similarly, METIS is described on its website as 'a performing arts company that works as a network of artists and collaborators' directed by Svendsen and changing from production to production. The company's name is taken from 'the shape-shifting Greek Goddess of wisdom and cunning' and, citing Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, this explanation goes on to note that she 'represents those qualities that keep theatre ever evolving: "flair, sagacity, intellectual flexibility, deception, resourcefulness, vigilant watchfulness, a sense for opportunities"' ('About METIS'; cf. de Certeau 1984: 81). Elsewhere in Steven Rendall's translation of de Certeau's text, the word 'skill' is used, as a translation of *maestria*, to describe not codified techniques but the evolving, unassimilable 'tactics' that define, for example, how local drivers navigate a city (1984: 18; cf. 1990: 36). Etchells, for whom de Certeau has been an important influence, has similarly attempted to distance himself from the possibility of articulable technique: he has described his personal practice as 'a matter of making mistakes that you quite like and then trying (with all your best "craft") to live and deal with the consequences' (2007). Finally, Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life* (1997) places the declaration that '[s]tudents should be taught *skills*, not ideas' in the mouth of a reactionary critic (2005: 251). The line appears in a key scene that satirically alludes to, and a speech that closely mirrors, the reactionary press coverage of Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love* (1996); Crimp implies that the same response could be levelled at his own, conspicuously ideas-driven play. As we shall see, the very fact that Crimp and Etchells continue to invoke words like 'craft' and 'skill' but signal their scepticism towards them suggests that the problem of how artists practically learn to make work remains live. Similarly, Svendsen and Crouch are deeply concerned with the structures, however informal or distributed,

within which their evolving impulses operate. For Crouch, the contract that all theatre-makers, including him, make with their audience rests on their 'technical ability to communicate a distinct form' (2011a: 419). One of the directors whom he has collaborated with has described their role as 'tak[ing] care of [the] whole', organising the network within which other makers relate to each other (smith 2011: 411). In a presentation to one of her production's funding partners, Svendsen has argued that the 'endeavour' invested in the production of artworks should be seen as going on, often unseen, at the level of how its process is planned and organised, with 'the artwork' understood as 'the output of that process' (*WF* A3). Nevertheless, the balance of experimentation and technique is never as evenly weighted as it is in the writing of Chekhov, and the infrastructure of the theatre studio. The free circulation of ideas, impulses, mistakes and networked collaborators are spotlighted, but the techniques that sustain them remain fugitive or vestigial, nowhere present but everywhere felt. In an era in which the studio cannot or will not be sustained, I argue that the burden of imagining this balance, and its ethical implications, is felt within the performances that these artists and companies make: without the studio, the contemporary British theatre auditorium is the space in which ideas about skill are constructed.

In the rest of this introduction, I offer a critical overview of the two theorists of skill whose ideas have informed Cornford's research and my own. These are the sociologist Richard Sennett, one of the main public voices behind the 'turn to the crafts' that Cornford identifies in his thesis, and the anthropologist Tim Ingold, who has taken greater prominence in Cornford's writing and thinking since. In each case, I attend particularly to how ideas of the theatre operate in their thinking, whether as a social and architectural space or as an art form – and, principally in Sennett's case, to how his ideas have already informed performance artists and scholars. I use this survey as a justification for my methodological difference from Cornford and Radosavljević, replacing their call for a practice-led approach for one that makes space instead for acts of textual or performance criticism, while still attending to the practices and attachments involved in those acts. To set the terms for subsequent chapters, I offer an example of such criticism, of one of Secret Theatre's performances.

2. Richard Sennett and the history of craft

Sennett's *homo faber* trilogy – *The Craftsman*, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*, and *Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City* – is the capstone of his long career as a sociologist of labour and urban life. As its overarching title suggests, the trilogy responds to Sennett's mentor Hannah Arendt, and particularly to her distinction between *homo faber* and *animal laborans*. Arendt sees a fundamental distinction between sheer labour, whether of mindless routine or of complete abstracted absorption 'in a task that shuts out the world', and the imaginative work of making the judgements that sustain 'a life in common', which can only

happen during a pause in labour (Sennett 2009: 6). Sennett proposes instead that both 'thinking and feeling are contained within the process of making', and that identifying how they are combined demands a 'more vigorous cultural materialism' (2009: 7). *The Craftsman* draws on a range of amateur and professional craft practices including cooking, metalwork, musical performance and interior design to begin outlining this materialism. The subsequent books of the trilogy extrapolate from that material base: *Together* highlights how co-operation demands skills that can be modelled on material practices (2013: 6); *Building and Dwelling* allows its ethics to emerge particularly from Sennett's experiences of co-operation as an urban planner, paying special attention, for example, to the material qualities of the models and props used in consultation workshops (2018: 244-50). What can be generalised is that 'all skills, even the most abstract, begin as bodily practices' but require 'imagination' to be developed, and to acquire their status as a form of knowledge (2009: 10). For novices, this imagined external perspective on their embodied situation comes from their awareness of the systems or authorities training them, which gradually becomes less conscious as they become accustomed to their practice. For the more experienced, imagination is exercised again during '"Eureka!" moments' or, somewhat more deliberately, through 'intuitive leaps' in which new functions are opened up in the tools and practices being employed (2009: 38, 209-13).

This constant interplay, which Sennett summarises in *Together* as 'the tacit-explicit-tacit rhythm of skill' and which allows Cornford to define his distance from Polanyi (2013: 234), requires conditions in which 'repetition is organised' and 'embedded' (2009: 38). Sennett thus precedes his discussion of the phenomenology of skill in *The Craftsman* with a section dedicated to how 'institutions' such as the medieval workshop 'motivate people to do well' (2009: 52). One of the distinctive qualities of these workshops and their modern successors is that the collaboration they require is codified. Yet while this demands sensitivity to the 'emotional inner impress' of one's work – those aspects of 'experience' which are registered by the German word *Erlebnis* – this emotion does not take the form of intimacy between workers (2009: 288). Masters would become surrogate parents to their apprentices but, as the master was paid for this role, the workshop was held together 'more by honour than by love' given freely (2009: 64). The mark of the skill of the multicultural staff at a Boston bakery is that they have developed strategies for everyday diplomacy, tolerating each other's differences without, for example, ever choosing to invite each other home (2013: 156; 2018: 257-58). This rejection of an appeal to authenticity makes Sennett's model particularly appropriate for Cornford's case studies: both Chekhov and Saint-Denis were distinctive, in an era dominated by understated psychological naturalism, for using and teaching performance techniques characterised by physical expressiveness (Cornford 2012: 29-30). Fittingly, on the only occasion in the trilogy in which Sennett dwells at length on the craft of acting, his example is Jacques Lecoq's theatre of the 'neutral mask', in which the

constraints placed on facial expression work to relax and liberate the actors' other bodily gestures (2013: 243-44). Lecoq's own theatre school would go on to be influenced by Saint-Denis's methods at the London Theatre School (Cornford 2012: 234).

This appeal to theatrical craft has to be set in relation to the wider role that theatricality has played in Sennett's sociology. This is intrinsically linked to the question of how these late volumes, which wish to celebrate and cultivate craft practices, relate to Sennett's earlier work, which has documented – as he continues to do here – how social changes have made that cultivation harder. In *The Fall of Public Man*, Sennett traces a shift, over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe, away from a system of public life where it was taken for granted that emotion was made present to others through a series of particular, codified expressions. It was replaced by a system which depended upon 'individual experiences reported accurately', whose accuracy was assured by a mystified 'closeness' or 'intimacy' (1986: 108, 259). '[T]hose who could actively display their emotions in public', such as actors, were understood to be people of 'special and superior personality' capable of drawing others to them: rather than being witnesses capable of identifying where and how skilled practices were executed, audiences retreated into being passive spectators of these displays (261). Similarly, Frederick Law Olmsted could foster a 'sociable ethic' in his design for Central Park because the public recognised that the space was 'a suspension of reality' and that they worked together to sustain its 'transparent illusions'. More recent attempts to foster theatricality, such as in the cleaned-up Times Square, failed because the illusion was taken for granted by visiting tourists as an authentic space (Sennett 2018: 48-51). In *The Craftsman*, this is mapped onto a distinction between 'craft' and 'art', which emerged earlier in the West with the growing influence of court patronage on the civic workshop. Artworks became valued less as the expressions of a workshop's creative skills, guided by its master and judged against the established standards, and more as the expression of individual geniuses constantly having to renegotiate the conditions of their practice and the terms on which they would be judged (2009: 65-73). This wider change is registered in the terms on which Anglo-American naturalistic acting comes to be discussed over the course of the twentieth century. Discussing a 2007 volume of interviews with celebrated actors, Cornford notes that they fall back on treating their craft as inexplicable tacit knowledge hard to distinguish from personality (2015a: 89-90). This is the consequence of the contemporary British theatre industry's dependency on discontinuous experiences of working and training, in which brief expressions of artistic genius are expected somehow to do the work of sustained craft practice (95). Paul Menzer describes how naturalistic acting is now praised insofar as it is a 'discernible absence', a craft that conceals its own execution apart from through the most minimal gestures (2015: 79). This mystification has been accepted because audiences have surrendered their role as 'aural umpire[s]' to the virtuosic critic, who is capable of matching the actor by identifying those

minimal revelations (85). An environment like the theatre studio, capable of marrying a shared recognition of technique to a sustained sense of creativity, is thus deeply counter-cultural. Indeed, Cornford concludes his thesis by suggesting that neither Chekhov nor Saint-Denis quite managed the balance: 'Chekhov's vision has been overlooked as a consequence of its distinctness from others', the mark of an artist prone to make a break for originality; 'Saint-Denis's has suffered from being insufficiently distinct', the mark of a master not in a position to take overarching control of the institutions in which he worked, to distinguish it from others' (2012: 361).

Although Sennett's project aims not to be a mere 'story of decline', the boundary between craft and its contemporary simulacra can become so porous that it risks becoming invisible (2009: 73). This becomes particularly clear in the work of the contemporary performance scholar who has applied Sennett's recent thinking most substantially. Jen Harvie focuses on what she terms 'socially turned art and performance' since the late 1990s, occurring largely outside theatrical institutions and taking its theoretical cue from the visual arts (2013: 4-5). As well as *The Craftsman*, Harvie draws on Sennett's earlier critiques of 'the new capitalism', his term for neoliberal, post-Fordist economic systems which have brought the longer-term shifts identified in his other books into the workplace. Previously, workers would view routine labour as an achievement to be arrived at, as they gained confidence in embodying particular, slowly honed skills at the difficult tasks allotted to them (Sennett 1999: 43-44). Increasingly, this marriage of flexibility or creativity to structure has broken down. Work either involves routine actions superficially simplified by machines, but in such a way that the worker is no longer bodily engaged and capable of altering the conditions of their engagement, or (more commonly and distinctively) it offers sheer flexibility without routine, in which the only constant is the 'dull, continual worry' over whether one's efforts will lead to success or failure (Sennett 1999: 47, 83). Harvie argues that these conditions have come to define how professional socially turned art is both produced and consumed. She gives examples of large-scale installation art, such as Doris Salcedo's *Shibboleth* (2007) in the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall, in which the artist delegated the execution of her prepared design to engineers, while refusing to explain to visitors how it was achieved (Harvie 2013: 41-42). She also discusses immersive theatre productions such as Kate Bond and Morgan Lloyd's *You Me Bum Bum Train* (2010) which relied on vast numbers of unpaid volunteers to stage predetermined interactive scenarios for one audience member at a time (27). Conversely, audiences' experiences of such environments, which supposedly offer the 'pleasures of action, self-determination and discovery' may ultimately have the effect of 'helping to rehearse [the] flexibility at work' demanded under contemporary capitalism, in which they must make a series of decontextualised, deskilled decisions about how to behave (49-50). This is also the mode of behaviour expected of young artists in an age of 'creative entrepreneurialism', in which the artist is expected 'to take initiative' and 'risks' rather than demonstrate a sustained skill

(62). Harvie argues that the success of young artists at developing this entrepreneurial attitude, particularly after Margaret Thatcher's introduction of the Enterprise Allowance Scheme to supplement unemployment benefits in 1983, helped to enshrine neoliberal governmentality more generally (83-84). The celebration of a 'creative economy' in which artists stood out as model entrepreneurs was one of the means by which both New Labour and David Cameron's Conservative Party aimed to cultivate the social liberalism that would distinguish them from Thatcher (67). Whereas Sennett, and Cornford, largely present the emergence of art shorn of craft as a *consequence* of political and economic changes, Harvie suggests that, in this context, it may equally have served as an ancillary *cause*.

Harvie goes on to associate ideas from *The Craftsman* with ways in which artists have attempted to reverse this situation: a return to artisanship provides a way to resist or re-appropriate the entrepreneurial model increasingly forced upon artists by funding structures, and upon individuals in neoliberal society more generally. These artists use their projects to develop updated versions of the workshop, in which 'social relations of mutual responsibility' are created as people with different specific skills collaborate on a single project (Harvie 2013: 98). Harvie's examples include Heather Ackroyd and Dan Harvey's resurfacing of urban surfaces with grass, and Steve McQueen's *Queen and Country* project (displayed 2007, published 2010), for which the artist oversaw the creation and display of pages of stamps bearing the faces of British servicemen and women killed in Iraq. Such art 'engage[s] socially very widely, across all audiences equitably, perhaps even democratically' (Harvie 2013: 2); in saying this, Harvie echoes Sennett, who highlights the democratic claims that Lecoq made for his theatre and insists that 'nearly anyone can become a good craftsman' (Sennett 2013: 245; 2009: 268). Yet, for Harvie, this requires a caveat that Sennett does not dwell on as fully as he might: 'although craftsmanship may be conceptually egalitarian, this egalitarianism is difficult to realize, given people's variable access to financial, cultural and social capital', and the term itself carries elitist and hierarchical implications (Harvie 2013: 99). She attempts to resolve this by drawing out moments in *The Craftsman*, and in some of Sennett's subsequent public comments, in which he looks beyond expert skills, emphasising his celebration of amateur and folk art, and his frequent citing of parenting as an archetypal craft (98-99). What counts as craft becomes elastic enough to contain, in the case of McQueen's work, not only his crafting of film and the spectator's gaze in his video installations, but also the crafts of philately and cabinet-making required for his *Queen and Country* project, and the particular military-technological skills of its deceased soldiers (101-02). The effect is to return to a craft-led understanding of art which draws on and encourages slow, sustained engagement in practice, rather than the execution of one-off ideas, and which celebrates collaborative rather than individual authorship. However, the examples do not necessarily demonstrate collaborative *organisation* of practice at a structural level, and still rely on a one-off

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'project' structure: while the experience of working with one of these artists might be one manifestation of a wider, sustained amateur practice, and have lasting effects on the participants and their environments, the practice is still only raised briefly to the level of '"aesthetically turned" socially turned art and performance' because of an artist's intervention (20). In this light, it can sometimes become hard to distinguish the case studies that exemplify artisanship from the ones that exemplify delegated labour. The conditions of the scientists and assistants with whom Harvey and Ackroyd collaborated are not clearly distinct from those who worked with Salcedo, beyond an acknowledgement that laying the grass was as 'labour-intensive' as a craft workshop (100). Harvie also admits that, regardless of the artist's and institution's attempts to deter it, Salgedo's installation could stimulate interest in how the work was made, giving the artwork 'a sense of achievability alongside […] its wondrousness', one that 'demystifies artwork as not just about individual genius' (38): in Sennett's terms, it makes the viewer a witness rather than a spectator once more.

At this point, it will be useful to make a working distinction between 'craft' and 'skill', terms which have remained porous until now (and will to some extent remain so as I negotiate how others use them). Sennett generally uses 'skill' to describe the processes by which habits are organised through repetition such that particular embodied actions are acquired, honed and altered, with an emphasis on the time that this takes; its primary sphere of concern is the relation between the subject and their environment, albeit with a degree of recognition that this relation can depend on bonds with particular other people and materials. 'Craft' is used to describe the various larger-scale social forms that those processes require, and in which the bodies acquiring them circulate, as well as the values that become attached to those forms: it is what becomes of the bonds once they have been widely discussed. Craft is impossible without skill, and this is reflected in *The Craftsman*'s structure, by placing a section on 'the development of skill' through embodied practice before one about more 'general issues of motivation and talent' (Sennett 2009: 10-11). The two can, nevertheless, be considered separately. There are certain skills which do not acquire the particular forms and values that would lead them normally to be described as craft (Sennett has little to say, for example, about sport or exercise). More significantly, the values associated with craft can be appealed to without being linked back to the particular processes which underpin them. Sennett, Cornford and Harvie all wish to resist any appeal to the patrician or conservative ideas that are sometimes associated with these values: with the 'folksy, old-fashioned or particularly nostalgic' (Harvie 2013: 106). Cornford emphasises that his proposed 'turn to the crafts' is 'not a return' to an idealised past, and prefers to highlight Sennett's most contemporary examples, like the craftsmanship of Linux programmers (2012: 358-59; 2015b: 95). Sennett himself is careful to distance himself from nostalgic (and often gender- and race-blind) fantasies of 'working-class cohesion' (2013: 150). He mourns the fact that some white-collar IBM

employees made redundant in the late 1990s only found solace in the inward-looking 'symbolic community' of local churches, rather than in a less symbolic shared space in which they could tell an accurate, reparative story about how their working conditions had changed (Sennett 1999: 130). Maintaining a connection between the different levels of analysis suggested by skill and craft is key to developing Cornford's dramaturgy in which 'process becomes structure'. I return to Harvie's analysis in my discussion of Forced Entertainment, who invert the respective emphasis placed on 'craft' and 'skill' in her case studies: the company's rejection of the rhetoric of skill and virtuosity belies the fact that, of all the theatre-makers I discuss, they have done so within structural conditions which best cultivate skill, working from a defined location in Sheffield, for a sustained period of time and held together by strong but flexible bonds of loyalty and friendship.

Introducing a recent collection of essays, Elizabeth Hallam and Tim Ingold describe Sennett's account of the craftsman as 'somewhat rose-tinted' and requiring 'a dose of realism' (2014: 9). But, running underneath the avuncular tone of his writing, Sennett never denies that the dominant mood of the craftsman is one of 'bitterness and regret' (2009: 296): the sections of *The Craftsman* on skill and talent are preceded by an opening section which acknowledges the West's 'deep-rooted trouble […] in recognizing and encouraging the impulse of craftsmanship' (9). Whenever Arendt reappears as the *homo faber* trilogy continues, her philosophy is associated with a failure to live sustainably with this 'trouble'. Her imagination of 'an idealized political community in which all the actors have equal standing' in their critical judgement over what gets made never materialises, because it fails to recognise 'community as a process of coming into the world' in which humans have to think as they make (2013: 273). Similarly, her definition of natality as 'a never-ending process of communication and interaction' did not give sufficient weight to conditions in which this process could be frustrated and thus become a source of pain and distress, as revealed in her own status as a refugee forced to sustain a home in America despite her disgust at the Vietnam War (2018: 300). The smoothness of Arendt's natality overlooks the turns of the 'tacit-explicit-tacit rhythm' and the affective significance that those turns can have on the practising subject: Sennett gives the example of a child learning to play the violin using the Suzuki method who, when the tonalising finger strips are removed, faces 'an unending, mushy process' with 'no sense of increasing control and no emotional experience of security' (2009: 159). This feeling gradually subsides as the performing body develops habits that compensate for the lost structures, and knowledge that had needed to be explicit can become tacit, only for a sense of loss to re-emerge as the body encounters new stimuli for which existing habits had not prepared it.

The philosopher whose presence in the fringes of Sennett's trilogy might offer a way to live with skill's difficulty is Walter Benjamin. Benjamin's "The Storyteller" is conspicuous by its absence from *The Corrosion of Character* and *The Craftsman*. Sennett describes skilled practice

as 'beget[ting] narrative', and the experience of telling their stories of redundancy apparently has a therapeutic value for the IBM workers which parallels the value that Benjamin finds in 'the tale' (Sennett 1999: 44, 131). The employees were engaged in a form of oral expression which provided them with an otherwise-denied 'ability to exchange experiences', and which carried an association with a concept of artisanship that had otherwise been lost (Benjamin 2007: 83, 85). Benjamin is only cited in *The Craftsman* to gloss the experience of 'surprise' and 'wonder' that comes when a practitioner discovers an unexpected use for a tool: 'the wonder that a thing exists' is described as '*aura*', implicitly drawing on Benjamin's definition of aura as felt proximity to an object regardless of spatial distance (Sennett 2009: 211; Benjamin 2007: 222-23). This helps to clarify that the demand for explicit consciousness to resurface can be accompanied by heightened feelings of joy as well as confusion. Benjamin is only discussed at length in *Building and Dwelling*, in which attention falls on the "Theses on the Philosophy of History", to describe the double temporality of the contemporary urban landscape. The angel who continues to look into the past while being carried into the future is realised, in today's globalised cities, by inhabitants who find themselves caught between the domain of 'the slowly growing, the adapting, the accreting', within which a sustainable experience of dwelling develops, and the experience of 'rupture' as new large-scale building projects emerge while old ones fall into obsolescence with increasing rapidity (Sennett 2018: 118-20, 279). Sennett goes on to map these two temporalities onto their interplay within craft practice: skills need time to develop slowly and continuously, but 'a skills-storm is needed' to allow for improvement (286). He also notes that Benjamin figures this experience of history as necessarily cataclysmic: even if urbanists and city-dwellers find ways to manage accretion and rupture, some ways of life will inevitably get lost in the rubble before the angel's feet (280). Although the link is not made explicitly, this appeal to Benjamin can work to connect some of the ways in which Sennett describes continuity across ruptures in different parts of the trilogy. In *The Craftsman*, he notes the risk, if knowledge was not distributed effectively across the early modern workshop, that secrets could die with its master: contemporary attempts to analyse or recreate Stradivari's violins are caught between starting from its material form or finding a new form that could recreate its sound; his marriage of form to function was not enshrined in the elements of the workshop that can be historically recovered (2009: 77). The challenge becomes a matter of finding a way 'to treat breakdown as a caution as well as an opportunity', a challenge also faced by those who attempt to memorialise practices or ways of life that have been destroyed irrevocably by historical trauma, and that cannot simply be rebuilt (2013: 215). A contemporary violin that remakes the sound of a Stradivarius while looking nothing like it might be comparable to David Chipperfield's renovation of the Neues Museum in Berlin, which incorporated wartime damage into its structure (2013: 216-18; 2018: 117). Although it is convenient to imagine skilled practice as defined by stretches that rely only on tacit knowledge, Sennett acknowledges that, when examined with enough precision, apparently regular

gestures are *always* responding to new stimuli: try to 'play a waltz strictly in time using a metronome', and one will almost inevitably find one's self introducing 'micropauses and microspurts' (2009: 175). Similarly, Benjamin understands history to be shaped and defined by rupture, occurring beyond the dominant ideology's consciousness, even in periods of apparently gentle accretion. While Sennett never assents to Benjamin's point explicitly, he acknowledges that, while 'the idea of the craftsman-citizen persisted' in ancient and early modern Europe, it 'flew in the face of ancient fact', give its Greek and Roman incarnations' reliance on slaves and near-slaves (2013: 57). Far from being rose-tinted, it might be more appropriate to say – borrowing a word that he occasionally uses – that Sennett's history of skilled practice is imbued with tragedy.

Even without appealing to a specific genre, Sennett's thinking across the trilogy lends itself to being understood as a series of dramatic conflicts that underpin the experience of developing and performing a skill: theatrical performances can dwell with, and within, these conflicts in a number of ways. For example, the two competing ways of narrating the development of a practice over time, as a flow of steady accretion or a series of violent ruptures, have been an underlying concern for Forced Entertainment whenever they negotiate and dramatise their shared history. This tension can also be felt, and provoke a range of affective responses, while a skill is performed, as one is compelled to move between going on unthinkingly and having to negotiate difficulty. Such moments can both emerge from and influence the system of social relations within which they occur – including the social relations at play in a rehearsal room or auditorium. Finally, when the *homo faber* trilogy is contextualised in relation to Sennett's earlier writings, one can discern a broader conflict. Have modernity, 'the new capitalism' or 'the fall of public man' caused a historical rupture such that the cultivation of skill becomes almost impossible? Alternatively, given that 'the desire to do a job well for its own sake' is 'an enduring, basic human impulse', can skill be cultivated anew, to the point that it reshapes the overarching structures that currently determine its marginality (2009: 9)? This is a debate central to my interpretation of Crimp's writing: to what extent do these plays' dramaturgical invitations, some known to be informed by Sennett's books, move from satirically exposing the deskilled society to proposing an alternative? Svendsen has incorporated *The Fall of Public Man* into the teaching of contemporary dramaturgy, as a way to highlight how naturalism's emphasis on giving characters transparent psychological trajectories is historically and politically determined, and does not need to be the only way in which a performance is organised (Svendsen 2017a). *World Factory*, described in its documentary record as 'exploring a post-Brechtian theatrical politics in the provocation of conversation', is an attempt to initiate an alternative, actively acknowledged set of bonds between actors and audiences, while raising the question of if and how such bonds can go on to be sustained within the neoliberal economy that the show investigates (*WF* A1). Naturalistic

acting is not *per se* dependent on the deskilling of actors and audiences: it might be feasible to resurrect a contract in which the fact that the actor is performing a controlled imitation according to certain conventions continues to be registered by the audience, who operate as witnesses rather than spectators, without demanding patterns of interaction between them as new as METIS's. This is the impulse behind much of Crouch's theatre, which has been described by one critic as 'explain[ing] away how all theatre works, but then do[ing] it anyway' (Rebellato 2015: 8). Far from requiring a 'turn to the crafts', all of these performances might be described as caught, more or less comfortably, *within* that turn, working to articulate exactly how a reskilled society would operate differently from the one that we currently inhabit.

3. Tim Ingold and the pragmatic critique of skill

Ingold and Hallam's description of *The Craftsman* as 'rose-tinted' can partly be explained by the fact that Ingold, an anthropologist rather than a sociologist, is less interested than Sennett in the broader value systems and social histories that attach themselves to 'craft'. He is invested in building analysis up from the relation of bodies to environments, at the level of 'skill' as I defined it above. Indeed, 'skill' is one of the topics which grounds Ingold's essay collection of 2000, *The Perception of the Environment*, and the key conceptual vehicle by which he has moved from what he has deemed the third phase of his career, focused on ideas of 'dwelling' and crowned by the 2000 collection, to the fourth, which has seen him developing an anthropology of 'lines' and closer investigation of the relationship between anthropology and artistic practice (cf. 2011: 9-14). Ingold is a prolific, accretive writer who draws on a wider range of theoretical and ethnographic sources than Sennett, but his understanding of skill has remained broadly consistent since he set out 'five points […] crucial to a proper appreciation of technical skills' in *The Perception of the Environment*: skill is a pattern of careful and dexterous activity, in which the practising body becomes embedded within an environment and elements of that environment are '*brought into use*' by the body; it is a pattern which is not acquired 'through the transmission of formulae' or designed in advance, but which continues emerging through 'perceptually engaged activity' by the practitioner (2000: 352-54).[3] Immediately the overlap with Sennett's thinking is clear: Ingold also argues that any understanding of skill must begin from bodily practices. If imagination is required to develop them, it is still, emphatically, an imagination which is grounded in and returns to the body. Even abstract thinking, of the kind that 'does *not* involve palpable engagement with the world', is still itself a skilled activity, a matter of 'dwell[ing …] in a virtual world' that is modelled and constantly dependent on the experience of dwelling within a physical world (2000: 417-18). Just as Sennett argues that pragmatism can offer accounts of experience that combine the senses of *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, the event that makes 'an emotional inner impress' and the one

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[3] In all quotations from Ingold's writing, emphases are his unless otherwise stated.

that 'turns one outward and requires skill' (2009: 288), Ingold finds that combination in the act of performing with his cello: 'I experience a heightened sense of awareness, but that awareness is not *of* my playing, it *is* my playing' (2000: 413). Expression here becomes bound to impression, but it is a binding primarily sustained by the habits of the body in its environment, rather than being consistently supported by the social structures and values that organise those habits more widely: the weight falls on working outwards from private impressions rather than inwards from public expressions. Ingold argues, in terms that disagree with the thrust of *The Fall of Public Man*, that '[t]he novice becomes skilled not through the acquisition of rules and representations, but at the point where he or she is able to dispense with them' (415).

Ingold's project as a whole can be seen as an attempt to dispense with what he sees as limited ways of representing human behaviour, driven by an 'understanding of practice as rule-governed execution' that he considers characteristic of 'modern Western thought', the geographical and historical bounds of which remain porous. He wishes to reject the idea of a fixed moment of division between pre-history (or the time of 'evolution') and history, as expressed through an origin, be it of language, technology or art (2000: 404-05). In its place, Ingold proposes a radically immanent and relational perspective in which there is no way to distinguish the essence of language from 'the manifold ways in which people actually speak' to each other, or the essence of a tool from how an object comes to be used in context (392). He describes these abstractions as attempts to fantasise a third 'between' entity that is distinct from either of the individuals speaking to each other in the case of language, or from the individual and the environment being worked on in the case of technology; in their place, anthropology should find ways of recounting 'the in-between', which is nothing other than the particular ways in which the two are related directly along lines of correspondence (2015: 147, 154). One of the important consequences of this project is a dethroning of human agency, in favour of broader environmental awareness, which Ingold has increasingly advanced as an ethically necessary response to life in the Anthropocene (2014 and 2017). Thus, he argues for an alternative to 'material culture' as conventionally understood, in which the material world is 'one of brute physicality, of mere matter, until people appeared on the scene' but one which has carried its own history of 'relations […] that may or may not include human beings' and into which humans should see themselves as becoming absorbed (2011: 31). His understanding of skill allows for no firm distinction between humans and animals: the human capacity to tell stories and develop analogies should be considered a second-order '*Skill of skills*' rather than a mark of evolutionary distinction (2000: 361). Hunter-gatherer societies, the ethnographic study of which defined the start of Ingold's career, model a relationship with the environment in which non-human participants are brought into use rather than used by humans, insofar as, for example, a spear that misses prey during hunting is not a manifestation of its wielder's failure as much as the animal not being ready to be

caught (2000: 320). Traces of such social relations can survive even in Western modernity, precisely because they cannot be mapped onto any of the abstract models of 'society' familiar from political philosophy, whether they prioritise intimacy between kin, the enabling of market-like interactions, or the state regulation of those interactions (1999: 400). A modern anthropologist can describe the apparently leisurely time management of Nuer pastoralists, in which the time required to perform a task is defined only by its relation to the other tasks needed to sustain life, as 'fortunate'; this recognition is a sign that such an experience has not gone away, even if it is now only faintly traceable as fleeting respite from the system of 'clock-time' which defines alienated capitalist labour (2000: 338). Likewise, in the face of the rise of deskilled mechanised labour that Sennett documents particularly in *The Corrosion of Character*, Ingold remains confident that skill itself will survive, as humans learn the skills of living with these machines, as elements within their environment. Arguably going beyond Sennett's appeal to 'an enduring, basic human impulse', Ingold memorably describes skill as 'destined to carry on for as long as life does, along a line of resistance, forever undoing the closures and finalities that mechanisation throws in its path' (2011: 62).

It is easy to see why Cornford finds Ingold's thinking a useful model for dramaturgical practice. He explicitly compares Secret Theatre to the anthropologist's wayfarers and hunter-gatherers in their ability to be constantly 'shaping something into something', a condition in which 'both materials and their emergent forms must be perceived and transformed'; this is an alternative to 'fixing stuff that's already there', in which performers have to reform and perform reified material in a preconceived way. One of the materials shaped was time: rather than following a fixed and hierarchically managed production schedule, regulated by the demands of the calendar, the company found that they had the freedom to attend more immediately to the social time of rehearsal, rather than looking back on or anticipating stages that needed to be reached (Cornford 2015b). Ingold's thinking also resonates with Holmes's commitment, which itself echoes Chekhov's and Saint-Denis's, to 'theatre as Art'. When the term 'art' enters Ingold's writing, he is quick to emphasise that he invokes its 'traditional meaning […] as *skill*', as in art-isanship, rather than the modern one of 'the spontaneous creation of novelty' (2000: 401). Before the binaries that Ingold believes modernity to have installed, there was no such division between active novelty and passive technique. Thus, when Chekhov expected his actors to serve 'the feeling of the dynamic of the event', or Saint-Denis and his associates advocated for funding based on what was best for the arts themselves, even to the point of proposing 'what I should like call the religion of the theatre', there would be no sense that those making theatre were servants of a higher abstract ideal, but discovering the bounds and potential of their own inventiveness (qtd. in Cornford 2012: 87, 183). Saint-Denis's advice to Laurence Olivier on the delivery of Shakespearean verse – which Olivier paraphrased as a matter of 'find[ing] truth *through* the

verse', without either discarding the verse as ornament or giving way to its 'utter unreality' – resonates with Ingold's attitude to all engagements between humans and their material (qtd. in Cornford 2012: 180, original emphasis). The material world's truth is 'neither objectively determined nor subjectively imagined but practically experienced', as the skilled subject sustains a relationship with it (Ingold 2011: 30). When explaining his more general exercises in *To the Actor*, which involve learning how to respond to the images and psychological gestures that underlie a play and its characters, Chekhov stresses that these images 'are independent and changeable within themselves', requiring 'active collaboration' in order to be 'fully developed and accomplished' (1953: 23): becoming skilled is a matter of participating in the flows of a more-than-human world, but not necessarily viewing that participation as submission to it.

Cornford notes that 'actors, producers *and audiences* […] constituted one single body' for Chekhov, and hopes to use Chekhov's example as a way to resist the contemporary theatre's 'dualistic' assumption that 'the creation of a production is separable from its performance', with the bulk of the creative work completed before a first performance subsequently repeated (2012: 65, 351, my emphasis). In *A Series of Increasingly Impossible Acts*, the Secret Theatre show on which most of Cornford's published analysis thusfar has focused, this impulse was illustrated nicely by the conceit of asked the protagonist the question 'What's this show about?' on two separate occasions during each performance; their answers – usually different from each other and from those of all previous performance – were immediately written up on the back wall.[4] The skills demonstrated in each performance could thus be 'truly generative of the[ir] object rather than merely revelatory of an object that is already present', and that whatever content or 'truth' they revealed could not be thought independently of, and might ultimately be secondary to, the process of formal generation (Ingold 2000: 346).

Does it undermine Cornford's argument, and Ingold's theory of artistic production, to note that Secret Theatre's performers originally had a single answer to this question in mind? It was originally proposed in rehearsals that the protagonist would always give the answer 'Love' when the question was posed the second time (and could choose to give it the first time) – and, even once this was evacuated from the production, the company were still able to describe the performance as the expression of an initiating desire to do a project that was 'about' the difficulty

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[4] Throughout this thesis, I use "singular 'they'", rather than 'she' or 'he or she', when I refer to an unspecified or generalised person whose gender is unknown or insignificant. I do this for three reasons. Firstly, in many cases, the pronoun refers to one of a small company known to contain both male and female performers. Secondly, it aids discussions of a number of Crouch's plays: in *ENGLAND*, the actors portrays a character whose gender is left unspecified; in *An Oak Tree*, an actor of any gender is called upon to play a male character. Thirdly, while none of my examples explicitly feature performers or characters who do not conform to the gender binary, I wish to acknowledge the possibility of – and hope that future researchers will more fully explore the implications of – non-binary or genderqueer people performing these scripts, collaborating with or being influenced by these companies, and having distinctive responses as audience members.

of discussing or representing sex onstage (Albina and Bill 2014; Cornford 2015b). As I noted above, Ingold's principle of seeing acts of linguistic and narrative representation as a skill of skills allows for this second-order level at which material is organised. The coherent world or body of a performance incorporates some elements which flow more slowly than others, and thus become more fixed than flexible, partly to allow those other elements to remain more mutable. By the time that he writes *Making*, Ingold has concluded that the human animal is not only distinguished by the *capacity* to use language and other vehicles of abstract reason as a skill of skills, but by the need to: skills 'can be taught, learned and studied precisely because ways of knowing […] do *not* commit their practitioners to silence' (2013: 111). Far from being 'tacit', the consistent need to respond to one's environment leaves the knowledge of how to perform a skill 'turbulent and sometimes noisy', as the practitioner negotiates a host of stimuli that they register with varying degrees of consciousness: '[o]nly at the eye of the churn, at the point of most intense concentration, does silence reign' (2015: 148). Noise, here, might be understood as the ruptures in tacit knowledge that do not reach the point of becoming the informative shareable content of explicit knowledge. In this respect, Ingold comes closer than Sennett to framing the tacit-explicit-tacit rhythm as one that goes all the way down during the practice of a skill, if it could be observed carefully enough.

However, while there are moments, especially before the 'lines' stage of his career, at which Ingold imagines a 'dialectical relationship between engagement and detachment', he is generally less ready than Sennett to think of the moments of absorbed bodily and affective engagement in a practice as somehow *of a different order* from the moments and systems of imagination, reflection and representation that organise and change the practice (even if, *contra* Arendt, they can occur within the same person). Ingold's dialectic more readily resolves in synthesis. When Ingold offers a generalised account of the 'recognisable phases' that all skilled practices have – 'getting ready, setting out, carrying on and finishing off' – he emphasises that these steps are 'processional, rather than successional'. Like the steps of a walk, every moment develops into another one and builds on a previous one until it is hard to identify a clear division between them, and even an apparently complete task sets up the conditions for the next to occur: 'I lay down the saw, but this may only be to pick up the next piece to be cut' (2011: 53). The transition from planning or 'getting ready' to 'setting out' has to happen at a decisive, carefully judged moment, but this too emerges from a wider structure of attention: citing Jean-Pierre Vernant, Ingold notes that the ancient Greek word for this charged moment is *kairos* (2011: 54); when he returns to this word in *The Life of Lines*, he draws on the fact that it is also the contemporary Greek word for weather, to highlight how any such moment is always the expression of the wider 'rhythmic relations' of which it is a part (2015: 71). When Sennett gives a similar level of step-by-step attention to the process of developing a skill in *The Craftsman*, he

places the emphasis on rupture rather than continuity. One can only discover a new use for a tool by making 'intuitive leaps' which 'break the mould' of its existing use, putting unexpected domains or materials into adjacency, and being surprised by the result; this surprise ultimately gives way, as the practitioner recognises that 'unsolved problems remain' and the imagination cannot continue to defy the limitations set by the material (2009: 210-12). In the primacy given to these momentary affects of 'surprise' and 'wonder', without spreading them out into a more diffuse 'turbulence' or 'heightened feeling', detachment from the material is allowed to have value in its own right.

Sennett is thus a more *pragmatic* theorist of skill than Ingold, in a softer sense as well as the more technical philosophical one that Sennett himself employs. In his introduction to one of the books on material culture that Ingold critiques, Daniel Miller notes that many anthropologists wish to stop 'talk[ing] about subjects and objects' and find ways of acknowledging that subjects as such only emerge by being shaped by the objects that they apparently shape, in a reciprocal, ecological relationship. Yet '[w]e will have at some point to descend from this place of ultimate revelation at the mountain's peak. We will have to return to the mass populations who consider themselves to be, in fact, people using objects.' Miller sees this 'downward path' as necessary for the sake of being a successful ethnographer who can accurately describe, and where necessary live among, such people (2005: 10). Ingold, who has recently begun insisting that 'anthropology is *not* ethnography', and that he professes the former, has been accused of forcing a distinction between fieldwork and subsequent acts of reflection (2011: 229-43). The terms on which these accusations have been made will come to carry significance:

> When Ingold implies that there is something base, something ill-conceived and inadequate about ethnography's empirical dimension, he steps into a standard role. He is the high priest who conceals and celebrates the mysteries of fieldwork. Or, less flattering, he is the parent who can't talk honestly to her kids about sex.

> "Well, honey, it's about attention, and care, and correspondence."

> "I guess," the cringing youth thinks, "But how do I… do it?" (Shyrock 2016)

Ingold's approach to anthropology is a form of magical thinking – and, much like the magical thinking involved in religion and sex, exposing it as such does not necessarily make it any less useful, necessary or enjoyable. Theatre-makers' sense of embeddedness within a process of always 'shaping something into something' might be as necessary as Philip Auslander concedes that their myth of 'liveness' is, even as he argues that it is an artificial construct unthinkable without recording technology (1999: 2). The challenge becomes one of not interpreting the failure

to stay embedded as a kind of disenchantment, but as an opportunity to trace the sources of enchantment, from a critical perspective, ever more precisely.

With this in mind, Ingold's brief references to theatricality merit reframing. Theatre has never been a source for specific examples within his developing theory of skill (although he draws on a collaboration with the philosopher of dance Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (2013: 139)). Instead, its role as a founding institution of modernity and its disenchantments has been critiqued. Following Kenneth Olwig, he notes that the development of the Jacobean indoor theatre, with its spectacular framing of an external environment within the proscenium arch, exemplifies the moment at which '[t]he wandering shadow and the written line of the ever-composing, worldly being have been surrendered to vectors of projection that serve to transmit the total composition from a now exteriorised world into the recesses of the mind'. Such theatre architecture would go on to inform urban architecture and repeat the inversion on a global scale: the world comes to correlate with a pre-conceived mental image, replacing 'the earth beneath our feet with Earth the planet' and 'the air we breathe with the phantasmal ether' (2015: 74-75). Modernity can only be undone by recognising the theatre for the inversion of the world that it is, 'turning the theatrical box inside out [to] restore the world's inhabitants to the fullness of earth and sky' (77). Ingold's working definition of the theatre emphasises its creation of simulations, and thus coincides with a number of definitions from within performance studies. Andrew Quick has summarised theatricality as 'a mechanism that works through exclusion, that always banishes the very version of reality that it promises to recreate'; even if not itself mimetic, it 'supports a particular representational economy' (2009: 31). Quick is drawing on the thought of Hans-Thies Lehmann, who resonates especially strongly with Ingold when he notes that '[e]ven performance artists who guard against theatricality and representation in every way by assuring the unrepeatability of their actions get ensnared, *simply by first conceiving an intention and then executing it*' – even if that anticipatory design is as loose as wanting to make a show about love (Lehmann 2016: 418, my emphasis; cf. Lehmann 2006: 180). Yet such perspectives can ignore how these simulations are, still, *creations*, appropriating and shaping material from the real world and ultimately having effects in and on that world: an onstage object is 'not just a copy but a new thing' that still has to 'be there' 'concretely' (Ridout 2006: 66). Holmes is alert to this when he proposes ways of 'attacking the form' that also 'attack the world', such as attending to the diversity of Secret Theatre's cast; Chekhov reaches towards it when he describe the actor's duty to '*interpret* life in all its facets and profoundness' [sic] rather than merely mimic its 'outer appearance' (1953: 3, original emphasis). This desire to escape the 'mechanism' of representation might play the role of the 'line of resistance' that allows skill to survive in other domains, but it does not enter Ingold's account of theatrical practice.

Ingold has been willing to argue that systems often registered as 'technological', such as writing (in that it supposedly requires pre-conceived mental compositions to be 'put online' and executed), can be reconceived as skilled, if writing is seen instead as an embodied process that retains a connection with prehistoric practices of 'graphism' (2000: 401-03). An activity such as typewriting would not seem to allow for such reconceiving: it does not leave as clear a trace of the particular body's impressions on the keys or paper as handwriting, no matter how 'skilfully and expressively' '[t]he typist's fingers may dance'. Yet, following the philosopher of design Vilém Flusser, Ingold admits that there is something affectively distinctive about how 'the writerly continuity of the linear walk comes hard up against the calculative discontinuity of the punctual assembly' as one types, as the skilled trajectory is repeatedly compromised and restarted. 'Thus the machine stutters along, in a stuttering world.' (2011: 190-91) Rather than seeing this 'stuttering world' as an experience generated by 'Western modernity', and enshrined by the early modern theatre and city, a pragmatic critique of Ingold would acknowledge that such stuttering goes all the way down. There is no world prior to the sealing off of theatres into discrete microcosms of the world, and no skill that cannot be broken down into systems of users and tools. Rather than seeing moments of stuttering as exceptions to a more deeply embedded form of engagement, we must look for models according to which they might be constitutive of it. One of this thesis's aims is thus to match Ingold's critique of the theatre with a theatrical critique of Ingold's anthropology.

Stuttering is a useful metaphor with which to interpret the effects that the Secret Theatre ensemble generated once their shaping was placed in front of audiences. Although Cornford wishes for a theatre in which production is inseparable from performance, the extent to which a contemporary audience of consumers can co-operate in the process of theatre-making with the artists whose productive labour they fund inevitably reaches limits. The inevitability of a barrier was acknowledged by Chekhov, who taught his students that audiences should feel the force of a psychological gesture that the trained performer should both feel *and know* (Cornford 2012: 94). Yet, as well as being a performance in which content remained strikingly open and negotiable, *A Series of Increasingly Impossible Acts* was also distinctive for the extent to which it invited audiences to 'get to know' the actors themselves, and to understand the structures by which the performance had been made (Albina and Bill 2014). This partly emerged from the circumstance of this show coming late in its season, once a loyal audience for these particular performers had been established, who associated the company's practice with a resistance to 'literalism' that went beyond casting: the season notably started with an interpretation of *A Streetcar Named Desire* in which all actors performed in their native accents. When the company decided to devise a show to fill a gap in the schedule, it thus felt appropriate for them to accentuate the sense of 'a weird little universe' between 'reality and performance' that non-text-based performances often give more

prominence to than the classic or newly-commissioned plays that made up the rest of the season (Albina and Bill 2014). *A Series of Increasingly Impossible Acts* was structured around a fixed series of exercises through which a randomly chosen company member was led: wrestling and swapping clothes with other performers, improvising responses to scripted questions, performing dance routines and isolated scenes from Shakespeare. The company used their own names throughout, performed with the house lights up, and chatted with the audience before the performance started; in the Lyric Theatre, and in the majority of venues to which it travelled on tour, the performance was staged in a rehearsal room or similar rather than a public auditorium.[5] On this evidence, it sustained its particular 'weird little universe' with more signifiers of 'reality' than the 'performance' of a fiction.

Perhaps the most distinctive production decision in *A Series of Increasingly Impossible Acts* was for the cast to perform in exercise outfits (embellished, in the case of the protagonist, by a comically small superhero cape). The tension between theatricality and anti-theatricality, and the tension between an understanding of skill which is always being reconstructed in the performance space and one which requires external forms of construction, both meet in sport. I suggested that the absence of sport from *The Craftsman* is linked to it being rarely associated with 'craft', which has its grounding in the repetitive embodied actions of 'skill' but also encompass the social forms in which those bodies circulate and which can easily accommodate changes and developments at the level of 'skill'. Sporting regimes seem less able to sustain that middle ground. Steven Connor notes that they gain their identity as such by being only games, minimally 'set apart from ordinary relations of dominance and rivalry' (2011: 174). They do this by setting certain restrictions on what actions participants can execute: these restrictions take the form of arbitrary rules that, unlike the development of the process of a skill in Ingold's or Sennett's ideal terms, can be recognisably and absolutely broken (even if the breakage is ultimately recuperated in the form of a new game or variation). Yet sport also demands the occlusion of these rules: it requires a sphere in which 'it is impossible to deny what is really happening' and which gains its value from being undertaken in a spirit of 'absolute positivity' and sincerity, *as if* the rules were being spontaneously renewed in the very act of executing it (Connor 2011: 175). The pleasure of spectatorship lies in the ability to witness real effort being exerted and rewarded rather than being concealed or managed. In the context of *A Series of Increasingly Impossible Acts*, the fact that the only character 'note' given to the performers was to 'do it to the best of their ability' was a gesture towards achieving sport's reality effect; the fact that it was still carefully rehearsed so that the exposure the show demanded did not become distressing, and that that the performers had strategies for reserving energy and intimacy, was a gesture towards theatricality, and its

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[5] One exception to this rule was the performances at the Tricycle Theatre, London, where I saw the performance that I analyse on 24 January 2015.

dependence on superimposed rules (Albina and Bill 2014). Ingold has expressed frustration with the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, 'who repeatedly insisted that the principles of the art of living could be passed from body to body, silently and insensibly, without ever rising to the level of conscious awareness' (2015: 152 n.3). This would reduce all knowledge to tacit knowledge, and leave no space for its articulable forms to emerge from the flows of consciousness within an environment. In an important essay by Greg Noble and Megan Watkins, the example of learning a sport is used to support the spirit of Ingold's argument while retaining and 'rehabilitat[ing]' Bourdieu's language. Bourdieu's habitus, the 'feel for the game' supposedly acquired unconsciously through a process of social inscription, requires an active and conscious process of 'habituation', in which the 'feel for the game' cannot be reached without 'a feel for the ball, the pitch, the uniform, the other plays, the coach, the referee [and] the spectators', not to mention the distinctive kinds of consciousness demanded during training (2003: 521, 527). While Ingold seems to seek the fundamental blurring of these categories, Noble and Watkins are willing to emphasise gradations of consciousness, between which one can make 'heuristic decisions' (530). During an exercise regime, a practitioner can move between 'automaticity' and moments of more conscious reflection, or feel them at the same time, but Noble and Watkins still describe these levels as 'a chain of intensities', a metaphor that combines connection and disconnection which Ingold prefers to resist (533; cf. Ingold 2015: 15). If Bourdieu's thinking (like Ingold's) 'rests on a monism [of] mind and body' which he inherits from Spinoza, they want to make it clear that this is nevertheless a monism in which mind and body are still '*distinct and parallel* expressions of the same reality' (Noble and Watkins 2003: 533, my emphasis).

This invitation to become more and more alert to gradations of consciousness, to try to catch the moment at which an executed action jumps the parallel tracks from being structured to being spontaneous, is made to the audience throughout *A Series of Increasingly Impossible Acts*. The sequencing of the tasks suggested a general tendency towards increasing competence and collaboration, a fixed narrative which would be made visible regardless of how the particular protagonist responded to challenges within the performance. Three times throughout the show, the protagonist would run through a short obstacle course of more or less impossible acts, including licking their own elbow, balancing off the ground on a small rubber football, and bending a metal pipe: with each iteration, the rest of the ensemble changed their relationship with the protagonist, from observing silently, to cheering the protagonist on, to actively helping. In a similar vein, a dialogue in which the protagonist improvised answers to pre-scripted questions took the shape of Iago's duping of Othello from Shakespeare's play; it was followed later in the show by a performance of the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, for which both speakers knew and delivered Shakespeare's original lines. Just as the performers were invited to balance raw effort, reflexive awareness of their own exposure, and obedience to the rules and structures that their

devising had provided, the audience were invited both to admire this effort and to deduce the structures which shaped the performance as a whole: an outline of the evening's running order was pinned up in the stage space and visible to the audience throughout. This common structure of attention shared between performers and audiences might explain a striking recurring feature across online reviews of the show: the expression of a desire to learn or join in with the performance's final jubilant group dance to Tina Turner's version of "Proud Mary".[6] The expression of such a wish suggests that the possibility of full mutual embeddedness in a shared environment, without the barrier of paying 'real' customer and paid theatrically framed performer, had become visible.

The fact that this desire to participate is always described as remaining unfulfilled is a reminder that such embeddedness can only be felt as a stutter. The audience and performers were both invited to move between different forms or 'intensities' of attention, but these patterns of movement were themselves separate from each other. The invitations were in common but also in parallel: the only sustainable mode of co-operation that we can reasonably expect is, in Ash Amin's phrase, to become 'indifferent to difference' (qtd. in Sennett 2018: 258). The theatrical encounter is a site where the turns of the tacit-explicit-tacit rhythm of skill can be acknowledged *as* turns, with their own distinctive significance, and where the body-to-body development of habitus is shown to be dependent on more conscious systems of habituation. Etchells notably opens *Certain Fragments* by recounting a similar experience of optative audience participation as, at an after-party in San Francisco, a couple of members of the audience decided to re-enact part of the show – and create 'the kind of performance we really dreamed of':

> I think we had always known that people in the audience often felt drawn to get up and join in with this very physical and probably dangerous bit of *Club of No Regrets* – you could see it in the twitches and energy of people in their seats – so it was really refreshing to see it finally happen. I mean I don't want to get *too* romantic about people going mad and smashing furniture to pieces to incredibly loud music, but that night there was definitely a line crossed. (1999: 15)

Others have used this kind of experience as the basis for broader dramaturgical statements. Crouch has given a description of *The Author* (2009), in which he notes that 'theatre is a place where the rules of engagement […] are pretty well formalised', such that any break from the convention of theatre-makers demonstrating 'technical ability to communicate a distinct form' is registered as shocking or transgressive (2011a: 419). Svendsen's desire to create a form for *World Factory* that simultaneously activated its audiences' agency while being a fixed, repeatable game structure in which they played a clear role (2016b). The works that I consider also telegraph their

6 See Hutton 2014, Vaughan 2014, and Catherine Love's contribution to Exeunt Staff 2014.

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reconstruction of Ingold's 'intransitive flow of animate movement' onstage in a variety of ways, coming to life from materials that would otherwise appear lifeless in their recorded or as-yet-unstaged forms (2011: 191). Creative decisions about how a pre-written text is punctuated can encourage new kinds of attention on the part of performers, forcing them to reconsider the terms on which they have been trained to act. The interaction between live and recorded media, whether in onstage presentations themselves or in the terms in which a theatrical performance is imagined, can force encounters between seeing a performance as the execution of pre-designed tasks and as the repeated rediscovery of what it means to achieve a task effectively. The alienating effects of labour, in the theatre and elsewhere, can be taken seriously as blockages to the lifelines of skilled engagement, even as the theatre can suggest means to recuperate and resist them.

Unlike Cornford, I have no experience as a director or dramaturg. I do not wish to argue too forcefully against the relevance of Ingold's theories for developing more successful rehearsal room practice – nor do I wish to argue against the vitality of Radosavljević's dramaturgy-led 'anything goes' approach to theatre-making. While, in one sense, my project is thus at some distance from the practical turn in theatre and performance studies within which Cornford locates his thesis, it is driven by a desire to reflect critically on the practices that contemporary theatrical forms expect of, or encourage in, their audiences. This is necessary because of the range of forms in which these performances have been recorded for analysis. Chapters 1 and 2 are informed primarily by the critical reading of scripts, supported in some cases by my experience of watching performances. Chapter 3 draws on some performance texts but, as Forced Entertainment have largely refrained from publishing such texts for projects since 2004, I place greater emphasis on live performances and their recordings archived in the British Library. Chapter 4 comes the closest to establishing a reciprocal relationship between my acts of critical reading and others' theatrical practice: as well as multiple experiences as an audience member, my discussion of *World Factory* draws on my role in helping to archive the research and rehearsal documents that contributed to the production. As an independent reader of these documents not involved in the rehearsals, my reading helped the theatre-makers to articulate a retrospective account of the process, which could be intelligible to the project's funders and readers of the published book of the game.

Having noted that the word 'theatre' shares an etymological origin with the word 'theory', Sennett argues that an audience member at a performance is 'an observer rather than […] a maker' and not 'engaged in a continual dialogue with materials' in the same way as a performer – but nevertheless admits that the audience 'developed their own skills of interpretation as spectators' (2009: 124-25). To explore what these 'skills of interpretation' might be, I am indebted to Nicholas Ridout's argument that 'an ethical work or event of art would be one which demanded a labour of critical thought for its ethical potential to be realised rather than offering

within itself anything of the ethical' (2009: 69). However, in keeping with my pragmatic critique of Ingold's embedded approach, what will remain open throughout this study is whether this 'labour of critical thought' needs to be understood as happening *outside* the rehearsal room or the auditorium, as a distinctive labour separate from practice as normally understood, or whether the two can occur simultaneously.

4. The radical critique of skill

The context for Ridout's statement is a more sceptical position on the role of practice in performance studies than Cornford's or my own. He worries that 'the present tendency to value practice over theory is a new form of what ethical theorists used to call "sentimentalism"', in which ethics is guaranteed by the immediacy of 'being there' and feeling that one is participating politically. His 'labour of critical thought' is necessarily external to the theatre (Ridout 2009: 64). This stance is a development of the argument from Ridout's first book, *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems*, an exploration of the constitutive 'wrongness of theatre', which modernist and contemporary experimental theatre-makers have sought to make visible: far from being a place where audiences and performers meet each other face to face and recognise each other's skilled engagement, the theatre of capitalist modernity is revealed as the place where 'one group of people spend leisure time sitting in the dark to watch other people spend their working time under lights' (2006: 6). Most of the theatrical work discussed in this thesis was produced after *Stage Fright*'s publication, some of it by practitioners who count Ridout as a colleague or collaborator – and the implications that its arguments have for their understandings of their practice are various. (Chris Goode can't be alone in finding the book 'sometimes dispiriting' reading for theatre-makers (2015: 85).) Crouch has expressed an 'old hippy' desire to develop plays that do not only 'confront' 'oppressive structures in traditional figurative theatre' but also build new forms of 'communal answerability' within the auditorium (2011a: 422), even as he has acknowledged and celebrated responses to his own plays, such as Helen Iball's, that highlight their ongoing troublesome complicity in dynamics of appropriation and entrapment (Crouch 2011b). Forced Entertainment provide a prominent case study for *Stage Fright*, and subsequent pieces by the company appear to be in conscious dialogue with it (cf. Ridout 2006: 130-31, 150-54). Yet, as the anecdote about the San Francisco performance attests, they are as invested in cultivating the theatre as a space in which new forms of friendship and sociality can be felt immediately as they are in exposing the bourgeois theatre's strategies for commodifying shared intimacy. From its research and development through to the publication of the book, the makers of *World Factory* remained fundamentally concerned with the nature of the actor-audience relations that they were establishing: the intention was always to expose the dynamics that underpin all service labour, linking industries such as retail and fashion back to theatrical acting, but also to encourage conversations between audience members which could have meaningful

political consequences. To inherit a term that Svendsen uses in her descriptions of the project, the performance could function as a 'synecdoche' for other kinds of public conversation (*WF* A1): representative of a 'labour of critical thought' that would necessarily occur outside the theatre, but also carrying out some of that labour in its own right. Regardless of their particular differences, all the theatre-makers that I consider come up against the fact that 'there is no unmediated relation to be found in the theatre' and that there is something ineradicably 'wrong' with theatre because of it (Ridout 2006: 15). In the previous section, I argued that a pragmatic uncertainty with these theatre-makers' relationship with theatricality, and an oscillation in their attitudes to mimesis, informed a certain pragmatism in their understanding of what it means to be absorbed in a skilled practice. However, this approach is tempered by a deeper sense that this pragmatism is somehow inadequate – and that a more aggressive discomfort with the theatrical situation, and with its ability to sustain ethical work while one dwells within it, is made manifest by a more forceful critique of skill as Ingold and Sennett define it.

The fissures within Sennett's own thinking about theatre become apparent when his treatment of it in *The Fall of Public Man*, on which Ridout draws for his conception of modernity (2006: 46), is compared with its briefer discussion in *The Craftsman*. I explained above that Sennett associates the loss of public culture with the loss of a theatrical contract in which the audience figured themselves as witnesses rather than spectators, performing their own skills in a reciprocal relationship with those of the performers onstage. In *The Craftsman*, this balance of skilled performer and skilled audience is also described as constitutive of the classical theatre '[b]y the time of Aristotle', but this balance is itself framed as a compensation for loss: the spectators' new 'skills of interpretation' are the mark of a lesser degree of engagement and arousal than they would have experienced in 'the archaic theatre', in which everyone 'danced and spoke, then retired to a stone seat to watch others dance and declaim'. Understanding and doing are framed as different kinds of skill, initiating the split between Arendt's *homo faber* and *animal laborans*. The workshop – and perhaps the democratic, workshop-inflected studio of Lecoq and Chekhov – remains the only place where this split did not fully happen, such that 'the workshop has a claim to make against the theatre' (Sennett 2009: 124-25). Sennett seems rhetorically caught between arguing that the collapse of craft needs to be recuperated, and identifying those places where the collapse never occurred. Both approaches, however, frame this conceptual collapse as something that needs to be worried about. Might a theatre which rejects the significance of this collapse, as something which theatre's 'wrongness' will never recuperate – which manages to lose the very loss of it – have a claim of its own to make against the workshop?

The rhetorical slippage is more prominent in Ingold's writing: he is prone to setting up binaries and leaving it unclear whether he is proposing a resolution to them, or the triumph of one side. An essay which distinguishes between a detached view of the environment as a globe and an

embedded one as a sphere concludes by noting that these views are not 'irrevocably opposed, and thus mutually exclusive' but are bound in 'dialectical interplay': Ingold simply feels that 'the contemporary discourse on the environment in the West […] continues to be dominated by global imagery associated with the triumph of modern and science technology', and should attend instead to 'local or indigenous cosmologies of engagement' as an alternative (Ingold 2000: 216-17). He opens *The Life of Lines* by admitting that there are 'blobs in the world', 'blobs' being his term for the detached or articulated 'material' which 'lines' join together, but that a greater consideration of lines themselves is needed to provide the grounds for 'life' (Ingold 2015: 3-4). He concludes the book by proposing how his approach to anthropology 'has the potential to transform our approach to the study of social life in all its traditional subfields' (154). He presents himself not only as an advocate for such an approach, but ontologically constituted by it. By using 'craftsmanship and song' as the foundational categories for describing human evolution, rather than their contemporary rationalistic decomposition into 'language and technology', the human is reconceived as 'a being whose verbal creativity and puzzle-solving is carried on within the context of involvement in a real world of persons, objects and relations' – and Ingold is 'indeed, such a being' and the product of this 'involvement' is *The Perception of the Environment* (2000: 293). Yet this attitude can only be achieved by denying the pragmatic sense that we oscillate between feeling embedded and detached. Ingold's decision not to acknowledge this double-bind could itself be a dereliction of an anthropologist's duty, as Philippe Descola has proposed:

> It simply inverses [sic] the common ethnocentric prejudice: it is no longer the animism of archaic peoples that appears as an incomplete version or a clumsy prefiguration of the true objectification of reality as Moderns establish it, but it is rather this very objectification that appears as a monstrous outgrowth dissimulating the truth of the primordial experience of the world, of which the hunter-gatherers, assisted by phenomenology, give us a better account. Yet, for anthropology, no ontology is better or more truthful in itself than another. Each of them must be examined not in terms of its plausibility or its moral virtues, of whether or not it authorizes a more authentic life or a more complete unveiling of its mechanisms, but for the variations that it manifests in regard to all the others in its manner of formatting our common experience of the world. (2013: 66)

Descola concedes that Ingold's attitude may be 'entirely legitimate as a philosophical profession of faith' or morality (66) – and this is why the application of his theories in dramaturgy is not contestable. Yet it has limitations for a theatre criticism which figures itself as a pseudo-ethnographic description of, and the beginnings of an ethical response to, the particular variant experiences that come together to suggest a 'common experience of the world' within a theatrical space.

Furthermore, Descola's description of Ingold as an inverted ethnocentrist, and as someone who looks to 'hunter-gatherers, *assisted by phenomenology*' for his example, suggests that Ingold's approach might have its own moral or political limitations. Ingold frequently attests that 'the opposition between the "West" and the "Other" has its source rather closer to home than we might have imagined': alongside the West's dominant 'commodity perspective', there can still be found, as 'a line of resistance', ways of living that are closer to those of hunter-gatherers, who retain a 'dwelling perspective' (2000: 337). We are capable, with the help of phenomenology, of knowing hunter-gatherers better than they know themselves. Ingold's rejection of universalising categories like language and technology is predicated on a desire not 'to populate the past with people like ourselves' (404) – but by swapping them in for categories like skill and song, he reinscribes that universality on different terms. Since Ingold concludes that hunter-gatherer social relations are not constitutive of society on the terms of contemporary political philosophy, the comparison of the commodity and dwelling perspectives can never be like for like. His generalisations about hunter-gatherers have been questioned by recent interventions in anthropology, drawing on archaeological evidence from the Upper Paleolithic Era and the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, to highlight that hunter-gatherers were as capable as the Moderns of 'multiple social strategies' and negotiating, consciously, between 'different social strategies in different contexts' such as changing seasons and locations (Wengrow and Graeber 2015: 602). It is as feasible to trace a connection from how a Nambikwara chief would negotiate a tribe's seasonal movement between foraging and horticulture to the negotiations of modern democracies, as it is from the entirely environmentally determined temporality of the Nuer pastoralists to the near-total absorption of a contemporary railway driver in the skills of his trade (Wengrow and Graeber 2015: 603-04; Ingold 2000: 324-25, 334-36). What becomes unimaginable within Ingold's account is the problem of fundamental differences between peoples and societies that informs Sennett's thinking on co-operation and dwelling in the wake of *The Craftsman*: Ingold's generalisations make it hard to see where his 'local and indigenous cosmologies' are local and indigenous *to*.

One further example of Ingold's ambiguous treatment of binaries will clarify the influence that it might have on a political aesthetics of performance. He proposes that modern industrialised subjects find themselves oscillating between the commodity perspective imposed by the conditions of capitalist labour and the dwelling perspective akin to hunter-gatherers' which the former has not been able to replace. The difficulty is that the commodity perspective, which provides one end of the pole, is itself subdivided:

> From one perspective there is free time and clock time, from the other all time is task-oriented. From one perspective there is work and leisure, from the other all life consists of tasks. From one there is creative art and the operation of

technology, from the other, skilled practices. And from one there are pure gifts and market contracts, from the other, socially situated prestations. (2000: 333)

Together, these binaries add up to a tension between an entirely coherent 'traditional state of affairs in which work is inseparable from life' and 'a modern condition in which every aspect of human life is split by a master dichotomy between freedom and necessity' (330). Yet this schema does not account for the parallax that comes into play when one attempts to describe the dwelling perspective from a contemporary position dominated by the modern perspective. Since there is no way to describe dwelling without setting it against the 'master dichotomy', one is left attempting to do so by finding ways to synthesise that dichotomy: the most common consequence of this is for the synthesised dwelling perspective to become indistinguishable from the rarer, more positive side of the commodity perspective. Ingold admits as much when he notes that, at least according to a certain 'rather Arcadian vision', hunter-gatherers *appear* leisurely or indolent because their tasks are not governed by clock time (336). When gifts return to Ingold's anthropology in his writing on lines, he subscribes to a Maussian view of the gift relation as the 'interpenetration' of particular individuals, who are not in service to a superordinate social or ritual order, which can continue for as long as they continue to give and receive: it can therefore be simultaneously free and necessary (2015: 10-11). According to Roger Sansi, this disguises the 'multiple contradictions and ambiguities' that become attached to the gift when it is isolated as a distinctive aspect of artists' practice (2015: 108). Many contemporary artists informed by Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics have framed their participatory projects as interactive gifts for their patrons, and do so as a way to offer 'alternatives to the market form' (Sansi 2015: 87). The role played by gifts in their thinking is analogous to that played by craft in Harvie's case studies: both are perceived as 'egalitarian' and cultivate the 'social relations of mutual responsibility' that neoliberalism erodes (Harvie 2013: 98). However, such an attitude relies (as it occasionally does for Harvie) on an overdetermined sense of the gift as 'free' or 'pure', whether taking its cue from the Romantic conception of the aesthetic as disinterested play, or the more transgressive intrusion of freedom suggested by Derrida and Bataille (Sansi 2015: 95, 101). They ignore the fact, highlighted by many anthropologists and sociologists (including Sennett), that economies of gift and skill can be structures of 'obligation, power and hierarchy' as ruthless as markets, and not necessarily inflected by freedom or intimacy (Sansi 2015: 103) – but Sansi notes that this ruthlessness can itself be overdetermined by anthropologists, and that collaboration with artists invested in the same concerns might allow nuance to be restored (12). Regardless, the gift as a neutral prestation appears impossible to pin down.

The significance of gifts and the work-leisure binary will recur throughout my case studies, but they serve as analogues for the one that unites them: the balance between technique and creativity in art practices which come together in the condition of *ars* or *technē*, and which

Ingold translates as 'skill'. Here, too, whenever this balance is applied in theatrical practice, the weight falls on freedom and spontaneity rather than structure and repetition: as noted in my opening section, Crouch, Etchells and Svendsen are all somewhat embarrassed at the prospect of associating their art with the patrician overtones of skill and craft. Even Cornford and the studio artists whom he cites, who work harder to keep both experiences in play, ultimately celebrate their synthesis insofar as it resembles freedom. Chekhov promised his students that discipline would bring them to a 'second feeling of freedom' (qtd. in Cornford 2012: 74); Peter Brook described his direction of the Experimental Group at the Royal Shakespeare Company as a series of 'exercises' that never came together to form a single dominant 'method' (qtd. in Cornford 2012: 341). There is a political risk to placing the weight on the side of order rather than freedom, and celebrating a micropublic in which the conditions for their synthesis are identified and adjudicated by a single powerful voice that speaks for the whole. Flashes of this become visible in Cornford's analysis of the historical studios, notably in the Nietzschean overtones of Chekhov's instructions for "The Actor's March" exercise: 'March around the room following a leader. You are strong, you are healthy, your hands and arms are free and beautiful, your legs are strong.' (qtd. in Cornford 2012: 79) Cornford highlights the risks of 'adopt[ing] the model of considering the individual theorists, all but a tiny number of whom have been white men'. His alternative is to develop a history of the studio as a collective institution, rarely driven 'from the top down' – but this risks allowing any particular identification of skill to dissipate, such that it becomes nowhere present but everywhere felt (2012: 361-62). When discussing the role that his ontology of corresponding lines might play in politics, Ingold, like Sennett, draws on Arendt and specifically 'the idea that the strength to act can come only from what others have lent us', in which leaders and followers in various contexts acknowledge their evolving dependency on each other as a gift relation (Ingold 2015: 156). It is all too easy – especially in 2018 – to see this relation fetishised, with the support of a particular group for a particular cause substituting for a more universal 'will of the people'.[7] Sennett's more melancholic reading of Arendt thus becomes essential. One of the ways in which contemporary theatre-makers attempt to manage the balance is to cultivate an image of, and a desire for, the utopian synthesis of freedom and necessity only to negate or dissipate it, declaring the theatre a fundamentally 'wrong' place in which to achieve it. Ridout's critical labour that begins with the end of the performance is the labour of living up to that failure.

This is why the traces of Benjamin in Sennett's trilogy deserve more emphasis than he gives them. Ingold is right that we should stop seeking a fixed origin point at which our distinctive capabilities were established, and the evolution of organisms gave way to the history of humans. But instead of using this to argue that evolution has never gone away, and that the

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[7] For an important recent study of the role played by overdetermined appeals to 'authenticity' in contemporary British literary and popular culture, which goes beyond the immediate remit of this thesis, see Kennedy 2018.

dwelling perspective of hunter-gatherers remains still to be cultivated, we should recognise that history is all that we can know: our belief in 'the childhood of man' in which a dwelling perspective was possible is a back-projection caused by our compulsion to identify an origin. History becomes the litany of inevitable failures to achieve the synthesis that the dwelling perspective apparently promises, the 'one single catastrophe' from which Benjamin's angel flees (2007: 257). *Kairos* can here acquire an alternative meaning to the one that Ingold emphasises. Instead of the defining moment within the continuous process of a skill, at which the practitioner changes the manner of their ongoing engagement in the flows of material, it is the moment of graced or Messianic intervention, at which time no longer seems 'homogenous or empty' because the present has entered a 'constellation' with an otherwise entirely distinct past (Benjamin 2007: 263-64). In neither of these cases can time be understood as proceeding sequentially, like the beads on a string – a simile that both Benjamin (2007: 263) and Ingold (2011: 53) employ. The difference is that Benjamin's temporality is not defined by the sustained participation of the subject in the flows of their environment, but their recognition of alienation from it. I described above how Miller's introduction to *Materiality* makes a distinction between approaches like Ingold's, which seek to erase the division between subjects and objects in favour of flows, and the pragmatic need to take the 'downward path' and discuss how the use of objects determines flows. *Materiality*'s final essay by Christopher Pinney proposes an alternative to both. To propose that subjects and objects are defined by their mutual ongoing construction of each other ultimately enshrines the subject: the object only ceases to be empty insofar as it acquires the meanings that come from its relation to the subject, the 'graspable qualities' that are articulated as 'biographies' or 'social lives' (2005: 259). While Pinney has the work of Arjun Appadurai and Nicholas Thomas in mind here, he could equally be describing Ingold's argument for a material culture in which '[t]o describe the properties of materials is to tell the stories of what happens to them as they flow, mix and mutate' (Ingold 2011: 30), a process that tellingly slips elsewhere into actively '*giv[ing]* the material a voice and *allow[ing]* it to tell its own story' (Ingold 2013: 31). The mark of a skilled practice is that an object becomes a tool, with which the practitioner works in harmony to develop a narrative of rehearsing, starting out, carrying on and stopping (Ingold 2011: 57). For an alternative approach, Pinney turns to Adorno and Kracauer whose work extends Benjamin's historical materialism: paraphrasing Kracauer's late work on history, he argues that time might be understood as 'cataracts', 'pursuing their own uncontemporaneousness in incoherent trajectories' that go beyond the processional (2005: 264). In the light of Frankfurt School critique, the material world in its flows, mixes and mutations is composed not of stories but of 'compressed performances' without necessary narrative coherence (Pinney 2005: 266) – stories that, in the words of one of Martin Crimp's protagonists, 'fell apart even as I was telling them' (Crimp 2015: 192).

Pinney's theory of materiality can be developed by taking his metaphor of performance more literally than he intends. Instead of seeing theatricality as the condition in which audiences become invested in a commodified, 'as if' version of the world in which we dwell, the contemporary theatre that I discuss brings to consciousness the conditions of simultaneous freedom and necessity that we expect dwelling to cultivate, only to find that neither the theatrical situation nor the world beyond fully meet the criteria to do so. The analyses that follow aim to show the range of ways in this failure can be highlighted: in some cases, the strategies of theatrical presentation and representation expose similar ways in which audiences are alienated from the wider world in which they apparently dwell; in others, a tentative condition of dwelling is developed within the auditorium, but is shown to occur at cost and may not be sustained outside the space. Regardless of their approach, they all, in words that Forced Entertainment have used to describe fellow theatre-makers they admire, 'dr[a]w lines from the stage to the world outside' (2016) – and, once this connection has been established, the pragmatic modification of Ingold's rhetoric of lines and absorption can retain some of its force. Rather than being a place in which a subject's perception of the environment becomes entwined with their action within it, the theatre is where actors' failure to develop action proper to their perception of the world becomes entwined with the audience's. Much recent writing on performance studies, including Ridout's, has emphasised the aesthetic or ethical significance of 'failure' within encounters like these (2006: 159, 163).[8] One of the aims of this thesis is to pay greater attention to *how* the experience of failure is recontextualised, multiply registered and socially shared. This experience is just one aspect of the wider questions that my case studies provoke by keeping 'skill' on their horizon of interests as much as 'failure': questions of whether and how tasks can be done well for their own sake, as Sennett and Harvie suggest; of whether and how gift economies can be sustained; of the role that skill might acquire in a postcapitalist or fully automated society.

Cornford's own writing has tacitly demonstrated the limits of Ingold's thinking to contemporary performance criticism. In a paper on Katie Mitchell's theatre-making practices, he describes her shows as constructed along 'life-lines', but lines that sustain complex onstage technological systems which respond to equally complex (and complicity-inducing) socio-political systems, to which he turns to Timothy Morton's *Hyperobjects* for an analogy (Cornford 2016a). This shift of emphasis overlooks the ways in which Morton's work resists the kind of embeddedness associated with Ingold, and which Morton condemns as 'ecophenomonology' (2013: 2, 18), as well as ignoring Ingold's corresponding condemnation of the object-oriented ontology of Graham Harman (Ingold 2015: 16). If Ingold is a 'phenomenological anthropologist' who mistakes himself for an ontologist, the theatre, where the boundaries between what is

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[8] For other relevant studies, see Chapter 3.

experienced and what is are put under artful pressure, might be the best place to trace those limits (Descola 2013: 65).

Critics seem largely to have overlooked the moment at which *A Series of Increasingly Impossible Acts* most distinctively reached and marked those limits. The tasks in the recurring obstacle course not only varied in the extent of their impossibility, but also in the extent to which their impossibility changed when other members of the company were able to give support. To take the three examples I listed above, balancing on the ball went from being possible with a certain level of training and preparation to trivially easy, as other members of the company could now hold them off the floor; licking one's own elbow similarly went from requiring the right body shape or level of dexterity to being no task at all, as someone else licked it; while bending the metal tube remained impossible regardless of who did it, every occasion provided an opportunity to demonstrate the same effort and techniques that could go into bending more pliable materials, reinforcing the fact that the impossibility lay with the affordances of the material not the actions of the performers. Each of these obstacles might thus be an opportunity for the company to tell a particular skill narrative, as they revealed the particular facets of the resistant objects on which they were working through the changing circumstances of their engagement with them and the localised moments of precision that the task required. The exception, however, was the penultimate act of the obstacle course (and thus, in its final iteration, the penultimate act of the entire show). The protagonist, and eventually the rest of the company, stared at a tyre lying flat onstage from a short distance; audiences will have readily understood that the proposed impossible task was to make the tyre move or levitate through telekinesis.[9] Yet it is never clear exactly what the task is, or what success in it might be, as no recognisable narrative of developing engagement can emerge as it can for the other tasks. In this moment, the onstage space becomes the fictionalised mode of engagement that Ingold accuses it of being. One might recognise that, surely, the performers know they cannot influence the tyre, and the question of whether or not they are doing their best to influence it or just pretending to becomes ridiculous. For some audience members, this recognition might encourage them to consider other ways in which the performers have been conserving effort all along, or have developed strategies to maintain distance from the tasks at hand, complicating the skill narrative apparently made transparent; going through the motions reappears in a performance that had apparently been driven by real effort. As the activity onstage becomes a matter of being still and just looking, they might in turn question the extent to which their own acts of being still and just looking throughout the show had constituted the engaged act of participation which the performance had promised it to be: did the sense of vicarious participation in the release of energy from "Proud Mary" act as a cover for my more fundamental distance from what the performers were doing onstage? Beneath the apparent

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[9] Reviewers who made this assumption include Bosanquet 2014, Gardner 2014, Lukowski 2014.

moral message of the performance's final moments – that sensitive collaboration makes anything possible, and that one can and should always become more open to others – lies a tougher underswell, the problem of acknowledging and living with our inevitable mutual failure to engage with others' lifeworlds as we attempt to build a common one. This problem is at the core of Sennett's sociology but plays a limited role in Ingold's anthropology. Recognising this complication might ultimately have been to the production's strength: by never quite equating the expression of skill in the production as a whole with its expression in performance, it guards against any potential for a paraphrasable message or structural principle to be isolated from the questioning and creative process that generated it; this moment of resistance, now for the performance's interpreters as much as the company, continues to provide the 'something' that needs 'shaping into something'.

5. Summary: within the 'turn to the crafts'

This introduction has proposed two sets of terms on which contemporary British performances could be seen as responding to Cornford's call for a 'turn to the crafts' within the theatre industry, despite not being products of the kind of studio structure that would most encourage this. According to the first, theatre-makers aim to maintain explicit allegiance to the values of the studio as far as possible: to develop conditions in which creative authority is not primarily associated with the author or director, who develop ideas put into practice by others, but is distributed across a range of participants, including ultimately audiences; in which every participant individually can understand themselves as executing technique, their abilities and potential to innovate honed through repetitive, disciplined practice; and in which, as a result, the whole performance comes to resemble a sustainable and sustaining environment, in which different forces come together in the service of 'Art' or 'the theatre', in which the emphasis is on process rather than product. However, these theatre-makers would also acknowledge that the current cultural and economic climate is such that institutions that could establish these conditions cannot be sustained, with Secret Theatre taking pains to be (and to show themselves to be) something of an exception. One of the most effective ways to promote changes to these conditions is to highlight the political and aesthetic virtues of performances made on these terms, and to gesture towards the inadequacy of the current situation for cultivating them: what is currently achievable by something like de Certeau's 'tactics' could, and should, be enshrined within institutions. Such performances can be described as propelling a 'turn to the crafts': they demonstrate what I have described as the pragmatic critique of Ingold's theory of skill, and embody Sennett's argument for the survival of skill when set against the context of his earlier work on the privatising effects of modernity and neoliberalism.

According to the other model, however, the studio is a structure that simply could not be achieved on terms adequate to those that it sets itself. It is best understood as utopian in the full sense of being nowhere achieved. The dream of perfect skill in which art becomes the expression of both 'freedom and necessity', and the expression of a community in which all individuals both feel liberated and part of a coherent social structure, cannot be sustainably realised: they rely on an understanding of dwelling, whether within society or the environment more generally, which has been rendered unsustainable, whether by modern capitalism or the revelations of the Anthropocene. Theatre made outside of studio conditions but seeking to cultivate their return is driven by 'cruel optimism' (Berlant 2011): it invests energy in seeking a dream of absorption and common life that it is structurally incapable of restoring, and which it could invest instead in alternative, less tacitly nostalgic political constructions. In more concrete terms, among the possibilities that overemphasis on skill and technique shuts down are avant-garde or punk gestures that are idea-driven rather than skill-driven, and which have been an important (if, I argue, historically mutable) component within Forced Entertainment's rhetoric. Another is the political argument in favour of increasing automation, or the expansion of the administered society, for broadly emancipatory ends: this has been marginalised since the collapse of Soviet communism, but METIS keep it within the range of possibilities that their productions imagine. Performances suggest these terms insofar as the harmony or absorption that skill is meant to provide is shown to be falsely co-opted, or is presented as an ideal that will vanish outside the theatre or cannot be sustained within it. They often place particular focus on the audience as subjects who can never contribute to a performance on the same terms as the other theatre-makers, because they relate to it as a commodity: their very presence exposes the ecology of the theatrical auditorium as one that can never be defined by dwelling. This is the resistance holding back the 'turn to the crafts', and which is undergirded by a radical critique of Ingold, as suggested by Pinney, Descola, Graeber and Wengrow, and the melancholic strain of 'bitterness and regret' within Sennett's writing.

This final point, that theatrical spectatorship constitutes a problem for versions of ecological thinking which rely on the primacy of dwelling, has applications beyond explicitly theatrical contexts. While this thesis's main emphasis is on setting ideas about skill and its politics as a context for interpreting contemporary British theatre-making, I also hope that it provides grounds for that relation to be reversed. A contemporary theatre which conspicuously frustrates boundaries between text and performance, or the dramatic and the post-dramatic, might be the most appropriate site in which to identify and interrogate how we should respond to other kinds of environment that resist our absorption and participation. To this end, I take up Ingold's assertion that the origin point at which a universal concept of history emerged from evolution, technology from skills and language from song is an imaginary one. But, rather than following Ingold and

taking it to mean that the arrival of history is a hallucination that can be relinquished, or critiquing him and insisting that evolution can only be seen through the lens of history, I propose that *the theatre is where this origin point is consistently imagined and reimagined*. Having surveyed my four case studies, my conclusion looks tentatively to the future, by asking what kinds of theatrical practice – as well as what kinds of critical writing about that practice – can best live up to this discovery that the theatre exposes skill as a construction, and to the political responses that such a discovery demands.

Chapter 1: Martin Crimp's songscapes

1. Between playwriting and theatre-making

The Secret Theatre show given most prominence in Cornford's published analysis thusfar is, notably, the only one to be devised, rather than an interpretation of a classic or commissioned text (Cornford 2015b). Given the wider context in which the company developed, it is unsurprising that it was judged to be the show that most distinctively expressed the company's values and promise (Bolton 2016: 343).[1] The company emerged from Holmes's ongoing dialogue with young directors and writers in the UK whose text-based work emphasised an effect of spontaneity, albeit spontaneity that could be recognised as the reward of effort and discipline. Bolton's analysis singles out Blanche McIntyre's 2013 production of *The Seagull* which kept some of its non-diegetic choreography 'very loose' so that performers could tailor details 'to how they feel according to that performance, in that moment', as well as an Ellen McDougall production which critics celebrated for being 'more like improv or a devised piece than scripted drama', and for giving the audience the status of active co-creators or 'co-conspirators' in the fiction (qtd. in Bolton 2016: 341-42). Both of these are expressions of Duška Radosavljević's vision of a theatre which is 'neither text- nor performance-led, but primarily dramaturgy-led' (2013: 191), in which 'the work's relationship with the audience seems to be more important that the formal division of labour itself' (23).

If this illusion of spontaneity in speech and movement is also the standard by which the naturalistic theatre of modernity, and its performance of authentic emotion, is judged, the context in which the illusion is received has changed. The bourgeois audiences that Sennett and Ridout analyse may no longer see themselves as identifying particular codified signs of virtuosity, but they still watch the performance from within a theatrical culture built around an idea of 'the text' as a common object through and on which multiple people work, in a manner that distinguishes and delimits their practices from each other and organises them into hierarchical relations. In such a culture, the text works to define the environment to which actors, designers and directors respond, and is in turn defined by its author's relationship with the social or literary context that constitutes its environment: spontaneity is achieved when each of these practitioners follows the expectations set by their environment as closely and smoothly as possible. This approach to text allows the theatre-making process to retain the vestiges of Sennett's workshop structure at an ideological level: theatre-making is a collaborative endeavour in which people engaged in diverse tasks are brought together by bonds of loyalty to the common tradition in which they are working, and thereby to each other; any divisions of power needed to organise the collaboration are consented to as means to this end.

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[1] Reviews which gave special emphasis or praise to *A Series of Increasingly Impossible Acts* in relation to the company's other productions include Stewart Pringle and Billy Barrett in Exeunt Staff 2014; Vaughan 2014; Trueman 2015.

The new spontaneity identified in contemporary performance is founded on recognition that the analogy no longer holds, as the bonds last only for the length of an individual job, and are ultimately sustained through contracts of employment – and such contracts require no shared loyalty to the practice itself. While common loyalty to craft could foster submission to the demands of others and of the material that was worked with, it could also legitimise dissent between practitioners and struggle with resistant materials in the name of developing the craft. Sennett gives the example of luthiers choosing not to inhabit their newly-refurbished shop on the terms that its architect had built for their ease, gradually adapting it in subtle ways to their bodily gestures (2013: 205), and of the tolerance for 'plain speaking' even in the hierarchically organised factories of postwar Japan (2009: 31). This capacity for dissent, and to alter the terms on which work is organised, is restricted within the neoliberal conditions of theatre programming and commissioning that Holmes sought to attack. For a production to appear spontaneous to critics alert to this restriction, it must show signs of having rediscovered this capacity to alter the structures by which creative work is made, to best suit the demands of both practitioners and materials. Radosavljević notes that, in her model of contemporary theatre-making, 'the creative process seems to be more important than the division of labour itself', and that this desire for individuals not to restrict themselves to a single skill emerges partly from the integrated practical approach of British university drama departments (2013: 22-23). It frequently becomes inappropriate to describe the text as an object initially composed skilfully by a writer, delivered skilfully by actors, and designed for and directed skilfully, nor for these to happen in a set chronological order. Instead, these skills may inform each other simultaneously, and all can be understood as *textual processes* without requiring a fixed object to mediate them. Bolton expresses something akin to this when she describes directors like McDougall and McIntyre as keen to demonstrate artistic 'ownership' over, and equality among, both 'the "script" of the dramatic play-text itself' and 'the seemingly immaterial "scripts" of theatrical tradition and convention' (2016: 342-43). Any performance text that is ultimately published for a show of this kind, whether intended for performance again or not, is a record of textual processes, albeit a layered and uneven one in which some processes are more legible than others.

The broad strokes of the transition that Radosavljević traces between the established Anglo-American hierarchy and the new 'theatre-making' approach resemble the difference between what I have termed the pragmatic critique of Ingold's anthropology, an approach which is willing to give more space than him for detached reflection on elements of the material world *as* objects, and his own, more fully vitalist expression of it. When it is imagined as a common object on which different artists work in different ways, according to their range of abilities and limitations, the need to emphasise the commonness of the object becomes more important than attention to the particular qualities of each kind of work. 'The text' can be spoken of in the abstract, as a medium that provides the basis for creative interaction to happen, like the pre-ordained 'materiality' of the object that

precedes any discussion of its properties (2011: 20), or Emile Durkheim's principle of a superorganic social contract that underpins any particular exchanges (2015: 9-10). Radosavljević's gesture is, like Ingold's, a refusal of unnecessary abstraction. The process of making a performance is nothing other than the sum total of all the practices that went into its production, the system that Ingold would call its 'taskscape'; collaboration only exists insofar as it is reinstated each time practitioners interact, like the participants in a Maussian gift exchange, rather than being shored up by an underlying structure (2000: 325). A text which is 'already there', in the words of the Secret Theatre ensemble, before it enters the rehearsal room and is merely 'fix[ed]' incrementally by being marked, cut, learned by heart and edited for publication, is the product of an act of *making*: it is inanimate until it is brought back to life by acts of performance or analysis. The alternative is to see the material text as *growing* or *being woven*, alongside the performance, and indeed the ensemble of practitioners who develop it. It both expresses that growth and depends upon it, like fruit on a vine or a pattern within a tapestry. The different texts produced and reproduced during the theatre-making process, including those that ultimately document it, can be described as 'punctuat[ing] but not terminat[ing]' the process (2000: 347-48). Such an attitude would mean that the difference between *A Series of Increasingly Impossible Acts* and Secret Theatre's scripted shows was one of degree rather than kind; it would also be truer to the etymological origins of the word 'text' in weaving.

In papers given since *Theatre-Making*, Radosavljević's arguments have taken an Ingoldian shape in other ways. Employing ideas from American media theory, she has suggested that, as the development of digital technologies marks the closing of the 'Gutenberg parenthesis' dominated by the printed text, orality rather than textuality will become the dominant mode through which theatre-makers see and practise their craft. She notes the rise at recent international festivals of 'gig theatre' and storytelling performances, in which the performer's prowess for remixing or spontaneously composing the text is privileged. The 'communal storytelling characteristic of a pre-literate era' is likely to become more and more important (2016a). Such a change of attitude acknowledges, and was made possible by, the importance of 'orality studies' – incorporating both the art of rhetoric and the ethnographic study of oral cultures – within the version of disciplinary Performance Studies that emerged at Northwestern University in the 1980s (2013: 105). Radosavljević is sensitive to the fact that this transition might not be as symmetrical as the metaphor of a parenthesis suggests, but her argument, in its crudest form, mirrors Ingold's as framed by Descola: a culture that locates authority in writing and print culture is imagined to be an outgrowth from more fundamental oral practices, which can and should be returned to. Her intervention is an important means to expand the field of what practices might be involved in making or influencing theatre, particularly from among previously marginalised cultures – but, like Ingold's, it risks generalising those that the West has othered, and erasing those elements of oral performances which are always-already dependent on practices of writing or inscription, and *vice versa*, practices which might go unacknowledged because

they are so fully absorbed. A more nuanced understanding of how orality and textuality relate to each other might lie within Ingold's approach to evolutionary theory. Summarising debates about whether music emerged from speech or *vice versa*, Radosavljević implicitly states a preference for the proposal that they have a common ancestor, named 'musilanguage' by Steven Brown (2013: 106). Ingold would describe this search for an origin as another abstraction, which avoids recognising that speech and song continue to exist on a continuum (2000: 410). Our urge to separate them is a result of the construction of language as a discrete conceptual system, itself a consequence of the idea that writing was invented to record speech (412). Just as speech and song should be seen as moveable feasts on a continuum of meaningful acts of linguistic and non-linguistic sound-making, writing should be seen as one of many embodied acts on a parallel continuum of different forms of socialised inscription, such as mapping or choreography, which André Leroi-Gourhan termed 'graphisms': language occurs whenever the two continua intersect (Ingold 2000: 403). Radosavljević is alert to the need for these nuances, suggesting that one alternative to the symmetrical closure of the parenthesis is that we are entering Walter Ong's age of 'secondary orality', in which live speech is augmented and mediated by technological devices some of which take over some of the functions of writing (2016b: 17).

If Radosavljević is seeking out a broad framework in which to account for the new conditions into which we are transitioning, my research is a more fine-grained investigation of how two contemporary playwrights' approaches to text and authority are expressions of this moment of transition. The parenthesis might be closing, but we are still (in Thomas Pettit's words) 'lying athwart' it, and it is still unclear whether what is developing is an alternative attitude to textuality rather than its departure (2016b: 17). Bolton is right to emphasise that the traditions and conventions that 'structure and inform the interpretation and realisation of play-texts' are only 'seemingly immaterial', but the specific terms on which the text remains recalcitrantly material deserve attention: both the manner in which it expresses a playwright's compensated material labour, and the more mundane sense that texts are physically manipulated, marked and edited in the process of generating a performance in which they are rarely present onstage (2016: 342-43). Drawing on both 'colloquial and philosophical' understandings of materiality, as Miller invites us to, is a useful way into appreciating the similar range of conceptual pressures that might be placed on constructions of skill in those contemporary theatre productions that still count text as their material (2005: 4).

To explore this issue, this chapter and the next develop the first sustained comparison of the playwriting practices of Martin Crimp and Tim Crouch. I choose them partly because they are fairly unusual among contemporary British playwrights in that a clear trajectory of formal thinking is visible as their careers have developed. In Crimp's case, my interest is principally in the recurring properties and concerns of *Fewer Emergencies* (2005), *The City* (2008), *Play House* (2012) and *In the Republic*

of Happiness (2012), with occasional comparisons to earlier work.[2] In Crouch's, I am interested in how the practices developed for *My Arm* (2003) and *An Oak Tree* (2005) come under pressure in *ENGLAND* (2007), *The Author* (2009) and *Adler and Gibb* (2014). Although both men have also carried out writing projects which lie outside this trajectory, or constitute a trajectory largely of its own – Crimp as a translator and librettist, Crouch as a playwright and adaptor of Shakespeare for young people – one gets the rare sense that the primary stimulus for each new play is to extend, or test the formal limits, of previous ones. I also wish to explore the implications of a number of strikingly precise, and apparently coincidental, points of resemblance between their plays, in relation to some of my areas of interest. The most readily quotable concerns the closing stage directions of *The City* and *An Oak Tree*:

> *The Girl begins to play the Schubert movement heard in Scene iii. She sets off confidently but gets stuck at bar 3. She starts again but is soon in difficulty. The lights begin to fade. She can't get beyond bar 4.* (Crimp 2015: 194)

> *The music* [having been 'a flawed rendition', 'faltering but ambitious', until this point] *passes through into the First Variation* [from Bach's *Goldberg Variations*], *which plays forcefully through to an end.* (Crouch 2011c: 106)

Both authors' decision to end a play by conspicuously staging an attempt at playing a piece of music expresses their own investment in experimental writing as a sustained mode of theatrical practice, and what it means to conduct such a practice well. The subtle differences between their endings is a consequence of the differences in how they negotiate the theatrical ecologies in which they operate.

Crimp plays a less substantial role than Crouch in Radosavljević's *Theatre-Making*, for understandable reasons: he remains a limit case within the established Anglo-American model more than an alternative to it. After graduating with a literary degree from Cambridge, Crimp made his name as a dramatist over the course of the 1980s and 1990s through long-term connections with the Orange Tree and subsequently the Royal Court, two London theatres associated with the production of 'new writing'. Aleks Sierz, who has sought to claim 'new writing' as Britain's 'traditional national form' (2011: 25), has been quick to claim Crimp for it – even while he acknowledges that Crimp, and many writers like him, trace their influence more from an experimental, continental and 'performance-led' theatre practice which finds one origin in the Royal Court's production of *Waiting for Godot* than from the 'pragmatic', literary one which stems from *Look Back In Anger* (43-44). Similarly, Dominic Dromgoole has identified Crimp as a rare maker of 'formal European experiments' who is still grounded in 'attention to truth' and, crucially, 'astonishing skills of

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[2] Dates in parentheses (as for all productions except METIS's) are of first full public performances. The three individual plays of *Fewer Emergencies* were written between 2001 and 2005. "Face to the Wall" was given a production in 2002, alongside which texts of both it and "Fewer Emergencies" were published.

draughtsmanship' with contemporary speech, metaphors which the playwright himself has taken up to describe his discrete personal practices (2000: 62-63). Crimp himself has sought to distance himself from identification as a European playwright, and from too specific a connection with 'European philosophy' (Angelaki 2012: 6). But the need to make these apologies only highlights the extent to which Crimp is well-regarded in Europe, with texts such as *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino* (2013) still unproduced in the UK and unpublished in English, and has suited the approach of *auteur* directors: in a series of mutually 'enriching' collaborations with Katie Mitchell, he has found another 'highly individual yet complementary' practitioner (Angelaki 2014: 311), who makes the authoritative 'process of wrighting a play embedded in the heart of […] directing practice' equally visible (Haydon 2013: 83). He is also an important case study for Liz Tomlin's argument that the division between 'new writing' like his and the 'performance theatre' of a company like Forced Entertainment is becoming a false binary, insofar as both are informed by the deconstruction of such marks of good theatrical writing as coherent character and narrative (2013: 63).

In the analysis that follows, I emphasise an aspect of Crimp's writing which exemplifies but also complicates one of the trends that Radosavljević identifies among contemporary theatre-makers: the rise of appeals to 'musicality'. She cites a range of practitioners who compare playwriting to composing for instruments, actors' intelligence to musicians', or ensembles to orchestras, in order to highlight the values they admire. For David Roesner, musicality is associated with a 'general expressive capacity' that frees the theatre-maker from meeting specific, disciplined benchmarks; for Adriano Shaplin, it is a model of 'working together'. She notes that 'none of these writers are particularly interested in social realism, although their work is frequently political' – and that this impulse may be a manifestation of a wider return to orality, to a situation in which writing for performance is 'no less a genre of music than it is a genre of literature' (Radosavljević 2013: 107-10). As well as writing texts for opera and having wider musical experience of his own, Crimp performed piano accompaniment for the first performance of "Face to the Wall" (later incorporated into *Fewer Emergencies*) in 2002 and has used musical metaphors to describe his practice.[3] Yet, on the frequent occasions in which music or song appear in his (non-operatic) works, the relation between them and the surrounding use of language or speech, as well as the politically coercive uses to which songs can be put, are exposed to critical attention. Drawing on Ingold's coinage of 'taskscapes', I describe the worlds of Crimp's theatre as *songscapes* – environments that gain their distinctive qualities, at the level of both mimesis and diegesis, by the manner in which they balance language and song – and interpret their construction as an expression of his thinking about the relations between writer, other artists and audience in the contemporary theatre. To organise this analysis, I adapt a division that Crimp has identified within his own *oeuvre* (and which Dan Rebellato has, rightly, acknowledged as

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[3] The Artistic Director of the Orange Tree Theatre notes that 'Martin used to conduct a choir […] and his musicality was always a hugely important part of his work' (Walters 2014:412).

not 'a wholly secure distinction') between plays that 'dramatize stories' and those that 'dramatize the telling of stories' (qtd. in Rebellato 2014). Tracing the boundary between dramatised stories, in which characters are represented as responding to music, and those that dramatise the telling, which present songs as modes of narration, will be essential to identifying an affirmative ethics beneath the satire in Crimp's texts.

2. The soundtrack to deskilling

Among Crimp's plays which build more conventional fictional worlds, *The City* is neither the first nor the last to end with music. In the closing stage direction of *Play With Repeats* (1989), the staff at a factory '*surrender to the relentless optimism of the music*', including the senior manager Franky who puts it on for them. The music provides a way to get back to work, to show that 'we're managing', despite the mental health difficulties a number of them face and the fact that their middle manager, the play's protagonist Tony, was killed in the preceding scene (Crimp 2000: 272). More recently, *In the Republic of Happiness*'s final moments see Uncle Bob forced to sing a '100% happy song' by his wife, Madeleine. Madeleine had earlier insisted 'I haven't said you have to say anything, you can say what you like', and the second stanza of the song itself goes 'We make up the words as we go along / each word is right / nothing we sing is wrong', all of which belies the fact that Madeleine prompts Bob with lyrics throughout (Crimp 2015: 347, 356-57). The tune itself is '*half music, half machine*', and produced apparently automatically by '*a small glittering box*' (356). The Girl's failed recital at the end of *The City* is the culmination of that play's anxious exploration of issues of practice and rehearsal. She had previously been seen reciting limericks, including two about performance and conducting, to her father, Christopher (171). Their next-door neighbour Jenny, who remains eerily dressed identically to the Girl throughout, had earlier described her own experience of playing the piano, which she 'took [...] quite seriously as a child':

> [A]lthough I can get all the notes and understand just how intensely the composer must've imagined it, there's no life to my playing. Emotionally it's dead. [...] I'm not saying that if you heard me in the street on a summer's day when I had the windows open you wouldn't think 'Oh – exquisite.' But if you stopped and began to listen – began to really really listen – then the expression on your face would turn – oh yes – believe me – to dread[.] (151)

In each of these cases, the pleasant affective state that music is meant to generate – 'relentless optimism', life rather than mere exquisiteness, happiness and liberty – is appealed to but either not experienced by the characters or framed ironically for the audience. There appears to be such a virtue as *musicality*, which is best realised in musical performance, but which not all actually existing music attains.

This appeal is similar to the one that Ingold argues is made for music within 'Western modernity': music is 'meaningful not because of what it represents, but simply because of its affective *presence* in the listener's environment'; this situation has come about because 'a movement of analytic *decomposition*' has broken music away from language, as codified by post-Saussurean linguistics (Ingold 2000: 408). Language is understood as a rational, 'conventional' engagement with the world, rather than music's affective and endlessly 'novel' one, through a decontextualizing process of sign-making: thought is encoded into words before being 'performed', whether by being spoken aloud or written, and finally decoded by an interpreter, who deletes the incidentals of performance to arrive at a thought identifiable with the original one (Ingold 2000: 399, 408). Language perversely provides the more appropriate model for how music actually gets made within the worlds of these plays. Madeleine's description of the hundreds of citizens being 'moulded *by* me *through* you *inside* each skull *by* the sound of each thrilling syllable of our hundred-per-cent happy song' figures communication as the abstractable, sequential interaction of discrete agents (Crimp 2015: 353, my emphases). Both this song and the background music from *Play With Repeats* are explicitly produced by mechanical means, and thus literally the expression of a predetermined code. Even piano playing is presented in *The City*, alongside poetry recital and habits of dress, as a disciplined practice which has to be instilled in children through regimented actions that restrict their creative play, until such restrictions become internalised, as they apparently have been by Jenny. In *The City*, these practices are linked to the underlying ones of writing and reading, which are more explicitly associated with coercion. Just before The Girl's performance, it is revealed that all the characters represented onstage are unsatisfactory inventions by her mother, Clair. A story from Clair's diary, read aloud by Chris in a voice which is as childishly faltering and '*oblivious*' as his daughter's playing, describes how she set out to visit 'the city inside of' her only to find it wrecked and uninhabited:

> I invented a child too, I was quite pleased with the child. But it was a struggle. They wouldn't come alive. They lived a little – but only the way a sick bird tortured by a cat lives in a shoebox. It was hard to make them speak normally – and their stories fell apart even as I was telling them. (193)

Writing, rather than being an expression of one's presence within a world, has to become a means of consciously – and tortuously – representing a preconceived idea of that world.

Music and language thus join the other binaries that characterise Ingold's conception of the contemporary commodity perspective: they line up, respectively, with creativity and mere technique, play and work, free gift and market exchange, freedom and obligation. Yet, in Crimp's plays, musical performance exposes the contradictory conceptual burdens that are placed on the first, more benign member of each pairing. Music, gifts and so on are the exception to the governing logic of the

commodity perspective that is necessary for the commodity to be recognised as such, but they are also the traces of an alternative dwelling perspective which has become less visible. Were it to become more visible again, it would be impossible to see the difference between the members of each pairing: play and work would meet in task-orientation, gift and commodity in prestation, music and language in song or originary 'musilanguage'. Ingold does not provide a specific term, however, for the reconciliation of individual spontaneity with a sense of obligation, which seems to characterise successful ensemble theatre-making in the eyes of Radosavljević's case studies and the Secret Theatre company – and this would explain their reach for musical metaphors. Crimp's characters also use music to signify this political harmony, to suggest an environment which is the fullest expression of, rather than just a backdrop for or the sum of, the agents or actions within it. Music will supposedly create conditions in which the workers in *Play With Repeats* can identify with their labour, and Bob can unite 'those hundreds and hundreds of gleaming eyes' that are apparently facing him into a new, happy republic (Crimp 2015: 353). The fact that such atmospheric management might work to exclude as much as to include subjects is highlighted in the fourth scene of *Play House*. The young couple who are the play's only characters dance to music, '*completely absorbed in each other*' (205). They attempt to ignore the doorbell, only finally to break off the dance and attend to the ambivalent feelings of someone outside their absorption. This interruption is tellingly carried out by another telegraphed act of reading aloud:

> 'Dear neighbours, when I listen to you dancing or hear you make love, I so want to dance with you or make love too. You see you cannot imagine how –' What's that word?
>
> – 'Unimaginably'.
>
> – ' – imagine how unimaginably'? – 'You cannot imagine how unimaginably hurt and – (*Turns card.*) lonely I am. But I am not asking for your pity. No. Do not pity me. I just need you to know that I exist and think your lives must be beautiful. Ian.' (206)

Crimp's ersatz or interrupted songs should be read as a subversion of Ingold's orientation towards harmony: the reason that there is no word to describe the balance of freedom and necessity might be because it cannot be sustained. The commodity perspective, as symbolised by language, has encroached upon the dwelling perspective to such an extent that musicality survives only as false consciousness, concealing the structures which ensure that the commodity perspective is sustained. While Ingold is adamant that modern humans continue to find spaces to dwell, even in the workplace, insofar as they acquire 'skills of coping' with the concrete material properties of their productive system, he concedes that 'home is often a profoundly uncomfortable place to be' (2000: 332). Skill may be 'destined to carry on for as long as life does, along a line of resistance' – but this does not give

due attention to the fact that the closure of the particular lines can feel like a death to the dwelling subject who has been pursuing them (2011: 62). He concedes that the particular association of dwelling with 'the domestic domain' and with the tasks of housework and child-raising are 'destined to disappear in due course' to be dispersed elsewhere, but an alternative interpretation of this transition would be to see it as an equally inevitable encroachment of the commodity perspective into family life. It is not that the housewife used to be 'formally in command of her own working capacity' or that her work was ever '*not* done under external imposition', but that this imposition, and capitalism's dependence on patriarchy, are now becoming transparent (2000: 330-31). While Crimp's writing has always engaged both with conditions of work under late capitalism and with the violence latent in domestic exchanges, the two concerns have become particularly clearly connected in recent work: *The City* is notably a play entirely set in a suburban home in which almost all the conversations between its three adult characters concern their jobs. *In the Republic of Happiness* begins with a section entitled "The Destruction of the Family", in which that destruction is partly registered by a speech in which a grandmother defines herself purely in terms of the disposable income that she is now capable of spending on her own happiness. She foresees a future in which the very impulse to sustain dwelling through social and sexual reproduction is resisted altogether: we might throw off the need to keep 'churning out more of the same' in the name of being 'a new kind of magnificent human being who may not even be human at all' (2015: 282).

The affect of musicality remains nebulous in these theatrical worlds because it can no longer be grounded in the practice of performing music skilfully: a practice in which there should be no distinction between playing the piano with technical precision and playing it with 'life'. This is one expression of a world in which the affects associated with skill are no longer grounded in the material conditions that encourage skilled labour. This is the central argument of Sennett's *The Corrosion of Character*, which Crimp has acknowledged as an influence on *The City*, although ideas from both this book and *The Craftsman* are anticipated by plays which he wrote before the publication of either (Angelaki 2012: 33-35). *The Corrosion of Character* argues that Fordist and post-Fordist labour betray both the established eighteenth-century conceptions of the sustainable relationship between work and moral character: Denis Diderot's vision of the worker who achieves identification with their labour by embedding themselves within its repetitions 'just as a musician learns how to manage time in performing a piece of music' (Sennett 1999: 34), and Adam Smith's connection of moral sympathy to the capacity to break from routine to respond to unexpected environmental stimuli (37). Fordist labour, *pace* Ingold, alienates blue-collar workers from their labour, but sustains a false consciousness of their embeddedness: hence Tony insists that his job is skilled even though that skill is fitting coils in loudspeakers, in the service of music's technological mediation (Crimp 2000: 207). The post-Fordist, white-collar jobs characteristic of Sennett's 'new capitalism' build on Smith's insistence upon the breaking of routine, but at the expense of routine as a background, placing the emphasis instead

'on sheer change' (Sennett 1999: 47). The only way to dwell within such conditions is to be able to make sheer change the grounds for personal identity, 'positioning oneself in a network of possibilities rather than paralyzing oneself in one particular job' or social role – a condition which looks superficially like skill, and might qualify in Ingold's attenuated sense of embodied coping within a hostile environment (62). What is lost in such conditions is the capacity to develop a narrative of how one's relationship with the workplace changes, something which the redundant IBM programmers whom Sennett interviewed only regained in slow, regular conversations with him (132-35). Christopher, the character in *The City* who is most clearly modelled on Sennett's case studies, fails to generate a 'current' or 'flow of speculation' about his own abilities (Crimp 2015: 142-43). This failure shows that he is as dependent on keeping to restricted, externally-authorised practices as Tony, both in the managerial position that he loses and in the supermarket butcher's post that he acquires. As well as being technologically mediated – the first sign that his position is under threat is that his office swipe card has stopped working – these impositions are often figured as inscriptions upon him: a more successful colleague is capable of 'printing herself onto people's minds' (142), and his humiliation is signalled first by having to wear a name-badge at work (187). At the end of *The City*, Crimp fiercely denies Christopher the capacity to narrate his life, as Christopher struggles to read aloud a narrative that eradicates the claim that any of the characters have to independent identity.

The other metaphor that Diderot famously uses to describe the labourer invested in their routine is the actor's capacity to 'plumb the depths of a part by repeating the lines again and again' (Sennett 1999: 34). Does Crimp's exploration of deskilling extend beyond his fictional characters to the performers in his plays? He invites consideration of this in *Play With Repeats* when Tony pointedly tells an actress that her job, unlike his, involves 'repeating a part' without 'making decisions', oblivious to the fact that he is being played by an actor in a conspicuously cyclical play (2000: 185). Crimp has been content to describe himself in interviews as a 'satirist' rather than a 'moralist' (qtd. in Sierz 2013: 142), and one might argue that the aim of gestures like these is to expose the phenomenon of the deskilled actor, of which audiences may otherwise be as unaware as Tony or Christopher. Far from being 'different every night', the condition of many actors in large-scale commercial drama is 'to replace a missing worker, accomplish their required tasks, and assemble the product without missing a beat, interrupting the flow, or disturbing the rest of the machine' (Russell 2003: 57): whatever sense of higher freedom a sustained training regime inculcates, the demands of the commodity perspective will inevitably encroach upon it. If Tony's conception of the actor aligns with the fate of Sennett's factory worker, Crimp's most recent satirical presentation of himself as a writer, in his preface to the latest edition of his collected plays, is of someone who has managed to embrace neoliberalism's erosion of the boundary between work and leisure in favour of a generalised dexterity or 'flow of speculation'. He offers an extended, apparently spontaneous paraphrase of Roland Barthes's "The Writer on Holiday" ('forgive me – I don't have the book in front

of me'), in which he acknowledges that stories of the writer going on an 'ordinary' holiday are designed to trick the reader into astonishment that the writer is still working on 'new forms for fiction and […] new kinds of theatre that the theatre world is so evidently agog for' – and the fruits of this trick leave him, in retrospect, both 'ashamed' and 'proud' (Crimp 2015: vii-viii).

This imbalanced division of labour, in which any claim to skill is lost on either side, becomes particularly visible in *Attempts on Her Life*, the first, highly influential text by Crimp in which storytelling is dramatised rather than story itself. Sennett notes that the postmodern novel has become the dominant model of contemporary narration, rather than the kind of developing life story which the IBM workers tell about themselves, because it celebrates '[a] pliant self, a collage of fragments unceasing in its becoming, ever open to new experience'. The disjunctive nature of *Attempts on Her Life*, makes it a theatrical analogue for such novels: its mutually contradictory accounts of a person or object called Anne (or Ani or Anuschka) resemble Sennett's 'life narrative [that] appears as a collage' (1999: 133). It denies actors many of the trajectories by which written material can be easily translated into the coherent or virtuosic performance of character, honed by the training regimes associated with Anglo-American naturalism. In its place, Liz Tomlin has described its production of characters as 'citational', telegraphing the way in which all linguistic and gestural actions are capable of being recontextualised and necessarily have origins external to the text being read (2014: 374). This is made particularly clear through Crimp's idiosyncratic use of 'punctuation and typography', too briefly discussed by Sierz (2013: 122-25). *Attempts on Her Life* contains a section of script written in advertisers' small print and another featuring ™ signs (2005: 239, 241-43). As well as forcing actors to deliver or embody signs for which there is no convention of onstage representation, commercial paratexts such as these designate forms of larger-scale structural power which even the individual writer is at the mercy of, interrupting the authorship that the rest of a text might work to render coherent. This is a model of communication which resembles Ingold's conception of language divorced from song, in which particular codified meanings are selected and put '"on line" for mechanical execution' in appropriate contexts, rather than being discovered within the experience of their execution (2000: 399).

As with much satirical writing, it can sometimes be hard to say whether Crimp's work is 'too caught up in the structures it looks at to be able to critique them', and requires an audience already primed to be alert to its irony (Clements 2014: 338). This has often been raised in relation to the objectification of women and the representation of sexual assault in plays such as *The Treatment* (1993) and *Attempts on Her Life*, but may equally apply to the division of theatrical labour. While his plays have never been produced on a scale that generates the worst excesses of neoliberal show business, the model of actors fulfilling tasks initially set by a script was the one that Crimp began writing to, and appears to remain his default. Crimp continues to prefer to develop complete drafts of

texts before rehearsals, and to workshop interpretations of the script rather than the script itself.[4] Unlike the plays to be considered in Chapter 2, there are no substantial changes made to the texts for the collected volumes assembled after first productions.[5] This is a model Crimp inherits from his musical experience:

> At the [start of my career], I'd seen very little theatre. So when I started at the Orange Tree, I saw a text as a musical score. And I expected people just to get on with it – and do the music. […But] obviously actors are more complex than that, they need more than musicians do. With a musical score, if it says *forte* and someone says *piano*, it's easy to correct, but acting is more complicated, and the more experienced you get, the more you realise that perhaps *piano* might be a better choice than *forte*. (qtd. in Sierz 2013: 87)

Crimp has increasingly taken on additional creative roles in the theatre-making process: providing piano accompaniment for the first production of "Face to the Wall" in 2002; performing *Blue, glimmer*, a text to accompany an art installation by Antoni Malinowski in 2009; directing *Play House* and a revival of *Definitely the Bahamas* (1987) in 2012. Nevertheless, in a text described by its editor as 'playfully challeng[ing] the opposition between director and writer' raising all these examples, Sierz continues to describe Crimp in mock-mythic terms as 'The Writer': he emphasises his surprise at instances in which a movement director and 'The Composer' are allowed to be as important as 'The Writer' (2014).

Near the start of the piece, Sierz describes how his realisation that *Attempts on Her Life* was an 'open text' led him to two conclusions: 'if the writer is king then an open text is an abdication' and 'if the writer can get away with not knowing what he's doing, the director certainly can't'. Later, discussing Mitchell's 2007 revival of *Attempts on Her Life*, he notes that 'only the director has the power to deliver a really big production' of plays of this kind (2014). This in turn inspires two conclusions of my own about Sierz's assumptions, which apply more generally to discussions of recent 'open texts' for theatre: that the writer of such a text has to make a show of surrendering authority, and that the authority must become identifiable with another individual artist. Dan Rebellato and Emilie Morin, who have both written about the trend towards indeterminacy in recent British drama (incorporating discussion of individual plays by both Crimp and Crouch among others'), still keep to these broad principles. Through strategies such as not specifying the number or identity of speakers of a text, or not identifying a setting or specifying it as 'blank', Morin argues that

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[4] See Cooke 2014: 410-11 for an account of Crimp's role in initial workshops for *In the Republic of Happiness*.
[5] One exception to this principle is that Crimp reconsidered and removed an opening stage direction, which notably emphasises a division of theatrical labour into acting and design, from the collected text for *Attempts on Her Life*: 'Let each scenario in words – the dialogue – unfold against a distinct world – a design – which best exposes its irony.' (qtd. in Sierz 2013: 50).

texts bestow 'opportunities' and authority on figures other than the writer (2011: 78), whose own discrete 'intention' (if it can ever be identified) goes unrealised (82) – but it remains, for example, Sarah Kane's decision to leave certain aspects of *Crave* (1998) 'unscripted' or 'partially indeterminate' (74). For Rebellato, the structuralist 'death of the author' may allow for the identification of new 'author functions' executed by non-writers, but it also simply allows the agency of the author to become more subtle: to give the option that a scene may be cut, as Crimp does in the script to *Attempts on Her Life* is to give 'the subsidiary implication […] that *no other scene may be omitted*' (2013a: 22-24).

Crimp's selection of Roland Barthes's '*Il n'y a aucune bienveillance dans l'écriture, plutôt une terreur*' as the epigraph for his translation of Molière's *The Misanthrope* (1996) now becomes particularly significant (2005: 96). Far from cultivating an 'anything goes' attitude, the structures of power associated with writing are troublingly ineradicable: insofar as writing is still framed as a distinctive skill that precedes performance, interventions by other practitioners carry the trace of dissent against an established authority, rather than the spontaneous negotiations by which authority is established. Freedom can only be registered as a resistance against or release from the prescribed modes of being that shape the commodity perspective. Crimp's, and others', interpretation of his plays as satirical leans into such a reading – but, particularly in the 'open texts' that follow *Attempts on Her Life*, another interpretation becomes possible, if we take Rebellato's cue to read that play as 'the most typical play in the world' as well as 'a strikingly influential innovation in dramaturgy', in that texts always underdetermine the worlds they represent and the writer thus need never have authority over them to surrender (2013a: 25). While this could not be described as moralism, it might be an *ethics*, in the sense of affirmatively modelling a particular way of being.

3. The horizon of reskilling

There remains something suggestive above Ingold's argument that skill is not a chimera precisely because modern humans still recognise, and worry about, what it feels like. Such worrying around the term is given dramatic expression in *Attempts on Her Life*, in which it appears twice. In "Untitled (100 Words)", a critic discussing the work of a suicidal avant-garde artist cries '*Why* can't people learn to draw? *Why* can't people learn to paint? Students should be taught *skills*, not ideas.' (Crimp 2005: 251) At first glance, a reader or spectator might take up the invitation to dismiss this distinction as reactionary. The scene incorporates another of the typographical devices with which Crimp breaks away from the established skills of playwriting: the hundred words of the title are listed down the page's right-hand margin, and are meant to be delivered (or displayed?) '*in the silence*' which punctuates the critics' debate (249-61). Any potential performer has to introduce an idea of their own to execute this impossible task, rather than falling back on skills. This is also the scene most conspicuously driven by ideas *about* contemporary theatre: the critic's subsequent accusation that this

'is the work of a girl who should've been admitted not to an art school but to a psychiatric unit' is lifted from Charles Spencer's review of Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love* (Crimp 2005: 252; cf. Sierz 2013: 53). Later, in "Pornó", a character insists that while pornography features 'no *story* to speak of…' '…[o]r characters', 'that's not to say that skill isn't required' to perform it (Crimp 2005: 270). The lines which immediately follow – 'Since we still need to feel what we're seeing is real / It isn't just acting. / It's actually far more exacting than acting' – are repeated almost verbatim from an earlier scene lineated as poetry for a single speaker and often staged as a song (223). This repetition of dialogue under very different performance circumstances, such that a decision has to be made whether and how to play them differently, draws attention to the skills required to respond to Crimp's script, even if it lacks the story or characters on which British theatre has relied. It becomes apparent not that his (and Kane's) theatre is driven more by ideas than skills, but that there is not yet an adequate discourse for describing the innovative taskscapes that these plays create.

This sense that Crimp's dramaturgy is one of skill not yet fully acquired is also visible in the metaphors that he uses to describe his own practice. Unlike Dromgoole's descriptions of his 'astonishing feats of draughtsmanship', or even multiple critics' reference to the polished 'musicality' of his lines, his descriptions emphasise that skill is not an assertion of one's authority or aesthetic legitimacy but an acknowledgement of the limitations of that authority.[6] It is driven by a willingness not only to learn from errors but to commit them. Translating Botho Strauss was compared to 'a sort of workout in which you flex muscles you don't normally use' (qtd. in Sierz 2013: 242); developing his version of *The Seagull* from an intermediate literal translation was 'like you are shaving and the mirror is always steaming up and you're always having to wipe it so that you can see' (240). In each case, the self encounters material that it cannot yet manipulate as a tool or recognise as a prosthetic extension of itself: a foreign language, a steaming mirror, unused muscles. Tacit knowledge needs to become explicit again, and weaknesses or limitations are engaged with. In the most extended reference in *The Director's Craft* to her collaboration with Crimp, Mitchell paints an image of him willing to be surprised, even (mock-?)ashamed, by his lack of awareness of his own practice:

> When I asked Martin what he thought the most common image in the play was, he confidently said war, then ashtrays and, finally, aeroplanes. When I told him it was children, he put his hands over his face and bowed his head. This outcome had never occurred to him consciously but, as soon as it was pointed out, he knew that he had put the experience of children at the heart of the play. (2009: 46)

The relationship between Crimp and Mitchell here recalls the emphasis that Noble and Watkins put on 'intersubjectivity' in the process of 'human capacitation': rather than being something which is simply passed silently from subject to subject, as Bourdieu and romantic appeals to craft sometimes elide it

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[6] References to the 'musicality' of Crimp's writing are made in both Haydon 2014: 410 and Walters 2014: 412.

into, working out how to practise a skill effectively requires being in a 'web of other mind-bodies' who will respond to and notice different aspects of a practice, articulating what was previously not articulated (Noble and Watkins 2003: 534). Howard Barker is the theatre-maker cited by Radosavljević whose musical analogy fits best with this attitude of shared, sometimes debilitating doubt before a complex process: Barker's comparison of his acting company to his orchestra is a way of acknowledging that '[t]he overall meaning of plays is unknown to the actors because it is unknown to me', and a manifestation of his Nietzschean model of art as a world-transforming rhythm which is alien to, but expresses itself through, the wills of particular individuals (qtd. in Radosavljević 2013: 109; Tomlin 2013: 110-13). Tomlin argues that Crimp and Barker share an interest in representing the collapse of the authoritative subject capable of representing their own life, at the level both of the artist and the fictional protagonist; where Crimp (following the humanist Sennett) mourns the loss of such a subject, Barker takes an explicitly antihumanist line and wills its destruction, so that new meanings can be forged (2013: 106). Yet Barker's gesture, more fiercely than Crimp's, arguably surrenders power only in order to reassert it: Tomlin describes him as celebrating, again at both levels, a vision of the artist-tyrant 'who will coerce others to bend to the shape of their created world' (2013: 110). Such a figure is arguably as tacitly neoliberal as Crimp's Madeleine. In contrast, the new subjectivity that emerges from the fragments of Crimp's and Mitchell's collaboration remains more tentative. Mitchell's 2007 production of *Attempts on Her Life* was underpinned – 'astonishing[ly]' for Tomlin, who only discovered from the education pack after watching it – by a rigorous Stanislavskian rehearsal process in which the actors worked against the grain of the text to develop coherent but functionally invisible characters, contestants in an improvisational game show, who could deliver the text's ever-shifting scenarios (2014: 374). The emphasis is not so much on co-operating to develop a performance which is the authoritative expression of everybody involved, but a careful coordination of how different groups of practitioners work at cross purposes to each other.

Tomlin reads Mitchell's strategy as something of a failure of nerve, a failure 'to realise fully the kind of indeterminacy that exists in Crimp's texts': the 'citational moments' that she deems distinctive to his style become 'less philosophically indeterminate, and more theatrically playful' (2014: 375). Her preference would be for a rigorously post-structuralist dramaturgy, in which any *logos* becomes entirely undetermined, 'be that in the written text, the *mise-en-scène* of the director or the virtuosity of the performer' (2009: 62-64). I propose, in effect, an alternative framework for reading the same conditions: Crimp's plays might be understood as the expression of 'negative skill', in which one can have the sense that a fully integrated and harmonised ecology of practitioners is on the point of realisation onstage, and any audience member could be embedded within it as well, but the precise techniques involved in bringing this about cannot be fully accounted for. Sennett acknowledges that the shaping of experience into narrative is protracted and difficult, and that it gains its ethical force by demanding 'engagement with difficulty' (1999: 135). Difficulty, as made manifest

by ongoing negotiations of disagreement, is also the basis for successful communities: the discrete and mutually resistant practices carried out by the different creative practitioners working on a play like this may thus be the most effective possible testament that anything goes. There is an active benefit to not allowing explicit knowledge to give way to tacit knowledge: thinking and doing, theory and practice, freedom and constriction are all kept in play but never come into the perfect harmony that one might ultimately expect of the unalienated, absorbing tasks of Ingold's dwelling perspective; if they did, there is a risk that this experience of absorption could be fetishised as, or confused with, merely the positive, compensatory side of the commodity perspective. The decision to end *The City* abruptly with the Girl struggling to play the piano permits an audience member to imagine the possibility that she *might* improve, just as one might believe that the broken, inconsistent characters in Clair's diary are 'stages in the development' of a better character 'within her subconscious' that might finally be realised (Angelaki 2011: 33). If this is the case, might the postmodern form of Clair's story, and the play that it constitutes, be an early step towards a richer understanding of 'life' that only currently feels disrupted? Ingold is also sensitive to the importance of difficulty and resistance: drawing on the writings of Vilém Flusser, he argues that, counter-intuitively, it is disingenuous to think that objects are designed to be smoothly fit for purpose; rather, '[e]very object of design sets a trap by presenting a problem in the form of what appears to be its solution', and consistent interaction with the object has slowly and quietly dictated how it is used (2013: 62). As we shall see in more detail later, Crimp and other playwrights who prepare indeterminate texts before rehearsal might best be seen as setting traps like these. Their texts should not be seen as transparent instructions for directors and performers, nor necessarily as ways for an empowered maker to exert control over victims (Ingold reminds us that there are hunter-gatherer cultures in which entrapment is understood to require the consent of the animal or attendant spirits), but as a means of testing the extent of one's agency within a network of other agents (2000: 320). The ecological relation moves from being one of pathfinding to one of actively working out how, in words that Simon Critchley has used to describe Samuel Beckett's prose, to negotiate 'a pathless path', one that can attain the level of a 'quasi-methodological expression', 'a quite rigorous historical technique' (1997: 166).

Rather than speaking of plays which generate indeterminate or under-determined worlds, could we frame them as *becoming-determined*, as the expression of multiple conflicted acts of *determination*? This word captures both Sennett's 'desire to do a job well' and Ingold's conception of skilled practice as the experience of being 'launch[ed]' into the flows of one's environment through the force of one's 'intention', rather than having an private intention and then publicly executing it (Sennett 2009: 9; Ingold 2000: 411). It is arguably truer to the spirit in which both Morin and Rebellato write about how indeterminate texts are staged. Morin traces the debt which contemporary playwrights owe to the avant-garde art practices of John Cage and Fluxus. These artists held, and playwrights inherited, a serious and disciplined commitment to the distinction between the

unexpectedness and contingency of the artistic product suggested by 'chance', and the heightened consciousness that indeterminacy requires from the artist, as they choose which approach to take in the moment (2011: 77-78). In an essay in which he notes that 'visually under-determined text' always generates 'metaphors for an indeterminate fictional world', Rebellato emphasises that such worlds can be made well or badly, through generative or clichéd metaphors (2009: 25-26). If, *contra* Tomlin, determination is thus a quality latent within Crimp's text for Mitchell to bring out, so is playfulness. Both *The Craftsman* and *Together* draw on the object-relations theory of D.W. Winnicott and John Bowlby to argue that play is the process which inaugurates and reinvigorates our capacity to sustain regimes of practice, and to allow them to grow in complexity; creative play forms the undercurrent to skill acquisition even if it does not have the formal, repetitive qualities that allows activities to be labelled as skill or craft (2009: 272; 2013: 10).

Crimp's most sophisticated dramaturgical tracing of what a more richly-skilled conception of the world might look like comes in *Fewer Emergencies*. Its three constituent plays take the same form as *Attempts on Her Life*, in which uncharacterised onstage speakers attempt to tell stories about unseen characters. Recurring satirical references to traditional craft and artisanship, as false signs of middle-class contentment, again link the trilogy together. In the play ultimately positioned first, "Whole Blue Sky", it can be wrongly assumed that the central couple are happily married because they are hosting a garden party with 'traders and craftspeople with exceptionally rare skills […] who designed and built then polished this ever-lengthening table' (2015: 93). In the second, "Face to the Wall", it can be wrongly assumed that a neighbourhood is becoming safer because it is full of 'people who bind books – people who make shoes – people who grind knives – people who mend rugs' (109). But this trope comes to stretch beyond satire because this overdetermined imagination of craft as an aspirational ornament, which increases the commodity value of goods within a capitalist economy, is set against a more fundamental appreciation of skill as a property of all socialised human subjects. "Whole Blue Sky" goes on to describe the relationship between the couple and their son Bobby, who is loved so much that he is denied any agency of his own. 'People have always liked him: always offered him fruit, always offered him love [...] assembled his jigsaws late at night' (98). In terms introduced by D.W. Winnicott, his parents are aspiring to be perfect rather than good-enough: like playing the piano in *The City*, completing a jigsaw is understood to be the application of a specific set of regimented gestures that, until Bobby learns them, could better be carried out by somebody else (1991: 10). This level of dependency reaches surreal proportions, and becomes associated once more with the artisanal object, in the final play, "Fewer Emergencies". Bobby is finally allowed a degree of separation from his parents, 'locked in for his own protection' while they are out, but he is left with a magical cupboard 'of precious wood installed by joiners' that includes 'all the things Bobby will need in life' – which means, apparently, all of Western culture as represented by assets from 'bone-handled knives', 'harpsichords' and 'cooked prawns' to 'the city of Paris'. Independent agency and

complexity is denied not only to Bobby but to the objects that he encounters; they operate like commodities or technologies in that their function, 'for pleasure and for emergencies', is fully known before he uses them (Crimp 2015: 125).

At the end of "Whole Blue Sky", Bobby makes the kind of transgressive demand that Winnicott associates with children who never learn to manage transitional objects. He demands the one resource that he has apparently been denied: 'Mummy and Daddy's song', a 'private song', the expression of his parents' own acquisition of bounded identity (99). Bobby demands the song because he wants to drown out a voice in his head that is 'too soft to make out', but certainly 'doesn't like him' (98). The voice is, quite specifically, 'not thoughts. He knows what thoughts are, but this is a voice' (97). Crimp is here working intuitively through a series of ideas about the relationship between language and thought which are also a key concern for Ingold. Scholars have not only debated when and how language emerged from its predecessors within human evolution, but also within the development of every human subject. Responding to Jean Piaget, who saw infants as needing to be coerced into speech, L.S. Vygotsky proposed that it was not a coercion but a reconciliation of the child's 'inner speech', a protean form that privileges the flow of sense over individual words while still being understandable as voiced, with 'outer speech', the fixed, public association of particular thoughts with particular words. 'Inner speech' survives, but it is largely restricted to the separate, emotionally-heightened sphere of song rather than the reasoning world of language (cf. Armstrong 2000: 138-40). If this resembles the structure of Ingold's dwelling perspective lingering beneath the commodity perspective, it shares the inadequacy of Ingold's structure: the capacity to dwell in 'inner speech' may survive, but the fact that it is now only permissible under certain conditions means that any reconciliation with 'outer speech' still feels like coercion, a process that has to be achieved for the child's own good lest they be alienated as insane. This is the pressure that Bobby is apparently put under, and the end of "Whole Blue Sky" seems to show that coercion being achieved:

1   I don't want to hear you talk about it ever again.

2   In front of guests.

1   In front of guests. In front of anyone. Not tonight and not ever again.

2   Says who?

1   I'm sorry?

2   Says who: not tonight and not ever again.

3   Says who? Says Mummy.

1   Says what?

3   Says Mummy.

1   (*smiles*) Not says Mummy, sweetheart, not says Mummy: says the voice. (2015: 100)

'The voice' is now indistinguishable not only from Mummy's voice, but also from the kind of previously wordless 'thoughts' that Mummy believed that the voice only existed to express. "Face to the Wall" exposes what happens, in contemporary conditions of alienated labour, if this coerced reconciliation is not achieved. The play ends with "Twelve-Bar Delivery Blues", a song in which a father violently refuses to be woken by his son. He first claims:

> There's another person
> Looking out through my eyes.
> Son son, he's filing reports.
> Son son, he's PROMPTING MY THOUGHTS. (115)

Language's role in thinking becomes overdetermined: the codification of thoughts into words is internalised to the extent that the human mind becomes an internal homunculus which is itself turning thoughts into language. Three stanzas later, after attacking his son, he adds, 'Son son, I ain't got no choice / Son son, I JUST HEAR THIS VOICE' – but this voice is immediately described as 'saying' the same wordless scat-singing that will recur in "Fewer Emergencies": language's role in thinking is here undetermined, imagined as something which represses the real 'pure thought' of wordlessness. What is missing, according to Ingold, is a model that does not depend on identifying a moment of origin for language, as much for the child as for civilisation: he offers that of another Soviet theorist, V.N. Vološinov, who argues that language 'is not tossed like a ball from generation to generation, but moves together with, and is indeed inseparable from, the actual current of speech' (Ingold 2000: 434 [Ch.22 n.2]). Such language would steer clear of both of the violent extremes that Crimp's play represents by being 'neither internally prespecified nor externally imposed, but aris[ing] within processes of development' and would maintain a far more porous boundary with song than Western discourse currently allows (Ingold 2000: 399).

Perhaps such musilanguage has never gone away. If the narrative within *Fewer Emergencies* fails to *represent* a model in which skill is ineradicable, and the difference between language and music is revealed as a false dichotomy, its dramaturgy may nevertheless *present* one: this is what allows skill to be shown up in negative. The difference between *Attempts on Her Life* and *Fewer Emergencies* here is important to note. The situations of the different scenes in *Attempts on Her Life* are fairly heavily implied (a discussion among art critics, a police inquiry, a sales pitch), with tone, idiom and occasionally typography varying accordingly, but the texture of *Fewer Emergencies* is more uniform and more ambiguous: the performers employ a fairly limited repertoire of phrases for questioning, correcting, agreeing and clarifying which leaves the context as a whole caught somewhere between a conversation by and about friends, the relation of a case history, or the plotting

of a fiction. Language is therefore given the potential to generate the environment in which it is employed just as much as the environment generates a particular use of language: a Winnicottian potential space is opened up in which the actors can play with different tones and contexts. For example, a 'They don't.' / 'They do' exchange in "Fewer Emergencies" could be interpreted as either a mark of disbelief or disagreement – or both, as it occurs twice (Crimp 2015: 123, 128). Indeed, set in a place and time which are only ever described as 'blank' in the stage directions (85), the only pre-existent material with which each individual line engages is the preceding lines and the provisional identities that have become attached to the particular onstage bodies which have spoken them. As a result, the closest that the play gets to dramatic climaxes are those moments when the conceit that the speakers are referring to a world and characters offstage suddenly collapses into the speakers embodying those characters: the (subverted) alignment of Speaker 1 with Bobby's mother in the extract from "Whole Blue Sky" quoted above; the explosive moment in 'Face to the Wall' in which a performer simultaneously lashes out at his collaborators and represents a murderer attacking children (111); and, particularly, when songs come into replace descriptions of characters singing. In relation to *Attempts on Her Life*, Angelaki notes that the two scenes normally rendered as songs have a Brechtian quality, generating *Verfremdungseffekt* by refusing to be smoothly incorporated into the texture of the surrounding action – but she tellingly does not apply the same reading to *Fewer Emergencies* (2012: 74). Although these moments might be initially registered as shocks by an audience, they demonstrate that there were never discrete offstage and onstage 'worlds' for them to emerge from or into, just as there is no idea of language, perhaps one figured as song or pre-lingual infantile communication, which can be fundamentally distinguished from language as it is developed through its social use.

The act of storytelling in *Fewer Emergencies* begins to achieve the goal that Walter Benjamin sets out for it, and Sennett hopes to retrieve for the former IBM employees: to develop a sense of unbroken continuum between the teller and the world, realised moment by moment as a result of patient development and a sustained investment in the task of telling. This principle should be seen as influencing not only the relationship between the play's diegesis and its representation, but also between the different authorships invested in the making of the play. Crimp has compared the gradual process of assembling the trilogy, with "Whole Blue Sky" being written some years after the other two in the same form, to that of building an extension to a pre-existing house: rather than determining content in advance, the last play emerged from the nature of the resources that he was using (Sierz 2007: 378). If it is hard for a reader to identify moments within the script at which performers stop narrating using the third person and start tentatively embodying them using the first and second, this is likely to be a transition to which actors will respond intuitively as well as through conscious negotiation within rehearsal, and into which Crimp as author may have stumbled unexpectedly. The cues that Crimp passes to collaborating artists through his texts, and the cues that they in turn pass to

their audience, are cryptic, to the point of being unknown even to those sending them – but such is the nature of the 'give and take' by which children begin to experiment with new forms of exchange with their caregiver, and this capacity to negotiate ambiguity lays the ground for all the subsequent acts of co-operation that the socialised subject will set out to achieve (Sennett 2013: 10, 13). Eventually, this 'give and take' could be the substance of a smoothly collaborative 'anything goes' approach to dramaturgy.

Crimp's continuing investment in these concerns is traceable in *In the Republic of Happiness*. This text also contains an integrated songscape, in which divisions between speech and music need only be as distinctive as any other divisions within the text. Billed as '*an entertainment in three parts*', this is Crimp's first play to combine dramatic styles that have previously been kept in separate plays: the first and third part invoke the 'seemingly naturalistic' drama of *Play With Repeats* and *The City*, while the second, a list of "The Five Essential Freedoms of the Individual", adopts the 'abstract' approach of *Attempts on Her Life* and *Fewer Emergencies* (cf. Angelaki 2014: 312). Breaking into song unites all three acts: songs occur twice in the first scene, once after the discussion of each of the Essential Freedoms in the second, and once again to conclude the whole play. Yet the extent of their integration into the diegesis varies: of the three songs in a more naturalistic context, the first is a song 'made up' by the family's two teenage girls, for which Crimp's script gives no suggestion about accompaniment (2015: 286); the second, sung by Madeleine to close Act One, is introduced by her crying 'And music!', but with no authorial indication of whether accompaniment is provided or whether its provision is diegetic (303); the third concluding song, accompanied by the '*small glittering*' box, makes both explicit. The play is also notable, in its second section, for marking the first occasion since *Attempts on Her Life* in which Crimp does not assign lines to specific speakers at all. While the implied scenarios in *Attempts on Her Life* set at least tacit prescriptions on how many people would be speaking, and how lines should be distributed, in order to facilitate patterns of turn-taking, the anaphoric non-narrative nature of this text leaves the distribution even more open. Indeed, the brevity of this section means that they need not be formally assigned at all. In Dominic Cooke's 2012 Royal Court production, the entire cast learnt the text and were free to come in as the next speaker at any point, varying from night to night. In her recent reading of the play, Angelaki emphasises how this directorial decision reinforced the play's themes of the toxic pressure on the individual to produce oneself under capitalism: in racing against each other to claim the next line, the actors were 'performing the traumatized yet self-aware individual in the process of healing' who knows they have to 'get there first' (2017: 156). However, the unusual relations which this section demands between its performers equally cuts against those themes. Just as the texture of *Attempts on Her Life* may only be revealed as fragmentary if it is underpinned by the cohering character work organised by Mitchell, the spontaneous competition of *In the Republic of Happiness* only emerges thanks to the cultivation, in rehearsal, of common, error-charged perceptual engagement. Crimp here

comes closer than he ever does to making manifest the theatre's status as a site where actors can demonstrate skill on Ingold's terms, as the actors consistently discover new ways in which they are simultaneously bound and liberated by the stimulus that his text provides.

4. Between traps and gifts

Why might this skill be more visible to audiences of *In the Republic of Happiness* than it was at *Attempts on Her Life*? The difference lies in its closing appeal to an audience: when Bob is confused because there seem to be no 'citizens' around for him to sing his song to, the audience might figure themselves seated in the darkness as a potential, happy polity for him to address. Insofar as they recognise that they are not (quite) themselves caught within the dystopian constraint that the text prophesies, space is left open for an alternative, more democratic modelling of collectivity. This new awareness might in turn prompt audiences to recognise that a theatrical production could never achieve the kind of totalitarian, '100%' technologised and administered world that this final scene appears to present. To describe Madeleine as 'a kind of embodiment of capitalist individualism' is immediately to protest too much: a human body onstage will inevitably generate a range of meanings that extend beyond any proposed allegory of individualism, just as an entirely 'artificial' room with 'no light or relationship to nature' (or, as in *Fewer Emergencies*, a 'blank' space) could never be designed (Cooke 2014: 411).[7] This resembles Ingold's assertion that engagement with particular materials will always offer 'a line of resistance' to the regimented, pre-designed tasks of commodification – but this resistance *requires the theatrical frame*, which Ingold sees instead as another mode of alienation, in order to make it visible. Chris Goode develops a point to this effect, using the concepts of signal and noise, to work towards a definition of theatre:

> [I]f performance sets a target – a script to be enacted, a score to be interpreted, a task to be accomplished – and noise refers to the complex of additional patterns and occurrences that permeate the event context within which the performance takes place, then theatre is the totality of the performance plus its attendant noise. Or, to rearrange the equation: noise is the difference between performance and theatre (2015: 208-09).

Ingold describes skilled practice as almost always being disrupted by noise: 'only at the eye of the churn, at the point of most intense concentration, does silence reign' (2015: 142). Inviting the audience to see the artwork, as the end of this play does, as a system that is designed to interrupt that process, always generating noisy ironies and aporias simply by materially existing, allows it to stand as 'the determinate negation of a determinate society' (Adorno 1984: 321).

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[7] As one director has noted in reference to his experience of working on *Fewer Emergencies*, '[t]here is a limit to how much one can act "blankness"' (Ledger 2010: 131).

Crimp begins to develop this strategy of tacit, and tacitly politicised, audience address, at the end of "Fewer Emergencies". The final reference to Bobby *does* describe him acting for himself, working to perfect his own relationship with the world independently. Now mortally wounded by a stray bullet from the 'emergency' raging outside, Bobby is apparently moving into 'brighter light' and developing 'more efficient use of his arms – more understanding of the geometry of the stairs – improved concentration' as he attempts to reach the cupboard (2015: 128). The speakers promise that 'if he opens the door, if he lets people in, if he takes them up the stairs, shows them the cupboard' and offers its contents as a gift, 'they'll love him' (127). Offering a gift requires the same negotiation of structure and complexity as acquiring a skill, and his capacity to sustain this negotiation is depleting: just as it has become almost impossible without a dwelling perspective to conceive that my environment works on me while I work on it, so it has become impossible to see that a gift is simultaneously a unique, free expression of my relationship with the recipient and a deeply conditioned expression of our relationship in its wider social context (Ingold 2000: 329-30). Crimp makes it clear that the reasons for this depletion are political. Just as Winnicott develops a connection between the infant's capacity to develop a give-and-take approach to signalling with their caregivers, and the cultivation at a societal level of 'the common pool of humanity' into which all can both 'contribute' and be hosted, Crimp implies a connection between the overprotection of Bobby and the segregation of the 'common pool' of society in which he lives (1991: 99). The emergency that has injured him appears to be a riot provoked by the fact that 'they've kicked out the Mexicans, they've kicked out the Serbs' and 'identified the sequence […] of genes that make people leave burnt mattresses outside their homes' (Crimp 2015: 124). Making an intervention that is both lovably original and capable of being accepted is risky, but this balance of determination and indeterminacy is the key quality that Morin and Rebellato try to articulate in the playwrights whom they discuss: these are texts that limit the performance opportunities that writers pass on to actors, while also seemingly offering near-infinite opportunities for all. This balance is never precise: if the relational aesthetics of contemporary art over-invests in framing gift relations as sustainable 'micro-utopias' that provide a benign alternative to markets, Crimp's plays owe more to the 'transgressive, excessive character of the gift' to shake receivers out of their assumptions, *promising* utopia rather than building it (Sansi 2015: 88, 105). The first and last of *Play House*'s thirteen scenes, both entitled "Declaration", refer to acts of generosity with an uncanny quality. In the first, Katrina responds to an extravagant declaration of love from her partner Simon by passing him a gift box which Simon says contains '[d]og shit' – but Simon phrases this as a question, the stage directions give no indication of what is in the (real or fictional) box or if it should be visible to the audience, and the scene immediately ends after the question with Katrina '*tr[ying] not to laugh*' (Crimp 2015: 201). In the last scene, Katrina offers a long speech in which she insists that she would prefer not to raise a girl because she would be 'dreading the day some man came and took her away from me […] and forced her to play house' –

only for Simon to respond that the apparently squalid conditions which she is imagining for their daughter might still be an expression of love, in words which repeat those of his opening declaration:

> Yes – but what if she turned out – Katrina – against all the odds – to be happy? What if she secretly liked to play house? What if the… broken bicycle on the stairs – or even the burst black sack – made her smile? And this man – what if this man of hers – the husband – with his shit job and all the other shit infecting his mind – what if he still truly loved her? Yes loved her and loved her – and loved her and loved her and loved her. What if he loved her at the end as much as he had loved her at the beginning? (224)

The possibility of the gift being recognised as such is equally 'against all odds' at the end of *Fewer Emergencies*, with the stage in darkness but with Bobby still described as reaching for the key while 'light's flaring through the window' (129). The audience is invited to work as hard as him to transform the imaginative stimuli with which they are being presented: by believing that the light being described is getting brighter simply because a character is saying so, even while the stage is getting darker; by resisting the established association of a blackout with a character's death. But they should then realise that this is simply a particularly poignant manifestation of their relationship with words and onstage images throughout the performance. To recognise that this is what one has been doing all along is to recognise that one has fulfilled something like a political injunction – but also something like an invitation to love. To be an audience capable of reimagining what is presented to them is to begin the process of becoming the kind of community that would receive Bobby's gift and welcome him, or trust that a loving relationship is being sustained between Simon and Katrina, or gather as a republic around Uncle Bob. Crimp's dramaturgy reconfigures the relationship between Ingold's commodity and dwelling perspectives to account for the parallax that Ingold overlooks: from within the modern commodity perspective, dwelling is registered as *an object of desire*, simultaneously intimate and defined by its absence or distance.

In each of the closing moments, an attempt is made to restore Sennett's vision of the public theatre as a place where performers' skills are matched, and brought to fulfilment, by audiences' skills of interpreting those performances. This restoration takes a significant effort of will and imagination in otherwise non-interactive plays but, once achieved, the feeling that might be registered is the combination of freedom and necessity: audience members who recognise that their imagination has made something happen just by them showing up and 'being themselves' are allowed to join with performers who might feel that their practice is both 'the obvious thing to do within the environment we were working in' and the result of special discipline (qtd. in Cornford 2015b). Yet this recognition is only invited at the very end of the performance: the theatre as it currently exists is unable to sustain this balance, and Crimp's plays should thus be seen as illustrating Ridout's argument that theatre is

ethical insofar as it *initiates* critical labour that has to be developed beyond the immediate context of the performance. In the conclusion of her monograph on Crimp, Angelaki describes how 'the spectator becomes an acrobat in [Crimp's] text, striving to make sense but continuously being thrown off balance' (2012: 180). Acrobatics is a fitting metaphor for skill at the point of its negation: the acrobat is a practitioner who appears superhuman or miraculous in their capacity to defy the pressures of the material world, and continues to face genuine risk as they do so, but who appears so because they can conceal (even to themselves) a careful system of responses to those pressures.

The acrobat's ambivalent relationship with materiality makes them a useful figure with which to test Ingold's theory of skill against Crimp's playwriting. Should an acrobat be seen, as a spectator is invited to see them and they might see themselves in the heat of the moment, as absorbed without friction in the environment through which they move, or, as they may more often see themselves, relentlessly rubbing up against obstacles in their environment, escaping from the traps that it lays? Although Ingold seems content with the latter perspective as just an alternative perspective on the former, his invocation of traps calls to mind an anthropological argument with which he has some disagreement: Alfred Gell's description of artworks as traps for their viewers. Gell defines an artwork as 'any object or performance that potentially rewards […] scrutiny because it embodies intentionalities that are complex, demanding of attention and perhaps difficult to reconstruct fully' (1996: 36). They entrap potential interpreters by generating a compulsion to explore how the object works: the hunter suits a trap to their prey by making it resemble an object in or with which the prey could dwell, but subtly repurposed to demand extra attention and to force the prey to come up against the limits of its capabilities; the manner in which the prey responds to the trap, which will be as unexpected to the hunter as the trap is to the prey, goes on to inform the way in which future traps are made. If a tool, for Ingold, is an object about which a recognisable story can be told of how it is used (2011: 57), a trap is an object in which a story is still fitfully becoming legible. If one way of understanding a playscript is as a tool for performers, Crimp's desire to offer scripts that dramatise the telling of stories, or appear to dramatise stories only for the stories to fall apart as they are being told, can be seen as an attempt to lay traps for his collaborators: the unpronounceable typography and fragmented narratives block the strategies that most actors will have acquired, but encourages them to discover new ones. This metadrama of entrapment and release mirrors those that Crimp says that he experiences while writing, such as his sudden need to flex new muscles when translating Strauss. It will also be followed by a similar encounter between performers and audience, who must, acrobatically, find an interpretation against the grain of the world with which they are presented.

The sequencing – of Crimp's entrapment, followed by his collaborators', followed by the audience's – is crucial. Gell emphasises that a trap consists of an object plus the 'time structure' of waiting, entrapment and release in which it is encountered (1996: 28-29). Traps also need to be distinguishable at some level from the environments which surround them: rather than being

embedded within Ingold's flows of life, they stand as 'parodies of [...] *Umwelt*', providing a material trace of how the particular agencies of hunter and prey interact (Gell 1996: 27). Traps are distinguishable from both agents, and mediate their agencies. As a model for theatre-making, the sequence of trapping structures lends itself to conditions in which time is more precisely organised, and labour more carefully divided, with a 'fixed'-but-alterable script being the medium of that organisation and division. The rhythm of entrapment and release is akin to Ingold's description of the stuttering or dotted line (which, like his comments on design and traps, ultimately draws on his reading of Flusser), where a feeling of detachment from one's making is registered.

Since traps necessarily have a theatrical quality in Ingold's terms – Gell even whimsically speculates in relation to one exemplary trap that 'perhaps this hippopotamus is Othello' – what alternative model could live up to the anti-theatrical dimension of Ingold's definition of skill (1996: 29)? While a trap maintains a degree of separation from its environment and associated subjects, a gift, in the Maussian terms that Ingold takes up, is 'nothing' other than the expression of the relationship between the donor and the recipient (2000: 319). The gifts in *Play House* remain unsettling because Crimp works hard to erase any signals of the social relations that they work to express: the dog shit (if that's what it is) and Katrina's laughter could be a rebuke to Simon or an in-joke; the squalor in which Simon's imagined couple live could be an expression of their relationship or have nothing to do with it. The ambiguity of these gifts themselves expresses the uncertain quality of Crimp's gift to his interpreters. As the gift only exists in the act of giving, every gift reinstates the relationship anew, which means that there is not necessarily the same sense of narrative sequence or development over time that is essential to the workings of a trap: '[w]hat if he loved her at the end as much as he had loved her at the beginning?' And while traps necessarily set up at least a contingent hierarchy between trapper and prey, even if it is ultimately subverted or surrendered, and gifts can be a basis for domination, gift relations carry at least the potential for equal exchange between parties, as they can be structured as a rhythm of 'spontaneous action and reaction' which is foreclosed by the planning and waiting that traps require (Gell 1996: 29). Radosavljević's framework of a coming dramaturgy-led theatre seems to aspire, ultimately, to such a model of theatre-making as a gift relation: in which a common, flexible process is emphasised over the division of labour and the scheduling of tasks; in which making text need not be seen as in any way detachable from the other forms of *poesis* involved in making the performance; in which text need not be produced before rehearsals and the writer never has particular authority to surrender; and in which emphasis is often put on remaking the production anew for and with each audience. By ending several of his recent plays with the tentative, compromised possibility of gift relations becoming visible, Crimp gestures towards this alternative model but cannot quite reach it: he and we remain, just, on the inside of Radosavljević's Gutenberg parenthesis. In turning to discuss Crouch's contemporaneous trajectory, I explore how a theatre-maker more central to her proposed framework finds himself falling back on

the older, more pragmatic model. In Crimp's work, traps can be revealed to be gifts; in Crouch's, gifts are revealed as traps.

Chapter 2: Tim Crouch's perfectionism

1. **The conditions of *ENGLAND***

Tim Crouch's *ENGLAND* (2007) concludes remarkably like *Fewer Emergencies*: a character attempts to defuse a threat, across an implied ethnic and national boundary, by offering the hostile party a gift. The play's protagonist wishes to give 'a work of art from England' to a veiled widow in a Middle Eastern country, whose husband had provided the heart for a transplant which had saved the protagonist's life. As in *Fewer Emergencies*, the play closes before it can be clear whether the transaction was a success, and the odds do not look good: instead of responding directly to the gift, the widow asks to listen for her husband's heart in the protagonist's chest and to touch the protagonist (2011c: 158). Like the objects in Bobby's cupboard, the artwork is expected to perform a different set of functions from those currently assigned to it, which the giver does not seem in a position to alter. Throughout Act One of *ENGLAND*, contemporary artworks have been celebrated on the basis of their apparently intrinsic aesthetic merit, which is quickly revealed to be linked to their value in the globalised art market in which the protagonist's partner works. Now, as the play ends, the unidentified work has to console the widow and 'make a reconciliation', her husband's heart having been acquired on the private market, without the donor's consent and while he may have had a chance of treatment (156-57). Even in this context, the protagonist explains that the gift 'will change [the widow's] life' but immediately translates that into it being worth '[a] lot of money' (157, 152). *ENGLAND*'s dramaturgy is also such that neither the giving nor the giver are represented onstage in conventional terms: in this second act, one of the play's two actors represents the transplant patient, and the other her interpreter, only for them to swap roles halfway through; the audience represents the widow they both address. In such circumstances, the act of giving starts, as in Crimp's theatre, to be mapped onto the performance of the play itself. The uncertain sense of whether the widow has received the gift or not is registered in audience members' own uncertainty about the terms on which they should be interpreting the performers' gestures. If they register that mapping consciously, it is a sign that the performance is succeeding, where the systematically violent world of the play might not: it changes the established principles of representation according to which objects, images and people are given significance in the naturalistic theatre. Stephen Bottoms summarises the play's ending in a way which highlights its menace, but also its counter-intuitive promise of hope, in much the same way that Angelaki reads the end of *The City* and I have read *Fewer Emergencies*: 'Is this an attempt at buying off [the protagonist]'s conscience? Is it an arrogant display of western munificence toward a "poor" foreigner? Or is it a true gift, an attempt at thanks for what cannot be reciprocated, *with* something that cannot be reciprocated?' (Bottoms 2011b: 459)

The key difference between *ENGLAND* and *Fewer Emergencies* is that Crouch's dramaturgy actively invites an audience to register that this transformation of perception is happening, and that

performers and audiences work together to bring this about. Crimp's characters never explicitly address their audience, and his identification of the 'time' and 'place' of both *The City* and *Fewer Emergencies* as 'blank' reinforces the sense not only that performers are invited to explore the text without apparent cues from Crimp, but also that they are themselves not expected to pass on any such cues of their own to their audiences: the sequence of traps thus survives. While Angelaki's model of the acrobatic spectator suggests that audiences can become accustomed to the lack of cues, neither her model nor Crimp's texts fully take into account what it might mean for an audience to respond as a collective, rather than as individual subjects (beyond the brief references in the script to alternative, imaginary cities). The arrival of a fully skilled commons, in which all participants can shape and be shaped by the environment that they inhabit, can only appear as a fleeting intervention. *ENGLAND*'s two acts, however, introduce a structure in which audiences are actively encouraged to see themselves as the participants within a provisional gift economy. Act One begins not in a space rendered 'blank' by the fiction, but in the particular space in which the audience understand themselves to be: in the first production, 'the Fruitmarket Gallery here in Edinburgh', the art in which has been '*the only focus*' for the audience until the performers begin to speak (111). Gradually, the performers begin to assign fictional labels to the pieces in the gallery at which they invite the audience to look, in order to narrate the story of the single, unnamed protagonist on behalf of whom they both speak. Crouch is confident that 'the "good" or "art" part of [an interpreter's] brain' will transform what they see (2015): 'This is the view out there', 'Look! My skin is damp with sweat' (114), 'Here he is giving me a glass of water' (115). Insofar as objects are granted new provisional identities through 'provocative juxtaposition of real-world materials with language that facilitates alternative perceptions in spectators' minds' (Bottoms 2009: 75) – but *only* through the addition of language, and *only* in the mind – the performers and objects in Act One of *ENGLAND* acquire the entirely new but entirely assimilable quality of gifts. Act Two relies on a more established theatrical idiom than Act One, in the sense that '*a different room in the gallery*' is taken as a 'blank' so that it can become a site for the fictional encounter between Act One's protagonist and the widow. Yet it also develops Act One's subversions of that idiom, by continuing a mode of direct address, '*to individual members of the audience*', with the specified aim of inviting the audience to imagine themselves into the role of the widow (Crouch 2011c: 143). The gap is crossed between the audience seeing themselves as detached spectators of a fictional world and active (if silent) participants within that world, provided that they register the transformation that Crouch's text is carrying out on them. The audience can receive *ENGLAND* as a gift insofar as they make a gift of their own presence to its performers – but this is the gift that they have always been figured as, by the performers. The phrase 'If it weren't for you, I wouldn't be here' is employed in both acts' opening exchange, as a way of inviting the audience to map the intractable dependencies on others onto their own renewed experience of dependency within the gallery space (111, 143).

Crouch's shift of emphasis from Crimp's is a consequence of the different conditions in which he has produced his theatre. Neither 'solely theatre [n]or solely performance', his work has sometimes failed to register with advocates of the 'new writing' model (Radosavljević 2013: 20). *ENGLAND* is described in passing by Sierz as 'a performance piece' (2011: 228), despite Sierz's book being explicitly dedicated to plays instead of performance, and *ENGLAND*'s own subtitle being *A* Play *For Galleries*. Crouch remains emphatic that his works are plays, a stance that he has taken in response to the refusal by Faber and Faber – who have remained faithful to Crimp – to publish his second play for adults, *An Oak Tree* (2004), because its use of a new second actor at each performance rendered it 'not a proper play' (Bottoms 2009: 67). Nevertheless, although happy to be described as a playwright, Crouch prefers the term 'theatre-maker' (2015). In contrast with Crimp, his writing projects that began with *My Arm* (2003) were preceded by a drama degree from the University of Bristol and a variety of emphatically non-writerly theatrical practices: co-founding the collaborative devising company Public Parts (of which no substantial documentation appears to survive); experience as a professional actor after training at the Central School of Speech and Drama; leading drama education for schools and teachers; and storytelling with the Woodcraft Folk (Crouch 2015; Rebellato 2013b: 126; Crouch 2011a: 422). As well as writing, Crouch acted in the first productions of all his plays for adults apart from *Adler and Gibb*, but he has always been quick to emphasise that they are collaborative endeavours, most notably with Karl James and (since *An Oak Tree*) Andy Smith, who have co-directed all these first productions. The three develop the work in a spirit of what Smith has called 'co-labour', alongside 'performers, technicians, front-of-house staff [and] audience' (2011: 411). Smith's decision to produce work under the pseudonym 'a smith' (by which I designate him henceforth) is an attempt to present himself as an anonymous craftsman, with the balance of humility and pride in work which this entails. smith's labour involves the kind of attention to text that might normally be called writerly, a relationship which has been most clearly manifested in Crouch and smith's decision to co-author *what happens to hope at the end of the evening* (2013), and to promote it as co-authored. Although Crouch acknowledges that his plays do emerge from periods of thinking and writing alone, it was writing preceded, in the case of *An Oak Tree*, by a workshop in which smith, James and he shared initial ideas.[1] At the end of a preparatory document for the workshop, Crouch invited his collaborators to help him 'imagine something more perfect than this' (2013a: 243).

This desire to focus on process rather than product – and a process 'that we imagine will never be fixed' – makes Crouch's approach particularly well-suited to Radosavljević's model of theatre-making as well as the more ideal forms of Ingold's theory of skill (Crouch 2003: 11). In particular, the desire to develop something 'more perfect' than their initial ideas implicitly combines a desire to keep working harder with the suggestion that there is something about the work which is

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[1] For evidence of Crouch's writing practices, see smith 2011: 413; Ilter 2011: 402; Radosavljević 2013: 217.

'perfect' already, invoking the harmony of firm obligation and absolute freedom that Ingold associates with dwelling and the classical conception of *technē* or *ars*. A version of this harmony will continue to be made visible in the eventual performances of *An Oak Tree*, by beginning the play with a reassurance that the second actor is doing 'really well' at portraying their character when they have apparently done nothing at all (2011c: 59). If the decision to conclude the performance with a recording of the Goldberg Variations played falteringly and then forcefully makes the play as a whole a testimony to endurance and perfectionism, this opening moment of reassurance signals that no disciplinary benchmark is set for such endurance. Ideas of skill can acquire the radically democratic quality that scholars like Harvie want for it: instead of the demand of acrobatics, Crouch's instruction in a later play that '[t]he audience should be beautifully lit and cared for' should be taken, I believe, at face value (2011c: 164).

There is a risk, however, that this harmony can be replaced by the simulacrum familiar from Crimp's theatre, the song that can never go wrong but only because it is so fiercely policed. Just as the possibility of a gift economy becomes briefly visible in Crimp's plays, *ENGLAND* is the first play by Crouch in which conspicuous attention is drawn to the coercions underpinning what appear to be free gift exchanges, both within the diegesis and the theatrical encounter itself. Early in the published text, before they become identified with a fictional character, the performers note another agent without which they 'wouldn't be here': 'the Scottish Arts Council [who] converted the market into a visual arts space in 1974' (Crouch 2011c: 112). Any capacity for an audience to frame themselves as givers or recipients of gifts requires them bracketing the fact that this performance is dependent on the purchase of tickets within a commodity economy. Ridout has explored how conventions such as the curtain call mean that this is an occlusion at which the 'theatrical machine' is particularly proficient: the occlusion, or perhaps the shocking failure of such occlusion, may be the bourgeois theatre's *raison d'être* (2006: 165). Later in the play, the protagonist admits that they 'wouldn't be here' without their GP, Dr Kumar (Crouch 2011c: 125): another apparent precondition for any reframing of perception – by protagonist, performers and audience – is their bodily and mental health. One occasional disconcerting feature of performances of *ENGLAND* was the need for Crouch and his co-performer Hannah Ringham to break from performing to help audience members to chairs as they fainted, as a result of the endurance required to stand throughout the first act and the psychosomatic effects of the actors' descriptions of declining health (Bottoms 2011b: 451; Crouch 2015). The realisation of this biological precondition has also been proposed as an ontological ground for theatre: in a work partly written in response to Ridout's, Alan Read (2008) has identified the theatre as 'the last human venue', the site in which humans come to acknowledge their own extinction and, upon and through realising it, construct a fantasy of its prevention. On such terms, the aim of *ENGLAND* would be to expose platitudes like 'art is for all', or its capacity to 'change your life' (Crouch 2011c: 116): the transformations that are achievable are shown to be strictly delimited, dependent upon provisionally

donating and transforming objects whose fixed identity under the signs of nature and capital ultimately go unchallenged.

The rest of this chapter compares the development of Crouch's practice before and after *ENGLAND*. In the more recent plays, the trap – or a greater willingness to present the performance as such to audiences – has begun to acquire a greater prominence than the gift as an implicit model for his dramaturgy. The effect is closer to the image of what I have called negative skill that emerges in Crimp's plays, albeit created with a greater desire on Crouch's part to identify the conditions in which skill, and the exchange of gifts, might flourish outside the trap of this particular performance. This shift within Crouch's practice has coincided with his plays carrying greater ethical risk and garnering more controversy. To explore this, a thread running through my analysis of *The Author* (2009), *Adler and Gibb* (2014) and *what happens to hope at the end of the evening* (2013) is the significance to each of the late Adrian Howells. Howells was both performer and (as 'Adrian') protagonist in the original Royal Court production of *The Author*; his memory is quietly invoked in the text of *Adler and Gibb*, which received its first performance months after his suicide; the text of *what happens to hope at the end of the evening*, published in the same volume as *Adler and Gibb*, is dedicated to his memory.[2] I argue that the dramaturgy of each play, and particularly decisions made about text, can be interpreted as a conscious response to Howells's performance practice: Howells's attempts to free performance from a logic of sacrifice is an ambition that Crouch and his collaborators can aspire towards but fail to achieve, because that logic is inevitable within a theatrical frame. Their aspiration is sustained for as long as the texts produced can be read as expressions of performances, growing alongside them, rather than material substitutes for them. While this is sustained, the theatre can remain a site, *contra* Ridout, in which ethical work can happen rather than merely being initiated.

2. Introducing a model: *My Arm* and *An Oak Tree*

My Arm engages in a more sustained commentary on the conceptual art practices to which Crimp alludes in "Untitled (100 Words)". It insists more forcefully that art *does* depend on skills – and that conceptual art is only identifiable as art when it finds a way of developing and manipulating those ideas skilfully. The protagonist decides, as a boy, to raise one arm above his head and to keep it there, an action which he deems an 'empty gesture' (Crouch 2011c: 46) ungoverned by 'any idea' (33). He eventually falls in with a group of artists, led by his older brother Anthony and their childhood neighbour Simon, who use the protagonist's disabled body as the centrepiece for increasingly lucrative exhibitions. The protagonist makes no claim for his gesture as art but, through a series of verbal parallelisms, Crouch implies that a similar emptiness characterises the art that appropriates it. The protagonist's claim that he 'went along with it all out of […] nothingness, really' (39) echoes the

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[2] Crouch's very recent play for families, *Beginners* (2018), which I have not yet seen or read, also features a character called Adrian. My thanks to Poppy Corbett for alerting me to this.

artists' description of their work as 'representations of nothingness'; his opinions of these representations as 'a little heavy-handed' resonates curiously with the cumbersome holding of his own hand (36). Simon's rejection of manual dexterity is contrasted with the art made by two other characters: a portrait painter for whom the protagonist sits, and, ultimately, Anthony, who abandons Simon to produce community art projects and then 'small canvasses about his memories' (47). Both of these acts of painting are associated with potential for moral transformation that the avant-garde artists lack. Anthony's return to painting seems to emerge from his activism, and secures his final reconciliation with his brother. The portrait painter's approach, as recounted by the protagonist, exhibits Richard Sennett's sense of material consciousness, with her subject here included within the compass of her material:

> There was no refuge or pretence. She hid nothing of what she was doing from me. She didn't want me to pose, but just to be. As soon as my concentration wavered, if I thought about other things, then she knew it immediately and we rested. It was a feat of endurance for both of us. […] I felt redeemed. I felt meaningful like something other than yourself is meaningful. For the first time ever I wished I could retract everything, go back, counsel myself out of myself on the night with the fireworks. Bereavement and redemption in the same breath. (43-44)

The artist both finds limits to her capacity to work with the protagonist, while simultaneously inspiring both him and herself to new levels of 'endurance'. This account highlights not only that artists should prioritise skills over concepts, but that this is the case because skills necessarily generate concepts. It is only when he is painted in this way that the protagonist's arm-raising becomes a conscious decision that might merit 'counsel', rather than a 'fact of life' (34) or an 'empty gesture' (46). Crucially, the meaningfulness to which the protagonist is exposed is only understood insofar as it is an expression of a relation with other elements of his environment. If, as Ingold argues, the concepts that are generally deemed 'abstract' still emerge from perceptual engagement with the world that makes up a taskscape, those thoughts would be better identified with that taskscape as a whole rather than individuals within it; as Gregory Bateson famously articulated, good and bad ideas should be situated within ecologies just as much as plants and animals (1972: 492). It seems paradoxical that an author who, in his introduction to the first edition of *My Arm*, worries that 'the visual arts have stolen a march on theatre in their ability to handle progressive forms' should present a play that, within the turns of its narrative, apparently advocates more strongly than Crimp ever does for a return to artisanship (2003: 9). By inheriting the staging 'vocabulary' of live art practices, Crouch challenges himself and subsequent performers of the play to match its progressive aesthetics with the progressive ethics of his fiction's painters, by emphasising the skill with which this vocabulary is manipulated (Bottoms 2009: 74).

The specific vocabulary that Crouch employs is to have the story told by manipulating and filming a selection of handheld props, largely donated by the audience upon entering the auditorium. This is how the most recently published version of *My Arm*'s script begins:

> This is the house we lived in.
>
> *The performer presents to the camera one of the objects from the audience.*
>
> This is my dad's car.
>
> *The performer presents a photo or an object.*
>
> This is my mum's car.
>
> *The performer presents a photo or an object.*
>
> This is our dog.
>
> *The performer presents a photo or an object.* (Crouch 2011c: 25-26)

The notes to the performer emphasise that '[a]part from a doll that represents the performer, the objects and pictures are in no way representational' and, in a particularly clear inheritance from the avant-garde practices identified by Emilie Morin, that they should be 'chosen at random' (Crouch 2011c: 24). The notes close by stressing that '[t]here is a *measured, haphazard* quality to how these events are given significance' (24, my emphasis). As discussed in the last chapter, this balance of hazard with a certain degree of structure, discipline or restraint is an important, but often ignored, feature of conceptual art. These plays are as determined as they are indeterminate and, in Crouch's theatrical setting, the work of determination is demanded of audiences as well as the performer. Both parties in *My Arm* conduct their own skilled practice, each with a distinct set of agents, tools and materials. The performer uses pre-prepared language to manipulate unexpected real-world materials and, by proxy, the mental perceptions of the audience; the audience apply their habits of mental engagement to the unexpected association of language and object before them. Although Crouch insists that the audience 'will make the transformation in me, not me', the practices are mutually dependent, each compensating for what the other cannot determine (qtd. in Bottoms 2009: 73): a performer makes a repeatable gesture before an audience, who share an established set of terms on which to respond. This is another restoration of Sennett's vision of the theatrical audience as an active witnessing force, and a more sustained one than Crimp's in that it is initiated by inviting the audience to contribute tokens of their engagement before the performance starts. Crucially, the objects which mediate this pair of practices are framed as gifts, objects whose value is located entirely in the social relations that they continue to renew. Crouch promises in his initial request for props that 'no conventional magic will be attempted' which would alter, or even appear to alter, the material conditions of the object (2011c: 24). Commentators have noted that *My Arm* gains its force from the

fact that its objects 'remain merely objects', and can continue to carry 'the resonances they hold for particular audience members' (Rebellato 2013a: 13-14; Bottoms 2009: 74). As the protagonist eventually does, they become 'meaningful like something other than yourself is meaningful' while never losing their relationship with the self who offered it (Crouch 2011c: 44).

However, *My Arm*'s initial script, printed before its first public previews at Battersea Arts Centre, does not establish the fixed pattern of this final version. Instead of objects which are 'in no way representational', the dog is represented by '*a photo of a dog*' and 'the house we lived in' by '*a rough picture of a house* [*drawn*] *on a notepad*' (Crouch 2003: 13, 15). Crouch claimed that he 'lost his nerve' over the original opening during the public previews, having been advised by his co-director Hettie Macdonald that these images 'break the rules' before their establishment (2015). The point of comparison with the portrait painter's treatment of the protagonist is clear: an environment needs to be created in which the audience are capable of contributing, by cultivating a matching structure of enduring attention. The heart of Dan Rebellato's argument about how Crouch's theatre 'explains away how all theatre works, but then does it anyway' is that Crouch highlights the way in which theatrical images are metaphors (2015: 8). The bodies and materials that represent fictional people and objects onstage do not require any visual or ontological correspondence with their referents. Naturalism, which *does* rely on certain enshrined conventions of visual correspondence, is merely a dead metaphor that *My Arm* exposes as such. One of the most suggestive features of Rebellato's discussion of metaphor is its association with skill. Good metaphors are those that 'reward sustained attention', making us 'stretch out' through a kind of mental gymnastics (2009: 24-26). Flipping Sennett's assertion that (sometimes wildly imaginative) metaphors can provide convenient ways of describing skilled practices, metaphors themselves both require and nurture skill (2009: 190-92). To appreciate all the interpretive possibilities that *My Arm* generates, audience members have to 'stretch out' and relinquish their habit of looking for visual cues familiar from naturalism – but they relinquish it gradually. As ultimately performed, the play's opening provides a transitional state in which the cues that audience members are expected to notice can still be traced to a single, albeit non-visual source: the words of the story being told. Watching the tentative 'rules' being established is comparable to Sennett's description of learning the violin through the Suzuki method: a delimited version of a complex technique only takes the initiate so far in becoming responsive, but it gives them immediate 'social confidence' from which to develop (2009: 155-56).

Like good musical teaching, the play does go on, rapidly, to complicate this model. Metonyms are introduced, such as the use of a lit sparkler to represent a firework display (2011c: 29). Introducing a real peanut and bird's nest to illustrate the protagonist's own simile to describe 'the thickest pubic hair and smallest penis [he had] ever seen on a boy of 14' initially operates as a joke to rupture the audience's now-established assumptions; after the surprise passes, however, it becomes clear that what is being shown is *itself* the referent of a simile, and that the overriding task of creating

new perceptions without full visual stimulus continues, but through a wider variety of means (35). The potential for words to influence the audience's imagination alone is made particularly clear with the entirely unillustrated simile about 'crying like a new-born lamb looking for its mother in the rain': the detail of it happening 'in the rain', superfluous to the sense but introduced as an affective extension of tears, suggests that the capacity for metaphorical imagination in Crouch as he writes and in the audience as they watch is now running unthinkingly (41).

However, close inspection reveals that all of this sophistication is still present, even within the final collected text, *before* the initial presentation of objects. Even setting aside the doll that represents the performer as an exception that proves the rule, the conceit of following the play's opening line, 'I'm going to hold my breath until I die', with a blackout relies, like the end of *Fewer Emergencies*, on a conventional metaphorical association between stage darkness and death (Crouch 2011c: 25). *My Arm* is, throughout, a complex representational ecology: 'the rules', as Crouch and his collaborators think of them, describe more than they proscribe the developing forms of engagement already latent within that ecology. Sennett makes clear early in *The Craftsman* that 'all skills […] begin as bodily practices' (2009: 10), but Ingold, who sees the social contracts that develop around these practices as one expression of a more expansive anthropology, is more emphatic in refusing too overstated a distinction between a novice's restricted set of movements and a condition of fluency. He argues that Walter Ong's description of learning to write or play an instrument as the internalisation of a technology until it becomes second nature denies the role of continuous bodily engagement (Ingold 2000: 402). To acknowledge second nature, one must turn away from nature. Such a turn is implicit in Gell's model of aesthetic objects as artificial traps into which viewers are seduced in order to free themselves and refine their perception, as well as in models of political theatre that paradoxically try to emancipate audiences from their habitual mode of perception by demanding a new mode of perception of them, in 'a rather intricate dramaturgy of sin and redemption' (Rancière 2011: 7). "The Emancipated Spectator", the lecture by Jacques Rancière that critiques these models, would go on to be a key inspiration for Crouch – but, even before its publication, Crouch's refusal to make a turn like this is implicit in his protagonist's description of being painted over nine months as 'a gestation' followed by 'my re-birth': the endurance demonstrated by artist and model is, for all the demands that it makes, indistinguishable from a process which is perceived as coming naturally. Here, too, the detail of conducting a nude painting under 'a bright *naked* light bulb' works to suggest a continuity between artistic activity and even the abiotic environment in which it is situated (Crouch 2011c: 43, my emphasis). There is another difference between the 2003 and 2011 scripts at this moment, one which works in opposition to the more carefully signalled presentation of objects: although both versions signal that the performer should pick up the doll at this point and hold it either '*in front of him*' (in 2003) or '*against their chest*' (in 2011), only the earlier script advises that '*this must feel like a break of convention*' (33). By the time the script enters its run of public performances, Crouch has

come to trust himself, and the performers and audiences who will go on to experience *My Arm*, that the play develops a series of evolving conventions, and that these already determine its continuous shaping as opposed to material which requires shaping and breaking as if from outside.

When Crouch began developing a second play, he noted that sustaining this integrated ecological perspective would be a challenge, and his own metaphors begin to drift: in a document of notes shared with James and smith before a preparatory workshop on *An Oak Tree*, he confesses that 'My Arm [sic] just happened. This, on the other hand, feels a bit like procreational sex. I hope we conceive.' (2013a: 231) Whether consciously or not, his choice of words continues *My Arm*'s commitment to refusing a binary between abstract ideas and material practices, as a *conceptual* art process is associated with parents' *conception* of children. He goes on to worry that his developing idea – of performing the play alongside a second, unprepared actor, different at every performance – will be seen as 'a gimmick' (239). The risk is figured as the play becoming a form of technology, which intrudes upon a natural perspective. Specifically, it risks becoming a labour-saving, cheaply repetitive form of technology, the kind that, according to Sianne Ngai, carries a capacity to erase technique within it (2017: 485). Ngai's 'theory of the gimmick' as an expression of how labour is organised under late capital will become important in relation to a later case study: for now, it is worth emphasising that the gimmick is just one, distinctively 'negative' or 'affectively mixed' way, in which the process of 'realiz[ing] supposedly abstract ideas in supposedly concrete things', central to any aesthetic theory, can be imagined (478). (Crouch's other worry that the idea might be 'crass *intellectual posturing*' also suggests an inappropriate mapping of abstracted choreography onto living bodies (2013a: 238, my emphasis).) Over the course of rehearsals for *An Oak Tree*, Crouch worked hard to avoid framing his idea as a gimmick and allowing it to remain a gift. Throughout these initial notes, Crouch returns to a definition of art, by Etienne Decroux, as 'the idea of one thing being given by another' (232, 238), with the second actor being framed as willingly giving themselves over to the play's representational matrix, rather than being claimed as material for the theatre-makers to appropriate. This framing continues into the performance notes published alongside the final text, which extends the chain of reciprocity further:

> This script contains examples of instructions to be *given* by the HYPNOTIST to the second actor. They are *given* as guidelines, but detailed attention must be *given* to these instructions to ensure a constant feeling of support and success for the first actor. (2011c: 56, my emphases).

The creative team offer their guidelines to any subsequent performers, who will return the gesture by giving their attention to the function of those guidelines, knowing that this gives them the authority to alter the text as necessary while recognising that they are unlikely to need to drastically. In the spirit of Radosavljević's proposal for a 'porous', relational dramaturgy, fidelity to the relations that the

dramaturgy establishes is more important than any fidelity to the precise details of the text exchanged (2013: 191).

The second actor does have to follow the script, however, and seems less able to reciprocate independently: for them, a confidence-generating but delimiting structure akin to the Suzuki method seems to apply throughout. This mirrors the constrictions in which the character of the father that they represent places himself, to gain 'closure' for the unusual and traumatic situation he finds himself in (Crouch 2011c: 95): the death of his daughter in a car accident, and his concomitant belief that he has miraculously changed the oak tree at the scene of the accident into her. These constrictions are reading out 'the instructions for a mental exercise' to himself and his wife, and volunteering himself for a hypnotism act staged by the driver of the car, who is played by Crouch: both experiences are cued in performance by the same '*"hypnotic" music*' (97). While Crouch emphasises the care that he took to ensure that there is 'no element of cruelty or parody' in his approach (55), and his research emphasises that 'all hypnosis is self-hypnosis' which can only happen if the volunteer 'giv[es] themselves over to being something else', the sense that the second actor is ultimately moved through a series of pre-planned postures is never entirely erased, and the script leans into this (2013a: 235, 238). In the opening exchange with the second actor, before Crouch takes on the role of the hypnotists, responses to apparently sincere, settling questions such as 'How are you feeling?' are scripted by Crouch; although the second actor is told that 'if you feel awkward or confused […] we'll stop', in a later scene, they are scripted to say that they have felt 'a bit' 'embarrassed' but chose not to mention it (2011c: 58-59, 91-92). The same scene also sees them feeding Crouch a compliment on a 'really well-written' play (94). The key to how this risk is averted lies in the scripted answer to a question about whether the show is 'a little contrived': it is '[h]ard to tell from here' (102). As this is among the later of the conspicuously fed answers, audience members are more likely to register that this might describe Crouch's own wishes for the play, passed onto the second actor like the compliment, as much as the second actor's experience. Where *My Arm* was developed in such a way that its moments of necessary contrivance are downplayed, *An Oak Tree* exposes and multiplies contrivances, but to the same underlying effect: just as *My Arm* relied on the fact that there is no point at which the audience would not be interpreting what they saw metaphorically, *An Oak Tree* highlights that there is no point at which socialised humans can describe themselves as not negotiating inherited postures or contrivances to which they must respond ever more sensitively to. Something that 'just happened', like *My Arm*, is simply the result of structuring conditions that have not yet become explicit. The image of Crouch and his co-performer remaining unable to tell if or how the situation they are in has been contrived resembles Barker's common ignorance, alongside his actors, before the meaning of his plays – but it avoids granting the play the status of a transcendent entity that somehow exists in addition to any of the collaborative acts required to make it.

This acceptance of a necessarily crafted or conceptual relationship with nature is dramatised in the play's penultimate scene, which provides *An Oak Tree*'s ethical climax. The father's commitment to rehearsing his therapeutic instructions and his imaginative exercise with the tree both face opposition from his wife, also played by Crouch, who complains that he is treating grief like 'some abstract intellectual fucking concept' (98) and refusing to acknowledge that 'what matters' is supporting his wife and surviving daughter (102). If the wife can be understood as making a misjudgement here, it is in insisting on distinguishing ideas and imagination from some purported material reality, without recognising that 'what matters' is generated by a process of making judgements about *matter* – and, indeed, that she is at this moment being portrayed by an actor and her daughter by a chair. The father's ethical failure is to attend too closely to certain practices at the expense of others, in the hope that he can reach the goal of redeeming 'all loss, all negativity' as the tape promises (99), and refusing to see his wife's response as a process of its own. The stance that would reconcile them is Ingold's proposal for a material culture in which subjects learn to 'tell the stories of what happens' to materials – with materials here including the stuff of the subject's own embodied emotional response – 'as they flow, mix and mutate' (2011: 30). If one character needs to attend more to the possibility of a new way of describing mutation, the other must attend to the limits that materials can place on descriptions of mutation. Crouch has sometimes described a loose wish to make theatre which is 'less material, more conceptual' (qtd. in Ilter 2011: 398). By this, he seems to mean resisting theatrical forms in which value and significance are generated by the verisimilitude or spectacular quality of onstage objects and performing bodies. But, as suggested above, part of the effectiveness of *My Arm* lies in the resonances that particular materials continue to carry, and of *An Oak Tree* in the visible accommodations that have to be made by the second actor – and Crouch oscillates throughout *An Oak Tree*'s working document between 'lik[ing] the idea of the de-materialised actor' (2013a: 238) and wanting to end the story with the protagonists 'managing to momentarily re-materialise the girl' (231). It might be more appropriate, therefore, to describe these plays as exemplifying Ingold's argument that a generalised 'materiality' is not conceptually useful, abstracted from stories of engagement with particular materials. Of all the performances considered in this study, *My Arm* and *An Oak Tree* are among the closest to affirming Ingold's theories of skill, and presenting the theatre as a space in which the syntheses of a dwelling perspective can be cultivated anew. Yet to do so requires a carefully delimited perspective: our capacity to 'work' and 'act together' to negotiate the flows of material spontaneously can only last as long as we are looking at them 'from here', within the theatre, independently from the wider world in which we dwell (Crouch 2011c: 82, 102).

3. Removing a model: *The Author* and *Adler and Gibb*

My Arm and *An Oak Tree* were developed with no particular venue in mind, and have been performed in a range of formal and informal theatre spaces. *ENGLAND* was the first of Crouch's scripts to be

commissioned for a particular space, albeit with the potential for national and international touring. These plays, as Stephen Bottoms has argued, are 'site generic" (rather than "site specific") plays, which seek to draw audiences' attention to the particular assumptions and structures that informed representation in spaces of this kind, when compared to the world beyond (2011b: 447). As discussed above, *ENGLAND* exposes those flows of nature and capital from which both audiences and actors are alienated, and cannot simply transform, because of the conditions of the gallery in which they find themselves. In *My Arm*, in which all the props are equally reshaped by the storytelling process, no distinction ultimately needs to be made between those which resemble and do not resemble their referents: the performance can rely, as Rebellato does, on the fact that the boundary between metaphor and metonym or simile is 'fuzzy' and 'relaxed'. But more precise demarcations are available. Eduardo Kohn has employed Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics to secure a distinction between human and non-human practices of sign-making. Iconic and indexical frames of reference, that which becomes indistinguishable from its referent and that which points towards its referent, can come to exist in the non-human world – with Kohn giving the example of the stick insect surviving to evolve because it constitutes an icon for a stick without knowing it – whereas symbolic representation is unique to humans. This symbolic order 'enjoy[s] a level of detachment from the lower-order processes' of icons and indices, but is also 'dependent' upon them, and Crouch's later work becomes more invested in this tension between detachment and dependency (Kohn 2013: 176). When compared with Kohn's model, informed by ethnographic research in the Upper Amazon, Ingold's 'relaxed' attitude to the line between the skills which come naturally to animals and those which have to be acquired by humans appears inadequate: like the parent unwilling to explain how sex happens, he, as Sennett curtly puts it, 'rather miss[es] the point' that any distinction between natural and cultural skills 'can be literally constructed, and the point is how to do it' (2009: 141). In the theatre, this construction of skill begins by acknowledging with Rebellato that metaphors can be made well or badly, and that these good or bad decisions have implications that relate to wider modes of representation. By suggesting not only that artifacts can be grown as well as made, but are *better* grown than made, and by denying appeals like Ong's to technologies that become 'second nature', Ingold avoids making particular judgements such as these in favour of ultimately folding culture back into nature's terms. This mistake is also made by *ENGLAND*'s protagonist, when they describe the expensive private clinic at which they will be treated as Act One closes. They declare that well-designed architecture is 'like an organism adapting to the culture of its time', but this is used to gloss the introduction of 'domes and minarets' in 'the Indian style' to an eighteenth-century country house in 1830 (Crouch 2011c: 141-42). Their tendency to interpret the design as organic, rather than imperialist, foreshadows their readiness to claim the organ of a comatose Middle Eastern man.

The house's dates are apposite. The protagonist's comparison of culture to an organism is an example of the kind of disavowed hybridity which Bruno Latour associates with the arrival of

modernity: the Moderns remain conceptually dependent on nature even as they believe they have detached themselves from it, because references to Nature's transcendence are required to guide the ways in which they 'construct Society through and through' (1993: 37). Ingold is in agreement with the broad strokes of Latour's argument, but never goes beyond effectively reasserting his claim that we have never been modern, rather than taking up Sennett's and Latour's invitation to reconstruct the false terms on which the division between nature and culture has been written into the social world.[3] There are times in which Crouch's later plays stretch even further away from Ingold's confidence in the dwelling perspective, appearing to take up an argument like Timothy Morton's critique of 'ecophenomenology': *contra* Latour, we are, and appear likely to remain, modern and the appropriate ethical response, particularly in the Anthropocene, is to reject nature and dwelling as categories and to find ways to live without them (Morton 2013: 19). The dying protagonist at the end of Act One eventually cries that '[t]here is no place to accommodate how I am and how I feel', and associates their terminal condition with their own 'defeatis[m]' and failure to be a good patient (Crouch 2011c: 140, 137). Unlike in *An Oak Tree*, a human cannot be perceived as doing 'well' simply by being (a) patient and allowing their accommodation with the changing flows of their environment to be taken for granted: the fusion of nature and culture has to be executed by each subject individually. To find one's self unable to perform this fusion is, according to Morton, to recognise that one is already living after 'the end of the world' – and this is precisely the phrase that Crouch uses to describe the '*deafening sound of splitting and destruction that leads the audience out of the first gallery space*' at the end of Act One, as the protagonist apparently dies (142). The decision to represent the end of the world by producing a soundscape from which an audience will, apparently spontaneously, flee suggests that Crouch wishes to map a failure of dwelling directly onto the performance space. Far from cultivating environments in which audiences can be newly absorbed, Crouch's later works seem invested in presenting the theatrical auditorium as an entrapping 'parody of *Umwelt*' in which the audience will inevitably fail to dwell.

Always set in 'the Jerwood Theatre Upstairs at the Royal Court Theatre', regardless of where it is staged, *The Author* repeatedly announces its apparently liberating detachment from the world outside. One character, seated among the audience and only ever figured as a particularly chatty audience member, insists that 'this is the safest place in the world', that '[t]he cars and buses go round and round outside and none of them have any idea' (192). Another, also seated among the audience, gives an account of himself entering a flotation tank: in one of only three physical gestures given as precise stage directions in the entire play, this character '*re-presents the action*' that he has previously described, of reaching up to seal himself into the tank, tacitly associating the auditorium with sensory deprivation (172). Having argued that their environments as entirely self-enclosed and untextured, in

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[3] For Ingold's most sustained critique of Latour's actor-network theory, on the grounds that constructed 'networks' demand an alienation from engagement with life that his 'meshworks' do not, see Ingold 2011:89-94.

ways that *My Arm* and *An Oak Tree* never needed to, these characters can imaginatively establish what they perceive as a non-hierarchial gift economy within it: the audience member proudly announces that he is a 'Friend of the Royal Court Theatre', a relationship normally understood to be gift-like in its reliable-yet-spontaneous reciprocity, but is here being used to conceal a commercial system (178); the man in the tank is revealed to be a playwright and director who sees his process as 'hand[ing] over' what he has 'discover[ed]' to allow actors and audiences 'to make their own discoveries', but still expects the authority that comes with that passing over (190). The theatre's failure to constitute a self-enclosed space is highlighted by the fact that each character cannot be clearly distinguished from the performer who portrays them: even when not played by him, as it was in the first production, the fictional playwright is always named 'Tim Crouch'; all the remaining characters are named for the actors who portray them, with the role of the audience member being created for and played in the original production by Adrian Howells. Crouch has acknowledged that he wrote this latter character on the basis of Howells's background in interactive, often one-on-one, performance pieces that require him to secure and sustain audience trust (2016: 280-81). Helen Iball has described Howells's role in the original production as a booby-trap for the audience, alongside other metaphors such as a parasite and 'gluttonous cuckoo chick' (2011: 438-39, 44). The audience at *The Author* are expected to recognise these traps for what they are: the careful and conscious manipulation of pre-existing material by a series of external agents which initially looks like an *Umwelt* until, through critical attention on their part, it is revealed as a parody. They should recognise it in part by recognising the failure of both 'Tim Crouch' and Howells's character to retain control of their own distinct agency in relation to this network of others. The latter delights in the kinds of explicit representation of violence that Tim's play exploits, and calls it 'such an education', until he finds himself in an altercation with one of the play's actors (2011c: 177); the former is seduced by his capacity 'to download and transfer and assemble' images of extreme violence, until he feels that he can 'meander, really, drift, not really thinking' in a world entirely composed of images – and ultimately justifies downloading child pornography (201-02).

For all that it seems as if a dramaturgy of traps is replacing one of gifts here, the revisions that Crouch and his collaborators made to the end of *The Author* over the course of its composition and production highlight a desire to retain some trace of a genuine gift economy: more consciously, if just as quietly as in Crimp's work, something like negative skill is constructed. The play's narrative ends with the 'Tim Crouch' character being found out for watching pornography (and, more circumspectly, for abusing a sleeping child in the room with him) and committing suicide in the flotation tank. After the death, signified by the actor's departure from the auditorium, Crouch's original draft called for the revelation of another planted actor: an elderly woman, compelled to 'say something', '[n]ow that we're on our own'. She would describe an article 'about stories', which she had read during her husband's diagnosis with a terminal disease.

It talked about the early days when the story-teller would stand behind the audience. The audience would face a wall or an empty space, and the story teller [sic] would stand behind them and tell the story without anyone looking at them. The audience would then see their own pictures, project their own vision of the story into thin air. This struck me. This gave me hope (2013b: 244).

This story suggests an alternative model of spectatorship from that of Howells's character, who goes to the Royal Court for 'an education' in experiences of violence and deprivation of which he would otherwise be unaware (Crouch 2011c: 192). This alternative is specifically informed by Rancière's vision of an emancipated spectator who does not need to be brought into new insights or perspectives, but is always 'link[ing] what [they] see to what [they] have seen and said, done and dreamed' (2011: 17). The speech suggests that the audience have been engaged in such free self-determination throughout *The Author*. Their capacity to be trapped by the verbal descriptions of violent acts, not knowing whether to 'allow [them]selves to imagine what is described, or actively attempt not to' is always still dependent upon a more fundamental, and hopeful, capacity to maintain control of that decision and to reimagine the world freely (White 2013: 190).

Yet this parable is an inadequate paraphrase of the performance, which does not account for the forms that the audience's agency takes in two crucial respects. Firstly, they have not put their imagination to work on 'an empty space', but on each other, the performers and the shared space. Secondly, they are invited to demonstrate their attention by making public contributions, not merely listening and privately reflecting. By electing, with varying degrees of consciousness and spontaneity, to answer questions or pointedly refuse to do so, to react non-verbally or even to walk out (as modelled by another planted actor), the audience are not only reshaping the material of the play but providing the material that others will reshape. *My Arm* and *An Oak Tree* had been attempts to sustain a gift relation between the theatre-makers and their audiences, with worries over the materiality as such of the performance being subsumed into the ongoing interactions between the participants *through* the material components of the performance. This approach allowed Crouch to meet Rancière's expectation of performers and audiences who are equally active – but at the expense of imagining the performance as a 'third thing that is owned by no one, but which subsists between them, excluding any uniform transmission', which allows all participants to register their engagement insofar as it resists their attempts at achieving an entirely absorbed mode of relation (Rancière 2011: 15). Some will underestimate their agency and fail to apply necessary force to what they are witnessing: these are audience members who, for whatever reason, find descriptions of violence and abuse as upsetting as their graphic representation. Others will overestimate it and assert themselves too forcefully, such as those who become frustrated at the actors' perceived failure to improvise in response to their contributions: while *An Oak Tree*'s script encourages deviation from the text if needed to give the second actor support, the cast of *The Author* realised that they had to develop

strategies to return to the text swiftly after interruption and to give the audience a sense that the invitation to interact came with responsibility to make appropriate judgements about their contributions (cf. Bottoms 2011a: 426-28). Far from securing conditions in which everyone can 'work' and 'act together', Rancière's model of emancipated spectatorship is built on a rejection of 'communitarian essence of theatre' that is bound up in the earlier plays' 'refusal of the third': the equality between subjects is always 'exercised through irreducible distances' (2011: 16-17). This is affectively registered in *The Author* as undeniable feelings of bitterness and regret, in both the audience and the performers, which justify Iball's continued ethical doubts about the burden that the play and its subject matter place on more vulnerable audience members (2011: 444).

Yet "The Emancipated Spectator" acknowledges explicitly that the aim of these interactions is to develop and exhibit new 'skills' – and a quotation from the closing paragraphs of Rancière's essay forms the epigraph for the collected edition of Crouch's plays (Rancière 2011: 22). Crouch's commitment to what he has termed an 'old hippy' desire for a culture of 'collective responsibility' leads him to retain the vestiges of a communitarian model of the theatre, one which works towards consensus rather than Rancière's dissensus even if it is no longer reached within the theatre itself (Crouch 2011a: 422). Radosavljević notes that plays like *The Author* guarantee safety for neither performers nor audiences, but with the important caveat (inherited from Bojana Cvejić) that what is unguaranteed is only 'safety [according] to a prior self-regulation': safety can and must, like the wider structures of ethical and aesthetic judgement within which it belongs, be continually discovered within a process of skill (2013: 189). In the first published version of the script, an attempt is made not to offer a model of such a theatre but to encourage the audience to end their time together by shaping it themselves, unsupported by Crouch as author. Now, after Tim's departure, '[*t*]*here is no scripted ending*': following initial prompts by the only remaining actor, the audience '*will deal with what's left – in whichever way is felt appropriate*', ideally by continuing conversations here or elsewhere, and '*certainly* […] *creating an imperfect act of love and hope*' (Crouch 2009: 61). Given these detailed suggestions, and the continued reliance on the actor playing the audience member for support, this ending in effect remained '*scripted*'. Ultimately the company found that these conditions still constituted a 'forced gesture of being "all in this together"' (Bottoms 2011b: 462). The 2011 edition abandons all text following Crouch's exit except '*The houselights are on. The doors to the theatre are open.*' (203) The continued presence of the last actor and 'the persistent absence of applause' offer an invitation to stay within the space; the lights and opening of the doors as clear an invitation to leave (Bottoms 2011b: 463). Either action is acceptable and can constitute an '*appropriate*' response to the performance. As in certain Fluxist pieces, and as in the opening re-imagination of the second actor in *An Oak Tree*, even the most apparently passive theatrical gestures acquire 'a quality of activity' (Morin 2011: 79). Like Ingold but in the opposite direction, Rancière's argument often hinges on resolving binaries by privileging one component: in his case, his desire not

to 'assimilate listening' and observing into 'passivity' leads him to a ruggedly political vision of theatre in which participants only exist insofar as they are acting or making interventions, which contrasts with Ingold's tendency towards presenting creative human actions as expressions of a wider environment (2011: 12). Crouch's continued emphasis on gentleness and support allows him to retain space for passivity, or at least tolerance for actions that are not fully conscious: Wendy Hubbard's account of finding herself fainting during a performance of *The Author* shows that the boundary between agency and passivity, working practitioner and worked-on material, is unstable all the way down (2013: 22). Such an account also makes space for ecological critiques of Rancière's political theory which allow degrees of agency to be extended to forces incapable of speech or rational thought, and thus for richer accounts of environmental absorption closer to Ingold's (Bennett 2010: 106-07).

Each of *The Author*'s three endings feels more '*imperfect*', or less determined, than its predecessor, but only feels less determined because the opportunities to determine the experience have been more widely distributed, beyond the sphere of the playwright, the performers or the individual audience member – to the point that, as *The Author* finishes and the audience gradually breaks up, this indeterminate quality of the remembered theatrical experience resembles the indeterminacy of the world outside. There is nothing to say that this world cannot be dwelt within. *The Author* can be seen as preparing its audience to enter a complex taskscape, governed by agencies which lie unseen and beyond their control, but in relation to which they retain a degree of agency. It does so by creating a model that bleeds into that taskscape: on these terms, it can only be considered a trap insofar as the world which it is modelling is also full of traps, to which the audience's attention may now be renewed. Reconceiving Crouch's theatre of indeterminacy as one in which agency needs to be ever more precisely determined helps to explain what Morin sees as its 'quasi-utopian' politics (2011: 80). Utopia will not be reached by skilful interventions in the political field from one individual or group, but at the moment at which all participants in that field have the opportunity to operate autonomously at once, in the kind of simultaneously compelled and spontaneous gesture that a gift economy, or Ingold's dwelling perspective, would allow.

This is a simultaneously dispiriting and comforting political affect: spontaneous unity of purpose and participation seems impossible, but also somehow embedded within existing practices, if they could only be spelt out more precisely. By the time of Crouch's next solo-authored play for adults, *Adler and Gibb*, this dispiriting dimension appears to have won out. The play dramatises these concerns by establishing a conflict between Margaret Gibb and Louise Mane. Gibb is the surviving partner from a fictional pair of reclusive artists who 'became united in their desire to integrate art and everyday life' and destroyed the bulk of their existing works (2014a: 29); Mane, who idolises Gibb's partner, Janet Adler, has recovered and exhibited much of this work, and wishes to star as Adler in a Hollywood film about her life. Louise attempts to frame this response to Adler's work explicitly as

the due return of a gift of a napkin that Adler passed to Louise's mother as a child (6), but it takes the form of appropriation, claiming as physical property artworks which had been figured instead as immaterial 'life' (88). Louise and her acting coach Sam attempt to achieve this perversely generous theft by breaking into Gibb's overgrown rural property, granting significance to the site but only in terms of what their intervention will add to it: in Sam's words, 'we go in, we work, we nourish […] we take what we can and we leave' (55). Confronting Gibb after their break-in, Louise attempts to convince her to be open to collaboration on the project using metaphors, borrowed from her own acting exercises with Sam, of expansion into physical space: 'see what happens when we take one brick away from this wall' (55). The examples all resonate with the Heideggerian definition of dwelling, as an act which is initiated by the intentional clearing of a space and projection of identity onto it, and which is critiqued by Ingold because it gives a false privilege and precedence to rational, distinctively human thinking rather than embodied doing (2011: 11). Adler and Gibb's attitude to art comes closer to this integration, precisely by foregoing the 'intention' that a naturalistic actor like Louise excessively values. Gibb simply declares that making 'some of the most influential work of the late twentieth century' was 'not our intention' (Crouch 2014a: 55). Yet any comfortable sense that her retreat is a 'home' is unstable: she acknowledges that 'the air is bad' (62), and that she makes a living by working at a gas station (39). The decision to reject the making of artistic objects in favour of a dwelling perspective still requires a degree of intention, and does not guarantee either personal bodily health or freedom from complicity in a resource-extracting labour market. Once again, the play's own dramaturgy reinforces this failure to integrate one's self within a world. Of particular note is the decision to have the onstage children, who appear to be the show's stage managers, replace Gibb's gun and Sam's sledgehammer with increasingly '*outlandish and theatrical*' novelty props: both are tellingly forms of tool, the latter of which Gibb sarcastically mistakes for a visitor's gift, which conspicuously cease to work either within the diegesis or the stage ecology that the theatre-makers set up (36-39).

Faced with such a resistant ecology, the only option left is to embrace one's failure to experience integration within it: Morton has argued that an ethics of dwelling within the world might be replaced with one of 'intimacy', in which non-human objects and assemblages 'obtrude on our awareness with greater and greater urgency' until they require conscious care (2013: 108). Yet to make this shift spectacularly is to continue to assert a degree of agency: to surrender intention without being willing to surrender that surrendering. Within Crouch's script, the deceased Adler, who justified an early 'attempt on her life' on the basis that she felt 'more intimacy with the dead than with the living', is testament to that failed surrender (2014b: 25). In a line that Adler used to seduce Gibb, and which Louise has discovered and appropriated for her portrayal, the couple are compared to 'climbing partners roped together' who will tumble 'gladly down into the crevasse' (85): the metaphor of the climber or acrobat, as used by Bateson to describe strategic and self-perfecting human management of

the environment, is reconfigured in its negative form, but still registered as a curious achievement (1972: 506). It serves as a knowingly impotent self-sacrifice: an attempt to make a 'pure gift" of one's self, "pure" on the basis that there will be no giver left to receive any return gift and no recipient is identified to enact the return.

What middle ground can be established between an intention-driven form of appropriative dwelling as practised by Sam and Louise and a potentially solipsistic rejection of dwelling exhibited by the theatricality both of Adler and Gibb and the makers of *Adler and Gibb*? It would be one in which one can acknowledge that 'there is no place to accommodate how I am and how I feel' but without having to move from there, as the protagonist of *ENGLAND* does, to a declaration that 'I think I DO want to die.' (2011c: 140-41) A potential model, albeit one which seems to be necessarily located beyond *Adler and Gibb* itself, is suggested by Gibb's monologue towards the end of the play. She recounts the end of Adler's life, a period during which her lover's sense of identity dissolved to the point that 'she didn't know the hand in front of her face'. 'The last year of her life was just cleaning, feeding and holding. Watching the yard and the creatures. Letting nature in.' (2014b: 77)

The gerunds make it crucially unclear whether it is Adler, Gibb or both performing these acts of caring. More pointedly, the opening sentence paraphrases the subtitle of Adrian Howells's 2011 performance piece *The Pleasures of Being: Washing, Feeding and Holding*. Howells had killed himself a few months before the first performance of *Adler and Gibb*, after one of many sustained periods of depression. Crouch, smith and James had seen at first hand the extent and consequences of Howells's emotional investment in responding to audiences during the original Royal Court production of *The Author*: part of the reason for the removal of the more '*scripted*' discussion at the play's end was because he would be too distraught to continue (Crouch 2016: 282). According to Howells's annotated script, he was encouraged to emphasise his detachment from his role as 'Adrian', to treat his character like an orchestral performer's instrument: although he would not always be playing it, he would remain 'part of the piece' throughout (qtd. in Crouch 2016: 284). Crouch had expected Howells to manage the same kind of porous identity which he was managing during the same play, or which the gathered objects develop in *My Arm*, always 'visible but unlit, on the tabletop, like actors in the wings' carrying their original resonances (2011c: 24). Yet Howells gave too much of himself (and chose not to participate in the play's 2010 run at the Edinburgh Festival): following the terms in which Iball had discussed the play, Crouch has compared him to the 'sacrificial anode' who supported the rest of the play to his own cost (2016: 287). This was a dynamic that Howells had become more attuned to and been managing to break away from in his own performance practice: during a fellowship at the University of Glasgow from 2006 to 2009, he had decided to abandon the drag persona Adrienne, which had characterised most of his interactive performance to that point, and begun making work centred around one-to-one offerings of therapeutic acts such as hugs and foot-washing. The aim, as he outlined in an interview with Dominic Johnson, was 'to

emphasise the *cost* […] of an engagement with another person' and to allow himself to receive in return rather than to operate within what Johnson calls a 'sacrificial economy'; some participants in *The Pleasures of Being* ultimately asked if they could bathe Howells in return (2016: 116). As with Crouch's plays, Howells's performances remained commodities, and Fintan Walsh notes that one of the consequences of being a 'generous performer' in such an economy is that 'there persists a sense that we can never fully return the offering' and 'a risk too of self-depletion or sacrifice' (2016: 232). These performances had self-depleted by 2014, but *Adler and Gibb* makes enough of a space to identify, in the closing story of its namesakes, why they were worth mourning: they modelled, however on the point of tipping into sacrifice, a relationship between performer and audience in which each was absorbed in responding equally to the practices of another. In an on- and offstage world in which dwelling appears impossible, *Adler and Gibb* can only offer a compromised theatrical representation of such performances. It remains unclear whether the play should be seen as following Morton's refusal of dwelling, by locating any fuller experience of these performances in a mourned-for past, or Latour's and a pragmatically reframed Ingold's promise of dwelling, by seeing them as a model for future performances to be created elsewhere.

4. Punctuation and sacrifice: *what happens to hope at the end of the evening*

To bring together some of the concerns of this and the previous chapter, I will consider how smith and Crouch went on to explore these questions in the collaboration of which they dedicated the published script to Howells, although it received its first performance before his death. *what happens to hope at the end of the evening* has been described as an attempt to combine the writing and performing styles that both collaborators use in their solo-authored work. As is conventional in his practice, smith's character, named as 'Andy', is seated at a music stand and reads from the script throughout.[4] The published script is a facsimile of that used in performance, a decision taken in part to highlight that '*ANDY* turns the page' is given as a stage direction at the bottom of almost every right-hand page. Crouch, listed and described only as Andy's 'friend', learned his role and performed it on more conventionally naturalistic terms. The political implications of creating a performance that incorporates two techniques for delivering a single scripted text become most clear in a particular repeated line. smith's speeches frequently draw on performance theory and historic performances that have informed his own scholarly research. Having, from the start of the piece, celebrated the theatre as 'a space where we can really be together' (Crouch and Smith 2014: 2), Andy announces that he 'want[s] to start a revolution here'. Yet his model of theatrical revolution is figured, twice over, as reliant upon continuation in non-theatrical spaces by non-theatrical means: he describes reading a book and having a conversation about how the Living Theatre 'led audiences out onto the streets and encouraged them to shout "Paradise Now! Paradise Now! Paradise Now! Paradise Now! Paradise

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[4] In some performances, Sue Maclaine stood in for smith, retaining the name 'Andy' (Crouch and smith 2014: iii). My thanks to Poppy Corbett for clarifying this.

Now!'"(46) As the piece closes, after Andy has left the space, his friend takes over reading from Andy's script and concludes the performance:

> We arrive here from some other place, but this is also a place. We listen and watch and we make. We do all of these things together. And then at the end we get up and we leave and we do something. We move somewhere else. To someone or something else. We start again.
>
> My friend is here.
>
> Paradise now. Paradise now. Paradise now. (63)

It is tempting to load critical significance onto the difference between 'Paradise Now!' and 'Paradise now.' The former suggests that, while the theatre might incubate the conditions for political change, it demands practice outside of theatrical space; the paradise of harmonious dwelling needs to be brought from its potential existence in the future into the present, but this speech-act retains the status of an unmet demand. These are the conditions associated with a dramaturgy of negative skill that I identified in Crimp's plays, as well as in *Adler and Gibb* and, more tenuously, *ENGLAND* and *The Author*; they underscore Ridout's model of a theatrical ethics which initiates a labour of ethical thought to continue elsewhere. 'Paradise now', if read as a statement of fact rather than an imperative, suggests that this labour has already begun: the difference between this place and the 'other place' in which the audience will go and do 'something else' is one of degree rather than kind; 'now' is being used to indicate that the change has to some extent already happened, and that any further change cannot happen *without* this sense of change already being prepared for and determined. This difference corresponds with the script's other conspicuous example of ambiguous punctuation, the absence of either a full stop or a question mark at the end of its title: does the performance offer a model for how hope can be sustained at the end of the performance, or does it invite the audience to feel frustration (again?) at hope's disappearance tonight?

However, the difference between 'Paradise Now!' and 'Paradise now.' is dependent upon my act of reading. Although the punctuation suggests a difference between them in intonation, volume and potentially accompanying gesture, none would necessarily be executed by the performers or noted by the audience. Similarly, in a collaborative script with the writers among its performers, there is no certainty whether a gesture like this can be isolated as a scripting decision: it might equally have emerged as an attempt to document initial vocal experiment. This kind of approach does not necessarily deny the relevance of my original interpretation, but the difference between two identically worded but differently punctuated sentences needs to be seen as one of a number of pairings that this performance relies upon, in which the partners hover between identity and non-identity: a text and its performance; an actor and their character; the people assembled in a theatre and

the wider political assemblies of which they are a part; 'Andy', Andy Smith and a smith; a man and his friend.

Writing about text and performance has often emphasised non-identity, in the name of sustaining a politics of radical difference, working 'to always and already destabilise its own particular claims to authority' (Tomlin 2013: 12). Rebellato's "Exit the Author" concludes by turning to Adorno as a way to account for the political importance of playtexts which underdetermine the conditions of their performance among the overdetermined signifiers of global consumer capitalism. The 'tensions between the performance and the play' help to remind audiences that 'art never totally resembles the world'; the more 'apertures that have to be filled by actors, directors, designers and audiences', the more 'perspectives […] that displace and estrange the world' become apparent, as if to help let in more of the messianic light from the end of *Minima Moralia* (Rebellato 2013a: 26-27; cf. Adorno 2005: 247). Yet the virtues of non-identity thinking are ultimately in the service of an argument which reinstates identity elsewhere, insofar as the essay is a defence of the playwright as an identifiable creative agent. To celebrate *Attempts on Her Life* as an 'innovation in dramaturgy' is to acknowledge that any performance of it would cease to be registered as such if it could not be identified, in at least some respect, with a text and a discrete creative gesture on the part of Martin Crimp (Rebellato 2013a: 25). Contemporary indeterminate plays only signal "the death of the author" in the sense that Barthes and Foucault originally intended: not to deny the author agency, but to trace that agency more precisely within the processes and 'author functions' by which the text is produced (22). Even if, like Tomlin, one's emphasis is on pursuing poststructuralist analysis as rigorously as possible, always seeking the remainder than an author function leaves out, the fact that theatre-makers themselves can employ this analysis as well as critics means that this refusal can ultimately remain, as she says elsewhere, 'just as authored, constructed and skill-based as any other aesthetic' (Tomlin 2013: 48). To discuss the relationship between a text and its performance, an actor and their character, or the inside and the outside of a theatrical frame always demands engagement with the sacrificial logic at the core of identity thinking: to work out which parts of a text or a person need to be given up or transformed in order to secure the survival of what is most valuable about them within a theatrical context. One conception of the author is killed only – and in order – for the author to rise again in a different form. The best that a radical theatre can offer is to refuse to mask the violence implicit in such sacrifices and acknowledge, as Ridout argues, that there is 'something wrong with theatre' that will only be altered by altering the society in which it is found (2006: 29). I believe that Crouch's and his collaborators' theatre-making is predicated on a belief that this is not enough. It should be possible to cultivate a theatre in which the separation of text from performance, actor from character, and so on is not registered as a breach. The theatre becomes just 'somewhere else' where we 'do something' that just happens to be differently framed.

The difference between the radical critical detachment from the theatre that this 'Paradise Now!' perspective works to enshrine, and the equally radical absorption within it of the 'Paradise now' perspective, can be mapped onto Ingold's distinction between making and weaving. The former demands that performers and audiences find themselves alienated from their processes of making or interpretation, to register them as materials or commodities, which they must work to give new value to and 'bring back to life' (2000: 346). The latter refuses any distinction between thinking and doing, with no condition of death or reification for materials to be brought back to life from. It is the expression of practitioners absorbed in 'the ongoing, temporal interweaving of [their] lives with one another and with the manifold constituents of [their] environment' (348). As his practice has progressed, Crouch has sought to highlight the near-impossibility of such a theatre: the logic of sacrifice is one that the modern subject cannot think beyond, without paradoxically sacrificing sacrifice. Yet, perhaps particularly in the wake of Howells's departure from *The Author* and, later, his suicide, Crouch has also placed greater emphasis on the moral necessity of cultivating this impossible theatre. All the more fiercely than in Crimp's theatre, the dwelling that Ingold presents as humans' proper ecological condition is reconfigured as an object of desire.

Desires require absence, but they can also be lived with, nursed and intermittently satisfied, as the expression of 'good enough' socialisation. Crouch's dramaturgy often feels closer in spirit to Ingold's writing, insofar as it allows for this, making the possibility of dwelling manifest within his practice. Indeed, Ingold's emphasis on the etymological connection between 'materiality' and 'maternity', as an invitation to see the world as continually reproducing itself and to locate ourselves within the flows of that reproduction, finds a resonance in some of the ways in which Crouch and his character describe their aesthetic experiences: not only in the 'gestation' of *My Arm*'s protagonist and Crouch's hopes of 'conceiv[ing]' as he makes *An Oak Tree*, but also, in a queered form, in the manner in which Adler and Gibb dissolve their art into a process of 'let[ting] the nature in'. Crouch's and his collaborators' emphasis on friendship, most prominent in *what happens to hope at the end of the evening*, as the condition from which theatre is assembled and which it explores, also helps to tie dwelling to concrete but contingent practices: friendship is, ideally, the form of relations in which exchanges of gifts or affection emerge spontaneously and voluntarily rather than according to an imposed ritual contract; every exchange both sustains that affection in the present and promises it for the future. Crouch sought to retain a trace of it across all three endings of *The Author*: at the very end of her speech in the original draft, the elderly woman mentions that she will be 'go[ing] as a group' to see *The 39 Steps* next week and Adrian cheerily promises that she will 'have a great time' (Crouch 2013b: 245); one of the suggested unscripted endings in the first published text is that audience members might go for a drink or to other shows together (Crouch 2009: 61).

Yet the most significant practical manifestation of this desire to achieve dwelling lies in Crouch's emphasis on textual processes over finished products. The conventional Anglo-American

text-based hierarchy which Radosavljević's theatre-makers resist imagines the text as a tool with an entirely coherent story that can be brought into use easily by other artists; this has led those who have historically preferred to associate themselves with the antagonistic performance tradition, such as next chapter's case study, to mock conferences at which playwrights offer a 'long long pontifications on the understanding of a comma' as evidence of a crisis of imagination when those tools fail to work (Etchells 1999: 104). In Chapter 1, I proposed a model of viewing indeterminate texts as playwrights' traps for other artists, which leave this skill-narrative unclear: no debate would ever resolve what to do with Crimp's small print or trademark signs. The ellipses that Sennett describes as essential to effective instructions are arguably such a punctuation mark: they invite the reader to come to their own conclusions about what needs to be done, but sustain control over the reader because they are 'located precisely where the reader wants the release from tension that an explicit conclusion might provide' (2009: 235). While these traps are benign in the sense that they provide the resistance which ultimately increases these artists' creative freedom, they still rely on the creation of fake or parody environments and the sacrificial deletion of one particular way of approaching a text for the sake of a new one. The texts that emerge from Crouch's and his collaborators' rehearsal processes, however, aspire to be one possible account of a process of the thinking that occurred *with* texts and *through* acts of writing, as well as directing, improvisational acting, negotiating props and working out when to open the doors, in the rehearsal room and the auditorium – and this list of acts can ultimately be extended to include all subsequent reading and staging of texts that they 'imagine will never be fixed' (Crouch 2003: 11). Texts might be seen as themselves environments in which a variety of tools and traps are encountered. Far from leading to an experience of rupture, punctuation is simply another ongoing feature of a process that is 'punctuated but not terminated by the appearance of the pieces that it successively brings into being' (Ingold 2000: 348). Cornford makes a distinction like this when he compares how Chekhov and Peter Hall directed Paul Rogers to interpret pauses in his delivery of scripts. Hall encouraged Rogers to treat the pause as a proxy line, in which nothing was said but which the actor fills with 'something', whereas Chekhov proposed that line and pause were both already imbued with a consistent 'stream of inner life' which the pause could radiate more fully than speech (Cornford 2012: 329-30). In the former, the text is considered to be a surface on which the independent human imagination acts to compensate for its fissures and insufficiencies. In the latter, the text is effectively dematerialised, as the interpreter comes to participate in the intention that underlies why it exists. Thinking about what it means to articulate the two different expressions of hope that are traceable in the difference between 'Paradise Now!' and 'Paradise now' is ultimately little different from the kind of thinking that went into scripting it.

The distinction between traps and gifts is one that has to be continuously negotiated in practice. For this reason, it remains more appropriate to describe Radosavljević's 'dramaturgy-led' theatre in which 'anything goes' as the expression of a desire for such a theatre in the face of larger-

scale material scripts and strategies that continue to police what is recognisable as 'rigour, intelligence, intuition and attention to detail'. Yet Crouch's evolving practices work to make this desire more and more realistic, and offer a model in which skill is not entirely framed by its negation. Within this approach, the relationship between theatrical fiction and the world beyond remains porous because the relationship between different theatre-makers, and between theatre-makers and audience, is more fluid, grounded in negotiation between intersecting practices rather than interacting with a common set of resistant objects. In the face of Ridout's location of theatre's ethical potential outside the theatre, Crouch's work might invite a more holistic ethics of theatre-making that distinguishes less absolutely between performers and spectators, or responses within and outside of the theatre. As part of her argument for Simon Stephens's influence on Holmes and the Secret Theatre project, Bolton draws on his admission, 'I love the idea of being a theatre worker, infinitely more than I like the idea of being a writer' (2016: 338). As more contemporary artists define themselves in these terms, Crouch's work invites a more holistic ethics of theatre-making, which explores how 'being a theatre worker' or even 'being in the theatre', in their broadest senses, can constitute a form-of-life in which ethical decisions have to be made, without the structure provided by a studio. This study's final two main chapters explore artists who have also negotiated these challenges, without taking the playwright as the model of the ethical craftsman to which they must respond.

Chapter 3: Forced Entertainment and the counter-studio

In 2014, to mark their thirty years of sustained collaboration, Forced Entertainment solicited and published short accounts of what the company and their work has meant to a range of their collaborators and supporters. In his, 'Tim Crouch, Theatre Maker' describes himself seeing the company for the first time while studying at the Central School of Speech and Drama in 1993: 'I watched that work like I was a house cat, its nose pressed against the double glazing, watching its wild brother playing in the jungle.' Their 'new forms that felt as old as the hills' would be a key inspiration when he began making '[his] own work'. Beneath the conspicuous difference between the wild experimental company 'smash[ing] things up and [getting] messy' and the tame young actor working on his 'audition pieces' to secure his place in a commercial industry, there is another one, which I have traced within Crouch's own practice (Crouch 2014b). The company's playfulness and wildness is the expression of a form of absorbed dwelling within the theatrical ecology that they have found, which Crouch is not yet capable of experiencing. The 'double glazing' operates like the virtuosic artist's 'technical ability to communicate a distinct form', the guarantor for a contract with the audience that *The Author* will go on to 'tamper with', or like the initial constricted stage of learning the violin by the Suzuki method (Crouch 2011a: 419). Strategic deskilling is something that the skilled, tame actor can and should learn from the company.

This underside to Crouch's response to the company becomes more apparent in Simon Bowes's contribution, describing a formative experience of the company over a decade after Crouch's. He remembers a symposium, held in conjunction with the company's twentieth anniversary production *Bloody Mess* (2004), at which 'the papers and presentations were complimentary, congratulatory, dulled by their agreement with one another' – until one delegate declared 'that Forced Entertainment had lost it and weren't experimental anymore'. Bowes goes on:

> As the company mark ten more years I'm thinking about what that old man said – how dismissive it was, and how little it seems to matter now. When I think about the kind of performance culture I want to be a part of, it has as much to do with tradition and heritage as experiment and innovation – not out of reverence, but out of respect. Out of respect, much contemporary theatre acknowledges a debt to Forced Entertainment; some imitates form, but the best of it applies values. What interests me so much about the company now is the sense of eldership I observe whenever I see them engage with younger artists – the generosity, hospitality, care taken. The way I have come to view them reflects that generosity, leading to deeper and broader expectations. (2014)

This attitude seems to be gaining currency among critics who have discovered the company's work after Crouch, in many cases after *Bloody Mess*. In the most recent review of a company project on his blog, Andrew Haydon suggests (as a term of praise) that they 'should feel to people now' 'as familiar, comfy and middle-of-the-artistic-road as a play by Alan Bennett' (2017). Previously, he has compared the pair of performers in *Tomorrow's Parties* to 'a younger version of my mum and dad, or […] nice teachers giving an assembly', noting with surprise that they 'don't seem ferocious or frightening any more' (2015). As the online livestream of one anniversary performance ended, Dan Hutton tweeted that 'like #Quizoola24, #FESPEAKLIVE has that strange quality of being both angrily, violently political & beautifully comforting' (@dan_hutton, 18 October 2014). The trajectory implied here is akin to the one that Ingold identifies for the practitioner who gradually becomes attuned to their environment: they move from being caught in the 'churn' of a wild, resistant environment to a point of 'intense concentration' or absorption where 'silence reign[s]', and there is no longer a distinction between thinking and doing (2015: 142). As the analysis in previous chapters has shown, this trajectory can also be mapped onto a utopian political one: from one in which social relations are defined by competing interests and unequal power dynamics to one in which more sustainable structures of reciprocity and mutual respect seem to have been achieved. Bowes, Haydon and Hutton all associate their experience with the company, whether as fellow theatre-maker or spectator, as a second, more conscious childhood, in which they have the confidence that their good-enough elders will both care for them and give them the agency to respond and explore. In this chapter, I discuss why and how this interpretation of Forced Entertainment has come about, the extent to which the company have accepted it, and the ways in which this response has informed the dramaturgy of their theatre pieces since *Bloody Mess*. I suggest that, in this late work, existing interpretations of the company's values should be reframed as explorations of the problem of skill.

1. 'Trying to succeed': failure, effort and skill

Eighteen months after Crouch's thanks, Forced Entertainment arguably returned the favour, when the company premiered *Complete Works: Tabletop Shakespeare* (2015), a production with a similar conceit to *My Arm*. Six performers take it in turns to narrate a roughly one-hour version of each of Shakespeare's plays, with all the characters represented by small household objects; the performers each present six plays spread out over blocks of varying lengths over a number of days.[1] The similarity between the conceits disguises the subtler differences between the two projects, which largely relate to the company's different and longstanding attitude to text. If both

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[1] The performers were the company's five core performing artists – Robin Arthur, Richard Lowdon, Claire Marshall, Cathy Naden and Terry O'Connor – along with regular collaborator Jerry Killick, under the direction of Tim Etchells.

performances can be described, as Bottoms describes Crouch's, as 'provocative juxtaposition[s] of real-world materials with language' (2009: 75), *My Arm* juxtaposes a broadly 'measured', pre-prepared text with a broadly 'haphazard' selection of materials contingent to each audience (Crouch 2011c: 24), while *Complete Works* is structured so that a balance between planning and spontaneity is shared more evenly across both. Each performer prepared their own versions of their plays, claiming as far as possible the ones with which they were already familiar, but making time to reread Shakespeare's original texts afresh once they were allocated. These versions were rehearsed, but without preparing a written script. Terry O'Connor has said that her text was never fixed 'as a sentence, or a series of sentences', even if the rehearsal process clearly involved the memorising of particular phrases (2016). In her version of *Hamlet*, for O'Connor to get to the point that she can offer 'like an angry prostitute that shouts in the street' as a paraphrase of Shakespeare's 'like a whore, unpack my heart with words / and fall a-cursing like a very drab', she would either have had to develop and learn the paraphrase, or to have a strong enough retention of the original words to paraphrase it spontaneously (O'Connor 2016; Shakespeare 1988: 669 [III.i.588-89]). It is likely that, during the rehearsal process, something like the former gradually gave way to something like the latter.

This attitude is of a piece with the company's long-held positioning of themselves in opposition to a British 'literary' theatre tradition, whether through the outright dismissal of playwrights made clear by Etchells's joke about the commas, or a more pragmatic feeling that writing is 'just something that got done' (qtd. in Benecke 2004: 46). More recently, it is the pragmatism that has become more audible. Both scholars and journalists have increasingly emphasised that the division between literary theatre and live art has long been overdetermined, and 'need[s] to be blurred to get back to the freedom of that all important cultural and aesthetic margin' (Hoffmann 2009: 104; cf. Smith 2013: 241). The company acknowledge the role that rigorously publishing and archiving textual records of their productions has had on their influence, even if these texts are created 'after-the-fact' from words that only exist 'in people's heads or perhaps partially on various scraps of paper, notebooks or computer files' and can be altered for as long as it remains in repertory (Forced Entertainment and Tim Etchells 2004: 5). Mark Smith has traced the 'processes and rhetorics of writing' that the company incorporate into their devising processes. He has gathered evidence, including the company's own admission, that they settle into separate periods of 'research and development' and then of 'structuring', so that the window within which moments of spontaneity or failure can inform the show as a whole is narrowed: this is true to an extent even of longer works which allow for improvisation (2013: 190, 220-24). In discussions of *Complete Works*, however, Etchells has been keen to widen the window for spontaneity again: as well as emphasising that no written script exists, he has made it

clear that, unlike in the company's theatre shows, any moments that look improvised will not have been prepared and timed but be the result of live decision-making (2016).

Each play's cast of objects is more fixed than *My Arm*'s in the sense that it has been pre-selected by the performers. However, each selection developed according to no precise logic, but through what O'Connor has called individual 'little games' with herself. She has described the significance of colour to some of her decision-making; shape, such as the way that bottles could suggest a human neck and shoulder, was important elsewhere; visual associations or puns, of varying levels of subtlety, were employed (Romeo, for example, was represented by a torch that would have to be taught to burn bright). But one challenge in writing about these performances is describing the kind of attention that I paid to those objects of which the significance passed me by, which may have carried no significance at all, or which demanded no critical effort. Some, albeit fewer, of the selections seem to have been just as haphazard as those made in a performance of *My Arm*. Indeed, the tendency for performances to incorporate objects from two discontinuous household contexts – a drinks cabinet and a shed, say, for *Twelfth Night* – gave the impression of a storyteller picking up whichever objects were to hand, as they moved around a hypothetical house. Beneath the Shakespearean narrative, the household objects are thus allowed to be the expression of habits or rhythms of dwelling that never quite add up to formal 'rites' or 'customs', or even the articulation of 'stories', but continue to hold open the 'new representational space' that de Certeau associates with modern fiction: 'populated by everyday virtuosities that science doesn't know what to do with', reliant upon 'an intuition that is alternately artistic and automatic' (1984: 45, 70).

This description of *Complete Works* might seem to locate this negotiation of freedom and constraint entirely with the performer, whether as they rehearse or during the performance itself. Yet *Complete Works* alters the contract that audiences have come to expect from the company's previous durational performances that began with *12am: Awake and Looking Down* (1992) and have reached a simultaneous global audience via livestreamed performances since 2013. In each previous case, the audience's freedom to enter and leave the space is in contrast with the performers' need to endure their stint at confessing, telling stories or asking questions. The performers constantly need to maintain energy and make judgements, but the stream of confessions or exchanges following each other as non-sequiturs leave the audience under little pressure to keep on attending, as they might to a dramatic fiction or a self-contained post-dramatic spectacle: both live and livestream performance 'reward sustained attention and concentration but do not require them to do [their] affective work' (Buckley 2016: 46). By choosing to present *Complete Works* in batches of four, six or twelve hour-long plays over consecutive days, and inviting audiences at the live performances to purchase (cheap) tickets per play with short breaks in between, this contract is slightly altered. The demands for endurance placed on company

members are conspicuously lighter than they would otherwise be. It is probably the easiest Forced Entertainment piece for audience members to imagine, with practice, being able to do a version of themselves, not least because it uses the semi-intuitive techniques for illustrated explanation familiar from YouTube 'how to' videos and descriptions of the offside rule. Conversely, audience concentration and attention is encouraged and rewarded slightly more than previously. The choices of objects and their manipulation are just arbitrary enough for audiences to be as legitimately distracted as they would be in a durational performance, particularly if watching multiple performances one after another. The complete works of Shakespeare become, like the banal and shocking confessions of *Speak Bitterness*, another massive data set which the rules of the performance attempt to flatten down into a consistent neutral tone without quite managing to. However, it is clear that enough of the staging has been planned for there always to be something potentially significant to attend to, with the larger-scale coherent structure of a Shakespearean plot and (at live performances) the payment per ticket sustaining this level of attention. While other durational performances have relied on the inequality between the free spectator and the constrained performer to generate the intermittent collapses into fiasco or corpsing that Ridout sees as the radical core of Forced Entertainment's work, this quality plays less of a role in *Complete Works* (2006: 167-68). It is hard to imagine a durational performance for which the performers were so carefully honed that no corpsing or collapse would ever became apparent; it is more of an open question whether a run of *Complete Works* in which no performer made a noticeable fluff would be any less moving, funny or satisfying. It was, significantly, during the publicity for its first performance that Etchells declared that 'we certainly work with frameworks that guarantee a certain amount of failure, or failure in certain terms, but I think we're always trying to succeed' (qtd. in Haydon 2016). Space is opened for the kind of making and working together with the audience, to imagine something more perfect than this, that Crouch's early theatre cultivated.

Etchells's admission suggests a growing recognition on his part that the rhetoric of failure that he, the company and its critics have cultivated has limits and limitations. Their practice, particularly at this stage in their collaboration, is clearly 'as authored, constructed and skill-based as any other aesthetic' (Tomlin 2013: 48); Etchells himself has described it as 'very stage-managed' (2009: 73). Sara Jane Bailes, who has explored the rhetoric of failure in the company and their contemporaries at the greatest length, keeps acknowledging skill parenthetically: the fact that the performers *are* skilled is repeatedly suppressed and released. The cultivation of 'the (apparently) failed moment' (Bailes 2011: 69), and the company's focus not on the construction of stage images but on their '(equally competent) demise' (75), require a contract with the audience, in which each set of participants' levels of agency and engagement are known in advance. The audience do not risk a sense of failure, but neither are they given the opportunity to

do so; this is a restriction on their liberty as much as a framework that keeps them safe. Zoë Svendsen has critiqued the company's rhetoric of spontaneity, noting that it is still dependent on a range of tacit 'social rules' (2017b: 297). Chris Goode has similarly argued that Forced Entertainment cling to a 'fetishistic mimicry' of failure, because all 'the amount of work and time and attention' that goes into making their productions 'precise and repeatable and predictable' comes at the expense of 'the possibilities for actual consequentiality in work that admits and discloses and is shaped by failure' in performance (2007). Goode (who acknowledges that the company are 'brilliant' even here) softens this critique somewhat in *The Forest and the Field* by noting that Etchells has recognised this distinction himself, by dividing the company's work into the shorter theatre pieces '*about* failure' and the durational work 'that *incorporates* failure'. This distinction still belies how both approaches ultimately generate 'liveness' without 'precariousness', and continue to cling to failure 'as a cherished dramaturgical agent or narrative instrument'. Failure, or 'noise', has a 'generative fecundity' that the theatre-maker should instead seek to 'collaborate with' rather than control (2015: 205-07).

Goode contrasts Forced Entertainment's attitude to failure with the kind that he has cultivated in workshops using resources published by the company's friends and collaborators, the Chicago-based theatre company Goat Island: when asking actors to perform 'an impossible task' invented by someone else in the group, Goode notes how 'the stated impossibility releases the action from the possibility of success' so that 'the actors tend to apply themselves to the *theatrical* event of their failure with gusto' (2015: 208, original emphasis). Although the comparison is imperfect, what distinguishes *Complete Works* from one of the other durational performances, and perhaps from the obstacle course of increasingly impossible acts performed by Secret Theatre, is that greater imaginative distance is placed between the performance and 'the possibility of success'. An audience member at the longer, endurance-requiring durational works can measure any moment of collapse against the run of moments in which the performers manage to keep going; at *A Series of Increasingly Impossible Acts*, the repeated attempts at the tasks invite an audience to imagine the conditions under which the performers could complete the task, or a similar one; at *Complete Works*, it is already a *fait accompli* that these retellings can never be comparable to a full-length full-cast performance of Shakespeare's text, so it is easier to abandon any abstracted mental image to focus on the practices that are being carried out, with something identifiable as success on their own terms. To borrow terms that Bailes uses to describe the work of Elevator Repair Service, the affect that *Complete Works* generates is thus a 'sociable and nonchalant' 'awkward[ness]', rather than the exaggerated 'self-consciousness' and 'performed paranoia and anxiety' which she associates with Forced Entertainment themselves (2011: 153).

The other opposite to skill that Forced Entertainment have cultivated, discussed most thoroughly by Mark Smith, is effort. 'Effort, not skill' is the heading under which he summarises

their preference for a slow, sometimes discontinuous rehearsal process, which actively allows time for reflection and moments of inspiration during breaks, and which maintains 'a clear connection' with the visible effort that the performers make onstage (Smith 2013: 194). It has an origin in the post-punk music scene around which Forced Entertainment developed their earliest work in 1980s Sheffield and in which, in Etchells's words, 'anybody can be creative, you don't need *skills* – you can just do something' (qtd. in Smith 2013: 195). The process of 'just doing something' rejects both abstract reflection and more material forms of embodied knowledge – but, given punk's abhorrence of class-bound conventions of taste and beauty, it resists the unconscious 'feel for the game' that characterises the *habitus* more forcefully, in favour of interventions in the creative field which are conscious in their resistance. Smith also cites interviews in which Etchells has expressed his dislike for performances that are 'about virtuoso skill'; he once referred (in paraphrase) to a review of a show in which fellow devising company Frantic Assembly were described as 'strutting around the stage like young gods', and admits that he '*would not* like to see that' (2013: 192-93).

The limits to this rhetoric has been exposed by cultural changes since the 1980s. Smith acknowledges that 'though their group mythologies rely in part on a denial of the role of skill, working together for this length of time inevitably *becomes* a development of skills, and a shared language' (2013: 235). Both punk and the early principles of Forced Entertainment have, at some level, an isomorphic relationship with the values of Thatcherism against which they sought to react: the belief that 'anyone can be creative' finds its match in Thatcher's celebration of 'exemplar individualistic achievers', even as the company's spectacles of flailing, resilient subjects can be interpreted as a parody of the Thatcherite demand (Bailes 2011: 81, 78). The fact that they remember the environment as one in which ambitious artists could 'just do something' without having to wait for funding should be seen in light of the fact that the company *were* capable of funding themselves on the dole, and soon acquired and proved capable of sustaining Arts Council funding (Smith 2013: 12-13). As noted in my discussion of Jen Harvie's writing, achievements like this inadvertently led to the rise of Third Way 'creative entrepreneurialism' (2013: 67). Bailes argues that the company were able to maintain a distance from Thatcher's model because hers remained grounded, sometimes uneasily, in a Victorian value system built on the nuclear family and imperial nostalgia that these artists emphatically rejected (2011: 82-83). This rejection, however, itself became a model for subsequent governments that sought to sustain Thatcherism's economic values while rejecting its social ones. Confidence in their capacity to create and self-fashion *ex nihilo* can generate unfortunate political implications within Forced Entertainment's performances themselves. This is the basis for Liz Tomlin's important critique of Bailes's interpretation of *Nights in this City* (1995). Where Bailes sees the company's subversive guided bus tour of the outskirts of Sheffield (and later Rotterdam) as 'a web of texts and contexts

belonging not only to the performers but to the audience-participants […] and to the users and inhabitants of the city' (2011: 91), Tomlin accuses the performers of 'changing raw material from a working-class or underclass existence into art for a predominantly middle-class audience' without giving those users and inhabitants the opportunity to shape their reception, and feel that they belong too (2013: 143). The underlying reason for this oversight is the same one that Svendsen and Goode identify for the company's failure to fail: agency is ultimately located only within the company's actions, as they reshape whatever material becomes available to them into an 'instrument' or surrogate 'dramaturgical agent'.

It is in response to these tensions that Harvie locates her account of the turn to the crafts in recent participatory art, which parallels the trajectory followed by the protagonist and his brother in *My Arm*. Aesthetic practices which emphasise decisive creative intervention, and invite audiences to enjoy the affects associated with voluntary transgression and danger, are co-opted by economic models in which risk is borne by individual rather than collective structures: the capacity to tolerate shock provides a means to survive the flexibility without routine which characterises Sennett's new capitalism (1999: 83; cf. Harvie 2013: 44-46). In response, artists have returned to practices that emphasise dependency on disciplined and 'comparatively *in*efficient' skills, as well as the traditional structures that have cultivated them – although Harvie takes pains to emphasise that these structures are valued for their potential for democratic organisation, solidarity or mutual care rather than the fetishisation of hierarchy (2013: 95). These structures and values, worthy of 'respect' but not 'reverence', are the ones that Bowes identifies in Forced Entertainment and prevent them from falling into a cliché of losing it or selling out. Moreover, Harvie's decision to emphasise parenting as a particularly egalitarian skill resonates with Haydon's choice of metaphor – and, arguably, with the performance style adopted in *Complete Works*. The production has emerged at the same time as such explicitly child-oriented or pedagogical works as the company's first theatre piece aimed at children, *The Possible Impossible House* (2014), and their educational course for teenagers *Art Breakers*. What might be termed the child*like*ness of *Complete Works* – in that it maintains the kind of practices required to make work that children can watch or perform for themselves, but with children themselves evacuated from the process and audience – is a sign that the new dramaturgical strategies that the company have acquired have aesthetic significance independent of that audience.

Nevertheless, there remains an 'angrily, violently political' strain to *Speak Bitterness* for Hutton to identify in 2014 – and Haydon's description of the company as 'familiar' and 'comfy' is in the context of a review framed as an attempt to explain the show's appeal to a younger critic whom it continued to alienate (2017). Across all these articulations of the 'turn to the crafts', the punk impulse dies hard. In *My Arm*'s narrative, Anthony's transition from prank-like conceptual art to traditional portrait painting moves through a sequence of more explicitly socially engaged

projects, in which the extent to which materials and other people require conscious, careful treatment gradually increases: taking 'photographs showing the detritus left by the police charge at Orgreave' is followed by 'encouraging refugees to document their experiences through collage' (2011c: 39-40). The Orgreave project appears to be an allusion to Jeremy Deller, who also provides one of Harvie's case studies. Deller's commissioning of brass and steel bands to play acid house and Joy Division respectively is an attempt to synthesise the subversive and the traditional: the original edgy impulse behind these musical pieces can best be preserved, now that they are canonised within the history of popular music, by being played by amateur ensembles whose normal repertoire risks marginalisation within that canon; conversely, the bands acquire a cultural capital without which they risk slipping into, in the case of the brass band, a patrician version of traditional values grounded in the 'folksy, old-fashioned or […] nostalgic' or, in the case of the steel band, the racially othered (Harvie 2013: 105-06).

However, Forced Entertainment are particularly keen to retain the spirit in which they began making work. Rather than being another illustration of wider trends in the British arts, or a mere expression of their economic context, their practice might be a critical response to it. They have sought to retain their 'outsider status' even as they have acquired the 'cachet' of sustained Arts Council funding and an international reputation (Smith 2013: 158-59). Tomlin argues that this marginality is linked to how the live and performance art tradition in which they work has tended to be classed as 'alternative theatre' which itself largely gave way at the turn of the 1990s to a community theatre that places its emphasis on attending to and coping with 'existing [political] structures and institutions' in order to reform them (2013: 40). Although Harvie distinguishes her case studies from such 'applied art' projects which 'emphasize socially meaningful (and usually "positive") processes more than artistic outcomes', she acknowledges that the boundary is 'porous' and that many contemporary artists view this as a false dichotomy (2013: 20). Forced Entertainment remain more resistant, and this becomes clear in one of the modifications made to *Dirty Work* (1998) in its updated remount as *Dirty Work (The Late Shift)* (2017). Its text is delivered by two performers taking it in turns to describe new hypothetical theatrical spectacles without further illustration onstage, many of which the company could never perform because of expense or the laws of physics. In one case, however, the spectacle is plausible but implied to be firmly outside their aesthetic: a show in which amateur performers tell a 'comical but affectionate' story of their town and 'a policeman does a rap about tolerance'; this show would end with the performers and the audience, which includes local figures and the performance's 'funding bodies', celebrating its success with a variety of notably non-alcoholic drinks, because 'art is for everyone'.[2] This is a fairly rare instance of a comment familiar from the

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[2] Transcriptions from a performance on 1 July 2017 at Battersea Arts Centre, London, cross-referenced with Forced Entertainment 1998.

company's paratexts and critical commentary entering a performance itself: a disdain for a public arts culture which determines its judgements on the basis of 'metrics or sentiment capture' (Forced Entertainment 2016), the meeting of targets, and its capacity 'to bring people together' (Etchells 1999: 22). As a National Portfolio Organisation, the company have a specific requirement to make work for young people: if one chooses to see *Complete Works* and other recent projects as an unwanted capitulation to a broader cultural turn towards this fetishised version of skill or care, *Dirty Work (The Late Shift)* offers a release valve, expressing the company's ideological discomfort with the possibility of capitulation.

Dirty Work (The Late Shift) and *Complete Works* might best be seen as opposite extremes within the spectrum of Forced Entertainment's attempts to conceptualise their late style: is it possible to try and fail for as long as they have without it paradoxically becoming a skill? Many of their shorter theatre pieces, with which the rest of this chapter will be concerned, provide a space in which the admission of skill and resistance to it can be held in play simultaneously. In this light, I believe that their dramaturgy of failure is compatible with, and ultimately supports, Goode's alternative definition of failure as theatre's 'medium'.

2. Assembling the counter-studio

The role that failure plays for Goode is similar to the one that 'material' plays for Sennett and Ingold. Both are ways of expressing the limits that the creative subject's abstract thinking and planning reach, given the need to balance such thinking with features of their environment over which they have no immediate control. In order to stop seeing them as fetishes, the subject must work *with* their materials or their failure rather than *on* them; any refusal to do so is to replace failure with the 'mimicry' or idea of failure, and materials with the concept of materiality. Forced Entertainment's tendency towards fetishising failure is akin to the torqueing that Samuel Beckett's 'Fail again. Fail better.' has suffered when decontextualised into an aesthetic mission statement, rendering it a more palatable ongoing process, in which trying and failing alternate with each other – rather than a masochistic desire for absolute catastrophe that refuses the very possibility of intent. Goode's attitude makes a return to Beckett's less famous location of failure not in the actions of the artist but in the relation of the artist to their work: 'to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that *failure is his world* and the shrink from it desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping, living' (1983: 45, my emphasis). While Forced Entertainment seek to make failure visible in their performances, failure's visibility as such remains less important for Goode. Indeed, those doing the Goat Island exercises experience 'a very liberated feeling' because they know that 'failure is not an option' (2015: 208). They experience the same immersion within their environment, 'the openness of a life that *will not be contained*' that Ingold sees animals as

experiencing within theirs, and that his inversion of Heideggerian phenomenology seeks to achieve for humans too (2011: 83).

How, then, is what Goode calls 'failure' different from what I have been calling 'skill'? It is worth repeating the definition of theatre, previously quoted in Chapter 1, which Goode develops from his discussion of failure:

> [I]f performance sets a target – a script to be enacted, a score to be interpreted, a task to be accomplished – and noise refers to the complex of additional patterns and occurrences that permeate the event context within which the performance takes place, then theatre is the totality of the performance plus its attendant noise. Or, to rearrange the equation: noise is the difference between performance and theatre (2015: 208-09).

Goode ultimately seeks to retain, however minimally, artistic creation on the side of 'making' rather than 'weaving': it cannot escape the fact that the constructed separation of the human from nature is such that humans cannot stop seeing creativity as initiated by their intention and guided by moments of detached reflection, even if those moments are acknowledged as secondary to a pre-existing embodiment; one can surrender intentionality but not surrender the surrendering of it. There is always, as a Secret Theatre member put it, 'some sort of end concept' (qtd. in Cornford 2015b). Theatricality is an expression of the distinctive 'capacity' of the human animal 'to disappoint' and be disappointed when their abstract intentions fail (Read 2008: 4). This is a failure of immersion that Crimp largely accepts, as part of the Barthesian '*terreur*' of writing, and Crouch appears to struggle against, but Goode accepts as a fact of theatricality. Tellingly, Goode took over Adrian Howells's role in *The Author* for the 2010 Edinburgh performances and subsequent tour. Goode appears to have been more capable of turning himself into his own instrument for the sake of the play, while accepting and indeed finding ways to celebrate the circumstances in which audience behaviour would cause his instrumentation to deviate from its 'target' (cf. Goode in Bottoms 2011a: 426-28). Howells, whose background was more recognisably in performance art than theatre, appears to have been distressed by the need to maintain this instrumentation and sense of a target at the expense of 'being there' with the audience. That which demarcates Ingold's absorption in the material world from Goode's in the medium of failure, and which thereby sustains theatricality as such, is precisely *the idea of failure* that Goode associates with Forced Entertainment.

Maintaining this line of demarcation is important for resisting the smooth trajectory into a dwelling perspective that Ingold's writing often implies. Goode's emphasis on 'noise' denies the possibility, or desirability, of the eye of the storm where silence reigns. Such a risk is also at stake in an oversimplified narrative of the arts since the 1980s which moves from the restless, effortful

interventions of artists asserting themselves in resistant environments – like a practitioner who is still 'starting out' and needs to rely on explicit, pre-thought engagements with material – to a steadier rhythm of practice built on a desire for constant, habituated recognition of dependency on one's environment – like a practitioner mid-flow who is simply 'carrying on' (Ingold 2011: 54-55). Ingold notes, neutrally, that 'carrying on' is 'generally the longest' stage and can stand as a metonym for the whole in a way that 'the "one-off" or *occurrent* movements with which they open and close' cannot – but this metonymy can carry ethical risks (2011: 60). Just as Arendt's vision of a leader granted authority by the free consent of those who follow can give way to a simulacrum of such consensus, so, as Harvie notes and Etchells mocks, can projects which posit a return to shared craftsmanship all too easily be co-opted into a false image of 'art bringing people together' for the sake of preserving vested interests. Yet, in the writings of Chekhov and Saint-Denis, the theatre studio remains oriented towards developing this vision of achievable harmony between intention and realisation. Chekhov in particular proposes the trained acting body as a site in which a union of spirit with matter is achieved in a way that, as Cornford has explored, resonates with Ingold's accounts of the flows and rhythms of life through the material world (Cornford 2017). For Chekhov a performance aspires to discover, rather than invent, the 'inner movement' or 'invisible body' of a play or a natural form through a deepening engagement with both 'the movement of the body' and 'what was normally considered the space beyond it', imagining the possibility of signal without redundancy (Cornford 2012: 51, 83-84, 116). The theatre studio as it currently exists, as a place where 'the (creative) artist and (producing) factory meet to test potential products', often 'err[s] on the side of caution and conservatism' because those products might not survive the transfer to a future environment where 'financial risk' needs to be controlled (Cornford 2012: 353-54). But the fantasy of the autopoietic studio – in which creator and producer, experimentation and technique are so mutually sustaining that the practices create and recreate the environment in which they occur – eliminates risk, at least at a conceptual level, as much as it cultivates it. If risk is cultivated as an arch-practice or 'skill of skills' within the studio, its survival as such is paradoxically dependent upon judiciously not making excessive changes to the wider social conditions of the studio itself.

If a theatre studio's purpose is to serve as a laboratory in which ideas about theatre are produced and sustained, in addition to (and sometimes independently from) their commitment to produce public performances, it might be useful to describe Forced Entertainment – at this stage in their career and in their current position of influence within the UK's theatre culture – as a counter-studio. The company have sustained more of the elements of the studio system that Cornford wishes to encourage than any of my other case studies. They have continued to operate from their base in Sheffield; although no longer living together, the six core artists are employed full-time and supported by a stable set of associates. Their devising process makes no firm

distinction between the skills of writing and acting, even if Etchells has emerged as artistic director, design has been delegated to Richard Lowdon, and the company have collaborated with sound artists and choreographers outside the core team.[3] This allows the company to organise their rehearsal time with unusual freedom, beyond a general shape of gathering and then structuring material (Mermikides 2010: 108). They aspire to be non-hierarchical, with Smith describing what he calls Etchells's 'anxiety of leadership', a desire to see his directing role as an alternative perspective which allows for 'a radical flatness of composition and contribution' (2013: 171). These structural dimensions influenced the organisation of Secret Theatre: Holmes used Etchells's essay "On Risk and Investment" in rehearsals for *A Series of Increasingly Impossible Acts* (Stephens 2016: 118), a show which ultimately earned the ensemble comparison with Forced Entertainment (Trueman 2015).

However, this similarity at the level of structure works to promote an opposing set of values. While the aim of a studio is to foster ever greater synthesis between theory and practice in the overall service of theatre as an art form, Forced Entertainment's aim is to accentuate the fissures between them. The strutting gods of Frantic Assembly find an equivalent in the participants in Chekhov's "Actor's March", or in Kleist's image of the god-marionette who acquires grace by having 'either no consciousness or an infinite amount of it' (1997: 416), an asymptote akin to Ingold's intense but silent eye of the storm: in each case, thinking can be seen as taking place everywhere or nowhere interchangeably, because it has become totally enshrined within embodied practice. In Forced Entertainment's practice, thinking and doing remain in constant syncopation: they have described how a piece can 'get unstuck when we're bored of being stuck', with the turning points coming during moments of wilful distraction, while on a walk or taking a break, rather than at moments of heightened consciousness (Forced Entertainment 1999). If this relies on doing without thinking, any articulation of thinking about their practice often relies on gestures of detachment: Etchells acquired his *de facto* role as artistic director because he was the member most comfortable with 'developing vocabularies with which to discuss the work' (Smith 2013: 168). Much of his writing and lecturing about the company has taken opaque, often fragmentary or semi-fictional forms, publicly delivered in a style that Smith compares to 'a cross between a stilted schoolboy performer and some sort of profane sermon' (181 n167). While studios aim to make narratives of skill acquisition legible, both through the practices that they develop and the textual material in which they are recorded – with Saint-Denis proposing a permanent logbook for the London Theatre Studio in which training could be both recorded and perpetually reacted against – Forced Entertainment offer, in their histories as much

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[3] For details of their collaboration with John Avery, see Smith 2013: 166, and with Kate McIntosh, see Etchells 2010.

as in the performances themselves, stories which are falling apart as they are being told (Cornford 2012: 198).

In two separate pieces, Etchells and O'Connor both develop a comparison between the work that they make and the stories that they tell to their sons. Etchells ponders why the stories that Miles prefers offer a secure means of 'building yourself', while he prefers ones in which 'the world is badly organised' (1999: 67). O'Connor describes going 'back to a bedtime favourite' when Leon is ill, the story of a mother bunny always capable of running after and catching her baby:

> She can go on forever. There is no eventuality that she doesn't have an answer for, that she cannot cope with. There is no possibility that she cannot counter. In this game the whole world is contained by her language, reined in and circuited; nothing can go wrong. In the world of Forced Entertainment shows, things do go wrong, as a matter of course, a series of virtuous errors, misapplied rules discovered or playfully brought to life in the improvised moment[.] (2009: 93)

This is another version of negative skill: the skilled practices involved in parenting are framed as relatable to theatre-making, and deserve to be taken seriously in their own sphere – but that sphere is *not* 'the world' in which Forced Entertainment prefer to make shows, instead preferring to refract and disrupt it. Yet one could also argue that the error-filled world of the shows is the more ethical, for all its apparent risk: it is a potential space which remains good enough; the alternative would be Crimp's overdetermined environment created for a child in need, in which every possible expression of intent would ultimately be 'reined in and circuited'. The company's investment in failure thus shuttles between being recognisable as 'an ethics' and 'an anti-ethics' (Goulish 2004: 257). If it is not itself as ethical as it could be in Goode's eyes, because it emphasises the *representation* of failure instead of its practice, this representation still offers an important model for practitioners like him, encouraging them to internalise the gap between signal and noise within their own practice without fetishising it: this would be, in Bowes's terms, inheriting the company's 'values' but not necessarily their 'form'.

In the remainder of this chapter, I offer examples from the company's recent theatre productions which highlight how this intuition of themselves as a counter-studio is made manifest in subtle changes to their dramaturgy, often by incorporating parodies of the techniques and aesthetic assumptions of studio training regimes. I also highlight the ethical significance of this parody: how can a refusal to accept Ingold's phenomenological account of 'life' allow Forced Entertainment's theatre to confront problems that his account dodges?

3. Collapsing atmospheres

Smith's survey places emphasis on the importance of an overarching 'atmosphere' to the success of Forced Entertainment's early performances, with reviewers being drawn less to the details of text than to the overall effect of acting, design and soundscape, in which individual people's skilled contributions were harder to distinguish (2013: 182). This is a consequence of the company's formative exposure to Impact Theatre, particularly *The Carrier Frequency*, a piece that exposed its audience to a coherent, if alien and apocalyptic, world gradually being flooded (Etchells 1999: 19, 58, 72). Atmosphere is also a central term within Chekhov's practice: exercises at his Dartington Hall studio involved inviting students to approach a scene by 'penetrat[ing] into' its underlying atmosphere, a 'feeling which does not belong to anybody […] which lives in the space in the room'; atmospheres are understood to have a 'music' or 'rhythm' within which the scripted scenes of a play can ultimately be located (qtd. in Cornford 2012: 85-86). This order corresponds with Ingold's conception of a recoverable music of dwelling of which language, and other forms of apparent abstraction, are merely the second-order expressions. The atmosphere is one of the terms according to which Ingold wishes to reorient our perception of the world, emphasising that the air can never 'be converted into an object that [we] can have a relationship with' because it provides the grounds for our other relationships – but it is an orientation which he believes that theatricality destroys (2015: 70). He critiques the neo-phenomenology of Gernot Böhme, who reduces the idea of atmosphere to a condition which emerges from people's 'encounters with one another and with things' rather than an ongoing process dependent on inhabiting a common air, because it depends on taking the stage set as its paradigm (2015: 77). In order to frame an artificial world, theatre-makers must necessarily break their perception of the world down into what Ingold calls its 'articulation[s]' (2013: 109). How, he asks, 'can any feelingful encounter take place between persons and things without there being air to breathe?' (2015: 77)

Something of Ingold's anxiety about the possibility of an atmosphere collapsing when it enters a representational economy is shared by Etchells as he introduces the texts for *(Let the Water Run its Course) to the Sea that Made the Promise* (1986) in *Certain Fragments*. Having spent a paragraph describing its set as redolent of 'the kind of abandoned industrial architecture common in Sheffield', he turns to outline the role played by text:

> There were effectively two texts in the piece. The first of them came from the live performers and was a gibberish language made of crying, whispering, mumbling, yelling – the undocumentable shapes and architecture of language without its details. The second text, presented here, was recorded on tape and played as a framing commentary or voice-over, dividing the piece into parts. (1999: 134)

His decision to give the undocumented and 'undocumentable' speech of the performers the status of text, but also to describe it as 'architecture', attempts to recapture the sense that the performance was a single coherent world in which different practices could not be easily distinguished. He attempts this in the face of the inevitable articulation of constituent elements that comes with publishing the records of a performance: hence he has to make distinctions between the two texts, and to acknowledge the origin of one in an offstage 'tape' that might not have been obvious to the show's original audience.

The Etchells of 1999 presents the documentation of performance as the collapse of an atmosphere into a series of airless objects, into which life will have to be artificially breathed; a decade later, when he and Robin Arthur write the text for Arthur to perform in *Spectacular* (2008), the collapse and recovery of atmosphere – and, with it, a failure to breathe – has become embedded into performance itself. The core of *Spectacular* consists of Arthur, dressed in a fancy-dress skeleton costume that covers his entire body, describing to the audience what 'normally' happens during the show.[4] He tries to describe the 'atmosphere' and 'the architecture of the evening', and seems to locate it particularly in states of transition and flow, in which precise moments of change cannot be identified: the way that the lights come up on him but without the audience immediately noticing; a 'very symmetrical', 'very simple' dance in which the dancers arrange themselves in whirling lines that 'don't bump into each other', until they disappear one by one without anyone noticing; 'a scale or an arpeggio' in which each note gracefully 'vanishes as soon as soon as you hear it'. The possibility that the show normally creates a mood in which he and the audience are no longer 'thinking' but 'in possession of thought' is particularly redolent of Ingold's reframing of skilled human practice as the subject's participation within its environment.

However, towards the piece's climax, Arthur also describes *himself* as an 'atmosphere', 'a presence' and 'a wash of feeling', expressing something 'essential' that cannot be learned or prepared for 'in the dressing room'. This instability exposes the fact that the whole of *Spectacular* has been an attempt to articulate where any atmosphere has come from, breaking what would normally be its coherence down into its articulated parts, all of which apart from Arthur are absent tonight. These include the plants that somehow do not add up to 'a set' but manage to 'gentle down the space'; the 'atmosphere'-generating warm-up comedian, whose notebook Arthur admits to reading and being confused by, to the point that it 'sticks in [his] head' at the end of each show; and each of his own actions, as he wonders what will happen if he puts a foot wrong. Arthur apparently reflects on this during the performance every night, which generates a perpetual sense of stage fright that gets its most protracted description at the opposite end of the text to his early

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[4] No text for *Spectacular* has been published; all quotes are my transcriptions from Forced Entertainment 2008.

self-identification as an 'essence'. The performer who starts to tremble with nerves yet consciously tries to keep going, and who can feel doubt 'seeping in and spreading out' as if it were external to him, highlights the obverse of any atmospheric harmony of subject and environment. Ingold acknowledges that moments of disharmony can happen, and that they are socially meaningful: he discusses the distinctive role of 'embarrassed self-regard', and of 'abuse' from others, when a Saami herdsman learning to use a lasso fails to operate it (2000: 414). But in *Spectacular* embarrassment is the rule rather than the exception, with the performer never letting go of his 'intelligence' of his situation to reach a point when he can 'act unthinkingly' (Ingold 2011: 93). In this regard, the performance illustrates Ridout's argument that Forced Entertainment expose the modern theatre's foundational status as a commodity, as a world which can only survive as such for as long as the performer remains alienated from it.

The association of these affective experiences with theatrical performance is made clear by *Spectacular*'s second component. As Arthur begins to describe his stage fright and risk of a certain kind of theatrical 'dying', Claire Marshall comes onstage and announces that '[she'd] like to do [her] dying now'. This 'big death scene' continues until the end of the show, and it is punctuated occasionally by Arthur offering advice on her performance, incorporating the same kinds of spatial metaphor that he uses to distinguish between good and bad atmospheres in his descriptions: Marshall's pained cries and gestures should aspire to be 'good background material' or 'ambient'; when they do not work, there is 'no room' in them, or she becomes 'hard to place'. Significantly, Arthur's description of himself as a 'presence' or 'essence' comes at the moment that Marshall falls still and silent, her death scene apparently complete. The moment of harmonious atmospherics created by fully proficient practice is, here, a moment of death rather than life; Marshall eventually starts performing again, and the silence of apparently perfect skill gives way to noise. This is one of many moments at which the audience might interpret Marshall's death as an alternative representation of Arthur's narrative, or perhaps an element of what the performance 'normally' contains which he has chosen not to describe. When Arthur turns away from offering commentary on Marshall to restart his own account, with deictic phrases like 'This is normally quite an awkward moment for the audience' or 'I don't really like this bit of the show', they seem to describe two potential performances at once. *Spectacular* as a whole can be seen as turning the survival of an atmosphere, and thus of the subjects within it, into the subject of a dramatic trajectory, rather than its prerequisite. Its human performers (alongside, less conspicuously, the fluctuations of its lighting scheme) seek to use skills that they have confidence in identifying as their own to determine the atmosphere, operating sometimes in sustainable, networked relation but often in conflict. Before turning to his critique of theatre's alienating architecture, Ingold appeals to Michel Serres's "Gnomon" to associate the imagination of the world as a scene with the advent of modernity: he might equally have used Serres's

contemporaneous dismissal of 'stage theatre' as both the clearest manifestation of, and a wider metaphor for, the process by which humans ignore their common dependency on their environment in favour of conflicts between agents within it (Ingold 2015: 74; Serres 1995: 3). When Marshall declares that her 'easy bit [is] over', that 'things are going to change' and that Arthur will need the microphone to be heard over her cries, the ghost of Goya's *Fight with Cudgels* – the image of two individuals sinking into a swamp which Serres uses to illustrate the modern turn away from nature – might become visible (Serres 1995: 1-2).

This analysis might be taken to suggest that Forced Entertainment are, like Ridout, making an antitheatrical argument ultimately along Ingold's lines. But Ridout's arguments about the company's performances cannot be perfect expressions of their significance, just as *Spectacular* cannot be reduced to attempts to illustrate Ridout's argument, precisely because the artists and critic are mutually alienated from each other by critical labour. Forced Entertainment's continuing investment in theatre as a world in which to be absorbed is made clear because a 'feelingful encounter' with the audience is still happening: what is being felt is the collapse of the atmosphere. Ingold's lack of attention to this can be linked to an omission in his reading of Peter Sloterdijk, another theorist whom he uses to develop his atmospheric aesthetics. Sloterdijk's *Bubbles* is Ingold's source for his identification of air as the grounds for objectification rather than ever being an object itself, as well as the basis for 'the kind of intimacy [between participants within an environment] that is denied by an object-oriented ontology' (Ingold 2015: 70, 67). This acceptance of one's dependency on one's environment as the foundation for action is named *Gelassenheit* by Sloterdijk: 'whoever lets others do something directly to them' can now be understood as 'indirectly doing something for themselves' (2013b: 374). As with Ingold, this immanence does not deny the possibility for apparently abstract response and reflection: *Gelassenheit* is not a 'pietistic' condition of being washed over by Being, but an ongoing cultivation of a subject's position in the world, as 'part of the game intelligence of humans in an elaborated networked world' (376-77). In his appeal to networks between humans, however, Sloterdijk can be crucially distinguished from Ingold – and the discrepancy becomes more conspicuous in the light of Sloterdijk's subsequent books and parallel projects, none of which Ingold cites. Sloterdijk's Nietzschean heritage means that he retains a central focus on the autonomy of the human subject, and their foundational alienation from their environment. The modern subject emerges as such when it becomes identifiable to itself as a 'carrier of exercise sequences': when, like the adequately socialised child, it has acquired enough distinctive personal habits to distinguish itself from others and think of itself rather than its environment as a primary agent (224-25). *Gelassenheit* marks that autonomy, because it marks the point that the subject is confident enough to surrender their autonomy willingly back to the environment; we see, again, a show of surrendering power that cannot itself be surrendered. The same rhythm of recognising

and then surrendering agency occurs on broader political levels too. Ingold's hunter-gatherers who maintain animist absorption within the cosmos give way to Sloterdijk's more strategically migratory nomads, who sustain and refine their 'behavioural patterns' precisely by moving into new locations, 'us[ing] deterritorialization itself to reterritorialize themselves' (2013a: 256-57). The trajectory of both modernity and Sloterdijk's *Spheres* trilogy is away from the imagination of a universalising sphere within which humans are subject, to which Ingold and Chekhov often seem more invested in moving back. It is, instead, towards the articulation – or, in Sloterdijk's preferred term, 'explication' – of an earth 'spanned by networks, and built over by foams' in which groups of humans co-operate to negotiate the creation, integration and separation of the foaming micro-climates in which they dwell (2013b: 7, 450-51).

All of this allows Sloterdijk to give more attention than Ingold to the real affective consequences of feeling one's self suddenly conscious of or removed from an atmosphere, of the kind that Forced Entertainment are able to trace. *Spectacular* presents a subject caught between these two attitudes, not sure if he *is* the atmosphere or if the show has one; this uncertainty is experienced as a struggle to sustain life itself as much as to keep the show going. An audience member similarly caught between imagining Arthur's hypothetical, described performance and attending to their more immediate sensory experience of Arthur's and Marshall's performances might also register this tension as a struggle – or they might register it as a pleasurable confusion in which little is ultimately at stake. This is the difference, in Goode's terms, between being caught up in the failure to meet one's targets and having accepted that 'failure is not an option'; between Hutton's senses of the 'violently political' and the 'comforting'; between mourning for a lost experience of dwelling and recognising that what counts as dwelling will always have to be reassembled. The latter experience, as Goode's commentary on Etchells's distinction suggests, is more fully cultivated by the durational performances, in the experience of the performers but particularly that of the livestreaming audience. Etchells has talked about the experience of durational performance in sacrificial terms, as a matter of 'losing all those bits of control' but doing so in order to find that one is 'gaining in intuition', 'a raw, more present kind of presence' (2014a). Even though watching these performances on livestream erased the material basis for describing live theatre as distinctively atmospheric – the fact that performer and audience sharing the same space and breathing the same air – Jennifer Buckley has argued that the feeling was *intensified* by the audience's capacity to 're-enliven' the performance as they tweeted about their experience and attended to the unusual relationship that it developed with their 'digitally saturated everyday lives' (2016: 36, 47). Far from destroying the capacity to feel (a)live, this breaking down of the sustained experience of a live performance – in favour of the sense that individuals could control the reshaping of the environment for themselves where they had not before –

appears to have suggested new possibilities for social life. *Contra* Ingold, the recovery of conditions for dwelling can be as much a source of 'feelingful encounter' as dwelling itself.

4. Abandoned practices

There is another way to describe the difference between failure as representation and failure as medium, between the experience of a collapsing atmosphere and of a collapsed-and-recovered atmosphere: as the difference between the radical and the pragmatic critique of Ingold. What the pragmatic critique retains from Ingold's model is a sense of legible teleology. Just as the affordances of Sloterdijk's 'global immune design' will always become more and more explicit (2013b: 451), the flows of the atmosphere keep inscribing irreversible changes onto Ingold's weathered beings: the weather can weather buildings, but 'weather [cannot] blow up from the weathered' (2015: 71). However utopian it sounds, Sloterdijk's global immunisation requires a pragmatic acceptance of violence: if the atmosphere is necessary for sustaining life, the gap between one atmosphere and the reconstitution of another must feel like a death, from which the participating subject's chances of resurrection can remain contingent. Elsewhere in his writing, he faces up to this violence more directly. He identifies gas warfare as the definitive modernising technology because it both relies on and parodies *Gelassenheit*: humans no longer need to kill their enemies directly, but use their agency to manage the environment in which their enemies dwell, and turn their own act of breathing against them (Sloterdijk 2009: 22-23). If the audience's work of reviving a durational performance by engaging on Twitter is cost-free, the performers' gains in intuition are paid for by an exhausting loss of control. The audience stands, like the user of mustard gas, 'vested with the privilege of watching the fall of an organic "system"', capable of imagining the environment as an abstract system because they do not depend on it – and this might be the violence that Hutton remains capable of tracing in *Speak Bitterness* (Sloterdijk 2009: 41). *Speak Bitterness* is a particularly relevant performance in which to notice this violence because of the pressures that its particular task puts on the audience's imagination of time. Each of the isolated, largely single-sentence confessions, delivered in the past tense, is an attempted speech-act (which requires speaker and listener to understand themselves as being present to each other) whose aim is to call up a past event but, by doing so, distinguish that past from the present in which they hope to be forgiven. Instead of Ingold's 'processional' skill trajectory, in which each new event is indistinguishably emergent from the previous ones like the steps of a walk, the connection between present and past here might be described as syncopated, with a relation between present and past activities simultaneously acknowledged and disavowed (2011: 53).

Ingold's archetypal skill trajectory does not make space for how feelings of syncopation can interrupt feelings of procession because it does not give enough attention to the difference between skill acquisition and habitual skilled practice. While there may be no distinction between

tacit and explicit engagement during the practice of an acquired skill, the acquisition of a new one through the explicit transference of knowledge may require distraction from, or even the suppression of, previously acquired habits. Noble and Watkins, who emphasise the distinction between explicit, intersubjective habituation and the 'feel for the game' more than Bourdieu or Ingold, speak of 'a dialectic of "remembering" and "forgetting"' in which particular details are brought to consciousness and then removed (2003: 535). For Rebecca Schneider, forgetting is itself 'a kind of prize at the end of the day – a skill, the hard-won step in the work that enables becoming' (2011: 41). Schneider is one of a number of scholars who have explored the political significance that can be generated when this forgetfulness remains incompletely achieved: she describes the 'queasiness' felt by those who participate in American Civil War re-enactments, in which the performed practice remains alien because of its sheer temporal distance from the performing subject. A 21st-century bugler who has learned to play 'Taps' and genuinely plays it on a re-enactment battlement is 'chas[ing] moments of forgetting where something learned (about time) becomes something played (in time)' – but this gap between a time that can be inhabited and one that can be learned *about* remains, however hard the performer might chase their synthesis (2011: 42). The dance theorist (and one-time Forced Entertainment collaborator) André Lepecki uses Deleuze's reading of Bergson to develop a model of temporality which is superficially similar to Ingold's: 'whatever action remains active in its effects (no matter when the action first took place) there we encounter and *walk along a line* of our present' (2006: 129, my emphasis). But this line cannot be grounded within an appeal to life, or within any self-contained living body or environment. Drawing on Sloterdijk's early study of Nietzsche, in which modernity is identified with kinesis and enshrined in the 'uninterrupted movement' of the dancer's body, Lepecki recounts how apparent interruptions of that body in contemporary avant-garde dance do not so much break flows, or even establish alternatives, as draw attention to the wide range of flows and movements that exist before and beyond the performing dancer (7). Lepecki and the practitioners whom he studies work to expose the 'sacrificial' 'grounds' on which the kinetic dancer of modernity appears to move immediately and gracefully: the sacrificed habits and practices include not only those of the individual body, through diets and training regimes, but also those of wider political orders, such as the racialised bodies or folk traditions excluded from the tradition of European national ballets (14). *Speak Bitterness* is a structure which conceals neither the exhaustion of the trained performers nor the histories which their vestigial characters attempt to have forgiven and forgotten. It confirms a point that Alan Read has made about Forced Entertainment's work as a whole, echoing the thrust of Schneider and Lepecki: the work remains fundamentally anachronistic, and one of the forms of 'disappointment' that it emphasises is that we live in what Isabelle Stengers calls 'a cemetery of already destroyed practices', in which particular embodied and socialised ways of gaining knowledge have been lost forever because they have been suppressed by more powerful forces, often in the name of constructing a fetishised

idea of skill (Read 2008: 54; Stengers 2007: 13; cf. Read 2016). The theatre, as Read's 'last human venue', becomes the site in which forms of embodied practice that can no longer be made live are mourned and ritually repeated.

There are a number of ways in which Forced Entertainment's recent dramaturgy has traced our tendency to abandon practices, or to sacrifice some for the sake of others. In some cases, this has amounted to a critique of their own previous work. One example is what appears to be an increasingly critical relationship with de Certeau. His conception of tactics as an endlessly generative and flexible response to the disciplinary strategies of social life, which nevertheless depend for their persistence on having strategies to resist, is an analogue for both Goode's, and Bailes's, celebration of multiple ways of failing which nevertheless rely on deviating from a single authorised model of success (Bailes 2011: 2). But the visibility of a tactic as such in the context of an aesthetic project depends on pre-existing structures of visibility which it takes theorists like de Certeau to legitimate, as is implicit in Tomlin's critique of *Nights in this City*. This is humorously exposed in *The Thrill of It All* (2010). Phil Hayes announces that he wants 'to reach out and connect' with the audience by offering a list of the 'small things' that are too easily forgotten.[5] This paean to abandoned woodwork screws, confetti by the side of the road and fake breezes recalls similar moments of cultural litter-picking throughout the company's texts and performances: one key example would be their mock-documentary *The Travels* (2002), which exploited the uncanny resonances of street names in a manner that resembles a number of art projects informed by everyday life theory (cf. Sheringham 2006: 375-85). As Hayes continues, the other male performers come onstage to offer inappropriate suggestions and start a futile, violent argument about what counts as a 'small thing' and what details are needed to define it: denied here is a shared understanding of what counts as quotidian within a given culture, an understanding that must precede any attempt by a performer to shape it. By acknowledging that any celebration of our capacity to subvert structures of knowledge necessarily frames it and brings it to consciousness, Forced Entertainment open a channel for possible critiques of de Certeau, such as the possibility that any model of capitalist production will already – and increasingly – anticipate this reappropriation by a consumer (cf. Tomlin 2013: 205; Jackson 2012: 27).

Their earlier show *The World in Pictures* (2006) had featured a similar framing of 'small things'. A certain discordant relationship with de Certeau is already invoked by the opening address to the audience, in which Jerry Killick gets 'us into a really good place' to start the show by describing how 'you' wander aimlessly through an unfamiliar city, climb a building and

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[5] No text for *The Thrill of It All* has been published; all quotes are my transcriptions from Forced Entertainment 2010.

admire the view beneath you.[6] As Cormac Power has suggested, this story owes a conspicuous debt to the opening image from *The Practice of Everyday Life*'s celebrated chapter "Walking in the City" – but the fact that the building in that chapter is the destroyed World Trade Center, and that Killick's story ends with 'you' unexpectedly falling to your death, equally suggest that the conditions on which de Certeau's perspective depends will be put under pressure (Power 2009: 118). Nearly halfway through the company's subsequent attempt to dramatise the entire history of the world, all the performers leave the stage, which is cast into darkness apart from the light of a small television set. A series of black-and-white photographs of mundane objects and environments are screened, which Killick describes to the audience. The description is always offered in the second person, and normally in terms of how the object was used or socially employed: 'this is a book you might have read'; 'this is a present you might have bought', said to accompany some high-heeled shoes; 'this is a game you might have played', said alongside an unopened pack of table tennis equipment. The emphasis on usage bears comparison with de Certeau's account of the Shelburne Museum, in which the assembled objects move him not in and of themselves but because they trace the life-world within which they were employed (1984: 21). This account serves as a model for the alternative understanding of 'material culture' proposed by Ingold, which traces the social processes 'hidden behind the product' that are in a continual state of becoming (2000: 347). Yet, through Killick's narration, any such life-world is held at a distance: the proposed use of the object is always kept in the subjunctive mood and the past tense; the faded, "found", slightly anachronistic quality of the photographs makes the objects hard to imagine in use. Those images that are 'hard to make out', or which Killick cannot identify, or are themselves images of self-concealment (like 'a kid' with 'his hands in front of his face') remain Ingold's inert 'blobs', resisting full incorporation into the flows of life. While tactics as a whole might be capable of forming 'a maritime immensity on which socioeconomic and political structures appear as ephemeral islands', and even of tying practitioners back into 'strange alliances preceding the frontiers of humanity' as Ingold often seems to wish, the burden of tactics' survival at a local level is tied to the continuation of individual lives and their capacity to be recorded in testimony (de Certeau 1984: 40-41). At the end of the series, Killick reveals that these are all images that 'you' might imagine as your life flashes before your eyes while falling from that building. Killick can only bring 'you' back into connection with lived experience by attempting to bring objects congealed within photographs back from this symbolic death, just as 'you' are inches away from hitting the ground and becoming one inert object among others. This inevitable deletion of the texture of 'immanent life' is associated with the wider erasures that are demanded by the narration of history (Ingold 2015: 143): this interlude is located at, and in place of, the Dark Ages in the show's ongoing history of the world. As the lights go out, O'Connor

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[6] No text for *The World in Pictures* has been published; all quotes are my transcriptions from Forced Entertainment 2006.

mournfully announces it by declaring 'it's a time of forgetting [...] it's things leaving the story [...] it's all leaving'.

The performance which engages most fully with the suppression of practices that has been and will be demanded of the individual practitioner, the company and the world as a whole – the one in which this worry is 'layered' so that it 'functions effectively at every level' without ever 'turn[ing] into a story' – remains *Bloody Mess* (Etchells, qtd. in Forced Entertainment 2004: 3). John Rowley attempts to bring that show to a close by telling a story 'called "The End of the World"', about the earth's destruction by a meteorite. Appropriately for a story about 'the inevitability that this is all going to come to an end', he implies that he has little control over how he tells the story: just as the organisms described in his story will be caught up in the flows of environmental change, so, in an absurd overdetermination of dwelling, is he entangled in both the act of telling the story and the world he is describing. He reveals this most clearly when responding to unhelpful suggestions from Wendy Houstoun: when she urges him not to tell the story, he claims that he has already started; when asked to 'slow it down', he claims that he cannot slow down 'the speed of the [fictional] meteorite' (Forced Entertainment 2004: 36-37). Throughout the production, Houstoun has taken on the role of cheerleader, urging both company members and the audience on in their engagement, in such a way that their own efforts are presented as the origin for all agency within the space. In her most extended intervention, she leads the audience through a series of exercises which invite them to 'get to those tears we're talking about here tonight': 'the body stuff' of locating and concentrating on the tear duct; retrieving and responding to an emotional memory; until, finally, combining the two exercises by inviting the audience to focus without blinking on one of the two 'characters' fighting around her and discerning what they 'remind you of' (23-25). Crying is presented as a practice – like the stage crying that O'Connor parodies throughout the performance – that can be controlled, the mark of a socialised emotional subject that has come to work in harmony with how their body expresses that emotion. But this represses any understanding of crying as instinctive, the consequence of the subject's immersion within a particular affective environment. This kind of crying is flagged as a lost history that needs to be reclaimed when Houstoun notes that 'we were all born weren't we and then someone hit us and we cried so it's not like we haven't done it before' (24). The appropriation of the environment as a resource, rather than a mutually participant cause, becomes the prerequisite for willed or 'successful' crying. The more violent the appropriation, the more successful the crying subject – but also the more the violence begins to appear valuable for its own sake, and to conceal the creative end that it is being used for. Although the fight is an unpredicted interruption, and Houstoun initially encourages the audience to ignore it, she herself becomes distracted and begins yelling at one fighter to 'make [his opponent] cry' (25). This convulsive principle – that a successful exertion of effort requires the

destruction of other, and others', modes of practice – appears once more as Rowley tries to conclude his story, with Houstoun screaming at him to 'finish the fucking thing' and 'get us to the end', 'a fucking ending' being one which involves 'it' being broken into 'sharp little fucking shards' and dust (42-43). Telling the story of one's immersion in an environment gives way to an understanding of making which requires hierarchies of creative destruction.

In a coincidental anticipation of Schneider's interests, a recording of The Band's "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down" is played as Houstoun yells at Rowley to 'finish the fucking thing'. Just as *Bloody Mess* uncomfortably reveals the concealed and futile efforts that go into a satisfactory finished performance, the song eulogises the time in which the efforts and infrastructure of Confederate society were violently dismantled in the name of preserving the Union. The apparently mismatched clauses of lines like 'I swear by the mud below my feet / you can't raise a Caine back up, when he's in defeat' capture the same marriage of valiantly going on and recognising that any such attempt will have no material consequence. Yet if the end of the performance finds itself engaging in a kind of war re-enactment through its association with the song, it retains a queasy critical distance from its events. The ethical challenge inherent to Stengers's non-reductive materialism becomes visible. She acknowledges that 'elimination may have been utterly relevant when it entailed struggle against the allied powers of church and state', but *Bloody Mess* invites me to wonder how an idealistic refusal to offer general or universal judgement on alien practices should extend to my relationship with slavery (2007: 8, 15). In place of a studio designed to cultivate a 'living theatre' capable of renewing itself and the society in which it sits, Forced Entertainment's counter-studio provides a structure which highlights the risks of failing to remember those practices which society has rightly chosen not to renew, or to remember our continued complicity with them.

If Rowley's splintered story prevents certain practices from being confined to the past, it also allows uncanny futures to intrude within the theatrical encounter. The other interruption to the opening movement of his story comes from Marshall, who has been dressed throughout in a full-body gorilla costume. As other members of the company attempt to illustrate the end of the world with cardboard starts, tinsel meteorites and a smoke machine, they encourage him to 'use the music' provided by Marshall banging a guitar. When, finally, '*the gorilla is swamped in a cloud of smoke from the smoke machine*' and begins '*dying an elaborate death*', Rowley decides to incorporate her:

> You know something? The first fucking creatures to die out when the climate changes are going to be the bloody gorillas. Huge ice sheets are going to come into the jungle habitat where the gorilla lives, all the trees are going to collapse under the weight of the ice leaving nothing for the gorilla to eat. It's going to die

a very long lonely starving death. […] Poor old smoky gorilla. Just a little emaciated figure left under the ice. That's all that's going to be left of the gorilla (Forced Entertainment 2004: 38-39).

While other accounts of deaths have been narrated earlier in the performance, and O'Connor and Cathy Naden have tried and failed to assume the postures associated with stage death, this is the first time in *Bloody Mess* that a performer's body represents the act of dying within a more specific dramatic context. It is also the only occasion where the audience are invited to see Marshall's actions in her costume as representing those of the animal in anything like a natural context, rather than simply being a volatile source of distraction. One undermentioned significance that animal costumes have had within the company's practice might be the way that they permit a parody of actor training exercises in which performers practise miming animals without the support of costumes. The aim of such exercises, as theorised by Saint-Denis and Lecoq, was to move from the 'observation and replication' of animals' movements to imaginative scenarios, often featuring human characters, based on those techniques (Cornford 2012: 169). They depend conceptually on Ingold's fundamental continuity between animal and human skills, as well as the primacy of bodily engagement with the environment: as Lecoq said of actors learning to walk on all fours, '[n]ot until they meet the ground on its own terms, and make full contact with it, can they progress' (2002: 94). Saint-Denis even frames the relationship between the human and the animal as a kind of animist gift exchange, in which elements of how the animal relates to its environment can be taken up without objectifying it or claiming it as property: the actor must 'get the feeling of the animal in his body and *lend himself* to it' (qtd. in Cornford 2012: 170, original emphasis). Here, however, Marshall's lending of herself to the experience of a naturally-occurring dying gorilla does not emerge from any sustained engagement on her part, but from the sudden constellation of the onstage props and stories that she finds herself in, as they form a temporary, artificial atmosphere.

At this moment, an audience member might feel a similar jolt into a new atmosphere in which they feel unable to dwell organically: they are invited to bear witness to an animal's extinction, as if to rehearse the appropriate feelings for when a scene like this will really happen – only to realise that this is a scene that they could never feasibly survive to witness, occurring in an environment in which they could not survive. By inviting the audience to imagine a world without them in it – as Killick will also do, more explicitly but incrementally, in his imaginative exercises at the end of *The World in Pictures* – Forced Entertainment find a limit case for Ingold's phenomenological approach. Accelerated anthropogenic climate change has created conditions in which the 'anecdotal' recounting of the weather cannot be converted smoothly into the 'statistical' details of how the climate is changing without translation – but, in spite of that,

'changing weather is nothing less than what climate change looks like' (Martin 2017: 128). Ingold critiques Steven Connor's account of weather as 'a time without history' or pattern, arguing instead that weather needs to be interpreted '*kairologically*', through the farmer's or sailors' skills of 'weather-wising': the ability to catch the moment at which the seasons are changing and nature is responding distinctively, which has been 'sidelined' by technological impulses but not erased (2015: 70). But Connor is closer to the truth in that weather-wising, and the interdisciplinary meteorology which Ingold develops from it, can never account for the affective significance of a skill's failure, at a moment of extreme fluctuation – a moment of *kairos* in something closer to Benjamin's Messianic or revolutionary interpretation of it as freestanding possibility – as well as for transitions in the climate beyond the experience of the perceiving subject. These are also experiences to which a rehearsal model in which the future is always moved '*towards* but not *to*', and which avoids the abstraction of time into 'snapshots', does not lend itself (Cornford 2015a).

5. The ends of history

At the end of *Bloody Mess*, as Rowley finally gives up on telling his story – which appears to have transformed into the end of a stadium rock concert – Lowdon begins an interview in which he asks Rowley 'why the best bands always split up' (Forced Entertainment 2004: 45). In a twentieth anniversary performance, this might be the first subtle invitation to begin imagining the eventual end of Forced Entertainment's work together. This is a cue subsequently taken up by Killick's rehearsal of the apocalypse at the end of *The World in Pictures*; giving the new *Dirty Work* the subtitle *The Late Shift*; perhaps the decision to end every run of *Complete Works* with *The Tempest*, in which Lowdon recounts, in his epilogue, how Prospero was 'only attempting to entertain'.[7] It has become most explicit in Etchells's words at the end of the company's collective acceptance speech for the International Ibsen Award: 'Thanks for what will come. For the break up of the company, fast or slow, by cut, slide, dissolve, or implosion, for the end to this particular crystalisation of the possible [sic]' (Forced Entertainment 2016). Ingold offers 'finishing off' as the final stage for his archetypal skill trajectory, and summarises it as a point at which conscious reflection gradually begins to override habitual action more forcefully – but ending still emerges 'as an asymptote', without a single defining moment of action breaking off (2011: 55). Etchells, still within the midst of the company's practice, where reflection and action remain in constant tension, is less sure that the end will not be experienced as a rupture to what came before: he imagines it as if observing it from outside, and as if it were a piece of recorded rather than live media.

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[7] Transcription from a performance on 6 March 2016 at the Barbican Centre, London.

This uncertainty has been a feature of Etchells's and the company's previous attempts to look back into their history: their performance lecture *A Decade of Forced Entertainment* (1994), and the more recent documents "A Text on 20 Years with 66 Footnotes" and "30-Year Performance". Each of these histories attempts to trace two experiences of time. One is the slow, accretive experience of the lived time in which the company have collaborated, in which precise moments of origin and change are overlooked in favour of developing but irreversible processes, 'more a shift than a change' of the kind that mark turning points within Ingold's skill narratives (Etchells 1999: 44). The other is the series of distinct but fragmentary events, of varying degrees of apparent importance and repeatability, which 'unexpectedly appear […] singled out by history' and which interfere with apparently organic memories (Benjamin 2007: 255). As time has gone on, the latter has become more prominent. *A Decade of Forced Entertainment* combines extracts from the company's previous performances, shorn of context and out of chronological order, with fantastic histories of the 1980s as well as with more apparently honest accounts of Sheffield's deindustrialisation:

> They knew something strange had happened to time. They drew a map of the country and marked on it events from the rest of the world. On this map the Challenger Space Shuttle had blown up in Manchester 1985. The Union Carbide Bophal [sic] Chemical Works which exploded late in 1984 was located in Kent (Etchells 1999: 30).

> We noticed big changes to the country but could never date them properly. When did the streets fill up with beggars? When did the great programmes of building, rebuilding and demolition begin? When exactly did the shopping mall and the 10-screen cinemas arrive? When did our city get its lift shaped like a rocket? From the day these places opened it seem like they had always been there (32).

"A Text on 20 Years" 'jumps and cuts backwards in time' as Etchells moves between memories by moving information into and out of footnotes, partly as a way to express his commitment to the fragment as 'an ideal compositional unit' because of its unknowable context (2004: 269, 281). Yet he makes some space among these jumps to trace the continuous growth – of bodies from other bodies, of artworks from improvisations and rehearsals – that bind some of the fragments together. He describes Marshall in rehearsal, improvising a dance that 'she does not know [...] will be in the final performance, but already, perhaps, suspects', a suspicion which would exemplify Smith's understanding of the company as sharing a honed intuition of how practice will pan out; he connects it to a memory of a later, pregnant Marshall teaching the dance to Houstoun, who will be replacing her in a subsequent tour of that show, even though there 'will not even be

the tiniest idea' of the pregnancy to come when the dance was first created (276-77). In "30-Year Performance", an 'impossible score' which, if correctly followed, would 'allow the complete recreation of Forced Entertainment's 30 year oeuvre to-date [sic]', any practice has to be traced from the various names, places and actions that each join the timeline at a single, undated point even when they refer to durations or repeated acts: 'Sheffield', 'Thatcher and Blair', 'bad TV', 'canned laughter (two minutes)', 'the same bad jokes again and again' (Etchells 2014b). The only sign of continuous practice is the simple horizontal timeline that connects 1984 to 2014, a legacy of a skill trajectory that cannot be abstracted entirely.

We noted in the Introduction that Sennett, who is more willing than Ingold to emphasise the distinction between reflection and action and to acknowledge the historical failure of skills to be transmitted, has cited Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" to explore how 'accretion over time and rupture by design' can work 'in parallel' to achieve successful craftsmanship (2018: 280). In these histories of Forced Entertainment, the same balances are visible, but with the emphasis reversed: the company's practice is remembered as distinct, surprising events which acquire their meaning by being assembled into constellations; these queasily cross-temporal connections between events become more visible, and more affectively foundational, than the slow accretions of time skilfully worked on by the same bodies in the same place. Like de Certeau's tactics, these skills only remain visible while the company are with us. If the role of a studio is to make skill more and more finely legible, this counter-studio aims *to make the fragility of that legibility legible*: it cultivates in those, like Bowes and Crouch, who look to the company for inspiring 'values', an enjoyment of the failure to follow either pre-prepared designs or fantasies of organic form. By increasingly making performances that look like dramatisations of their constellated out-of-joint histories, Forced Entertainment are preparing us for their own demise, but also reminding us of the demise that accompanies all forms of practice. In this last human venue, Arthur's account of the atmosphere at a performance is not quite no atmosphere at all, and Killick's of the images of a life flashing before your eyes is not quite no life at all – but, by already looking like the memories and archives that all performances eventually turn into, the comforting pedagogy of these performances is that they invite us to turn away from mourning, and to attend to what is possible by re-enlivening them already.

Questions of what happens to performance practices when they are remembered, and of how they might generate and anticipate the future to which they are uncertainly connected, are at the heart of the next chapter. Given that they have aimed to 'forgo the suspect certainties of what other people called political theatre' (Etchells 1999: 19), and admitted that 'the world is more complicated than […] the Communist Manifesto' (qtd. in McGuire 1998: 12), it appears that Forced Entertainment's recurring fascination with the ways in which practices are suppressed or

concealed has been intuitive rather than programmatic. What dramaturgy emerges, instead, from a company who take 'the extent to which […] we struggle to see the relations that drive the larger mechanism' as a starting point – and seek, from there (Svendsen 2017c: 1), 'to celebrate the skills and processes' that are concealed (*WF* A1)?

Chapter 4: *World Factory* and the dramaturgy of apprehension

1. METIS in context

Zoë Svendsen combines her artistic direction of METIS Arts with a number of professional practices which distinguish her from my other case studies. She is the only practitioner who has worked separately as a dramaturg, most prominently on a number of productions of early modern plays directed by Joe Hill-Gibbins and Polly Findlay. She is the only one to have conducted sustained academic research in theatre studies independent of her practice, and continues to teach drama and performance for a university without a specialist department or a tradition of accredited practical teaching. Thusfar, if I have used the term 'dramaturgy' without defining it precisely, this largely mirrors the practitioners whom I have been discussing, for whom it provides a more-or-less useful if nebulous term for describing the principles that underlie their theatre-making. Asked to describe the relevance of dramaturgy to his work, Crouch notes that 'the word itself rarely appears' but that the definition given by his interviewer, 'decisions that define and shape performance', suggests that it is 'integral' (qtd. in Vile 2015). Dramaturgy is a practice distributed across the collaborators in his plays, from Crouch himself as he begins with a formal impulse and develops a play to be contained by it (2013a: 231), to smith and James who see their direction as 'tak[ing] care of th[e] whole', clearing the space to allow others to make decisions (Smith: 411). This resonates with my conclusion that their work is driven by a desire (however frustrated) to dwell within theatre as immediately as a fully attuned subject dwells within their environment. Invited to give a talk about dramaturgy, Etchells insists that, while this is what he has to do 'officially', he prefers to find ways to digress from this: codifying dramaturgy is presented as an obstacle to him being viewed as 'some kind of person, a human creature with a life that extends beyond this room and with interests that extend beyond the topic' and, instead, 'our dramaturgy might be the controlled and deliberate setting up and then cracking' of codes and surfaces (2009: 71-72). This too speaks to Etchells's interest in oversignifying theatre's investment in failing to meet targets, in the hope that others are liberated to see the process of having and expressing 'a life' as enough dramaturgy to be getting on with. Svendsen's practice, however, demands that she confront the fact that dramaturgy is simultaneously a profession with 'traditions, histories and established practices' distinct from directing, playwriting and indeed literary criticism, even as it is inherent to the construction of all performances 'without the necessary involvement of the dramaturg' (Turner and Behrndt 2008: 3-4). In previous case studies, dramaturgy has provided a way of describing the *environment* in which practitioners ultimately seek to immerse themselves and their audiences, in a set of conditions that would undo the division between thinking and doing, but with the weight often falling on doing. METIS's performances are concerned with retaining dramaturgy as a *skill*, a line of engagement running through this environment that continually needs to be constructed, and with the emphasis falling

on not letting it become habit or instinct. Dramaturgy can 'imply an engagement with the actual practical process of structuring the work, combined with the reflective analysis that accompanies such a process', but also refer to comparatively freestanding analysis (Turner and Behrndt 2008: 3). Svendsen's commitment to granting dramaturgy this degree of detachment provides the circumstances for my own writing about METIS's work.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Svendsen has joined Goode in critiquing Forced Entertainment's tendency to disguise the rules on which their performances rely in order to keep their failure and spontaneity within an aesthetic frame: '[i]f the audience members are as cavalier with the social rules of theatre as Forced Entertainment are in their testing of the traditions of representation, mimesis, and narrative, then the edifice collapses into a "real" mess' (2017b: 297). She also places less emphasis than I would on the potential for *The Author* to trace an alternative set of social relations: the expectation that the audience will be 'beautifully lit and cared for' and invited into genuinely friendly interaction are, to her mind, ultimately ironic strategies subverted to renew attention to the violence, implicit to the theatrical situation, in which *The Author* continues to participate.[1] Nicolas Bourriaud's argument for a relational turn within contemporary aesthetics, and even Radosavljević's identification of 'an evolving dramaturgical approach which places relationality at its core' (2013: 151), work to conceal the ways in which 'questions of the social are key to understanding the operations of theatricality within any given historical moment' (2017b: 289). Svendsen cites Ridout's work to make this argument, and her approach aligns with his emphasis on the theatrical encounter as a mechanism for resisting the smooth integration of the aesthetic into the social that the workshop and the studio often seek to imagine (2017b: 290, 301). The theatre now appears to make a claim against the workshop.

However, Svendsen's desire to sustain this claim in practice leads her to embrace a pragmatic form of this critique as much as a radical one. In interviews and discussions about *World Factory* (2012-17), Svendsen described the company as aiming towards a 'robust conundrum' that could offer variation, but from within a structure that would remain fixed and with all its options contained and circumscribed (2016a).[2]

> So the dramaturgy was 'set' and part of the purpose of having the cards exposed so clearly was so that it was clear that all the possible stories were already contained in the show apparatus. As when actors come on stage and speak the first lines of a famous play, the production might play with it in different ways

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[1] Svendsen raised this interpretation, which has helped to nuance my own, during an unrecorded conversation with me on 29 July 2015, in response to an early draft of material in this thesis. For a similar interpretation, see Iball 2011.

[2] Given the variety of theatrical and non-theatrical forms that METIS's outputs can take, dates in parentheses indicate the duration of work on the project.

and reshape [it] but you know that there's a fundamental dramaturgy there that's already set. (2016b)

METIS's productions have been driven by the same tendency to allow process to take priority over and determine structure that Cornford and Radosavljević have promoted: Svendsen has shared credit for direction on many of these projects with Simon Daw, who also takes specific charge of design; actors have played a key role in shaping both the form and content of the performance in rehearsal; in the case of *World Factory* in particular, the technical skills required to shape the card game at the performance's core meant that credit for it was shared between collaborators who might normally be divided into artists and administrators. But such attention is given to the process in rehearsal in order that it need not be felt in the auditorium as well, allowing for a structure of conception followed by repeatable execution that is against the purported spirit of the studio's continuous rediscovery of theatrical form within performance (Cornford 2012: 355-56). This is partly done out of a desire to expose the play's status as a commercial product, but also an attempt to retain some of the affects associated with liveness and spontaneity through alternative means. Svendsen argues that the pleasure of the live is partly associated with 'relief from the effort of construction', which is now made possible not by denying construction altogether, but locating it in the performance's past; she also associates liveness with 'an acknowledgement of the precariousness of any attempt to create a stable structure' (2017b: 297-98). We have seen in previous chapters that, whenever a commentator has sought to propose a turn to craftsmanship, even in models such as Cornford's that are working particularly hard to balance process and structure, an emphasis is always left, if not on explicit awareness of the fact that precarious labour has been required to make it, then at least on some of the good qualities of precarity that sustain creative work: 'leaning away from habit, stepping outside of comfort zones, changing the speculative and uncertain act of critical thinking' (Ridout and Schneider 2012: 9). Anything less than this risks seeing the return of a patrician or hierarchical fetishisation of craft. Yet there remains a risk of the weight falling the other way, with art fetishising and remaining parasitic upon the structural injustice that it is attacking. By developing their 'robust conundrum', METIS simply sought to remove from the auditorium this tension between what Ridout and Schneider call good and bad precarity – between the *precariousness* of actors within an environment and the *precarity* of labouring subjects within contemporary capitalism (2012: 8). The problem of spontaneity is a political one that transcends the immediate experience of social dynamics within a performance, and it is the second-degree traces of how the company have registered this problem, rather than liveness or spontaneity itself, that audiences were invited to register.

If the ongoing cycle of problem-solving and problem-finding that Sennett puts at the heart of craft is allowed to have a clearer stopping point than some of my previous case studies, it is

also allowed to have a more definite starting point (2009: 11). Previous chapters have emphasised continuity across theatre-makers' projects: Crimp and Forced Entertainment repeat and develop tropes and formal strategies over the course of successive productions; Mark Smith has highlighted the tendency for Etchells to problematise 'the notion of a "day one"' for any project, in favour of allowing it to be an expression of ideas that had been 'in circulation since *before* "day one"' in his and other company members' imaginations, and the same could be said for Crouch's impulses towards form or story (2013: 147, original emphasis). While this is only a difference of degree, Svendsen has been more willing to locate the origin of METIS's projects within specific moments or encounters that have helped her to establish a research question: compare Etchells's possibility of there being a '*before* "day one"' to Svendsen admitting 'I can't remember when this started but I think it was *from the beginning*' (2016b, my emphasis). Being willing to imagine a beginning keeps each project distinct, while still allowing them to emerge from each other. *3rd Ring Out*, for example, emerged from a desire to continue the thinking explored in *The Bunker Project* (2008-09) but, in the wake of new scholarship by Tracy Davis on the theatricality of the Cold War, to do so in relation to the question 'what does it mean to "rehearse" for something?' (Svendsen 2013). The decision to focus specifically on rehearsals for climate change is then connected to Svendsen's 'highly personal experience' at the 2008 Camp for Climate Action near Kingsnorth Power Station:

> In the midst of my frustration by the way that the noise of the police helicopters made it hard to hear the speakers I'd come for, I had a deeply troubling epiphany. Climate change was not the remote, incrementally developing, long-term future problem I'd imagined from my understanding of the mainstream news of 2008. It was much more immediate, the risks were much greater, and the potential outcomes far worse than I had realised. (Svendsen 2013)

Accounts like this appear to turn the narrative of the project's development into a series of points along a line at which particular decisions were made, against the spirit of an Ingoldian dramaturgy. On one level, this is demanded by the conditions under which the work was made and funded. Svendsen was expected to offer narratives of the project's creation and (anticipated) consequences to supporting bodies such as the Arts Council, the National Theatre Studio and TippingPoint, as well as for a contribution to the University of Cambridge's Research Excellence Framework ('Impact case study' 2014). The ongoing need to sustain METIS's projects across discrete workshops and residencies, and to find time for them among the other professional commitments of both Svendsen and her freelance collaborators, appears to be an active accommodation to a contemporary neoliberal theatre culture which denies continuous experiences of training and rehearsal.

Yet, just as an apparently conservative refusal to telegraph liveness in performance frees the company to think about how skill is constructed elsewhere in their process, a refusal to telegraph a distaste for audit culture (as Forced Entertainment in particular have continued to) allows METIS to attend to how such a culture is experienced and how it might be reappropriated. Crucially, what is newly determined at each point in a project's development is not only its content but also its form. Svendsen's epiphany was not only that the project should be about climate change, but that it should be aimed at 'people who might take an interest, but weren't already actively engaged with the problem of climate change', seeking not to change their minds as much as to replicate the recognition that something apparently 'remote', in which there is little secure grounds for belief, suddenly feels immediate. This recognition seems linked to the environment in which Svendsen found herself, in which the material grounds for political action (in audible speech) and its immediate consequences (in police surveillance) became visible. Creating an equivalent environment for the target audience would not be a matter of trying to generate and measure alterations in belief, but of inviting the audience to perform new kinds of embodied practice, which would allow them to focus on some of the consequences of climate change without requiring their belief in it. METIS's investment in practice-as-research distinguishes them from my other case studies, insofar as the environment in which the company frame themselves as wayfaring is not exclusively theatrical, nor is the material that they have to work on primarily prescribed by their own bodies, imaginative impulses and previous practices. What prevents the trajectory from breaking down into a dotted line or – to use another metaphor that Ingold resists – a fluid passed between different containers (2000: 393-94), is the recognition that every new piece of research influences the terms on which it will be presented, while changing expectations of form determine what needs to be researched. The stated aim of *3rd Ring Out* was to produce research outputs that could not be replaced or substituted by any alternative to the 'embodied' performances that balance these demands, disseminated in 'professional theatre contexts' and presented to the public on those professional terms: research was not merely inhabiting this form in order to test a thesis (Svendsen 2013). The value of the non-repeatable, autonomous artwork is thus recuperated by alternative means.

This preference for emphasising the difference between projects has led METIS to encompass a wide range of interdisciplinary forms, sometimes within the same project, including dance, installation art, the theatrical adaptation of a short story, and interactive theatre. It has also led me to restrict my analysis to a single project, with occasional comparisons forward and back. *World Factory* originated with a conversation between Svensden and Chinese theatre director Zhao Chuan about 'communism, capitalism, textiles and factories'. Like her experience at the Camp for Climate Action, this shocked Svendsen into recognising the limits of her own engagement: both with the choices she made about where to buy clothes, and with the relationship

between the current conditions of the textile industry in China and their model and predecessor, nineteenth-century Manchester's 'workshop of the world', in which Zhao Chuan was particularly interested (2017c: 4). She was 'very determined not to make another multiple choice, multiple decision making piece of work' [sic] after *World Factory*. Initial ideas, developed in discussion with Daw, included inviting audiences around a simulated factory (possibly entered through a 'posh shop') in which they would experience information booths and 'cabaret acts' that would invite them to consider the conditions under which textiles are consumed and produced. This was refined to include 'a boardroom that was higher up' looking down on the factory 'where you might make some decisions' in groups, in response to Zhao Chuan's suggestion that they show more 'commitment' and say more emphatically 'what you want them to see' beneath the process (Svendsen 2016b).

In a talk given for the History of Planning project at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, one of *World Factory*'s sources of funding, Svendsen summarised the company's attitude to the project's development:

> While artistic endeavour is recognized by the works that are finally produced, what is planned, ~~in our creative process,~~ in theatre[?] is not so much the work itself, but the process – the artwork is the output, or *Ergebnis*, as is nicely put in German, of that process. What articulating planning in the creation of *World Factory* enables us to do is to both acknowledge – and take charge of – its material and organisational context without reducing aesthetics to social relations (*WF* A3, square brackets in original).

The rhythm of moving between 'taking charge of' and 'acknowledging' material is subtly different from the ideal that the previous case studies have either tried to embrace or conspicuously rejected. Pathfinding through a continuous landscape or a similarly 'continual movement towards an unknown-but-anticipated future and away from the known-but-vanishing past' implies a horizon, whether achieved or not, of clear and legible synthesis between theatre-maker, making process and made product (Cornford 2015b). Maintaining a division between 'the output' and 'the process', by devoting their attention to planning and 'articulating [the] planning' only of the latter, prevents this synthesis from being achieved and denies it as a goal: in choosing the term 'articulation' to describe the process of negotiation, Svendsen selects a term that Ingold uses for the *breaking down* of the continuous lines of attention which he prefers to *trace* (Ingold 2013: 109). At the conclusion of my analysis of Forced Entertainment's work, I argued that the company have become more invested in representing their history, and that of the world as a whole, through acts of articulation. In order to better demonstrate that '[t]he chaos of the work was always running to catch up with the chaos of the time' (Etchells 1999: 32), the increasing

emphasis on non-linearity, jump-cutting and wild inconsistencies of scale in works like *Bloody Mess* and "30-Year Performance" invite the company's audiences to recognise that this is what history is really like, beneath our superficial sense that time and space correspond, however discordantly, to the experience of embodied subjects. The difficulty is that this process needs to keep the 'running to catch up' conspicuous. The performances and documents must acknowledge their interpreters' experience of linear time and continuous space, and convince them that those experiences are the fictions – and this is harder to do for a company that have grown old together to the point of knowing each other's tricks, and have a British Library archive far tidier than "30-Year Performance" would suggest. Both the performance and the published text of *World Factory*, however, begin with a quotation from the Victorian journalist George Dodd's *Days at the Factories*: '[t]he bulk of the inhabitants of a great city, such as London, have very indistinct notions of the means whereby the necessaries, the comforts or the luxuries of life are furnished' (qtd. in Svendsen and Daw 2017: vii). By announcing this materialist lens so explicitly, METIS provides a more convincing basis for the barriers that their audience's perception of time and space places on 'see[ing] the extent to which the things we take for granted in our everyday lives connect us to the lives of so many others across the world' and across the history of capitalist modernity (Svendsen 2017c: 1). They succeed more than Forced Entertainment at executing the Benjaminian inversion of Sennett's 'skills-storm' (2018: 286), in which history becomes not an accretion over time occasionally altered by rupture but a constellation of ruptures through which connections can only fitfully be seen.

The intractable complexity of history is also one that no 'process of research' can fully account for (Svendsen and Daw 2017: 1). Practice-as-research commits the company to participating in that intractability, as they work out how to develop an original form in which to disseminate their research. A summary of the continuities and changes between *World Factory*'s initial ideas and final performance exposes the extent to which new ideas (about commitment or complicity, for example) could substantially alter the concrete actions performed by designers and actors, but also how such material negotiations subtly change the ideas being generated. Eventually, it was a version of the boardroom decision-making process that was retained instead of the installation, after members of the company 'just tr[ied]' another multiple-choice 'choose-your-own-adventure' exercise during a residency, which evolved into a simulation, played in teams, that was ultimately more complex in its multiplying scenarios than *3rd Ring Out*'s. The spatial dimension of the audience 'watching each other being part of it' survived in Daw's design, but on a rotated axis (Svendsen 2016b). Instead of looking down onto a factory floor, audience members stayed stationary at individual tables from which they could look across at the heads of others as if at other workstations, while video images of real Chinese factory floors were projected above them. The impulse towards incorporating cabaret performance, inspired

particularly by the contemporary spectacular consumption of YouTubers who guide viewers through their wardrobe, was tested by Svendsen and cast member Lucy Ellinson at a University of Cambridge symposium in 2014 (*WF* I9). Elements of it ultimately survive in the performance of another actor, Naomi Christie, during the show's final 'Reckoning' section: she plays a '*resident expert on clothing*' gathering up garments made by the factories (Svendsen and Daw 2017: 287). The freestanding documentary evidence originally imagined for the booths was largely presented in an introductory section in which the actors performed extracts from speeches by Reagan, Thatcher and Deng Xiaoping as well as edited material from research interviews conducted in the UK and China. The lines of connection and influence can be extended to other METIS projects: the traditions of cabaret performance are an extension of those employed in Svendsen's earlier theatre adaptation *Four Men and a Poker Game* (2008); the impulse to develop an installation with which visitors could interact more freely will be fulfilled in *WE KNOW NOT WHAT WE MAY BE* (2016-).

A summary like this can overdetermine the extent to which the earlier ideas constituted a single coherent stage in the creative process, instead of intuitions which had more or less concrete expressions. In fact, METIS can be seen as fulfilling Goode's aspiration for a theatre which lives with and celebrates 'the complex of additional patterns and occurrences that permeate the event context' of theatre-making, but with that 'event context' being the development process rather than the final performance (2015: 208). The best representation of this process in all its complexity remains the substantial archive of documents that Svendsen collected from the companies' residences, research trips and performances, the print components of which I have catalogued and used as the primary basis for my analysis. These documents constitute the kind of record-keeping that Turner and Behrndt associate with the dramaturg in devised theatre: 'a hybrid between rehearsal journal, research archive, documentation, dramaturgical analysis and creative reflection' in which 'anything and everything can become significant' (2008: 176-77). The critical labour of dramaturgy, by Svendsen in interventions such as her talk to the Max Planck Institute and by me in this chapter, is to negotiate between 'the chaos of the work', knowing that to articulate too precisely how the work came together would be to fixate on the output rather than the process, and the complexities of the economic system with which it engages, knowing that there is a limited extent to which such a vast 'material and organisational context' can be taken charge of (*WF* A3). Articulating *World Factory*'s planning becomes a fulfilment of the requirement which Goode's poetics of theatre demands: to maintain a minimal distinction between signal and noise.

Is it appropriate to call this practice a skill? At the close of our interview about the project, Svendsen admitted that, in 'theatre', 'it's very hard to describe what you did when and how. Because you just do it so it's partly in the nature of it' (2016b). The company's inability, or

even refusal, to imagine themselves as bearers of explicit, taught knowledge suggests that the only definition of skill that fits is the concealed, resistant tactics of de Certeau from which they take their name. Yet Svendsen's invitation for me to help to catalogue and trace the project's development was to incorporate somebody who could note the details that the company themselves were too close to the process to see. This investment in being able to 'describe detailed practices' locates the company within the kind of 'intersubjective' 'web of others' that Noble and Watkins associate with more conscious, even disciplinary forms of skill development (2003: 534) – although the aim is not to fold these revelations into the company's subsequent practice as much as to allow its development to be narrated and archived for new audiences. This appears to be another form of negative skill, in that these two approaches are both appealed to but can never be located together, in the practice of a single reflective embodied subject or ensemble of such subjects.

Importantly, however, this description of unarticulated theatrical process came up by way of comparison to the difficulty of getting the workers whom the company met during research, in both China and the UK, to describe what they do in detail. The difficulty is exacerbated for such workers, relative to the company's experience of theatrical labour, because 'that practice isn't valued culturally, and textiles isn't valued' as a result of their proliferation in the contemporary global fast-fashion market (Svendsen 2016b). Svendsen also expressed this in 'Thoughts on ethics', an undated document apparently written for herself or other members of the company during the rehearsal process, in which she explains the benefits of the company making 'this extraordinarily complex system visible' without necessarily being able to posit 'a better future':

> Instead we want to celebrate the skills and processes – to reinvigorate a sense of care, even within the system of mass production. We want to reassign value – and recognize that there is a whole world in the making of a shirt (*WF* A6).

This exposure of an analogy between theatre-maker and shirt-maker, albeit one that is constructed across a substantial difference in cultural prestige and quality of life, is key to how the company sustains its negation of skill and uses this negation to provide a line of political engagement. *World Factory*'s dramaturgy produces and represents a range of subjects who find themselves unable to describe what they do, but continue to do it: not only the theatre-makers themselves and those that they have encountered during their research, but also the audiences at the final performances. All of these subjects are, as groups and individuals, pursuing independent paths through the performance and the world that it represents, so that each can offer an external perspective on the others: from the perspective of such an outsider, each appears to be expressing a form of knowledge of their particular path which they themselves would be unable to articulate. In a capitalist system defined by alienation, it is not merely that the commodity perspective is

encroaching ever more fully on the modern subject's memory of the dwelling perspective but that dwelling becomes something which just happens to other people. By identifying as many of the skills and processes at work in the system as possible, METIS find a way to make good on Ingold's belief that they provide 'a line of resistance' to 'mechanisation' without, as he does, ignoring the fact that capital's mechanisations are consistently and unevenly death-wielding (2011: 62). The achievement of dwelling, in which one can feel freedom and necessity perfectly combine, will only be fulfilled when it is recognised as the expression of a *collective* relationship with the environment, which can only be sustained through forms of collective action.

Introducing her retrospective essay on *3rd Ring Out*, Svendsen notes that her writing is not a substitute for METIS's performance outputs, and proposes three reasons for writing about it that avoid this trap (2013). Two of them, to provide a documentary record of the performances and of the research undertaken to produce them, are less relevant in the context of *World Factory*. As well as publishing the game, part of the script and other documentation as a book, this project marked the beginning of METIS's commitment to what they call 'research-in-public': 'rather than engaging with experts behind closed doors, we decided to meet with them in advertised "conversation" events in cafés and galleries', some record of which is also published on the company's website (Svendsen, in Svendsen et al. 2015). My approach thus takes up the third of Svendsen's purposes: to trace 'the relationship between the genesis, rehearsal and performances' of the play, as well as of the play with the system researched (2013). The next section of this chapter offers a lateral reading of how skill is constructed across the subjects of the *World Factory* project, moving between descriptions of the performance (in relation to recent critical models for interpreting immersive theatre), material from the rehearsal archive, and secondary texts on the textile industry collected and read by Svendsen.[3] In doing so, I build a picture of the ways in which the network of practices conducted within the project mirror, and begin to offer an alternative to, capitalist networks of production and consumption, making connections with relevant theoretical models from economic and political theory. I show how developments in METIS's practice since the initial performances of *World Factory* have sought to sustain investment in fostering this alternative model, questioning the extent to which the project might, like *3rd Ring Out*, merely be a pre-political rehearsal of action. According to such a reading, METIS's project might be to Forced Entertainment's as Crouch's is to Crimp's: one which is seeking to enact, in however compromised a way, the utopian desire for a spontaneously engaged commons of which its predecessor can only promise the faintest representation.

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[3] I attended performances at the Young Vic Theatre, London on 30 May 2015 and the Cambridge Junction on 18 October 2016, as well as an abridged version of the performance designed for postgraduate researchers at the Judith E Wilson Studio, Faculty of English, University of Cambridge on 20 February 2016.

2. Performing the skilled collective

In the final script for the opening verbatim section of *World Factory*, the following two accounts of skill, each part of a longer testimony from a worker in the global fashion industry, appear almost consecutively. The first, performed by Lucy Ellinson, is from an interview that came about when another actor, Heather Lai, mentioned that her mother had spent her life working in textiles in Hong Kong. 'Gloria Yeung' (the script uses pseudonyms for all interviewees) began as a 'general worker' at the age of eleven and worked her way up, thanks to a night school qualification, to become a merchandise manager who liaises between brands and factories. The second, performed by Naomi Christie, comes from 'Jenny Rivers', a knitwear designer in the fast-fashion industry, who creates low-cost imitations of major brands that must be made in the factories with the lowest possible labour costs.

> It's like if you work for Foxconn – electronics, iphones – then you have absolutely no value. You are just part of a machine. You just work like *(chaka, chaka, chaka)* and you don't need any skills. Anyone can do it. However, textiles is different, you do need skills. If I can deliver a good piece of clothing, if the seam is aligned, the pocket is nicely sewed – then I am happy. Isn't it called craft? Craftsmanship. I am like a carpenter. If you can make the piece of clothing **beautiful**, then you are happy, even if you are a worker (*WF* G23: 7).

> The thing is, when I think about the heritage of knitwear design I think back to wives knitting the fisherman husband jumpers to go out to sea, and it was practical and beautiful at the same time, and handmade from wool. But now you don't have to look after your garments anymore because, it's not going to take my mum two weeks to sit down and do an hour a day on the jumper. It's going to be produced at breakneck speed (8).

In the context of the picture of global capital that *World Factory* is developing, the appeals to 'skill' and 'craft' appear to have an ironic framing, similar to the one that Crimp frequently gives them: skill is exposed as an ideological fiction which conceals histories of deskilling. Yeung only becomes able to see her job as a 'craft' after she has spent years 'put[ting] the bits and bobs together' with 'the sewing girls'; she admits that she felt 'like my life only consisted of going to work, coming back from work, eat, sleep' (*WF* G23: 3-4). The skill in which she takes pride is her first desk job, of dividing a garment's pattern into parts for maximum profit, calculating the time it would take for each machinist to make each component, presumably by still going '*chaka, chaka, chaka*'. This condition of rapid, price-focused work is now faced even by Rivers in her design work: the skill of making something 'practical and beautiful' by hand is confined to the past and, arguably, to the contemporary high-end designers higher up the current chain of

production whom Rivers copies. This interpretation, which stands opposed to Sennett's and particularly Ingold's claims that skill is ultimately ineradicable, conforms to the argument, most famously made by Harry Braverman, that industrialisation has 'systematically stripped and re-stripped' labourers of 'their occupational and craft heritage', and the reskilling involved in learning how to work alongside machines or to do 'clerical and service work' is 'simply a form of dexterity' (Roberts 2007: 84; cf. Cornford 2015a: 95).

Yet Rivers is technically wrong to suggest that clothes are no longer 'handmade'. The reason that METIS chose clothes rather than electronics as their 'synecdoche' for globalised industry was because they, like Yeung, could still recognise the skill that went into it (*WF* A1): 'the machine is simply a needle that goes up and down, so it's not like other kinds of evolved machines that actually do the complex work' (Svendsen 2016b). The working distinction between 'skill' and 'craft', between the feelings associated with mere bodily engagement and with the wider social structures within which they are contained, becomes important again here. The effects of deindustrialisation that Braverman identifies in the West can be framed not as deskilling without adequate reskilling, but reskilling without the adequate development of a social structure to sustain it: Yeung's account is intercut with that of 'Andy Smith', a third-generation textile worker from Bradford of the same age who felt that his job offered 'a way of life' only to see it collapse due to low government investment (*WF* G23: 4). While Smith's capacity to define himself and his family in relation to his job is, like those of Sennett's downsized IBM workers, falling apart, Yeung's is fitfully emergent at his expense. She notes that her mother encouraged her to work in order to develop 'special skills' and in the absence of any other way to provide 'care' for her (*WF* G23: 3), and that the impulse for Chinese workers to work overtime on piecework is out of a desire to spend more money 'when they go back home for Spring Festival' (5). If Smith's story is similar to the one that inspired the character of Christopher in Crimp's *The City*, Yeung's might be set alongside the possibility of improvement that Angelaki reads into Clair's story in that play and I read into Bobby's fate in *Fewer Emergencies*: there remains a possibility that, given an appropriate response from other agents within the system, her conditions could become the basis for a stable 'way of life' that has not been realised yet. While the production presents no substantive discussion of textile production practices indigenous to China before industrialisation on Western models, the company drew on historical research which narrates this transition in other developing countries neither as a fall from innocent absorption nor as the arrival of a 'way of life' where there was none before. Maxine Berg, who contributed to one of the earliest research-in-public events for *World Factory*, has discussed how 'industrial dualism' survives in regions of India, with traditional artisanal practices flourishing alongside, and inheriting technologies from, newer factories, with individuals facing active decisions about how and where to work (2014: 134, 147-48). Equally, the intercut testimonies invite consideration

of whether the skill-narratives commonly perceived to be lost are worth mourning for: what claim does Yeung's emancipation from manual tasks into what she calls 'crafts*man*ship' have to make against Rivers's vision of fishermen's wives dutifully knitting jumpers without remuneration? To resist a system that is focused solely on extracting surplus labour from their bodies, all of these interviewees identify, and develop narratives around, conditions under which their execution of tasks can develop more freely through the interaction of mind and body: if work, or unemployment, is 'a profoundly uncomfortable place' to 'dwell', they can still project another one (Ingold 2000: 332). But the difficulty of sustaining resistance globally is that these individual projections remain so various.

Immediately after the excerpt from Rivers's speech, the card game begins and the audience start making management decisions about their own small textiles factory, inviting them to engage with these dilemmas from the perspective of a Chinese factory manager. The first, universal question is to decide whether to 'cut the wage bill' by sacking workers or by reducing pay (Svendsen and Daw 2017: card 1).[4] Later, all paths will converge on asking whether the factories should move to piecework, paying workers per garment rather than per month. While this is another example of the same impulse to extract maximum surplus value that drives Yeung's division of garments, the information on the cards emphasises that 'skilled workers tend to like it, as it means they can earn more to send home' (card 158) and that such motions have union support (card 328). To continue to invite the audience to consider how these decision impact individual lives, Rivers and Yeung appear as characters in a number of the cards; so does Madame Wang, described as a 'neighbouring factory owner' but introduced in a video halfway through the game as the owner of the real factory from which METIS commissioned an order of shirts to aid their research (cards 23, 404-05). Players are also given photographs and short biographies of the employees mentioned on the cards, inspired by interviews with Madame Wang's employees – although some players tellingly made a point of refusing to look at them lest it influence their decisions (Svendsen 2016b).

If these were the subjects whose lives audiences were explicitly invited to invest their energy in imagining, the dramaturgy was also structured to offer a more peripheral invitation to reflect on the performers' changing behaviour. Having spent the opening minutes representing politicians and interviewees, the four actors immediately turn to act as the game's dealers, 'a kind of cross between a croupier and a games master' (Svendsen and Daw 2017: 255). Each serves four tables, handing players the relevant cards, and exchanging those cards for money and samples from their clothing orders once the players have registered a decision with a handheld barcode scanner. This shift is apparently a transition from theatrical acting, understood as the

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[4] Pages displaying the cards are not numbered.

crafting of fictional representations, to meeting the real or functional demands that will sustain the audience's imaginative experience. But audiences are gradually invited to recognise that the dealer is a distinct persona, as choreographed as a fictional character but without the same degree of legibility. While clearly related to the game they are playing, there is no precise person-for-person equivalent to the dealer within the factory system that they are invited to imagine. The earliest invitation to interpret consciously comes at every factory's third card, when they are invited to choose whether to work with local government businessman Ku Fang, or refuse on the 'socialist' grounds that 'all factories should be treated equally' (cards 254-57, 260, 300); accepting it and earning his favour will allow their clothes to ship quickly enough to meet orders later in the game. In the unpublished production script, the dealer is primed to tell the factories that Ku Fang is a 'friend of mine' as soon as they receive the card back from the players (*WF* G23: 12). The dealer's behaviour inherits some of the cryptic nature of Ku Fang's own uncertain relationship with the Chinese state and its values, which the rest of their performance goes on to exploit. Sustained attention was given in rehearsals to developing a range of roles that performers could move between, including 'air steward', 'retail assistant', 'corporate PR', 'provocateur' and 'enforcer' (*WF* J4, J5): the last of these, first visible in the Ku Fang response, becomes more pronounced as the game goes on to encourage more rapid movement through the story. These roles could be demonstrated through actions such as throwing down cards or money silently, or performing lavish tricks with them; bribing players, or pocketing money instead of returning it to the till; having favourites within and between teams of players; demanding responses, or being slow to respond themselves. Players would have noted the shifts, but probably not the specific roles being appealed to, and certainly not their explanation: responses bore 'no relation to the decisions being made by a factory in relation to the cards, although players might interpret it that way' (Svendsen and Daw 2017: 256). Audiences are invited to make loose associations between the authority that the dealers both wield and fear and the structures of theatrical authority within the venue. The dealers occasionally 'look up at Ku Fang' as if he is in the tech box (*WF* G23: 15). Towards the end of the game, each dealer would receive a call from the production team asking 'if there are any troublemakers': this could be used flexibly either as a fictional gesture of intimidation or a way of troubleshooting difficulties with particular teams (*WF* G23: 16). At the end of the game, after clearing the game away, the dealers leave the auditorium and the overhead screens show an 'outtake' scene: CCTV-style footage of the actors taking a break in a dressing room. In the earliest run of performances at the New Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich, they could also be heard gossiping about the audience's behaviour, sarcastically repeating the show's capitalist slogans and – at least in one draft – admitting that even this 'cup of tea is scripted' (*WF* G16).

These details add up to another apparently unambiguous depiction of deskilling without reskilling under the demands of capital: the exposure of Diderot's comparison of the skilled

labourer and the actor as a fallacy. Again, this is comparable with Crimp: the fissures within this comparison are also discussed by characters in *Play With Repeats* and *Attempts on Her Life*, who ironically insist that acting is mere repetition compared to the distinctive skills required for manufacturing and pornography. Many other contemporary performances, including some of my previous case studies, incorporate moments when the boundary between performer and stage management roles is blurred, to highlight the ways in which seeing acting as skilled depends on the concealed delegation of more apparently menial tasks. When John Rowley begins his first story about what we are 'doing here' in *Bloody Mess*, he stresses that he *doesn't* mean what Richard Lowdon, playing '*a rock gig roadie that does not want to be seen*', is doing with the microphone: 'he's working' (Forced Entertainment 2004: 14-15). This is emblematic of what Ridout believes that the bourgeois theatre is primed to expose: it is where we 'watch other people spend their working time under lights' and enjoy the exploitation (2006: 6). *Adler and Gibb*'s children who conspicuously do some of the work of stage managing the play, partly occluding the work of paid stage managers, are an attempt by Crouch to acknowledge this dynamic but also to look beyond it, to a return to the origin of plays in a spirit of common, transformative play: the children offer the promise of '*an open space in which anything is allowed*', and care is taken to make the experience enjoyable for them (2014: 1).

These performances, and others like them, largely generate their effects by highlighting and troubling a binary between those within the space who are actors and non-actors; in *World Factory*, the binary is between the same people acting and non-acting, and is troubled in different ways over the course of the performance. Long before the 'Outtake', the actors had also performed downtime during a pause in play to mark Spring Festival, while the factories' workers returned to their families: over long static shots of empty factory floors with music playing 'as if outside the room', the performers make it clear that 'the workers aren't back yet' and proceed to fill ninety seconds of dead time by playing on their phones or aimlessly cleaning their equipment (*WF* G23: 15). Svendsen referred to this facetiously as 'Belgian Dance Theatre' (2016b), the kind of hyper-minimalist framing of everyday unskilled gestures as performance associated with choreographers such as Pina Bausch and Yvonne Rainer. (While 'milder' in its gestures, such work has been influential on Forced Entertainment's attempts at subversive 'cultural biography' (Etchells 1999: 18)). Such performances thrive on uncertainty on the audience's part about whether and how these moments are crafted – but Svendsen says that she likes them because she finds them 'hilarious', and the later 'Outtake' can be understood as spelling out the joke (2016b). The reaction that Ridout looks out for is the shock of recognising that actors are just working, or the shock that we are shocked by that – but much of the theatre and performance which generates this reaction fails to move beyond that, to explore how audiences might dwell with their awareness of it. Shannon Jackson has proposed that the 'dedicated amateurism' or conspicuous

constructedness of such performances is 'the new naturalism' for those in the 'politically open, participatory DIY performance world': it has become what audiences within that world expect art to look like without compelling close attention to how it was made, such that Svendsen can make generalisations about it (2012: 18). By performing not-performing and not-working in two distinct ways, the company invite the audience to note that everything within the show has ultimately been designed. It is entirely circumscribed by labour relations within which the actors may seek out moments of tactical spontaneity. It might become retrospectively apparent that the opening impersonations of the politicians are, in the words of the stage directions, merely '*channelling*' rather than '*pretending*': '*they are mannequins*' (*WF* G23: 1). The challenge is no longer to see the replacement of theatrical acting with the dealer role as the loss of a skilled 'way of life' like Andy Smith's (as it is for many contemporary actors who describe themselves as falling back on 'survival jobs'), but to recognise that such a difference has long been overdetermined. The professionalised naturalistic actor has always stood as a synecdoche for the modern urban subject (Ridout 2006: 41-44), and become more so in a post-industrial Western society in which employment has increasingly centred on 'immaterial labour', the creation or management of experiences rather than goods (Lazzarato 1996: 137). The dealers highlight the dependency of post-Fordist labour on what Paolo Virno calls 'virtuosity', action which leaves no end product beyond the experience itself, and requires an audience of others (2004: 52). Virno emphasises that virtuosity need not be associated with high-status artistic skill, and can be 'mediocre or awkward'; his willingness to identify speech as 'virtuous performance' makes the term more comparable to Ingold's ineradicable skill than to ideas of craft (55). He also suggests that the effects of immaterial labour can be felt even in those parts of the global economy where manufacturing still dominates: now that the means of production on which all others depend is not manufacturing but the culture and communication industries (which fast fashion makes particularly visible), the burden of performing one's status as the world's factory becomes critical to these nations and their citizens (61). The card game is as dominated by decisions about how to make a factory *look* ethical to clients in impossible circumstances as it is to *be* ethical, and about the lengths that workers will go to to appear hard-working and employable (eg. cards 324 and 113, 303). This exploration of the forms of virtuosity common to the actor in the UK and the worker in China – rather than the spectacular rejection of the lay sense of virtuosity in order to claim superficial solidarity with the deskilled – is key to *World Factory*'s distinctive political goals. Where many previous attempts to make performances about precarity have faltered because 'these two virtuosity discourses' have become confused (Jackson 2012: 17), METIS take care to distinguish them: 'celebrat[ing] the skills and processes' that make a shirt is a matter of attending to the ways in which Virno's virtuosity is currently demanded of *all* workers, in order that we might eventually create the conditions in which we can all be recognised as virtuosos in the old sense.

The actor cannot escape precarity and describe themselves as skilled until a worker like Yeung escapes it alongside them.

We saw that Crouch's attempt to create performances with this kind of utopian horizon involve a renewal of the contract that still tacitly underpins naturalism, but has become ossified by contemporary 'literalism': audiences use interpretive skills of their own to make up for any limits in the performers' ability to represent a fictional world. Insofar as they identify themselves with the not-yet-skilled, METIS prefer to avoid this implicit sense of reskilling, in favour of developing a new incipient theatrical form: Virno associates the virtuosity of Fordist workers with a 'general intellect' that requires expression in a new, self-determined kind of 'political community' (2004: 41). *World Factory*'s form was assembled in rehearsal partly by reframing naturalistic techniques. The script lists 'motivations' or 'intentions' for the actors in the opening section and during the Spring Festival pause, sometimes in the form of transitive verbs familiar from Actioning; in one archived page of script, Ellinson's opening speech as Thatcher is annotated line-by-line with a relevant intention (*WF* E5). But the actors would execute this knowing that their aim 'to convince' or 'to bring everyone to see the light' will be interpreted ironically by the audience, at whom it is not aimed in the same way as the speeches' original audience (*WF* G23: 1). Likewise, the intended movements back to their consoles and then to restart the game at the end of the Spring Festival sit at odds with the looser, private, time-killing gestures which separate those movements (15). As the piece developed its form, the company had to balance asking questions about the world that the dealers were inhabiting in order to ground themselves – after one trial, Ellinson asked 'How do we relate to "the state"?' and 'What power structures are at work within the room itself?' (*WF* I10) – with a recognition that this world must necessarily remain indeterminate, and that the audience would not share the labour of making or exploring this environment with them. The aim was to make an atmosphere that remains as inoperable as the world it represents.

This desire not to pass the labour of shaping the world onto the audience was an important principle for Svendsen: in the same response to the trial, Ellinson asks who the players imaginatively become within the game and Svendsen's annotation in response is that they are 'not "cast" as such' (*WF* I10). The audience are the third group of subjects in *World Factory* who hover between seeing themselves as making skilled decisions and merely going through the motions demanded of them, and the manner in which METIS negotiate this sets them apart from a number of contemporary approaches to immersive theatre (a term which Svendsen admits to hearing for the first time after it started to be applied to *3rd Ring Out*!) METIS might be expected to resist the assumption that getting to interact with others and to try out new or unexpected tasks is inherently emancipatory, allowing audience members to 'feel sensually and imaginatively alive in the way that one does after a revitalising walk' (Machon 2013: 25). Yet Svendsen was also

keen to avoid the self-consciously radical alternative to this dynamic, taken up by companies such as Shunt and Half Cut, which 'probes what it means to demand or unquestionably expect the rewards attached to productive consumption', and places audiences in conditions where their desire for complete absorption or successful participation is frustrated (Alston 2016: 23). While accepting that 'there's a place for that' and 'a politics to it', Svendsen 'wanted to invite people to pay attention to the situation rather than to their own discomfort or otherwise within the situation' (2016b). The purpose of beginning with a documentary section was to settle audiences into the game, and to reduce feelings of exposure or judgement for their beliefs. For all that it apparently limits their freedom, the restriction of every card to a binary choice stopped the audience from feeling that they were responsible for creating the dramaturgy or approaching it with the "correct" attitude. It allows for Svendsen's 'relief from the effort of construction' (2017b: 297), as well as constituting one of the 'forms of protection' from the pressures of public self-fashioning that Virno concedes are 'capable of achieving a real sense of comfort' (2004: 40). Evidence from the performances suggests that this structure bred the kind of 'sociable confidence' that Sennett associates with the restrictions of the Suzuki method (2009: 156). Svendsen was keen to achieve a visualisation of the data for 'The Reckoning' in order to '"reward" [the audience's] efforts' and give their actions 'a semblance of meaning', because audiences had been so universally engaged by trials of the game (*WF* J7; Svendsen 2016b). Here too, as with the workers and the actors, the emphasis is on not simply dismissing perceptions of skill as false consciousness, and on sustaining a theatrical politics that goes beyond shame at recognising complicity, *beginning* from the recognition that the audience have paid to come and see trained performers in their leisure time, and working out what ethical action is possible within those circumstances (Svendsen 2016b).

Notably, the appeal to 'the *World Factory* supercomputer' and its presentation of all factories' (and all previous games') aggregated data at the end of the game, for all its spectacle, a sincere attempt to use technology to meet dramaturgical goals (Svendsen and Daw 2017: 287). After seeing the show, games scholar Joel McKim corroborated Svendsen's sense that the expansion of scale could work to alter political theatre's 'traditional aesthetic strategy' of setting 'the specificity of one life, relationship or family against the backdrop of a larger historical moment or set of events' (in Svendsen et al 2015). Rather than inviting audiences to judge a character (or, here, themselves) for their actions, and risking turning socio-economic conditions into 'fodder for the exploration of an individual psychology', the primary focus of attention is shifted to those structures that could never be experienced by an individual subject (Svendsen, in Svendsen et al 2015): as well as highlighting the sheer range of pathways and stories available, 'The Reckoning' highlights the fact that no team could prove successful against all the criteria that it analyses (making the most money, garments, hirings, or improvements in working

conditions). Throughout the *homo faber* trilogy, Sennett makes a useful distinction between replicants, technologies that replace the human body by mimicking elements of it more efficiently, and robots, which are 'ourselves enlarged' performing feats that the human body or memory could never achieve (2009: 85). In a factory context, the former is perceived as a threat to workers' skills and jobs, but the latter retains its status as a tool 'of limited scope, though infinite power' that requires skilled human management (2018: 255). Throughout *World Factory*'s card game, replicant technologies dominate social relations. Devices like using a barcode scanner to select the next card speed up processes that could have conceivably been done without them, and expose the slowness of the human dealer to respond to the scanner and to perform non-mechanised tasks such as counting out money. One might describe these devices as gimmicks on Ngai's terms: something which intensifies labour as much as it eliminates it, simultaneously working too hard and not hard enough (2017: 493). The dealers' movement between multiple personae is partly driven by their struggle to be as efficient as their machines, and to make their audiences as efficient in turn: technology models behaviour in the sense of providing a set of standardised or ideal conditions against which humans should be judged. This association is announced by the opening presentation of the performers as super-models striking poses on catwalks. It is also, perhaps, there in Svendsen's penchant for describing the dealers in 'provocateur' or 'enforcer' modes as 'latter-day capricious Greek gods' (2017c: 8), forces which can only be incorporated into their audiences' understanding as emerging *ex machina*. Both of these associations only make the dealers' momentary revelations of vulnerability to the system all the more unsettling, highlighting how the performing subject is passive to affective forces too large for it to harmonise within itself. 'The Reckoning', however, offers a hopeful alternative: for all its spectacular presentation, this spectacle feels more adequate to the scale of the information being presented; the effort that the audience recognise that they have put into it means that it is neither a transcendent 'wonder' nor a mere 'trick' that would have happened regardless of their actions (Ngai 2017: 469). The fact that the computer is revealing information that the performers could not know, but that its technology nevertheless remains in their control, allows for the reconciliation of agency and passivity that the game itself had denied.

This transition means that I would differ slightly from Svendsen, and argue that *World Factory* does fit Adam Alston's model of immersive theatre in which the audience's ultimate object of aesthetic attention is their own experience of the performance rather than the work of the performers (2016: 7). It is just that this self-conscious experience is delayed, and designed to occur most fully after the performance is over and thanks to the intervention of robotic technology. After the final blackout and curtain call, the dealer would print out a long receipt for each member of their factories, detailing every decisions that their group made and the resources that they used; the receipt also featured a URL under every decision which would link them to a

relevant page on the company's Digital Quilt, a website onto which they have uploaded primary source material that informed the game. Audience members were invited to reflect on how they might have chosen differently with further information, and how the circumstances in which they played the game may have influenced their decision: this might inspire mitigated, private feelings of embarrassment which would motivate alteration to their behaviour and consumption patterns. For all that the performance 'hardly feels like straightforward ethical or political training' given its opacity in the moment (McKim in Svendsen et al 2015), it can now become the first, novice stage in a training regime that the analogy to the Suzuki method suggests, with the audience now having a greater sense of how the system works and responsibility to alter it. The model actions that the performers and audiences perform are allowed to stand as 'a proposal rather than a command', which they can and should go on to respond to independently (Sennett 2009: 101). Machon's dream of being revitalised by the experience of immersive theatre resonates with Ingold's description of the skilled practitioner absorbed in the flows of his environment, whose 'heightened awareness' is an expression of the synthesis of action and reflection (2000: 413. METIS's interactive theatre does not so much deny this felt synthesis as defer it to the future, once the audience have become capable of imaginatively combining the action-with-limited-reflection that occurred in the auditorium and the reflection-with-limited-action occurring afterwards. Since the final performances of *World Factory* in 2017, the company have offered more opportunities for this kind of reflective engagement by publishing the cards as a book. The volume incorporates instructions for reading multiple routes that highlight the full range of the game's stories, but a caveat is given that this capacity to go back and think means that it 'differs […] from both the experience of the performance and the real-world situation the game sets out to imagine' (Svendsen and Daw 2017: 249). This makes it clear that – as with all practice-as-research – the purpose of this publication is not to disseminate new information, or even new capacities for detached critical reflection in its readers, but to generate new concrete actions on the part of those who use it.

All of this seems to bring *World Factory* into line with previous models of the theatre as the site of negative skill, where synthesis and absorption can be imagined but not realised – as well as with Ridout's argument that the location of meaningful ethical action remains outside the auditorium. Reporting on his experience of playing the game, Fintan Walsh states that, even if he were to play it again knowing the ethical implications that 'The Reckoning' had taught him, he would 'probably make the same risk-oriented, profit-hungry choices: for to give up on these would also mean to *give up on theatre*' (in Svendsen et al 2015, my emphasis). However, evidence from the performances suggests that the boundaries between the end of the play and the beginnings of the world beyond were as porous as they were in a play like *The Author* or *what*

happens to hope at the end of the evening. The script of 'The Reckoning' published in the book contains the following evocative final words, absent from all of the production scripts:

> *Audience members are allowed to stay in the space as long as they wish to. Meanwhile, the theatrical labour continues. Stage management start to refold and pack up the garments "made" and handed out over the course of the evening. Sometimes audience members help out.* (Svendsen and Daw 2017: 302)

On the one hand, this emphasises that there has been no lasting structural change: the performance remains circumscribed by labour relations, and audiences are expected to recognise this; indeed, the appearance of stage managers demonstrates another dimension of labour which even this show needed to conceal to survive. Yet the audience's willingness to help out – and the company's identification of this as significant, if only minimally – suggests that the temporary form of life which the performance constructed can be sustained. The audience's investment in the real decisions they made about the fictional making of clothes has moved them, consciously or not, to continue to invest in caring for them and for the labour which made this structure of care possible. Ridout has described the curtain call as the audience 'trying to figure itself as the recipient of a gift' rather than paying customers (2006: 165). Here this self-figuration is extended to the point that they do, however fleetingly, perform an action that intervenes, in a way that the company did not expect, within the labour of the theatre. As the company move from this project to *WE KNOW NOT WHAT WE MAY BE* in which they will invite audiences to imagine future social structures, it is worth highlighting some of the ways in which this balancing of structure and spontaneity within the company's dramaturgy, in which skill is constructed but deferred, itself models such a possible future – and provides a better model for political organisation than the more immediate, collaborative sense of spontaneity that emerges from Ingold.

3. Imagining the future

The final invitation made to the audience before the receipts are printed in *World Factory* is to begin this kind of larger-scale reflective thinking: each factory is asked to divide its capital between four proposed sustainable futures for the textile industry – to relocate to Africa, to relocate to the UK, to set up a workers' collective, and to invest in textile-waste processing – each promoted by one of the dealers (Svendsen and Daw: 294-97). In the essays by the project's associates collected in the book, it is notable that the last of these is the only one to be discussed with explicit scepticism: Lucy Norris argues that, for all their 'solid foundations in concepts of sustainability', strategies such as waste processing which depend on a 'circular economy' do not tackle issues of 'social justice and equality'; instead, they retain faith in the capacity of growth-oriented capitalism to eliminate all waste from the system. However, the 'locally-based', 'open-source' and 'collaborative' alternatives that she and others offer to such large-scale change can

seem frustrating in their smallness (316-17). Many of the other contributors to *The Routledge Handbook of Sustainability and Fashion*, a copy of which is in the *World Factory* archive, fall back on the same rhetorical appeals as Ingold (and in some cases cite him (Williams 2014: 235; Middleton 2014: 270)): they recognise, accurately, that no object is only experienced as a commodity and that 'consumption is [necessarily] understood as embedded within other social practices' (Woodward 2014: 135), but believe that change can be brought about simply by shifting one's emphasis onto those other practices and 'build[ing] autonomy from the ground up' (von Busch 2014: 281); this risks ignoring the ways in which the commodity's abstraction controls and fundamentally alters the other practices in which it is embedded, and risks the cruel optimism by which changing one's feeling towards a system is considered the same as actually changing it. Neither global nor local perspectives alone seem to be sufficient to the challenge that the end of the performance sets. Ngai's recognition of the way in which capital's materialisations seem simultaneously too big and too small to be worked with continues to haunt possible responses to 'The Reckoning' once the performance is over, and once theatrical apparatus is no longer there to mediate it. If the feeling of 'reward' is too great, it can imply that the audience have already achieved something: the spectacle of watching the data be amassed can offer 'a strange kind of sympathy with the processes of globalisation' (McKim, in Svendsen et al 2015). If the feeling of complicity in the system is too great, it can leave the audience feeling paralysed from altering personal behaviour in the future. The sheer difficulty of sustaining a structure in which action and intention can both be sustained ethically beyond the auditorium is acknowledged by the decision to take a pointedly pessimistic line from Rivers's interview as the script's last line: 'It's like – "Well, I've been exposed to it, and I know about it, but I'm not choosing to do anything about it"' (Svendsen and Daw: 301).

The dramaturgy of *World Factory* should thus be seen as expressing a desire – even if it cannot, quite, propose a model – for a labour theory that can sustain both scales at once, one would which account for how subjects can still execute meaningful actions despite doubt or ignorance, as agents throughout the global system have shown themselves able to do from the company's research. It might find its affective analogue in the experience of helping somebody with a task you know they are paid to do, but knowing that this neither invalidates the gift nor changes the system by itself. This is the approach taken in a recent attempt to develop 'a labour theory of the iPhone era', partly in response to the direct action in Chinese factories following the 2010 Foxconn suicides: rejecting the binary of material and immaterial labour, it situates the iPhone itself as the 'battery' at the centre of separate 'circuits' (Qiu, Gregg and Crawford 2014: 565). Through formal labour, surplus value – whether measured by bodily capacity, time or affect – is extracted from bodies at every level of the design and factory system that makes the phone (569); through informal labour, the phone provides the means by which, for example, working

mothers can organise the division of their time between paid and unpaid labour, and the open access programs of Web 2.0 can be developed and shared (571-72). Political action becomes a matter of either instigating or coping with the 'short circuits' that happen when, for example, redundant factory workers find themselves relying on alternative networks of 'survival labour' for support, or activists use knowledge from Foxconn student interns to organise interventions internationally (574). If the two circuits together form the environment through which phone users move, the 'short circuit' constitutes Ingold's or de Certeau's moment of *kairos*, or Sennett's 'intuitive leap', at which perspectives change and new openings become possible.

METIS intuited a similar approach when they decided to focus their research on the path of a shirt through the production process, noting the values that accrue to it as it goes. Although this path was ultimately used to structure the research process rather than the production, the final performance still finds strategies for encouraging audiences to focus their attention on specific items of clothing, as they move between appearing as commodities and as non-abstracted expressions of skill and care. Lines in 'The Reckoning' like '[i]f it's lucky, your consumer might pass it on to a charity' (referring to a cheap cotton garment) occasionally give the impression that the show operates like a dramatized 'it'-narrative (Svendsen and Daw: 290) – or, perhaps, as a version of *My Arm* or *Complete Works* in which the imagined transformation of objects is not secured merely by co-operation between performers and audiences, but by the interactions of the formal and informal labour processes that they bring with them into the auditorium. During the game itself, a sample of clothing is given to factories whenever they successfully complete an order; the dealers offer the first with '*flair and panache*' but increasingly throw them down brusquely (*WF* G23: 11); at the end of the game, factories are invited to select the garment that they believe best represents their values, for examination during 'The Reckoning' (16). Each garment thus begins to accrue a host of potential values and meanings: as a symbol of the fashion, or just fast-fashion, industry evoked by the opening catwalk; as a prop essential to the formal immaterial labour of an actor; as a token to be used to keep score in a game; when absorbed in the game, as a reward for their informal labour as a player (and, imaginatively, as a factory manager); as the product of the formal material labour of a textiles worker. Few of these are likely to be registered by the playing audience, but all will have a tacit effect on their response to the performance. For all of these values to be held in potential, the garment has to be seen as 'made' rather than 'grown' in Ingold's terms, taken out of the lifelines in which it can 'flow, mix and mutate' (2011: 30); it is left to the audience to make a tacit, and perhaps ultimately explicit, decision about which of these values they will bring back to life in the way that they remember and respond to *World Factory*.

In that they are objects whose significance is conspicuously both shaped by and beyond the control of audiences and performers, the garments of *World Factory* begin, in their theatrical

context, to behave as the readymade does in a gallery context according to John Roberts. A readymade like Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* would appear to mark the zenith of aesthetic deskilling, the rupture of art from *ars*, so that it becomes no more than the mere 'spontaneous creation of novelty' (Ingold 2000: 401). *Fountain*'s contemporary legacy on these terms would be the appropriative conceptual art which Cornford, Harvie and Crouch have all expressed distrust for and which 'remains such a prominent stereotype of a gimmicky artifact' (Ngai 2017: 478). Roberts argues instead that Duchamp's intervention in rejecting 'traditional artistic skills' was to open the artwork 'out to other skills and therefore to other use values' because 'non-alienated and alienated labour are brought into view *simultaneously*' (2007: 24-25). Manual worker and artist can be 'brought together into suggestive, albeit uneven, alignment' (35). This opening up and alignment were not always immediately visible: an interpreter's ability to recognise them requires the delay between which *Fountain* turns from 'an object of contemplation' in the gallery to 'an object of reflection', akin to the delay between receiving and reflecting on the receipt at the end of *World Factory* (37). Duchamp also recognised that this alignment would only become more uneven if the gesture was identically repeated: his later readymades, in which he incorporated painting or other acts of alteration into their assembly, found new ways to assert that all art is inconceivable without 'the artist's reliance on what has been made and touched by other hands' (Roberts 2007: 53). *Fountain*'s inheritor in contemporary art on such terms would be neither gimmicky conceptual pieces, nor those forms of Bourriaudian relational aesthetics which simply assert that everyone is an artist by inviting their common participation in a mundane skill. It would be those artworks – which can, like many of Bourriaud's examples, take the form of a 'plan, consultancy or research-programme'– that invite their interpreters to make connections between the 'internal complexity' of the work, like the host of planned creative decisions and live deviations that constitute a performance of *World Factory*, and the 'attenuated complexity' of the social relations in which it is embedded, like the decisions and deviations of agents in the textile industry. To achieve this is to offer a 're-radicalization' of Adorno's autonomous artwork that expresses the relations between aesthetic and non-aesthetic reason (Roberts 2007: 222-23). Where the gimmick presents 'the transformation of idea into thing in a way that charms but also disturbs us', such an artwork resists that fate by keeping idea and thing in generative tension (Ngai 2017: 478).

Roger Sansi offers more details of what such art projects might look like, under the sign of Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov's model of 'ethnographic conceptualism', which should clarify the resemblance with *World Factory* and start to bring a number of threads from this thesis together. Ethnographic conceptualism proposes an alternative to the traditional, colonial model of the ethnographer who lives within the field for long enough 'to accept that the field has its own agency' and that it will determine the objects of their inquiry for them, based on what is relevant

to those already living in the field. The field operates like a trap which resists the ethnographer's intellect and compels them to be 'born again' so as to release themselves. The problem is that, with this release, the ethnographer's autonomy is restored: the field and its inhabitants can be translated into a monograph, and the planned 'methods, timelines and objectives reappear' (Sansi 2015: 139-40). This is another version of Daniel Miller's metaphor of the journey back down the mountain – and the reason why Ingold has taken to dismissing ethnography. Anthropology must find ways to continue to treat its fields and objects of inquiry as gifts, studied *with* in a spirit of 'joint activity' and constantly renewed reciprocity (Ingold 2011: 238). The most appropriate way in which to imagine such a response would be crafting a work of art, with Ingold pointedly attaching 'no particular significance' to the difference between art and craft here (2011: 239, 253 n.6). But this works to elide the fundamental difference between the ethnographer and their subjects, who each relate to their field with a different set of skills: in Roberts's terms, it celebrates the internal complexity of the field without worrying about the attenuated complexity of the field's relationship with the wider world of which it is a subset, and of which the anthropologist remains a representative. Ethnographic conceptualism – in which the artist figures themselves as an avant-garde or conceptual artist rather than an artisan – retains this spirit of the ethnographer making something new with the inhabitants of the field, rather than reporting back from them, but embracing the generative differences between participants: the field, in this respect, becomes a laboratory (Sansi 2015: 142). Such an attitude retains Ingold's (valid) observation that space and time is not full of 'people like ourselves', but without concluding from that that we can, or necessarily should, respond by trying to be more like them (2000: 404).

In *World Factory*, the structural differences which separate textile workers, performers and audiences cannot be absolved, but an association can be drawn between them, on the basis of the strategies that they have all developed for living with doubt and difficulty: between the forms of knowledge latent even within audiences who feel constrained by the difficulty of making ethical decisions under pressure, even within workers who have to cope with deskilling, and even within a company without a projected model of the form that their research should take. Making doubt and difficulty visible at every level of the system means that no-one can be judged for failing to fulfil a model nor, as is implicit in Ridout's détourned bourgeois theatre, are they personally accused of imposing a model on others. Only by mapping this network of strategies can judgements be made about how to make large-scale changes to the system: creative ethnography is best understood not as a matter of participating with others within the field, producing a Maussian gift economy of consistently renewed social relations, but of mobilising a collective intervention in and on the field, a radical Bataillean gift where the capacity for reciprocity remains unknown. Sansi's description of such ethnography as 'a machine for making the future that generates unexpected events' arguably finds a particularly clear manifestation in

the *World Factory* supercomputer (2015: 142). Furthermore, the transition in how the production presented and represented human relationships with technology invites comparison with the utopian 'reorganisation of an ideology of technology' that Virno and his fellow autonomists believe can emerge from communication industries' usurping of manufacturing's status as the underlying means of production (Piperno 1996: 125). In order to allow informal labour circuits to achieve dominance over formal ones, potentially freeing populations to choose how and how much they work, computation must be recognised as a different kind of knowledge management from human capacities for reflection and action, rather than its ideal or upgraded form – just as 'the knowledge of savage societies' is not, as twentieth-century anthropologists framed it, a 'false or incoherent theory' upgraded by the discovery of writing (Piperno 1996: 127-28). Again, such an attitude keeps Ingold's correct insistence that humans retain a capacity to dwell, that we should figure orality and musicality as distinctive ways of storing and transmitting knowledge, and that cultures or ways of life which value them more risk erasure by capitalist modernity. But it proposes instead that the way to prevent their erasure is not through paying them compensatory attention as much as by mobilising that knowledge to develop a new collective understanding of what dwelling with machines might look like, at every level of our dependency on them.

In this light, it is unsurprising that *World Factory* resonates with a number of contemporary initiatives on the British left which continue the autonomist project. The production initiated an ongoing collaboration between Svendsen and Paul Mason, who highlighted in his review how the performance dramatises the conflict between capital's demand that we 'see ourselves as cashflow generators, profit centres or interest-bearing assets' and 'the non-economic priorities of human beings and the need to sustain the environment' (2015a). In *Postcapitalism*, he describes how he likes to 'think about Shakespeare', to give an example of how large-scale economic changes can be registered at scales that remain accessible: close attention to the conflicts over what characters value within and between different plays are the expressions of a society slowly negotiating the shift from feudalism to mercantile capitalism (2015b: 166-67). A postcapitalist theatre would, like this postfeudal theatre, be any theatre made with 'a knowledge that postcapitalism is coming' and, in being so made, 'shape the century' that follows it (2015c). In his posthumous foreword to the recent collection *Economic Science Fictions*, which counts some of METIS's collaborators among its contributors and gathers texts that resemble some of its outputs, Mark Fisher proposes that, if capitalism is 'the system that liberates fictions to rule over the social' as '*effective virtualities*' no longer registered as fictions, experimental aesthetic works can resist it by providing alternative virtualities, even 'engines for the development of future

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policy' (2018: xii-xiv).[5] If one of the failures of the post-war Left has been its inability to sustain its own Mont Pelerin Society, a dispersed and 'self-consciously long-term' project for laying the intellectual foundations of an alternative economic consensus, works like *World Factory*, which seek neither to tinker pragmatically with the closed capitalist system nor reject it for local initiatives, will remain essential (Srnicek and Williams 2016: 56, 67). This careful '*design* [of the] transition to postcapitalism' would perform the function of Ingold's skill of skills (Mason 2015b: 108): a second order of reflection or theory which nevertheless remains fully in contact with practice or praxis rather than in any way abstracted. The skill that Duchamp continued to show was to be willing 'to open himself to the technical forces that were about to pass through art' (Roberts 2007: 43). However, rather than the 'hunch' that Roberts calls this, this is a practice which demands and requires conscious attention, particularly in its contemporary forms that require collaboration with those beyond the gallery or theatre space: ethnographic conceptualism carries risks distinctive from those of conventional ethnography because what counts as an ethical relation between participants is constantly being discovered (Sansi 2015: 150-52).

One can detect ways in which METIS have been engaged in this reflection, and where they may still need to. A barrier to interpreting *World Factory* with confidence according to the terms that I have proposed is that Madame Wang and the Chinese textile workers are only collaborators on the project by dint of being interviewed, and have no opportunity to see or respond to the performance as *aesthetic* agents in their own right. (It should be noted, however, that the project was conceived and imagined throughout as a collaboration with Zhao Chuan and his company Grass Stage, who were making a performance of their own on the same topic in China from a more agit-prop or Poor Theatre perspective, with semi-amateur actors, even if it did not result in explicit connection within the final performance (*WF* A1; Svendsen 2016b).) *WE KNOW NOT WHAT WE MAY BE* seems to mark an ongoing development in the way in which METIS frame their collaboration with experts. Where *World Factory* had moved from interacting with experts privately to conducting research-in-public, the new project brings the expert into the final performance itself: audiences will hear a 15-minute talk before being invited to participate in an interactive installation. This has the apparent aim of activating a rhythm of acting and reflecting within the space rather than after it, and of encouraging audiences to think of themselves as active subjects with their own different kind of perspective on, and latent knowledge of, the world.

Furthermore, thinking of *World Factory* as making a concrete design for a speculative future allows us to recognise it not as an application of autonomist or postcapitalist thought, but as

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[5] As an example, one might fruitfully compare the texts collected in *Economic Science Fictions* with Giles 2011, a response made by one of the artists-in-residence in *3rd Ring Out*'s 'strategy cell' during its run at the 2011 Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

a piece in critical or hesitant dialogue with it. The promises that many proponents of full automation make for 'an interventionist approach to the human', which will unleash a libidinal 'expansion of desires, of needs, of lifestyles, of communities, of ways of being, of capacities', might give us pause (Srnicek and Williams 2016: 83, 181). An emphasis on limitless bounty for all – often, notably, made by white male academics and journalists in the West with limited experience of structurally limited bounty – risks not giving adequately flexible attention to 'the non-economic priorities of human beings and the need to sustain the environment' that they acknowledge to be necessary. A speculative ethnography might thus serve as a 'last human venue' in the sense of *holding back* the transition into a humanism changed beyond recognition, and insisting that more design work needs to be done. Many of Mason's tentative proposals for a postcapitalist theatre revolve around more-or-less realistic representations of contemporary ironic subjectivity as it is experienced on social media and other such digital platforms (2015c), of the kind that Sennett dismissed as leaving 'little room for understanding the breakdown of a career' or for 'communication between fragmented selves' (1999: 133, 143): the latter is essential for what he sees as a left-wing project properly founded on 'dialogics' (2013: 14-24). I argued that the social fragmentation represented in a play like Crimp's *In the Republic of Happiness*, with its dramatisation of people who want to fashion themselves into 'a new kind of magnificent human being' through individual acts of therapy, medication and consumption (2015: 282), stood as a negative example for a better, collective mode of emancipatory self-fashioning – but it achieves this by satirising the dangers of an uncritical accelerationism as a means of such emancipation, in a way which could equally be read through the lens of demanding a return to traditional modes of social discipline.[6] While *World Factory* is never as ambivalent about the need to imagine new social structures, it places its emphasis firmly on developing 'conversation' in a manner that Sennett would appreciate (*WF* A1). It also invites audiences to continue thinking in terms of the lives of individuals within the system, relayed through forms like the interview and the potted biography on the workers' cards which are less fragmented and technologised than Mason's. The company draw attention, as Sennett does too (2013: 144-45), to the role that mobile phones have in strengthening traditional social bonds with the stories that it presents, but keeps this outside its modes of theatrical presentation.

The effect of these strategies, as in Crouch's theatre at its most hopeful, is to suggest that radical change to social structures need not demand practices that are consciously different from those currently in operation by people within the theatre. It is not up to any individual, or any decisive moment, to bear the burden of executing the transition from wanting 'Paradise Now!' to achieving 'Paradise now'. In Crouch's theatre, in which utopia is still imagined as a return to lost,

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[6] It should be noted that Crimp has acknowledged that another recent influence on his writing, in tense addition to Sennett, is the increasingly reactionary sociologist Frank Furedi, notable for his pathologisation of what he perceives as a contemporary 'victim' or 'snowflake' culture (Angelaki 2017: 153-55).

pre-sacrificial forms of communion, this future is presented as an object of desire; in METIS's, where no such model is available other than those humans must make for themselves, this desire might be matched by something like fear. When I describe *World Factory* as relying on a 'dramaturgy of *apprehension*', I play on the multiple senses of the word to capture what the experience of attending a performance was like: I was being made aware of experiences and forms of knowledge that had previously been occluded, but without necessarily yet being aware enough to articulate them or inhabit them for myself, and I registered this uncertainty about how I could or should change as a minorised, manageable experience of fear. The word also accounts for how the performance might reconcile a fissure within Sennett's thinking. One of the baleful characteristics of precarity among white-collar workers is that work is entirely focused 'on what [is] just about to break, on getting ahead of the curve' with little stock held in past experiences (Sennett 1999: 79-80). However, the process of 'anticipat[ing] and act[ing] in advance of sense data', or 'prehension', is innate to all embodied subjects and one of the abilities that various skilled practices aim to hone (Sennett 2018: 178): a hand is cupped in anticipation of grasping a glass, a successful batsman needs to "get ahead of the swing", a city-dweller learns to anticipate threatening elements of their local environment (Sennett 2009: 153-55; 2018: 179). The tendency for these two to elide into each other, which allows Braverman's mere dexterity to be mistaken for skill, is exposed at local moments throughout *World Factory*, in the paradox of the performer who has carefully rehearsed strategies for appearing to respond more spontaneously than they are to the surprises of gameplay. But, taken as a whole, the production might be seen as a world in which this tension comes to rest: in which the networked organisation of a society can respond as intuitively and gracefully to unexpected challenges as a trained bodily nervous system, from which this metaphor of the network ultimately comes (Mason 2015b: 188; Sennett 2018: 255); in which this response can be felt as intimately as an embodied sense by each citizen.

METIS's 'machine for making the future' that they still do not know quite how to operate leaves us at some distance from the wayfaring hunter-gatherers of Secret Theatre, who prefer to stay more consistently 'in touch with Time', already taking it for granted that they experience the rehearsal structures through which they are moving as intimately as physical material (Cornford 2015b). This distinction also highlights the difference between my methodological approach and Cornford's. The analysis that I have come to of *World Factory* (and, indeed, of my other case studies) is dependent on my degree of detachment from the company's practice, viewing archives and performances but not attending rehearsals or framing myself as an embedded or participant researcher. Cornford's argument in his preface, that he has discovered a sufficiently useable past to develop a 'theatre history of the future theatre', rests on a research methodology that sees him 'moving back and forth between the archive and the rehearsal room, testing and exploring in practice the techniques and ideas uncovered' (2012: 10). Any theory must return to the provable

practice from which it originated. In this respect, Cornford inherits from Sennett and Ingold an insistence of skill's transhistorical legibility. It will 'carry on for as long as life does' (Ingold 2011: 62), and 'nearly anyone can become a good craftsman' (Sennett 2009: 268), even if contemporary conditions make that inevitability seem at risk. My own conclusion is an attempt to identify some promises for a sustainable and progressive future theatre revealed in my case studies, and in certain approaches to writing critically about them, which reject that inevitability. What fresh hopes can theatre-makers offer precisely when they *abandon*, or at least stop repeating, the familiar drama of skill's recovery after loss?

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Conclusion: skill's afterlife

1. Between two invitations

This thesis has been an exploration of how one might respond, as a theatre scholar, to two invitations made primarily to contemporary theatre-makers and audiences, which I introduced in its opening pages. One is Sean Holmes's assertion that British theatre needs 'new structure[s]' for making work: by remaining consciously acknowledged and flexible, these new structures could expose and challenge the larger, more rigid political structures in which they are enmeshed. To do so would be 'to truly treat theatre as Art' in that it 'attack[s] the world' by attacking established theatrical modes of representing it (2013). As the Introduction explored in detail, this is the same promise that Cornford finds latent within the historical British studios that he analyses: by building on their example, Holmes's direction of the Secret Theatre project began the process of fulfilling Cornford's wish for his research to provide a 'theatre history of the future theatre' (2012: 10). The other invitation is made over the course of Duška Radosavljević's *Theatre-Making*. Far from proposing particular new structures that are needed, she concludes that British theatre is moving towards a point where 'anything goes' in terms of how relationships between practitioners are constructed, 'so long as the artwork being created – text-based or not – is crafted with rigour, intelligence, intuition and attention to detail' (2013: 107). Her commitment, and those of the artists that she discusses, is as political as Holmes's and Cornford's. Taking her cues from Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community*, she argues that this kind of work emerges from a desire to secure the survival of democratic forms of community, now at a greater risk of 'eventual demise through the economic forces of capitalism' unleashed globally since the fall of the Soviet Union (188).

Both invitations are, in their different ways and contexts, calls for 'an active and integrated intellectual and embodied approach' (Radosavljević 2013: ix), one in which forms of reflection and theory are always integrated into theatrical practice. This is an integration which Cornford has used the work of Sennett and Ingold to gloss and which carries political significance, because the harmonisation of body and mind is also registered as a harmonisation of freedom and constraint. Michael Chekhov made it clear that the purpose of incorporating Rudolf Steiner's bodily exercises into his studio timetable was to allow students to enter a 'new' and 'right' 'second feeling of freedom', by passing through constraint (qtd. in Cornford 2012: 74). Radosavljević concludes *Theatre-Making* by noting that the most striking feature of new political dramaturgy is its capacity to cultivate 'creative freedom contained in a fixed structure': she recounts an Ontroerend Goed performance in which a burst of 'chaos and spontaneity […] turns out to be a carefully rehearsed choreography', as well as the forms of liberation generated even by Crouch's 'closely guided performances' of *An Oak Tree*. Indeed, in relational works such as Crouch's, this experience of balancing 'freedom and responsibility' is also activated within the audience (2013: 191-92). More

clearly than in the historic studios, or than in Secret Theatre's shows, the claim that craftsmanship helps to cultivate democracy or the common good thus begins to be activated within the auditorium, as well as the workshop or rehearsal room.

It seems appropriate to read the two invitations as working in harmony. Putting Radosavljević's invitation alongside Holmes's and Cornford's might seem to expose something of a blindspot on the latter pair's part: why do they need to pitch their advocacy for new structures in the form of transformative manifestos when the evidence of a study like *Theatre-Making* suggests that plenty of such structures are already emerging, with apparent spontaneity? Yet Holmes admits that the Lyric got to the point of being able to execute the Secret Theatre project because of the range of 'successful devising companies' and 'European ensemble[s]' that had collaborated with the theatre in recent years, a dependency which inspires his own 'humility' (2013). And, inevitably, rather than generating new structures that could be reproduced outside the context of the Lyric's refurbishment, Secret Theatre's radicalism ended up being just as tentative a microstructure, which would require collaboration elsewhere in order to be sustained: its politics might be best compared to the Nancian being-in-common that Radosavljević identifies, or to the anarcho-syndicalism which Cornford has ascribed to ensembles such as Theatre Workshop (2016b). Holmes is adopting the position of a theatre professional invested in absorbing forms of experimental practice from the theatrical margins into mainstream producing houses, where those forms can acquire prestige; this is an investment that Cornford shares in his manifesto, which focuses on the structure and leadership of institutions like the National Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Royal Court (2012: 350-51, 356-57). Radosavljević is, in this instance, a non-practice-based theatre academic invested in surveying a range of work accurately, which includes a concern with rendering the margins visible as a site of innovation in their own right (although *Theatre-Making* makes a point of drawing on 'mainstream and non-mainstream theatre practice' (2013: ix)). If both invitations are about balancing freedom and structure at the level of each individual performance, production or organisation, reading both of them together like this provides a way to enshrine that balance within contemporary theatre-making culture as a whole. Radosavljević, like Ingold, puts slightly greater weight on the primacy of 'intuition', a quasi-immediate response to the environments in which practitioners find themselves, from which any need for external or abstracted framings of that response are a difference in degree rather than kind. Cornford, like Sennett, puts weight on emphasising the larger-scale social forms that allow these responses and intuitions to flourish in particular ways. When taken together, it becomes possible to argue that a studio structure resembling Secret Theatre's is the most feasible and sustainable way of demonstrating the 'rigour, intelligence, intuition and attention to detail' that Radosavljević wants of dramaturgy – but that it was the work of earlier, more risky expressions of those qualities that brought about this richly and rightly 'free' environment, in which 'everything we put into the show was just the obvious thing to do' (qtd. in Cornford 2015b).

Over the course of this thesis, I have identified a couple of case studies in contemporary theatre practice that make good on this approach. These are performances that, although generated outside the studio system, anticipate or enable it. They might be registered as *applications* of Sennett's and Ingold's theories, and allow forms of skilled practice to be recognised. Following through on the implicit politics of those theories, they would allow feelings of collective possibility into the auditorium, as in *A Series of Increasingly Impossible Acts*' cultivation of an ensemble whom audiences felt they got to know well enough that they could almost start dancing with them. I described Crouch's earliest two works for adults as affirmations of Ingold's theory of skill. *My Arm* sustains a critique of artists after the conceptual turn, for refusing to think *with* or *through* the materials and environment of their production, by reimagining their practices as a 'vocabulary' which Crouch's plays can use with greater care (Bottoms 2009: 74). I described how both the early plays aspire to be gift exchanges between Crouch and his audiences, in which those exchanges are orchestrated not by a superordinate structure of his design, as much as by a common engagement which onstage objects mediate and which could be repeated across a variety of other structures – just as these plays themselves have efficiently shifted context, from Crouch's private amateur performances of *My Arm* before the text was published to the touring venues and arts centres of various sizes to which they have transferred. Dan Rebellato notes that audiences at *An Oak Tree* are often 'willing the second actor on, expressing a kind of care for that second figure, as character and actor and person', apparently without distinguishing those categories (2015: 8). The show is a special case of Rebellato's argument that sensitive theatrical representation invites audiences to 'lean in' and 'stretch out' as they attend to the complexities of what they are seeing: it exposes how theatre relies on and develops skills in audiences as well (2009: 23, 26).

Similarly, to lift a phrase from Sara Jane Bailes's description of their practice, Forced Entertainment have engaged in a 'littl[ing] down' of skill (2011: 84), downplaying any necessary elements of structure and hierarchy within their practice through the sheer length of the time that they have spent collaborating. Etchells's emergence as artistic director was a matter of him being the company member most comfortable with 'developing vocabularies with which to discuss the work' (Smith 2013: 168): reflection is recognised as another kind of skill that develops alongside practical ones, and remains in consistent contact with them. The company cherish the slowness and discontinuity of their devising process, in which revelations can happen spontaneously (Smith 2013: 194) – but they also accept that they can recognise this *because* that process has settled into a loose, intuitive rhythm of periods of 'research and development' followed by 'structuring' (Naden 2003: 134; cf. Mermikides 2010). Their capacity to sustain conditions resembling those of a studio throughout their time on the cultural margins in the 1980s and 1990s, and then to retain that ethos of marginality and discontinuity during their period of greater stability and prestige, allows them ultimately to hover between an 'anything goes' fringe and an institutional mainstream. This is what

has allowed other younger artists – including Secret Theatre, during their devising process – to appreciate that inheritance of the company's 'values' will be more important than inheritance of their 'form' (Bowes 2014). At the opening of Chapter 3, I highlighted some examples of this inheritance being compared to a benignly self-reflective version of a child's relationship with a parent or teacher: one in which both participants are alert to the ongoing structures by which agency is opened up or denied, and mutual respect sustained, without rejecting those structures altogether.

However, these interpretations stand out as exceptions within a study that has largely focused on performance practices in which the harmony of action and reflection, of freedom and constraint, that would complete any 'turn to the crafts' does not *quite* come about. My readings across all four chapters have revealed a range of theatrical work in which the sheer difficulty of bringing such harmony about is exposed, and its consequences explored. I framed Chapter 2 around the fact that Crouch's work for adults since *ENGLAND* has been characterised by a recognition of the theatre's inadequacy as a site of Ingoldian dwelling. The material that Crouch seeks to 'dematerialise', by reframing it as the mediation of new social relations, will continue to bear the marks of the world beyond the theatre from which it is appropriated. The ways in which abstractions such as nature and capital inhere materially within objects cannot genuinely be challenged by the theatre's use of them to make new metaphors, although the theatre can continue to wish and work for their reimagination. Howells remains, for Crouch and his collaborators, a figure of the ways in which this reimagination requires sacrificial labour, forms of constraint that do not ultimately lead to freedom. My interpretation here draws the worlds of Crouch's plays closer to the more conspicuously coercive and exploitative ones associated with Martin Crimp's, and the production of those worlds closer to the complex negotiation of quasi-antagonistic agencies that Crimp's demands.

Although Forced Entertainment's passing of some of their practices onto the future is assured, their theatrical performances continue to represent worlds in which various kinds of practice are shown to be unsustainable. What is made legible is the inevitable failure of skills to be passed from embodied subject to embodied subject, or from institution to institution, in the face of material interference: we are left with objects 'you might have' used, or routines which might have turned an actor into a pure 'presence'. This persists in Etchells's and O'Connor's comparison of their work to childishness, or to the consequences of bad parenting. The company's commitment to the principle of failure – to the 'noise' that distinguishes 'theatre' from 'performance' – is precisely what holds them back from fully coinciding with Chris Goode's call to embrace theatricality, treating failure as a quasi-material to be inhabited rather than an abstraction, and thus achieving the 'very liberated feeling' that 'failure is not an option' (2015: 208-09). This desire to develop a dramaturgy which emerges from and responds to the sheer difficulty of describing what one is doing within the opaque networks of late capitalism, without any promise of being able to solve this difficulty within the auditorium, is one of the qualities of Forced Entertainment's work that METIS most clearly builds

upon. If Goode's invitation joins Radosavljević's and Cornford's in promising new kinds of heightened or liberated feeling, there might be something equally valuable in Forced Entertainment's and METIS's decision to hold back.

I have argued that reactivating the primacy of dwelling which Ingold associates with hunter-gatherers is unfeasible and unhelpful: even at those rare moments of skill mastery at which 'intense concentration' is achieved by individual practitioners (2015: 111), and however sincere the feelings of transcendence that this generates, the system of alien 'rules and representations' does not fall away (2000: 413). Sennett's conception of skill has been somewhat more useful: skill is presented here as an endless oscillating rhythm between reflective, socially structured explicit knowledge and embodied, instinctive tacit knowledge, which generates 'bitterness and regret' as much as it keeps the practitioner persevering (2009: 296). By assembling a genealogy of recent theatre practitioners who develop a dramaturgy in which feelings of absorption within an environment are held off, and the resolution of a 'liberating constraint' is treated with some scepticism, I have highlighted a faultline within contemporary theatre-making culture, which a synthesis of the studio-building approach and the 'anything goes' approach cannot account for. When taken together, what unites this work – beyond labels such as 'new writing', 'live art', 'performance theatre' and '(post-)immersive theatre' that might be variously applied or misapplied to them – is a strain of resistance that merits explication on its own terms.[1] The virtue of holding both Cornford's and Radosavljević's invitations in mind throughout has not been to develop some hybrid or generalised account of 'the construction of skill in experimental theatre' as much as it has to expose an approach to its construction which both invitations omit, which now deserves clearer contextualisation.

2. Refusing the invitations

To begin to do so, the expansive terms required to hold the hybrid account together – 'experimental' on the one hand, and 'skill(s)' and 'craft(s)' on the other – need, finally, to be unpicked. The more closely one looks at the differences in how Cornford and Radosavljević define each side of this balance, the clearer it becomes that the difference in their perspectives can be traced to how they relate those sides: what it means for theatre-makers to experiment relies on a particular understanding of how those theatre-makers relate to 'skill' and 'craft', and *vice versa*. In Cornford's argument, references to 'experimentation' can never be separated from 'training': the studio provides an environment in which 'the process of acquiring and honing successful habits' is always counterbalanced by 'the restructuring of those habits to cope with new problems' (2012: 25). This suggests a concept of experimentation entirely habitual to scientists, but less commonly taken up by artists: the practice of setting up strictly controlled conditions in which new discoveries can be

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[1] Alston has proposed the term 'post-immersive' to describe one possible response to the perceived saturation and political limitations of immersive theatre as a genre, a perception with which the makers of *World Factory* hold some sympathy (2016: 225).

isolated and confirmed with precision. The development of such conditions is dependent on a structured sense of what defines each of the crafts that need to be honed, and how they relate to each other. Cornford's 'future theatre' would (and Secret Theatre did) employ actors, directors and designers on simultaneous contracts, to allow their various experiments to enter into dialogue with each other (351) – but the boundaries between who gets to execute each practice largely remain demarcated.[2] Radosavljević's discussions of experimental theatre employ the looser use of the adjective, to label inventive practices defined by their opposition to mainstream expectations. Part of what makes contemporary theatre-making experimental for Radosavljević is its engagement with artistic practices that belong to the expanded field opened up by post-Schechnerian Performance Studies: the theatricality of the performance examples with which she bookends *Theatre-Making* partly inheres in the way that they all recontextualise visual and conceptual art practices (2013: 191). This emphasis on porosity speaks to her focus on theatre-makers who have refused clear delineations by craft, in favour of a holistic 'creative process' (23). Many of them refused these delineations, in favour of a dramaturgy-led approach because, like Radosavljević herself, they took drama degrees from UK universities that 'did not explicitly equip [them] for the profession of an actor, or a playwright, or a director, although it gave [them] skills in all of those forms of theatre creation' (viii). Given that another distinctive feature of 'dramaturgy-led' theatre is its willingness to frame 'the audience as co-creators of a theatrical experience' and to grant them access to its 'inner workings' (4-5), Radosavljević leaves further space open to consider how the creative work of audiences might relate to that of performers, even if she never goes as far as to call it a 'skill' or 'craft'.

I began this research project assuming that 'skill' was a particular, independently circumscribable area of concern that might be experiencing a 'turn' or 'revival' within some equally circumscribable field of 'experimental theatre', of the kind that Cornford advocates for within mainstream theatrical institutions, and that he and Jen Harvie have identified within non-theatrical visual and participatory art. It has become apparent instead that the two terms circumscribe each other. Nicholas Ridout has provocatively described the modern bourgeois theatre as 'the place we go to feel what we feel about work' (2006: 167). One of the threads running through this thesis is that Ridout's analysis leaves limited space to explore the affirmative responses that can be generated once theatre-makers and their audiences have accepted this dynamic. Therefore, we might modify the description to say that experimental responses to bourgeois theatre create *places where we go to feel what we feel about skill*, here understood as the broader terrain of social practices from which, partially and unevenly, work is extracted. Across Sennett's books, moments from different eras when definitions of theatricality shift, such that they might be called experimental – the splitting off of the

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[2] Much of the detail of Cornford's manifesto is about restoring the status of acting as a master craft, of which directors should have more experience than they currently do, to avoid figuring themselves as mere employers or even 'consumer[s]' of actors (2012: 356) – but at no point is it suggested that the role of director as such should be removed or usurped.

spectator from communal ritual in archaic Greece; the replacement of technique with charisma in nineteenth-century culture; the emergence of Lecoq's studio in postwar France – are symptomatic of a culture's re-negotiation of what it means to be skilled. This is a re-negotiation that might feel like a transition from skill to deskilling or *vice versa*. To stake a claim on the works of Crimp, Crouch, Forced Entertainment and METIS being distinctively experimental, in ways for which other models do not account, is to suggest that they identify a crisis in how social life is organised within a shared environment, and begin the process of sketching out an alternative.

What are the salient features of the UK in the historical epoch that form this thesis's 'contemporary', in which my case studies diagnose a crisis? Allowing for a couple of outliers, the main performances that I have analysed chronologically begin with *Attempts on Her Life*, first performed two months before the start of Tony Blair's first premiership, a historical circumstance to which Katie Mitchell's important 2007 revival made significant reference (Angelaki 2012: 58). They close with *World Factory*, a show that entered its technical rehearsals on 8 May 2015, as a majority was returned for a Conservative Party committed to continuing a programme of austerity. Svendsen has described the 'sickening feeling' of having the show's thesis confirmed: that 'Thatcher did indeed "not fail" to change the British "attitude of mind"' (2015). The context of this study has been a period in which neoliberalism's position as the end of history was rendered hegemonic in the UK and other Western democracies, as a series of centrist governments continued right-wing economic policies but mitigated them with social liberalism. The significant consequence of how my case studies have constructed their idea of 'skill' has been to expose how widespread appeals to the term in this period – including those by Sennett, Ingold and many of the performance scholars I cite – perpetuate the soft acceptance of neoliberal ideology even as they purport to resist it.

Radosavljević's invocation of Nancy to develop her account of relational contemporary dramaturgy is a case in point. She explicitly presents Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* as a postscript to the project of state communism: in order to ensure the survival even of ideas of 'community' in its wake, it 'had to be divested of the essentialism that characterised the ideological programmes about its realisation' (Radosavljević 2013: 188).[3] Resistance to capitalism is primarily framed as a defensive action. This emphasis is also implicit in Harvie's thinking, and justifies her tracing of Sennett's principles in a range of contemporary artists. It applies even to the sharper and self-consciously less 'naïve' proponents of relational aesthetics whom Harvie cites, such as Jessica Morgan and Claire Bishop: their argument that democracy is enacted through 'art practices that cultivate socially antagonistic and dissonant relations' is congruent with Sennett's critique of communitarianism, in that communitarianism refuses to acknowledge that 'people are bound together

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[3] Without refuting the arguments that I go on to make, I should note that Radosavljević's politics are, unlike mine, shaped by her status as a 'displaced' former citizen of the 'fragmented, and technically non-existent' Soviet Union (2013: viii).

[…] by verbal conflict' (Harvie 2013: 7-8; Sennett 1999: 143). Such an approach to politics operates on the same frustratingly local scale that Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams describe as a failure of Occupy and other 'folk-political' movements (2016: 48-49). The 'folk' tag here points to some of the ways in which such movements might find their efforts blocked by something like a 'turn to the crafts' in their approach to revolutionary change. If the old socialist projects were doomed for being over-theorised, a case of ideas being pre-conceived and then tyrannically executed, the current ones follow Sennett and Ingold in building a politics up from the fact that all human practices begin from absorption in one's environment, which are gradually and imperfectly reflected upon. Yet giving priority to the working out of one's commitments as one goes along can prevent any capacity to articulate (or maybe even to *have*) any commitments at all, beyond 'rigour, intelligence, intuition and attention to detail'.

If 'skill' and 'craft' have remained so hard to define during this project, it might be because they are often employed as prophylactics against overthinking. 'Skill' has to be defended, frequently and on multiple fronts, from what it does not mean, defences which often rely on a rhetoric of common sense. As mentioned at the end of Chapter 4, Sennett never entirely explains the difference between the acquired, quasi-spontaneous dexterity of the skilled practitioner and that of the neoliberal employee, especially given their common need to anticipate unexpected problems or discoveries. Sennett would argue that a more careful examination of their feelings would highlight how one feels only 'dull, continual worry' and the other a trajectory capable of being narrated (1999: 83). Yet this relies on developing an intersubjective framework in which to recognise feelings, a framework that is unsustainable for as long as the deskilled person insists that they *are* skilled, as Crimp dramatizes in *Play With Repeats* and *Attempts on Her Life*. Meanwhile, on another front, defenders of a 'turn to the crafts' have to make it clear that what they are cultivating is not 'folksy, old-fashioned or particularly nostalgic' (Harvie 2013: 106). Cornford argues that the 'turn' is 'very different from a return', and thus avoids longing for 'a (non-existent) pre-industrial state of meaningful and rewarding handicraft' (2012: 358). But a turn nevertheless shares with a return a sense of continuity amid change: the direction of travel may have changed but the fact of travel remains. Implicit in his argument here is an acceptance, inherited from Sennett, that work's rewards have always been contingent and social relations marked by difficulty. Skill becomes a transhistorical category that simply requires deeper attention to recorded experiences to be more fully recovered: Cornford notably uses evidence from interviews with labourers, alongside *The Craftsman*, to contextualise his turn (2012: 13-15). What these approaches ignore is that some of these alienations might carry the force of a real abstraction, written irreversibly into the history of social and environmental relations beyond the bounds of phenomenal experience, and require not just a change in practice but in reflection-preceding-practice

in order to be transformed.[4] They never fully follow up on the opportunity that Ingold gives himself to describe why 'the worker does not cease to dwell in the workplace […] but [that] home is often a profoundly uncomfortable place to be' (2000: 332).

Any defence of skill as a line of resistance against its perceived neoliberal or traditionalist parodies becomes harder to marshal within a wider culture that is ready to absorb these parodies, in the name of reinforcing a consensus-driven public sphere. The problem with the most infamous of the conceptual works of the Young British Artists was not only that any sustained engagement with art's material conditions gets replaced by figuring the artist as a maverick genius who occludes their own labour (Cornford 2012: 352; Harvie 2013: 41-42). It was that to level this critique at the avatars of Blair's 'Cool Britannia' was to figure one's self as holding out for the cultural conservatism it replaced, or else for a refutation of that conservatism which had been too dogmatic in its radicalism: in each case, a refusal of a certain kind of liberal flexibility or spontaneity. *Attempts on Her Life* and *My Arm* both engage critically with the conflicting responses to this work, using their theatrical form to chart a middle path between them. These plays highlight the ways in which ideas of craft can survive as criteria for judging innovative and avant-garde work – but they also highlight the fragility of that path, exposing the ways in which 'skill' feels like an inadequate term to describe one's experience of making or viewing them.

In the subsequent popular backlash against this art scene, and late-nineties British culture more generally, the accurate critique of its neoliberal shallowness has been absorbed, but it continues to be combined with more dubious condemnations of its excessive social liberalism (sometimes filtered through rhetorics of 'elitism' or 'cosmopolitanism'). While the 2008 financial crisis is often cited as the reason for this shift, Joe Kennedy has recently argued that a return to 'identitarian […] narratives about belonging' and a broader 'acceptance of a supposed reality principle' was already executed by New Labour by 2003, as a mark of cultural 'maturation' to cover for its 'vandalistic economic thinking' (2018: 185-90). The communitarian tendencies of David Cameron's 'Big Society' are anticipated here, as is a Labour opposition that could only manage to offer a modest critique of austerity through 'a nostalgic rhetoric of a former period of austerity' (Hatherley 2016: 2-3). Cultural touchstones for this shift, such as the middle-class celebration of artisanal goods, are already being satirised by Crimp in 2005's *Fewer Emergencies*. By the 2010s, theatrical attempts to chart a survival path for a craft-based aesthetics are replaced by a desire just to be able to frame art *without* appeals to tradition, often via an excavation of punk or earlier avant-gardes. *My Arm* gives way to *Adler and Gibb*, an exploration of contemporary theatre and film's failure to accommodate those 1960s live art

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[4] I leave bracketed, here, debates about when in the history of capitalism these alienations occurred – but I note that recent eco-Marxist analyses of capitalism's emergence through a series of multiple metabolic rifts, stretching back at least to the Renaissance and unevenly across the globe, are different in kind from Sennett's argument about the multiple emergences of theatricality, while remaining usefully similar to it in shape (Moore 2010: 392).

practices which resist the materiality and archivability which would allow skill to be traced, and which resist them in order to expose the 'creative destruction' that neoliberalism needs to occlude. Forced Entertainment's decision to incorporate a description of a publicly funded community play into their 2017 remount of 1998's *Dirty Work* suggests that a culture in which one could simply refuse to make art on communitarian terms has been replaced by one in which radical artists need to announce their distance from it. With gestures like these, the company continue to suggest that the connection of a punk and post-punk DIY aesthetic with post-Thatcherite 'creative entrepreneurialism' has been overstated. There might still be a place for Etchells's claim that 'you don't need *skills*[,] you can just do something' (qtd. in Smith 2013: 195) – or, perhaps, that the political value of attending more closely to skill does not override that of performances which expose its limits.

Not all the practitioners I have studied would necessarily assent to the politics implicit in this argument: recall, for example, Etchells's distaste for the 'suspect [ideological] certainties of what other people called political theatre' (1999: 19), and Crouch's 'old hippy' desire for 'communal answerability' and collaboration above all else (2011a: 422). Nevertheless, their decision to engage innovatively with theatrical form in the way that they have tentatively opens a space for such a politics. At a time in which skill's status as a construction needs to be exposed, Ingold's reason for hating theatricality becomes its greatest strength: the work of framing and staging a performance, which is necessary to even the most apparently anti-theatrical live or performance art, means that the business of 'first conceiving an intention and then executing it' can never be entirely erased (Lehmann 2016: 418). Even if those intentions are multiple or nugatory, and become erased or transformed in the process of execution, the primacy of action over some form of reflection is nevertheless challenged. Yet neither Radosavljević's nor Cornford's and Holmes's appeals to theatricality emphasise this dimension of the concept. Radosavljević situates *Theatre-Making* within a perceived return to 'theatre' within Performance Studies in the wake of thinkers such as Lehmann, suggesting that we are now comfortable with the fact that theatre's dependency on mediation and appropriation is not some original sin (2013: ix). Cornford and Holmes locate themselves in a lineage of evangelists for 'what I should like to call the religion of the theatre' (qtd. in Cornford 2012: 183), who see it as a discrete realm of practice and a social good. What remains foreclosed is a line of experimental theatre practices that continue to take heed of anti-theatrical arguments, reclaiming them in order to sustain their 'critique of the actual theatre' (Puchner 2002: 73). What is defeated is precisely Michael Fried's understanding of modernist art as that which survives for as long as it continues to defeat theatricality. Fried's criteria for theatricality – a recognition that what is being produced is not a fixed object but a new holistic 'situation', which not only incorporates but depends upon the beholder's embodied presence (1998: 155) – are criteria common to Sennett's and Ingold's definitions of skill, and which Secret Theatre and other contemporary relational ensembles set out to cultivate in their rehearsal rooms and auditoria. The case studies that I have built this thesis around were chosen because they all,

with varying degrees of consciousness, work away at the fissure that Secret Theatre's performers cracked open when I watched them just staring at a tyre: this was the point at which the performance's status on the boundary of theatre and live art allowed it to collapse from presenting actual gestures of exertion to the abstracted suggestion or 'efficacy of gesture', of the kind that Fried values in modernist sculpture (1998: 162).

If Crouch and (to a lesser extent) Forced Entertainment are the case studies in whom this modernist collapse from absorption into appropriation is discovered in the course of theatre-making, Crimp's and METIS's works arguably suggest a more consciously late modernist project. This project deepens and renews modernism's politics through its commitment to diversifying the expressions of, and responses to, resistant or autonomous theatrical experiences. Ultimately, I believe that attention to the breakdowns in skill's construction that this thesis has traced can foster an enriched version of Radosavljević's 'anything goes' approach to dramaturgy, and of the values that this approach appears to attach to 'skill', even if the term becomes inappropriate.

3. Surviving modernism

Crimp has claimed that the first professional theatre that he saw was *Not I* at the Royal Court (Sierz 2013: 29). The memory of it appears to have inspired his decision to end *In the Republic of Happiness* – first performed on the same stage almost forty years later – with the image of Uncle Bob's face illuminated on an otherwise dark stage (Crimp 2015: 356). Crimp's debt to Beckett, and his location within the 'experimental tradition' of British 'new writing' that emerges from *Waiting for Godot*, has long been acknowledged, but little has been made of the citational role that the older playwright often serves for him (Sierz 2011: 25). The phenomenon of someone being forced to deliver a pre-scripted performance at the coercion of an authority figure is often made to carry a telegraphed political message in Crimp's theatre: the author's ineradicable power to dictate the terms of a performance, however much they are resisted or mitigated, speaks to the ineradicable forces that determine life under late capitalism. Yet Crimp's decision to overdetermine this message yet further, by appealing to a playwright famously perceived to be an even more tyrannical *auteur* with the same nihilistic message, marks an intensification of his ongoing attempts to complicate it. A dramaturgy framed around the clashing of authorities can, in fact, provide a sharper expression of political hope than appeals to collaboration; a hope that apparent traps can give way to gifts.

Far from being tyrannical, Beckett's dramaturgy asserts a deeper kind of freedom insofar as it takes the claim that we achieve our freedom through constraint, central to theories of skill acquisition such as Chekhov's and Sennett's, and carries it through to the point of parodic exhaustion in the figure of the Kleistian god-marionette. Only by completely submitting to be a mere instrument of the dramaturgy can the actor be redeemed, even as that submission could only ever be complete if the actor lost any capacity to feel that redemption. From the moment that Beckett's application of Kleist

in the rehearsal room was identified, it has been emphasised that his actor is always only '*virtually* a puppet' (Knowlson and Pilling 1980: 281). To recognise this is to recognise that the creative potential of the actor in response to the text was never in doubt, and did not need to be proved: what Beckett's dramaturgy offers is a set of conditions in which other practitioners develop autonomous techniques of their own, which they execute *around* the restraints that the text sets rather than *through* it. Something like this is detectable in Jonathan Kalb's analysis of Billie Whitelaw's performance of *Rockaby*. Her visible blinking, and her decision to slump rather than lower her head as the play ends, both of which are neither confirmed nor denied by Beckett's stage directions, succeed in 'briefly transporting us to an atextual reality where people blink' or 'releas[ing] us prematurely from this [textual] world in which [...] laws like gravity are discretionary' (1989: 16).

Crimp's innovation beyond Beckett's approach is to make this dynamic of generative antagonism between playwrights and other practitioners more explicit, within a theatre industry in which the playwright is already less likely to be identified as the prime site of authority, but where their authority cannot yet be softened away by appeals to spontaneity and collaboration. Notably, after pioneering his indeterminate approach to playwriting in *Attempts on Her Life*, he refines it in *Fewer Emergencies*, to test the degree of fixing and determination that the form can hold while remaining apparently liberating, through new strategies such as assigning lines to partially characterised speakers and identifying the verse components explicitly as songs. This is combined, both in this play and *In the Republic of Happiness*, with an incorporation of the audience as an additional set of engaged participants whose underlying liberty Crimp trusts: I highlighted how both plays' endings carry a utopian promise *only* if the audience recognise that they are being tacitly cast as witnesses to Bobby's suffering, or citizens of Uncle Bob's republic, and take up the invitation to respond to this casting.

My reading here resonates with Tomlin's advocacy for poststructuralist performances in which there is no governing authority, 'be that in the written text, the *mise-en-scène* of the director or the virtuosity of the performer' (2009: 62-64). But, by highlighting Crimp's interest in multiplying the possible authorities that are proven to be partial, and the forms that their partiality takes, I have attempted to celebrate 'playful[ness]' as a more viable underlying stance to be taken towards these performances than Tomlin perhaps allows (cf. 2014: 374). Where Cornford's and Radosavljević's collaborative dramaturgies figure the space through which practitioners move as a common taskscape, in which each discrete practice can be interpreted as helping to sustain and assert the coherence of the whole, Beckett's texts develop networks of practices around them which resist or pass across each other. The theatre becomes a space in which we cannot dwell, but might survive. Crimp's expansion of the scope of engaged practice continues this, but slightly softens it: a contemporary theatre of mutual alienation might generate new ways of understanding what it means to survive together, without necessarily needing to gather these practices of survival under the banner of 'skill'. In Chapter 2, I argued that Crouch's later plays, in which the possibility of experiencing dwelling within

the theatre is deferred, inherit Crimp's dynamic but intensify the desire for a communal expression of it. In *what happens to hope at the end of the evening*, the auditorium provides a space in which the undoing of the logic of sacrifice can be imagined through alternative kinds of concrete action. 'Paradise Now!' maintains a relationship, however vexed, with the things we do to bring about the feeling of 'Paradise now.'

METIS's *World Factory* offers an explicitly anti-capitalist expression of these principles. A modernist theatre which conspicuously objectifies the world, and produces that objectification through dramaturgical strategies that are themselves 'set' and reified (Svendsen 2016a), is the most appropriate way of revealing the fact that this is how the world is experienced even when subjects feel absorbed in its flows and processes – and it requires further processes of reflection and abstraction in order to be transformed. I compared the responses that the play might generate to Duchamp's readymades as interpreted by John Roberts: the radical, ongoing project of conceptual art is a matter of replacing an aesthetics built around the dream of non-alienated absorption with an aesthetics in which the dialectic between 'non-alienated and alienated labour' necessary for making any art is more fully exposed (2007: 24-25). (The readymade can thus arguably come to be aligned with modernist sculpture as Fried defines it, insofar as it is 'possessed by the knowledge of' not the human body but the labouring body, without representing it (1998: 162).) *World Factory* was, admittedly, born from a desire to celebrate the 'skills' and 'care' that operate 'even within the system of mass production' (*WF* A6). But it celebrated them while recognising that the alienations inherent in the system would make those skills hard to identify both to the practitioners themselves and to those attempting to map them. What is universally shared is not some generalizable experience of skill, which a sociologist like Sennett can help to narrate or an anthropologist like Ingold can participate with in a spirit of 'joint activity' (2011: 238), but one's participation within a system that inhibits skill. METIS's dramaturgy emphasised the ways in which *World Factory*'s textile workers, croupiers-cum-actors and interacting audience members could all find themselves negotiating their own alienation from the tasks that they have to complete. The world it represented, as much as the situation it created, operated like Tomlin's nexus of deflected authority. To say that recognising this common struggle is freeing or enabling in any concrete sense is as inappropriate as saying that one of Beckett's actors is freed by having to follow ever more precise routines. But recognising it is also something more than Sennett's high-minded assertion that 'sociality' is driven by a difficult appreciation of others' difference, and of 'those wounds of mutual experience' that cannot be healed by anything other than 'the acknowledgement of a pained connection' (2013: 38-39; cf. 2018: 55). Insofar as the show highlights how each member of the system already demonstrates a form of socialised intelligence, the system's transformation can begin to be imagined. The base from which the show's aesthetics builds up is not a lost fantasy of absorption within the environment but an acquired capacity to negotiate that environment. This allowed Svendsen to claim that the principal horizon of the show's politics

ultimately lay in its provocation of 'conversation' (*WF* A1): a commitment to acts of ideological reimagination need not be mutually exclusive of strategies resembling Srnicek's and Williams's distrusted folk-politics. The audience member who reflects on the receipt that they are given at the end of *World Factory*, or who feels moved to help stage managers gather the props, is beginning to do something, even if the labour relations underpinning their action remain unchanged.

Crimp's satirical edge means that his invitation to the audience to respond to their alienation practically remains implicit. This is also largely true of Forced Entertainment: their generosity to those responding to their work is more a quality of their relations with critics and other artists than a quality built into the theatrical encounter. (Nevertheless, I noted that this dynamic operates differently in their livestream performances, citing Jennifer Buckley's argument that this form of mediation intensified feelings of theatrical liveness by inviting audiences to 're-enliven' it self-consciously (2016: 36).) It is significant that Crouch and Svendsen, the two younger theatre-makers native to Radosavljević's twenty-first century era of 'anything goes' dramaturgy, remain the most committed to its principles: resisting a text-performance binary; integrating, after Rancière, an already-emancipated and critical audience into the dramaturgies that they construct; emphasising a porosity between practices in the theatre and beyond, and thus querying Ridout's argument that the 'labour of critical thought' required to activate the theatre's 'ethical potential' must necessarily happen outside it (2009: 69). The modernist principles that I have outlined in this final section – the desire to multiply fissures within the smooth development of form and structure in order to multiply theatrical form's 'attack [on] the world' – can in fact be sustained by this context of apparently looser experimentalism.

This makes it difficult to assert what feels like the obvious conclusion to this thesis: that, having exposed the political insufficiencies of an appeal to 'skill' or 'craft' as contemporary culture defines it, we need a manifesto for a 'future theatre' in which those fetishes are abandoned. The years since 2014 over which I have written this thesis have made the political conditions for such a transformation visible. The UK's centrist neoliberal consensus has split (however uncleanly and unresolvedly in its details) between a Labour Party committed to ending austerity and reviving certain expressions of socialism and a Conservative Party committed to binding its economic policies more tightly to a nationalistic imagination. Both rely on different appeals to togetherness, and to a need for radical change, that 'skill' alone cannot suture. Taking a broader perspective, this split might be an epiphenomenon of intensifying attention to the role that human action and, specifically, *human organisation of economies* play in both the cause and the response to climate catastrophe, as well as to its most visible political consequence, the European migrant crisis. These realisations make it harder to acknowledge that there is any achievable, non-materialist consensus on what it means to live together, an unfeasibility which Sennett's recent invocation of Benjamin's philosophy of history suggests that he is becoming alert to. (Ingold, for his part, seems to be facing the Anthropocene with something approaching cheerful misanthropy. One recent piece dedicated to the topic closes by

describing how all human endeavours should be understood as processes in perpetual motion alongside non-human forces, such that any monument designed to 'put an end to time' or signify 'immortality' is itself doomed to fail (2014: 146).)

I could propose some of the ways in which a new experimental theatre on these terms might reject or modify some of the proposals that Cornford made in 2012. Such a theatre would seek out the fissures within the apparent syntheses and harmonies that sustain practice, to acknowledge the sacrifices on which this harmony depends: one sees that happening through the ways in which Crouch, James and smith continue to wrestle with their dependency on Howells's sacrifices; it will be interesting to see if and how Forced Entertainment and METIS will develop the steps they have already taken to acknowledge their dependency on state support and forms of non-creative labour respectively. Rather than simply rejecting or softening the literary dimension of the theatre, or seeking to close Radosavljević's 'Gutenberg parenthesis' (2016a), it would continue attending to the intractably resistant ways in which the survival of 'writing', and the multiplication of forms that it takes, puts pressure on performances as they get documented or written about. Any attempt to synthesise practice and theory within dramatic training would have to be kept in check by ways in which the skills required for each continue to resist each other – leaving space open, for example, for the non-practising theatre academic and for a wider variety of ways in which making and training performers might be understood as the work of the university.

However, stating this as a manifesto does not do justice to the fact that these changes are already happening. They can be seen and said to be already happening because the horizon of who gets to participate, and to dictate the terms of their participation, keeps being expanded through a more sensitive relational dramaturgy. What 'skill' means for this iteration of 'experimental theatre' would not be a clearer recognition of one's participation within socially enshrined embodied practices, but a deeper and newly *collective* engagement with something like de Certeau's 'tactics', the subtly reflective practices by which social systems are transformed from below, by a quasi-native awareness of one's alienation. Ingold's insistence that skill is ineradicable, and that we need simply to make its flows and processes more legible in the face of the commodity perspective, might be usefully substituted with Sara Ahmed's arguments for a deeper and more diverse exposure of where forms of revolutionary subjectivity are not only latent, but already being affectively activated (2010: 272 n15, 269 n8). A manifesto like mine, designed in response to another manifesto, and with an emphasis on consistently disrupting potential practices rather than offering concrete alternatives, risks succumbing to a heroic commitment to 'absolute negativity' in the name of 'a dream of a more perfect order' (2010: 270 n10). This is, for Ahmed, dependent on a privileged distance from precisely those places of subjection where new orders are needed and being constructed now. What is needed to construct them is neither affirmation nor negation but 'a queer mix of optimism and pessimism, hope and despair' (2010: 275 n23). What the new line of experimental theatre thus requires from me, and from

non-practising scholars in my position, might be to cultivate new and betters forms of critical description of what is already happening. The limitation of Sennett's and Ingold's approaches is that their presentation of themselves as ambassadors for 'skill' in the general case leaves them imprecise, or reliant on dubious intersubjective frameworks, in their description of how 'skills' are affectively registered in all their variety. I noted above how Sennett assumes a pragmatist's capacity to distinguish between meaningful and mindless labour. Ingold, for all his desire to pitch himself as writing 'within the context of involvement in a real world' (2000: 293), often replaces his descriptions of actual feelings with references to 'feelingful encounters', recognisable only insofar as they are distinguishable from the 'empty, exoskeletal silence' of the modern or theatrical world 'eviscerated of all traces of affect' (2015: 77, 149).[5]

In writing this thesis, I have found myself coming up hard against the same tendency to gather and generalise, in the name of establishing the theories of skill that my case studies contest. For example, my decision to write about Crimp as an autonomous author, in a manner familiar from much of his treatment in British playwriting studies, was informed by a desire to show how he inhabits a model of the modernist *auteur* in order to subvert it. Now that it has been subverted, more could be written on the nature of Crimp's interactions with the other practitioners whom his texts make space for: my ideas about how Crimp's scripts imagine the relationship between language and song need to be tested against consideration of how those relationships have actually been rendered musically (including in his libretti, undiscussed here). Similarly, in order to narrate an overarching story of the increasing recognition and activation of the audience as participants in general, I have often ended up referring to 'the audience' as a placeholder, usually for a synthesis of my own experiences as an audience member and what I can reconstruct of a practitioner's intentions. Closer attention to who makes up the audiences of these plays, and how they respond, is necessary – and Crouch's unique status as a practitioner who moves between making work for and with adults and children, increasingly within the same play, makes him an important test for these approaches. I am particularly interested in the queer politics of how Crouch figures the child, as someone already alert to their own alienation and agency rather than someone in need of care and protection. More critical exposure could be put on the assumptions that Forced Entertainment continue to make about their audiences' familiarity with the rules that they break, to which Svendsen has drawn attention (2017b: 297), and

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[5] Ingold has also exposed the limits of his descriptive ambitions by consistently – and with increased prominence in his most recent book – refusing to give up his use of 'man' and 'he' as universal placeholders, on the basis that questions of gendered difference are 'of absolutely no significance for my argument' (2015: xi). This suggests another respect in which Ahmed's queer feminist perspective makes her a productive theorist for moving beyond Ingold's arguments while retaining their shape (as Jason W Moore has been with regard to Sennett). She too builds a phenomenology around lines, but in a manner which emphasises that subjects construct those lines, because of their inevitable detachment from the objects that they are '"directed" toward' (2006: 2). The line is the subject's expression of hope for the environment's survival, rather than an ontological precondition of the environment into which the subject must enter (cf. 2010: 184).

with the rhetoric of 'amateurism' within their work (cf. Bailes 2011: 104). A starting point for this alternative methodology would be my own writing about *World Factory* in Chapter 4, which begins the process of reflecting more precisely on what makes my reception of the show unique. But writing like mine should also be set in the context of the range of other critical descriptions, more or less likely to be registered as internal to the performance itself, that METIS's projects generate. These would also include the published game-book of *World Factory*, the artist's responses to *3rd Ring Out*, and the various audience contributions produced within the space of *WE KNOW NOT WHAT WE MAY BE*. To think about criticism in this way is to abandon a sense of METIS's projects as material to which various respondents bring particular, acquired forms of attention, in order to make the material more fully known: instead, it allows us to intensify their answer to Mark Fisher's call for new virtual alternatives to capitalist systems, by exposing the status of the projects themselves as tissues of expanding virtualities, which survive through ongoing speculative documentation. METIS's impulses here coincide with Radosavljević's, who notably decided to follow up *Theatre-Making* with an edited collection on changing practices of theatre criticism, stretching across academia, print journalism and online modes (2016b). If critical writing is the next horizon of an ever-expanding field of what counts as theatre-making, now is the time to investigate the material conditions that are already allowing it to be done with different versions of 'rigour'.

Throughout this study, I used the term 'negative skill' to describe the condition towards which my case studies seemed to be gesturing. It was my way of describing how they all used theatrical form to acknowledge that any firm integration of embodied action into abstracted reflection – as a way of making art, engaging with one's environment, or founding a politics – has been rendered impossible. But I have also attempted to trace the ways in which, to varying extents, they have used that negation to bear affirmative fruits. If theatrical form can make us recognise the ways in which action and reflection exist within a dialectic, and have always done so, such knowledge can come to be lived with, in ways which might be as sustainable, generous and wonder-inducing as absorption is claimed to be. These ways might not adequately be mapped by the term 'skill', but it is 'hard to tell from here' what other term could be used instead, to render those terms shareable (Crouch 2011c: 102). Perhaps the more appropriate, queerly ambivalent approach to looking beyond 'skill' is not to negate it, to critique it either pragmatically or radically. It might be to let it go, and to allow the cherished affects associated with it to appear in whatever practices emerge as appropriate. This is why I have framed this conclusion in terms of skill's 'afterlife'. Skill might not be 'a line of resistance' 'destined to carry on for as long as life does' (Ingold 2011: 62) – or, at least, for as long as we wish 'life' to be something that humans have, and have as abundantly and as equitably as possible – but new lines of resistance will emerge from having attended to it.

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B: Unpublished documentation from the *World Factory* (*WF*) print archive

*All documents listed below are currently in the possession of Zoë Svendsen and held, temporarily, along with the rest of the print archive, in the Faculty of English, University of Cambridge. The alphanumerical code, which is marked on the documents themselves, refers to their position within the catalogue of the print archive that I have developed: letters correspond with broadly chronological stages/functions within the production process and numbers with chronology (as far as can be determined) within those stages. Comments in **bold** refer to a title given within the documents. Apart from the script, all documents have no page numbers.*

A1   **'Not a theoretical frame, but a concrete attempt'**: an introduction to *World Factory*'s form and politics, for an informed public. Annotations to one copy suggest that it was distributed at (but not exclusive to) the CRASSH symposium 'The Politics of Framing and Staging', Cambridge Junction, 8 December 2014. 3 copies (with small differences/pen annotations). 1 page.

A3   Script for a presentation by Svendsen on the project's method and themes, with particular emphasis on ideas of planning and structural organisation, delivered to the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science's History of Planning project during a Berlin residency in late 2014 or early 2015. 2 pages.

A6   **'Thoughts on ethics'**: a document, written by Svendsen for herself or private circulation among the company, justifying the decision to conduct research by having an order of shirts made by a 'non-ethical' Chinese factory. 2 pages.

E5   **'WORLD FACTORY / SOUND WEAVE'** [one of multiple copies]: draft script for opening section of the play, with Ellinson's lines (as Thatcher) annotated with relevant intentions from the opening stage directions. 2 pages.

G16 Draft script for the **'outtake'** between the card game and 'The Reckoning', in which dealers chat during a break, with Svendsen's comments/alterations. Audio for this scene was abandoned during first public performances at New Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich. 1 page.

G23 Final production script for use at the Young Vic Theatre, London, dated **18 May 2015**. Material from the game instructions for dealers informs Svendsen and Daw 2017:253-60, and a subsequent touring version of 'The Reckoning' was published as Svendsen and Daw 2017:285-302. 28 pages.

I9   Plan, with scripted elements, for Svendsen's talk and Lucy Ellinson's cabaret performance on contemporary attitudes to clothing consumption, for performance at 'The Politics of Framing and Staging' (see A1). 9 pages (plus many blank sides).

I10   **'Lucy Ellinson – Write up of test-game played at Birkbeck, 11 March'**: document beginning with Ellinson's observations and questions about the dealer role, developing into examples from Ellinson's research into unionisation in China and how it might be incorporated into the game; Svendsen annotates the whole document in pen. 10 pages.

J4   **'Dealer observations and thoughts [7 April]'**: notes on strategies and devices that actors have been developing for the dealer's role in rehearsals for the first public performances in 2015, with suggestions of how to develop them, 'for Zoe's consideration'. 5 pages.

J5   **'DEALER ROLE THROUGH GAME'**: document confirming strategies and devices for the dealer role. 7 pages.

J7   **'The World Factory Awards Ceremony'**: an early draft of 'The Reckoning', with Svendsen's comments/opinions on possible audience responses; notable for ending on a note of frustration that 'a visualization of the data' isn't possible. 2 pages.