

**Theatricalizing Dissent: An Examination of the Methodology and  
Efficacy of Performance in Contemporary Political Protest**

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## **Declaration**

Declaration of Authorship: I, Sian Rees, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: Sian Rees

Date: 16/05/2018

## **Abstract**

Activists and artists are consciously bringing theatre to the forefront of contemporary protest interventions. This thesis examines the efficacy of performative modes in acts of theatrical dissent.

My research is based on case studies from the UK, Paris, Belgium, and the United States which staged interventions, often experimenting with different democratic models of relationships and often prefiguratively, and which campaigned on social, economic, and political issues: against austerity, climate injustice, and consumerism. They employed diverse performative modes: Rough Music, Guerrilla Performance, Play and Gaming, and the creation of a Temporary Autonomous Zone. The Practice as Research component provided the perspective of an insider through my participation in theatrical dissent organized by artists and activists, and through my own work, *HOUND* (2016), which incorporated a variety of performative modes previously identified as efficacious.

Activists seek to expose, through their own performances, the performances of power and legitimacy staged by corporations and governments; and to advocate the necessity for change. Some elements of these modes may militate against political efficacy, whilst others contribute towards it by working to avoid a crude and heavy-handed didacticism by encouraging spectators to collaborate in the performance. I identify and analyze the elements of performance modes which may be conducive in supporting and sustaining activists; and those which may ignite an interest in a cause in spectators. To be a dissenter, to some extent, is to be an outsider, one who questions society's norms and mores. I argue that theatrical devices (such as 'making strange' the everyday), provide the necessary distancing for audiences and participants alike to question the 'normal'. This is the first step in an exploration of dissent provided by theatre's ability, when staged as dissent, to create new political realities.

## **Table of Contents**

Acknowledgements	1
List of Illustrations	4
Introduction	10
Chapter One: Contextual Overview of Theatrical Dissent	32
Chapter Two: Guerrilla Performance	53
Chapter Three: Play As a Mode of Protest	108
Chapter Four: Re-considering The Temporary Autonomous Zone	166
Chapter Five: Theatricalizing Dissent in Practice, Practice as Research	227
Conclusion	291
Appendix One	303
Appendix Two	307
Appendix Three	325
Appendix Four	326
Appendix Five	328
Appendix Six	330
Bibliography	331
Categorized Bibliography	432
Illustrative Material	
(a) <i>HOUND</i> Audio Tracks: CD	
(b) <i>HOUND</i> Programme	

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## List of Illustrations

### Chapter Two

Figure 2.1: Great Court, British Museum. Source: Diliff, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen\\_Elizabeth\\_II\\_Great\\_Court](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen_Elizabeth_II_Great_Court) [accessed 10 December 2015].

Figure 2.2: Reverend Billy begins the commemoration part of the performance. Source: Kristian Buus, <https://bp-or-not-bp.org/2015/05/02/we-create-an-oil-spill-inside-the-british-museum-with-reverend-billy-and-the-stop-shopping-choir/> [accessed 10 May 2015].

Figure 2.3: The ensemble use black umbrellas to create the image of a moving oil spill, inching its way towards the pelican in the Great Court, British Museum. Source: Kristian Buss, <https://bp-or-not-bp.org/2015/05/02/we-create-an-oil-spill-inside-the-british-museum-with-reverend-billy-and-the-stop-shopping-choir/> [accessed 10 May 2015].

Figure 2.4: Crowd gathers for *Deepwater Horizon Spill* performance (2015). Source: indyrikki, 10 seconds, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWpqZ4L2x\\_A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWpqZ4L2x_A) [accessed 10 May 2015].

Figure 2.5: Visitor spectates *Time Piece*, reading the text whilst Liberate Tate performers inscribe the floor with quotations. Source: Guardian 2015a, 2 minutes, 43 seconds, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZoDeiNPnACs&t=2s> [accessed 19 June 2015].

Figure 2.6: A Tate visitor reads passages written by performers during *Time Piece*. Source: Liberate Tate, <http://www.liberatetate.org.uk/performances/time-piece/> [accessed 19 June 2015].

Figure 2.7: Tate Visitor moves across the floor of the Turbine Hall, taking large strides to avoid smudging the text. Source: Guardian 2015a, 2 minutes, 41 seconds, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZoDeiNPnACs&t=2s> [accessed 19 June 2015].



Figure 2.8: Liberate Tate's 'living area'. Performers laid out sleeping bags and one Liberate Tate member updates social media. Source: Liberate Tate, <https://twitter.com/liberatetate/media> [accessed 19 June 2015].

Figure 2.9: A Tate visitor watches the performance from a balcony when access to the Turbine Hall was closed by Tate management. Source: Guardian 2015a, 5 minutes, 28 seconds, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZoDeiNPnACs&t=2s> [accessed 16 June 2015].

Figure 2.10: Cleaners wipe away the inscriptions written by Liberate Tate. Source: Twitter, <https://twitter.com/search?f=images&q=%23liberatetate%20%23timepiece&src=typd> [accessed 19 June 2015].

### **Chapter Three**

Figure 3.1: CIRCA adopt the tactic of undermining authority by mirroring the physical stance of officers, G8 Summit, Scotland, July 2005. Source: Labofii 2015, [www.labofii.net/experiments/g8tour/gallery](http://www.labofii.net/experiments/g8tour/gallery) [accessed 10 August 2016].

Figure 3.2: Alternative protest staged in the Place de la République which used the semiotic power of the shoe; and offered a striking visual depiction of the presence of dissent through the absence of the dissenter. Source: Patrick Aventurier, Getty Images, [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/11/29/paris-climate-march-attacks-memorial-place-de-la-republique\\_n\\_8677496.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/11/29/paris-climate-march-attacks-memorial-place-de-la-republique_n_8677496.html) [accessed 15 December 2015].

Figure 3.3: Video still of the latter part of EZLN's performance, *Nature Vs Cars*, November 2015. Source: EZLN 2015a, 2 minutes, 7 seconds, <https://vimeo.com/147410136> [accessed 10 December 2015].

Figure 3.4: Video still of car dealership workers' differing reactions to the performance. Source: EZLN 2015a, 1 minute, 12 seconds, <https://vimeo.com/147410136> [accessed 10 December 2015].

Figure 3.5: Map of area where the *D12* performance took place. Red markers note the beginning and end points. Source: Mapmyrun, <http://www.mapmyrun.com/routes/create/> [accessed 15 August 2017].

Figure 3.6: A shift in mood, as the inflatable cobblestones, which held a strong semiotic charge, are playfully thrown into the air by protesters at the sound of live brass and samba bands, Avenue de la Grande Armée, Paris, 12 December 2015. Source: Everyday Infrastructure, [www.everydayinfrastructure.net/fabriqueaparis/](http://www.everydayinfrastructure.net/fabriqueaparis/) [accessed 15 January 2016].

Figure 3.7: Protesters playfully interact with red material banners for the *D12* performance situated on the Avenue de la Grande Armée, Paris, 12 December 2015. Source: Sian Rees.

Figure 3.8: Reclaim the Power Protesters play football during the occupation of the largest coal mine in the UK, 3 May 2016. Source: Reclaim the Power, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/reclaimthepower2015/sets/72157667625036896> [accessed 10 December 2016].

Figure 3.9: Reclaim the Power protesters utilize the performance objects and performative language created during the *D12* action in creating a stark visual image, during the occupation of the largest coal mine in the UK, 3 May 2016. Source: Reclaim the Power, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/reclaimthepower2015/sets/72157667625036896> [accessed 10 December 2016].

Figure 3.10 Front and back images of the performance postcard handed out upon arrival at the performance, *Early Days (of a Better Nation)*, 23 April, Battersea Arts Centre. Source: Coney 2015.

## **Chapter Four**

Figure 4.1: Aerial View of Burning Man showing the semi-circular layout, plazas, and the central focus of the effigy, viewable from all vantage points, allows for social interaction. Source Jim Urquhart, <http://www.businessinsider.com/burning-man-aerial-photos-2013-8?IR=T> [accessed 18 November 2016].

Figure 4.2: A group of Burning Man participants collectively build a geodesic dome (2009). Source: Tristan Savatier, <http://www.loupiote.com/photos/3905593397.shtml> [accessed 10 September 2015].

Figure 4.3 *Helco* (1996) staged by the Seemen Troupe. The devil figure depicted here, ‘Papa Satan’, represented the threat of commodification; performing in a farcical way he attempted to purchase participants’ souls. Source: Queer Burners, <http://queerburners.com/principles-and-blurry-lines> [accessed 15 July 2015].

Figure 4.4: *Burn Wall Street, Occupy Black Rock City*, 2012. Source: Jim Urquhart, <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2012/09/wall-street-burns-at-burning-man.html> [accessed 20 September 2016].

Figure 4.5: Photo from the *Daily Mail*, depicting activity at OLSX at approximately 1am. Source: James Emmett, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2053463/Occupy-London-90-tents-St-Pauls-protest-camp-left-overnight.html#ixzz4OJ2b7pxz> [accessed 8 July 2016].

Figure 4.6: Occupy LSX Map (2011). Source: Occupy, <https://occupywiki.org.uk/wiki/London/Maps> [accessed 12 July 2016].

Figure 4.7: OLSX General Assembly, 10 January 2013. Source: Guy Sallman, <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/45-teaching-occupy> [accessed 12 July 2016].

Figure 4.8: HDM gestures used in OLSX’s General Assemblies. Source: Occupy, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:OccupyHandSignals.pdf> [accessed 12 July 2016].

## **Chapter Five**

Figure 5.1a: Activity Summary Table for *HOUND* (2016).

Figure 5.1b: Activity Summary Table for *HOUND* (2016).

Figure 5.2: Performance Summary Table for *HOUND* (2016).

Figure 5.3 Map of Route. Source: Mapmyrun, <http://www.mapmyrun.com/routes/create/> [accessed 15 November 2016].

Figure 5.4: Purposeful walking by the Friends Meeting House. Source: Hugh Warwick 2016.

Figure 5.5: A moment of quiet reflection as the participant physically engages with her environment, whilst listening to the audio walk in Tolmers Square. Source: Hugh Warwick 2016.

Figure 5.6a: Tolmers Square (1976). Source: Wates 1976, 62.

Figure 5.6b: Image of Tolmers Square (2016). Source: Wikipedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tolmers\\_Square,\\_Euston\\_-\\_geograph.org.uk\\_-\\_660365.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tolmers_Square,_Euston_-_geograph.org.uk_-_660365.jpg) [accessed 10 November 2016].

Figure 5.7: A participant encounters the ‘glass’ and ‘the heat’; reflecting on the implied critique of the corporate world exemplified by the projected walking woman who goes nowhere, outside the New Diorama Theatre. Source: Hugh Warwick 2016.

Figure 5.8: The stillness and performance of a participant ‘pretending to wait for a train’. Source: Hugh Warwick 2016.

Figure 5.9: Two successive shots of participant approaching the underpass, looking in several directions before she enters the next space. Source: Zoe Broughton 2016.

Figure 5.10: Participant listens to audio track in Tolmers Square, surrounded by two people also listening to headphones, who, unknown to her, were not part of the performance. Source: Hugh Warwick 2016.

Figure 5.11: Participant improvises with performer in Café Caritas, in the Royal College of Practitioners. Source: Hugh Warwick 2016.

Figure 5.12: Participants pursue the fox in Regent’s Place; watched and followed by a member of security, in the far left of the photo. Source: Hugh Warwick 2016.

Figure 5.13: Security approaches participant, asking to see a form of identification. Source: Zoe Broughton 2016.

Figure 5.14: Sanctioned Play: table tennis and Unsanctioned Play: the hunt. Source: Hugh Warwick 2016.

Figure 5.15: Image of Triton Square, 10 May 2016. Source: Sian Rees 2016.

Figure 5.16: Screenshot of security phoning for guidance regarding a suitable response to HOUND. Source: Zoe Broughton 2016

Figure 5.17: Participants listen to the last audio track before the unsanctioned Guerrilla Performance (Section E). Source: Hugh Warwick 2016.

Figure 5.18: Participants chase the fox during the pervasive game in Triton Square, surrounded by informal audience members. Source: Hugh Warwick 2016.

Figure 5.19: Participants committed to the collective pursuit of the fox, approaching Triton Square. Source: Hugh Warwick 2016.

Figure 5.20: Performers arrive in Triton Square to perform the Rough Music scene. Source: Hugh Warwick 2016.

Figure 5.21: Participants respond as performers, dressed in hunting attire, approach them. Source: Hugh Warwick 2016.

Figure 5.22: Participants create an approximate semi-circle audience formation around the scene as it unfolds. Source: Hugh Warwick 2016.

Figure 5.23: A participant is invited to make the sound of hooves with coconuts. Source: Hugh Warwick 2016.

Figure 5.24: Participants cheer when the figure of George Osborne is lifted by performers. Source: Hugh Warwick 2016.

## **Conclusion**

Figure 6.1: The Spectrum of Allies, Nadine Bloch. Source: Bloch, Beautiful Trouble, <http://beautifultrouble.org/principle/shift-the-spectrum-of-allies/> [accessed 10 August 2017].

## Introduction

It is May, 2013. I have dedicated the last twelve months to devising a performance, *Make Tea, Not War*, for the Brighton Fringe Festival. Performed ten years after the largest recorded protest in history occurred, the performance is designed to provoke a dialogue with the audience: why didn't the largest global mobilization of people gathered, marching across the globe, prevent Britain and the United States from invading Iraq? Did the failure of this protest, remarkable for its size and diversity, render protest obsolete, not fit for purpose? What impact did this failure have upon us, the people who took to the streets? The performance, drawing upon parody and dark humour, bombarded our audience with such questions. As an ensemble, we committed time and labour to creating a performance with the intention of challenging what we had identified as apathy in ourselves and our audiences.

Yet, the performance was not enough. It was during this period that the core research questions underpinning this thesis were formed. Through practice, questions regarding the efficacy of protest emerged, together with the realization that creating work situated in a theatre *about* dissent was not enough. Our work had posed questions, but had not mobilized or activated our self-selecting paying audiences. In this sense we had missed the mark, perhaps because we had raised the concept of dissent, but had not dissented in form.

As a practitioner, I understood that there was more to be unearthed; further questions to be raised regarding protest, performance, and efficacy. Further research persuaded me that there was a distinct gap in scholarship; research regarding performative forms of resistance had been largely overlooked by social movement scholars and performance scholars alike. Indeed, even now, it remains a subject which has yet to be interrogated rigorously. Performance scholars have favoured primarily the subjects of theatre and performance, overlooking other forms of theatrical protest: live acts of protest as performance, and protest dramaturgies, although there are notable exceptions (Nield 2010, 2012, 2015; Kershaw 1992, 1999; Rowe 2013). Similarly, social movement scholars have largely neglected to examine the role and impact of creative forms of dissent, focusing instead on the mechanisms behind social movements and their measurable impact upon government policy (Love, Mattern 2013, 3). Since the inception of this thesis, however, there has been a shift by social movement scholars towards acknowledging that creativity is not mere window dressing, but potentially an area of critical scholarly concern (Juris, Khasnabish 2013;

Fahlenbrach, Sivertsen, Werenskjold 2016; Harrebye 2016). Such acknowledgement is to be welcomed, but nevertheless there remains an absence of analysis from the perspective of theatre and performance practitioners and scholars; and it is this perspective that my research provides.

Whilst there may not have been much academic interest in studying creative forms of dissent, there has been an upsurge in its use by activists: dissent has become increasingly theatricalized. Social movements have a rich history of engaging with creative forms and we can trace examples of theatrical dissent to the fourteenth century, if not before. Whilst theatrical dissent is not new, the sheer number and scale of actions engaging with performance and the diversity of tactics are new, as are the changed conditions in which they take place. As Harrebye summarizes:

globalization, diversification, individualization, the increasing mediatization and aestheticization of politics [...] have crucial spatial and temporal consequences for mobilization and thus a revision of the role and the ways and the hows of creative activism. (2016, 26)

Practitioners have built upon past examples, standing on the shoulders of historic victories and failures, and there has been, in recent years, something of a peak in activity. Actions and protest interventions increasingly are overtly theatrical in form, and theatre is being used innovatively to enrich dissent, as the case studies in this thesis exemplify. Forms specific to the context of the work are being used to produce, to borrow L. G. Bogad's term, 'tactical performances' (2016), which are well executed and place their target in a disarming, difficult situation, where actions enhance the performance: a performative crowbar, capable of producing leverage, as Bogad would have it. To call them 'tactical performances' arguably undermines their potentially transformative affective power by placing them in the realm of advertising or public relations, as though they are working in the same context as spin doctors or marketing moguls. Practitioners certainly are thinking strategically, utilizing tactics to strengthen their performances, but their work, in creating theatrical dissent, encompasses far more in enriching and potentially sustaining social movements. To dissent is to express an opinion at variance with those commonly held, to resist and challenge the dominant narrative. To produce theatrical dissent is to draw upon theatrical forms to express that opinion and, at times, to go further still in prefiguring what an alternative to the dominant narrative may look or feel like.

This thesis is entitled *Theatricalizing Dissent* rather than Theatrical Dissent in an attempt to emphasize that the subject is not fixed. Instead, it is in flux, constantly evolving, shifting, and adapting to the cultural and political landscape. Further, this terminology indicates, too, that dissenting performances occur in the present, the here and now. Of course, this is not really the case. The reader will be reading the thesis from 2018 onwards. Nonetheless, it is critical to understand the case studies as being unfinished; as not yet achieving their aims and, hence, constantly adapting their tactics in a period of time characterized in Europe and North America by political and economic turmoil. Such terminology also acknowledges my own role in this research, as an active agent, an artist and scholar, who participated in actions which theatricalized dissent, and independently created a dissenting performance as part of this thesis.

Dissent is often visually arresting, humorous, and well produced. It frequently exploits both digital technology and the staging of the streets or spaces it inhabits for maximum gain. It is, at times, colourful, enlivened by costumes, characters, objects, music, dance, text, and lighting. It can be unpredictable, disruptive or high-risk. It branches out from what we understand as the traditional repertoire of protest; increasingly blurring the boundaries between disciplines and bursting forth with newly formed assemblages. It is difficult to categorize. For some, the term ‘dissent’ has negative connotations. Scholar, Jen Harvie, for instance, argues against prioritizing dissent ‘because pleasurable fun can constructively engage audiences while dissent’s bad feeling can risk alienating them’ (2013, 23). Interestingly, she pits dissent against pleasure and fun, understanding it as producing not only bad feeling but also alienation. Clearly, alienating audiences is a far cry from activists’ aims to engage and mobilize. However, theatrical dissent, as exemplified through my thesis case studies, is indeed often engaging, fun, and pleasurable. But, nevertheless, conflict is necessary, to a degree, for theatrical dissent to take place and to have efficacy. The selected case studies are, by their nature, disruptive. They exist as a challenge, but that challenge can take many forms, often forged through the tactics of surprise, humour, and pleasure.



## **Methodology**

### **Research Aims**

The aim of this thesis is to analyze and assess the efficacy of theatricalizing dissent in terms of its impact upon participants, formal and informal audiences, and the wider social movement through identifying factors which may militate against efficacy, and those which contribute towards it. Considering the common aim of many contemporary activists to create long-lasting social and political change, it is important to ask how far theatricalizing dissent supports the mobilization of participants and sustenance of social movements. Through examining the modes of Rough Music, Guerrilla Performance, Play and Gaming, and the Temporary Autonomous Zone (through the performance of everyday life and through play as dissent), this thesis seeks to identify and analyze the use of theatrical devices and performance to enhance and enrich contemporary political protest. Engaging with PaR offers a significant opportunity to analyze the efficacy of these modes in action.<sup>1</sup> First, participating in theatrical dissent organized by artists and activists affords a critical opportunity in assessing the effect and impact upon participants and audiences from the ‘inside’, as a participant. And, second, independently devising new forms of theatrical dissent brings together elements of each of these forms.

This thesis proposes that the theatricalization of dissent has contributed to a shift in social movements, reinvigorating and provoking a renewed sense of urgency and momentum. In order to understand its potential role in enriching, mobilizing, and sustaining contemporary political protest, an examination of the methodology and efficacy of performance is crucial. Yet the very term, efficacy, is problematic. It is understood as ‘thorny’ (Rowe 2013, 5); indeed, there is a marked reluctance from

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<sup>1</sup> Within the field of theatre and performance, practitioners use various terminologies which capture their approach towards using practice as a research tool. Practice-led research, Practice as Research and Practice-based research each have a slightly different emphasis. Nelson, for instance, would likely argue that due to the word count of this thesis of 100,000 words, rather than 40,000 words, the term practice-led would be more appropriate in describing the nature of my practice. Nelson argues that a word count higher than 40,000 words runs the risk of marginalizing practice (2013, 102). Despite the fact that this thesis takes advantage of the word count available, arguably, the term PaR is far more fitting in capturing the way in which practice continuously feeds into my research. The practice not only led me to make research discoveries but also created a bedrock which I continued to contribute towards, manifested through my participation in protests, Guerrilla Performances, case studies, workshops and in producing a performance.

scholars to analyze the efficacy of performance in protest. This reluctance makes sense. Sustainability, mobilization, and a tangible shift in power dynamics and social relations are not easily quantifiable. Any attempts to measure impact may also be criticized for being reductionist in nature. Indeed, James Thompson points towards the ‘end of effect’ in his work, *Performance Affects* (2011): ‘by working solely in the realm of effect, where performance communicates messages or concentrates on identifiable social or educational impact, the practice becomes restricted or weakened’ (7). Yet, despite this reluctance, scholars frequently employ the term efficacy as a means of examining political performance, socially engaged performance, and protest in performance (Cronin, Robertson 2011; Shaughnessy 2012, xvi; Harvie 2013, 192; Kershaw 1991, 1992, 1999; Rowe 2013). Perhaps, then, employing efficacy as a means of examining theatrical dissent needs to include the quantifiable *and* unquantifiable, the effect and affect, the ‘bodily responses, sensations and aesthetic pleasure’ (Thompson 2011, 7). Further, in utilizing this term, and mindful of its limitations, the need to identify specific criteria for assessment becomes more important still. As Baz Kershaw helpfully notes, in relation to Practice as Research (PaR), general criteria of value are a ‘fool’s illusion’ (2009b, 5). Arguably, the same argument applies to efficacy: we cannot apply the same criteria for analyzing the efficacy of a Guerrilla Performance, staged in the British Museum, as we would for examining the performance of everyday life in Occupy London. Each performance had different aims, participants, and audiences. Spatially, temporally, aesthetically, they were different. Each performance, then, needs to be judged according to its own aims, taking into account its context and modes. Nevertheless, efficacy remains a thorny frame for analysis; arguments are easily dismissed if they do not acknowledge and attempt to go beyond the confines and limitations of the term. What better frame is there, though, which helpfully outlines the parameters of study? Efficacy focuses upon what the performance *does*: to performers, to audiences, the protest targets, the social movements as a whole. It can encompass the micro to the macro, the short-term and long-term, the visible and invisible, the ‘group dynamic, a social situation, a changed energy, a raised consciousness’ (Bishop 2012, 6).

This thesis does not examine any particular political theory in its exploration; nor does it explicitly utilize the thinking of theoreticians such as Jacques Rancière or Félix Guattari. It is certainly the case that work from established theoreticians is

pertinent to the issues my thesis addresses: from Jacques Rancière's *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2006), *Dissensus* (2010) to Félix Guattari's *The Three Ecologies* (2014), from Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy* (1994), and *A Thousand Plateaus* (2016), to art critic Nicholas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (2010). These works examine the relationship between art, politics, and protest, aesthetics, and the reception of, and practice of art criticism, as well as its impact upon wider society. Reference to such work would have prompted different questions, and produced a different understanding, which would have been extremely valuable in situating my research in relation to that of others. Additionally, it may also have shed a new light on the efficacy of the theories utilized, and the tactics employed by proponents of Theatrical Dissent; whilst, at the same time, providing a vehicle for analysis. There is a strong argument for saying that my work is less robust for not giving these theoreticians due attention. However, to do so would have produced a very different piece of work. Case studies, such as the ones I have selected in this thesis, are frequently examined through a Rancièrian and Guattarian lens (Jeeves 2017; Ingram 2017; Bottoms 2013; Dean 2016; Brunner, Nigro, Raunig 2013). My adoption of a similar approach, arguably, would not have provided innovation, although it would doubtless have provided insight. I was also mindful of the danger of allowing political and philosophical theories to dominate the argument; with the case studies becoming more a means of understanding theory than the theory being utilized as a tool for analysis. I did not, for instance, want the tool to become the subject of investigation. In not using a Rancièrian or Guattarian lens for analysis, I focused attention on an examination of the efficacy of a diverse range of case studies which differed geographically, politically, socially, and spatially, in terms of intent, tactic, demographics, and content of performance, as well as the contexts in which they were staged.

The intention of adopting efficacy as a framework for analysis, rather than drawing upon more established theories, was also, in a sense, an experiment in discovering whether such a framework were possible, or even desirable, when considering such different case studies and whether it could provide the flexibility required but also bestow the cohesion and rigour necessary for analysis.

## Practice as Research

It is perhaps fitting that a thesis examining dissent ought to seek to challenge the knowledge regime and hierarchies of knowledge prevalent within the academy through an interrogation and re-positioning of research methodologies. Brighenti argues that ‘re-opening all the clutches of power is what all movements of resistance need to learn’ (2011, 75). I return to these clutches of power, manifested in various ways, throughout this thesis but research methodologies too can also work to challenge or confirm these clutches of power. Sociologists Back and Puwar, for instance, criticize a parochial, comfortable, ‘dead sociology’ which objectifies and disengages. Instead, they argue for a live sociology which attends to the ‘fleeting, distributed, multiple and sensory aspects of sociality through research techniques that are mobile, sensuous and operate from multiple vantage points’ (Back, Puwar 2013, 1). PaR can be helpful in exactly these ways, in valuing the visceral, sensate, multiple, and experiential, in, as Back and Puwar put it, taking our research tools out for a walk (2013, 10). This, in itself, may issue a challenge, as Madison argues:

knowledge is power relative to social justice, because knowledge guides, equips us to identify, name, question, and act against the unjust, consequently, we unsettle another layer of complicity. (2005, 6)

Unsettling another layer of complicity, however, also requires us to understand that the ways in which we acquire this knowledge, the research methods we employ are equally capable of being complicit in maintaining the status quo. Bill Readings described the University as a ‘ruined institution’ (1999, 19), driven by a corporate agenda. Almost two decades later and the British education system has, to a degree, mirrored the corporate structure Readings recognized in the US: it is now a ‘devastated place, thoroughly occupied by marketization’ (Wardrop, Whithers 2014, 6). Market values and practices may be seen to pervade the University. The rapid re-branding, the bonus cultures for the upper echelons of management, the perception of students as customers, and the widespread precarization of labour practices, all point to the University being a business, a marketplace. Such marketization affects not only the understanding of research and its purpose but also the research methodologies employed, establishing knowledge itself as a commodity. PaR methodologies may gesture towards challenging this by not only extending research frontiers but also by providing the radical potential of a *philosophy in action*. Crucially, PaR has the potential of allowing reform in two important areas. First, by taking the perspective

from the ‘inside’, by implementing new critical frames for assessment, it places value not on product but process. Such a process may place value on the ephemeral and often invisible, a shift in group dynamic or perception, for instance. Second, PaR modes may contribute towards shifting power relations by the blurring of traditional roles, as in my own case where examiners become participants in performance protest practice.

Although in some respects the academy has welcomed PaR methodologies; nevertheless it has also met with some resistance from the academy, despite its increasing popularity of PaR modes for students (Haseman 2010, 149; Kershaw 2009a, 106).<sup>2</sup> Nelson posits that such resistance may be explained by the ‘numerous instabilities in the diversity and ephemerality of performing arts practices [which] pose particular challenges to ideas of fixed, measurable and recordable “knowledge”’ (2013, 4). Certainly, this explains some of the resistance towards PaR: as Nelson notes, it does not quite fit quantitative or qualitative models (2013, 20). Indeed, PaR is difficult to quantify, measure, and justify; after all, what constitutes a *successful* research outcome in terms of practice? PaR does, indeed, address the emotional, the sensate, the unstable, the ambiguous, the interactive, the messy, the affective, the embodied, the divergent, the fluid (Fleishman 2012; Barrett and Bolt 2009; Smith, Dean 2009, Kershaw 2009b). As such, Haseman suggests that PaR practitioners are formulating a ‘third species of research, one that stands in alignment with, but separate to, the established quantitative and qualitative research traditions’ (2010, 33). From the ‘inside’, practitioners can gain a ‘performative, embodied or practical knowledge that exists before or beyond words, [it] impacts upon us, does something to us, changes us in all manner of ways (aesthetically, perceptually, ethically, emotionally, even physically)’ (Nelson 2013, 56).

Scholars too are keen to position PaR on a spectrum, associating it with subjectivity, the binary opposite of objective quantitative research methodologies. As Barrett and Bolt note, ‘a general feature of practice-based research projects is that personal interest and experience, rather than objective “disinterestedness” motivates the research process’ (2010, 5). There are, however, problems with such arguments. First,

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<sup>2</sup> The ten highest rated UK drama departments for BA courses (according to the *Guardian’s* University Guide and League Table) offer specific PaR courses (Guardian 2015b).

according to some, there is an assumption that for research to be research, then it should be objective; second, that research can be purely objective; and third, that PaR is purely subjective.

It might well be the case that the humanities and arts are more subjective and reflect more overt biases than the pure sciences. But such bias is not solely the preserve of the humanities, for quantitative research may also have a particular bias and agenda, influencing the choice of research area and also, in some cases, the research outcome. For instance, Professor in Disease Prevention John Ioannidis argues that ‘in health care, research is often performed at the behest of companies that have a large financial stake in the results’ (2011). If we examine the field of biomedicine, for example, we can see that competition and conflicts of interest have influenced scientific findings, with what has been termed an epidemic of false claims (Ioannidis 2011). Even so, scientific research does not seem to acknowledge its bias in the same way, as is commonplace in the arts.<sup>3</sup> PaR requires the researcher to account explicitly for the effect of personal presence upon the work by analyzing the effect of being ‘inside the research’. Such explicit acknowledgment is important, and significantly offers the reader or viewer critical information regarding the ideological framework of the research (Smith, Dean 2009, 4). It may also be the case that a PaR practitioner, in being subject, object, and observer, in taking these multiple perspectives, is capable of giving a balanced and multi-faceted, critical analysis of work.

Although PaR produces an ‘end product’, research findings which are disseminated, it is my contention that PaR acts as a critical research method which is important precisely because it also values process, and, in doing so, accounts for different criteria to more orthodox research methods. PaR values the subjective, the affect, the invisible, the raised consciousness, the shifting, elusive dynamic of social relations. Further, it is difficult for PaR manifestations, at least in the field of theatre and performance, to contribute to the knowledge economy. Unlike art, media or design, no

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, the notion of ‘pure science’ has been challenged by many who have worked to reposition scientific research in relation to historical, sociological, anthropological and political assumptions and norms (Feyerabend 1993; Latour 2014; Stengers 2000). Despite this, there seems to be an onus on PaR practitioners in the performing arts to be transparent about the effect their presence, and more precisely their bias, has upon the work, which, arguably, is not matched in scientific fields.

material products are produced. It is ephemeral, unrepeatable, a one-off. In this sense, it begins to challenge, however gently, our definition of what constitutes knowledge, in demanding that we consider further additional criteria, and despite the difficulties involved, or perhaps because of the difficulties involved, has something of worth to contribute.

One of those difficulties involves the establishment of sufficient assessment criteria or frames to understand or judge PaR. The field is rife with contradictions. Many PaR specialists, for instance, write defensively, seeking to justify the very existence of the field by attempting to frame PaR with quantitative assessment and measurable outcomes (Barrett, Bolt 2010), but such means of assessment may not be appropriate when used in PaR, and new ways are being developed. Haseman, for example, suggests that PaR should devise different research models by marking ‘out a third paradigm [that] pivots on methodological innovations, [and] alternative forms to report our research findings’ (2010, 150). Stylistically, a shift is necessary too. For instance, instead of the use of the passive voice, or of the third person singular commonly used in academic work, where research might be thought to gain credibility through the mirroring of the writing style and structure of quantitative disciplines, the first person singular is encouraged in PaR. The researcher is not absented from the research, but the ‘personal’ here is both acknowledged and embraced.

The influence of the scientific discipline is clear too if we consider the way in which institutions demarcate what constitutes a practical PhD component. For instance, Goldsmiths, University of London, defines the practical component of a Theatre and Performance PhD as the following:

The practical elements should exemplify and illustrate the ideas contained in the written part of the thesis, and should be submitted together with a retainable record of the performance in a form that has been approved by the Research Degrees Committee of the Department of Theatre and Performance. (Goldsmiths Graduate Handbook 2017, 64)

Understanding PaR as an *illustration* of the written argument, arguably, misunderstands the potential of PaR. Such language undermines the messy and unknown nature of PaR, which can produce a reciprocal and generative relationship between practice and theory. Rather than framing the practice as part of an on-going

process, it is framed as an end-product, which fits well with the notion of research being part of the knowledge economy. It therefore positions PaR as a practical manifestation of a conclusion, in neatly bringing together the strands of theory and written argument presented in the thesis; as a type of ‘answer’ to the overall research question which also provides further evidence to support the thesis. In a sense all research is part of a wider narrative; all conclusions lead to further beginnings; and all researchers need to respond and adapt during the process of research: a researcher may discover unexpected material in an archive, for example, which may not answer the original research question but may be far more significant. However, the application of linear thinking to research is particularly problematic for PaR; as Gray suggests, it does not happen in that ‘neat and predictable way’ (1996, 3), as often research is ‘initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed’ (1996, 3). Kershaw goes further and argues that the PaR community has objected to ‘questions’ themselves as ‘even the most open and carefully expressed queries inevitably imply a more or less predictable range of responses, which flatly contradicts the qualities of radical openness and excess that the creativity of performance practice at its best can produce’ (Kershaw 2009a, 112). In terms of my own research, as with Gray, questions emerged out of practice through the performance, *Make Tea, Not War* (2013), which led to my thesis proposition. Such questions continued to expand and develop through the varied PaR (workshops, Research and Development, performances) undertaken throughout the thesis, producing a cyclical relationship between theory and practice.

Moreover, it is important to perceive PaR as more than a final product, as more than a conclusion which is simply disseminated through practice rather than the written word. Such a position rejects Barret and Bolt’s argument that we need to prove the relevance of PaR by ‘extending and articulating our capacity to discover [...] alternative methods of research capable of generating economic, cultural and social capital’ (2010, 2). Rejecting this notion is particularly important, if we consider the topic which my main PaR component, *HOUND* (2016) raises: the use of art to critique capital, in this case, the politics of austerity. Barret and Bolt’s position may well be pragmatic, perhaps an attempt to prove that PaR is viable and sustainable as a market product of the university institution, a form of survival in an increasingly harsh culture of funding cuts, but is short sighted in limiting research areas to those



guaranteed to contribute to social, economic or cultural capital. If we measure PaR, or any research in this manner, in valuing its contribution solely in terms of capital, then we risk marginalizing and de-valuing research which contributes to the field in other ways.

The nature of PaR is indeed unstable and unpredictable, and the answers provided through practice may or may not answer the initial research questions, as with any research. Yet it will provide insight that would not be unearthed through theory alone. This is the radical potential of PaR. My approach towards PaR therefore is more in line with the research aims proposed by Goldsmiths Visual Cultures Department, ‘the practical research should not simply “illustrate” the thesis, but develop and extend the concerns of the thesis through the forms and processes of creative work’ (Goldsmiths Graduate Handbook 2017, 63). In rejecting the notion of PaR existing as an illustration of written argument, this definition is far more fitting in understanding the characteristics of PaR, which may work to complicate and deepen the written argument. I may have more questions upon completion of the PaR than when I began.

### **Research Approach, Methodologies, and Model**

Despite my rejection of the use of a scientific framework for PaR, I am advocating that whatever framework emerges in its place has the rigour ‘equivalent to that of the sciences’ (Nelson 2013, 39) and I am mindful of the necessity of employing such rigour in my overall research. First, in fulfilling the position of researcher I am presented with an opportunity to embody the role of a ‘Para-Academic [who] can change the university by changing how we think and behave as its constituent parts’ (Rolfe in Wardrop, Withers 2010, 1). Rolfe suggests that it is the duty of those who feel disenfranchised by the commodification of the University to join a community of ‘dissensus’ (Rolfe in Wardrop, Withers 2010, 1). In this vein, I endeavour to understand research regarding performance and protest as may a critical ethnographer who:

takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts the status quo and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control. Therefore the critical

ethnographer resists domestication and moves from ‘what is’ to ‘what could be’. (Madison 2005, 5)

The critical ethnographer, according to Madison, accounts for the effect her presence has upon the research. Rather than understand research as subjective, Madison persuasively suggests that the frame of positionality is far more useful as it ‘forces us to acknowledge our own power, privilege, and biases just as we are denouncing the power structures that surround our subject’ (Madison 2005, 7). She further notes that positionality demands a reflexive approach, a turning back on ourselves, so that we examine our intentions, methods, effects and account for our authority and responsibility to both representation and interpretation. In assuming this position, it is critical, therefore, to remain transparent by explicitly referring to my own biases and reference points throughout the thesis.

My own left-wing political views will undoubtedly affect the way in which this research is conducted and the affective dimension will be considered in conjunction with performance analysis from secondary sources. Rowe notes that theatre and performance researchers can utilize their knowledge of acting to:

don the masks necessary to work alongside and participate with the research subjects, while at the same time maintaining an awareness of self that allows for reasoned critique at the same time. (2013, 17)

Yet, as Rowe admits, this may prove difficult, ‘on the ground in the midst of pressing political issues, academic detachment becomes a thing of degrees’ (2013, 17). The aim, therefore, is to embark on PaR whilst maintaining self-awareness.

My examination of Theatrical Dissent is limited to the case studies selected. It is not, nor did it intend to be, representative of a range of causes, but rather an exploration of form. Whilst performance content was considered, my focus was to examine form in relation to efficacy. My study does not, for instance, take into account social movements which aim to challenge systemic sexism, racism, homophobia, or transphobia within our society. Certainly, there are many social movements which engage with creative forms of resistance that are omitted from this study, and would have provided equally interesting material. For example, Black Lives Matter, and Sisters Uncut, to name only a few, have engaged with highly performative modes that

I would certainly categorize as Theatrical Dissent.<sup>4</sup> However, the case studies I selected to examine utilized performance modes in specific contexts. For example, the staging of Guerrilla Performance in culturally assigned spaces (museums, galleries) funded by British taxpayers, and in receipt of corporate sponsorships, is necessarily different and distinct from the creative direct actions which Sister Uncut stage, such as the die-in staged at the film premiere, *Suffragette* (2016), which was well attended by celebrities, members of the press, as well as spectators and fans.

It is certainly the case that consideration needs to be made regarding a possible bias deriving from the choice of research method as well as maintaining an awareness of the limitations of my research methods. For instance, two of my case studies are analyzed through video analysis, and the limitations of this will be explicitly acknowledged (due to the surprise, pop-up nature of interventionist performances, my participation in each case study was not necessarily possible or practical). The differences between perceiving live and pre-recorded performance documentation have been widely discussed and contested (Phelan 1993; Dixon 1999; Rye 2003); documentation is not a substitute for spectating live performance. The video lens privileges one narrow perspective, limited to what the camera and operator captures. As Rye pertinently notes, what we see on video is different from live performance, ‘we see a *version* of the space that the event inhabited [...] rendered from three dimensions into two, [...] we can hear an *approximation* of the sound’ (my emphasis, 2003, 216). Any performance analysis will therefore take into account the strengths and weaknesses of the research approach and method.

This thesis aims to provide a rigour in articulating arguments and providing evidence regarding the efficacy of theatrical dissent. Through participant observation, performance analysis (phenomenological and semiotic), action research, reflexive PaR analysis, interviews, and audience reception analysis, I examine protest

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<sup>4</sup> Black Lives Matter is ‘a global network [...] member-led organization whose mission is to build local power and to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state’ (BLM 2018); their tactics have included die-ins, which exploit the use of theatrical gesture and script, such as the ‘striking embodiment of the reported final stance and words of Michael Brown’ (Hughes, Parry 2015, 300): ‘Hands up, don’t shoot’. Sisters Uncut is a British feminist, intersectional collective which ‘takes direct action for domestic violence services’ (Sisters Uncut 2018). Its tactics have included die-ins, subverting, and performance interventions.

performances from a variety of vantage points. As a largely physical pursuit, on the one hand, a researcher can provide insight when he or she is not only present but also a participant. Participant and audience responses, as well as more sensory-based responses, cannot be accounted for in the same way from the perspective of a spectator. On the other hand, a researcher may gain insight from seeing a performance intervention as another audience member would, without any prior knowledge or personal experiences of participating. As such, the structure of this thesis, whenever possible, is based upon the model of two selected case studies (Chapter Two and Three), where I have participated in one (as a performer, protester or participant) and acted as an observer or spectator in the other.<sup>5</sup> The aim of this model is to provide differing perspectives which allow the research to take account of the process and performance. In this sense, one case study provides the perspective of the insider, whilst the other, the outsider. The PaR component of this research is therefore dual: partly it is woven throughout the thesis, through my participation in performance interventions, designed and facilitated by others; and partly through a separate series of research and development workshops and a performance entitled *HOUND* which I designed and created for 14 September 2016.

The relationship between writing and practice within this thesis is based on the dynamic interaction of the repetitive cycle of action, thought, and reflection. The decision to provide what Nelson terms ‘complementary writing’ (2013, 36) regarding my PaR workshops and performance relates to his argument that practice alone cannot take account of the context in which it is experienced. He notes that PaR practitioners often use the argument, ‘if I could put it into words, I wouldn’t have to dance it’ (2013, 36). Whilst a dance or an art work, as Smith and Dean suggest, does transmit knowledge in non-verbal and non-numerical forms (2009, 3), complementary writing provides an opportunity to reflect upon the practice whilst accounting for context and audience response, enriching the research further. Whilst PaR modes, criteria, and assessment are complex, there is perhaps a tendency, due to the knowledge hierarchies prevalent in the academy, to over-complicate. Haseman and Mafe concisely denote PaR as an activity where ‘practitioners think, read, and write as well

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<sup>5</sup> Chapter Four examines the case studies of Occupy London (2011) and Burning Man; one took place before I began the doctorate and, due to practical and financial constraints, I was unable to attend Burning Man.

as look, listen, and make' (2009, 214). Performance is widely understood as interdisciplinary, an anti-discipline, a 'dissenting discipline' (Read 2015, 22) or 'Trans-discipline' (Kershaw 2009b, 5). My PaR is simply another means of engaging with this dissenting discipline and discovering knowledge that could not have been unearthed using an alternative method. I would argue that traditional forms of scholarship and PaR should not be placed upon a spectrum as opposing binaries, but simply added to the strands already available to theatre scholars.

### **Chapter Outline**

The topics, or crises, which currently dominate the performance intervention field – austerity, ecology, and democracy – are said, by many, to be matters which define our age (Bramall 2013; Piketty 2014). The thesis investigates these subjects and largely focuses upon case studies in the UK, but also includes one case study from Paris and Belgium, and one from the United States. This research and practice led to the development of my culminating PaR.

From the second chapter onwards, each chapter seeks to address the core research questions by focusing upon a specific performance mode and related theories, in order to assess efficacy. The chapters also contribute towards an analysis and overview of the use of performance in contemporary political protest. The various forms of theatricalized dissent discussed in this research present a fraction of the diverse works, and new forms currently emerging.

### **Chapter One: Contextual Overview of Theatrical Dissent**

Chapter One proposes that theatrical dissent, the intersection between art, theatre, and protest, is not, as many believe, novel. In fact, forms deemed as having efficacy today bear striking similarities with historic cases of theatrical dissent which predate the Middle Ages. In providing a contextual and historical overview of theatrical dissent, the chapter situates interventions and performances where art and protest meet on more equal terms. The chapter addresses a significant gap in scholarship regarding early examples of theatrical dissent. Whilst the early twentieth century and the 1960s produced a wealth of material regarding social movements and related creative forms

of resistance, there are far earlier examples of theatrical dissent which are both pertinent to contemporary interventions and worthy of critical attention. This thesis proposes that the folkloric practice of Rough Music, otherwise known as Charivari or Skimmington, is one of the earliest examples of radical protest performance which can be understood as theatrical dissent. Although the practice has been acknowledged by theatre scholars (Schechner 1993; Moll 2001), it has largely been understood as being less significant than other performances. Schechner, for instance, only refers to it as a descriptor, noting that a performance was ‘charivari-like’ (1993, 74). It has been marginalized, literally as material which is worthy of a footnote and nothing more. Existing as highly theatrical processional street theatre, it is critical that theatre scholars acknowledge the contribution the practice has made to contemporary acts of theatrical dissent. As part of the practice, dating from at least 1310 and surviving up until the 1950s, communities expressed rejection of individuals offending community norms. As a form of community justice, in many ways, the practice worked to confirm the status quo, with many misogynistic and racist motivations recorded. However, other cases focused upon staging Rough Music against the oppressor, such as a wealthy landowner who increased tax during a poor harvest year. E.P. Thompson, describes the practice as noise-fuelled action and a ‘ritualized expression of hostility [...] which might include parading the accused on a donkey, masking and dancing, street drama, or the burning of effigies’ (1999, 3). Part game, part ritual, part performance, the folkloric practice has striking similarities with contemporary forms of creative activism, perceived by many as novel. An examination of Rough Music thus illuminates our understanding of the efficacy of contemporary theatrical dissent.

## **Chapter Two: Guerrilla Performance**

Whilst many of the works discussed in this thesis are not permitted or legal, Chapter Two specifically examines the politics of unsanctioned performances in the work of activist groups, BP or Not BP and Liberate Tate. The chapter brings together two vantage points. First, that of being inside the research through my engagement of PaR with BP or Not BP (rehearsing with and performing in several Guerrilla Performances) and, second, of being outside the research in utilizing conventional

scholarship tools in examining Liberate Tate. Although there has been academic interest in both of these groups (Serafini 2015; Holtaway 2015; Jordan 2010), theatre scholars have not been as attentive. Instead, scholars have examined performances from the disciplines of media, communications, and the fine arts. Nor has there been a comparison of performance tactics employed by these groups, despite their strong links in both belonging to the Art Not Oil Coalition and performing in cultural spaces in protest of BP sponsorship. Therefore, in focusing upon the theatrical methods employed by these groups, this chapter seeks to address a gap in scholarship, in seeking to understand the efficacy of unsanctioned performance in the context of performing in spaces assigned for cultural activity. Whilst the performances are non-violent, they are unsanctioned works which take place within a privately-owned site (although publically funded) and seek to cause maximum disturbance and embarrassment to management in the tradition of civil disobedience. Performance theorist, Alan Filewod, describes Guerrilla Performance as the act of performers using their ‘bodies as instruments of dissent’ (2011, 243). This notion is interrogated within the chapter, with participants being at risk of repeatedly threatened arrest (one actual arrest having taken place in 2014, barring entry to the British Museum). The performance modes utilized in the selected works, from durational performance to live art, object animation to disobedient commemoration, are examined in terms of their efficacy, judged by the responses of participants, audiences (museum visitors, board members, and online audiences) and the dissemination of their works online.

### **Chapter Three: Play as a Mode of Protest**

Chapter Three proposes that play and gaming structures are modes of protest and theatrical dissent which have a potential yet to be harnessed, specifically in terms of sustainability, shifting social relations, and provoking imaginative responses. The chapter analyzes the efficacy of embedding play and gaming within theatrical dissent, asking how far these compelling and popular formats can widen accessibility and reach new audiences, as well as identifying factors which promote and militate against efficacy. Sociologist Henricks argues that ‘play is the laboratory of the possible. To play fully and imaginatively is to step sideways into another reality, between the

cracks of ordinary life' (2006, 1). The chapter seeks to address the neglected area of scholarship which understands play and games as a potentially compelling and accessible entry point into activism. The research also proposes that the form of play is capable of producing a distinct affective, collaborative experience which can also produce powerful forms of theatrical dissent. It also aims to examine the capability of gaming structures to disturb ordinary life within a protest environment, and create, even fleetingly, another reality for the participants, and crucially, one which nourishes and sustains. Play and gaming, as one of the most dominant cultural contemporary forms within our society, is frequently discussed by academics from diverse disciplines (McGonigal 2007; Örnebring 2007; Dena 2008), but it is rarely understood as a means of sustaining social movements, especially through actions which take place virtually *and* digitally. Additionally, this thesis aims to understand whether play and games widen accessibility; whether they undertake a vital, prefigurative role in making visible and actualizing more democratic relations. As a compelling format, which has widespread appeal for a diverse demographic (as demonstrated by the growth in the gaming industry), might play and games provide the entry point into political debate, activism, and even protest? Drawing upon play, sociological and anthropological theorists, this chapter explores the intricacies and complexities of shifting the function of play towards a precise political end. Through actively participating in the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination's devising process and political gaming intervention, *Climate Games* (2015), and *D12* (2015), and fulfilling the role of spectator in Coney's performance, *Early Days (of a Better Nation)* (2015), the subject of play as resistance is examined.

Whilst both cases draw on play and games within their work, combining theories and fields rarely brought together, their work contrasts on many levels. By interpreting these case studies in order to ascertain the efficacy of play and gaming as a mode of resistance, this chapter analyzes the methods and strategies employed by these companies in selected works. The research proposes that ludic participation, in the context of direct action and performance, affects participants in a distinctive way. Not only does the mode of play, in these cases, require participants to shift their behaviour towards considering the collective, but it also demands a performance that is heightened, conscious, and often conjures a more energetic version of the participant. Whilst these works have a political intention, the act of framing their interventions as



games, and embedding acts of play within them, undoubtedly changes the prospect of participation. The notions of agency, labour, and participation are explored in relation to the play element involved. The chapter puts forward the argument that such cases are laying the groundwork for a new form of protest vocabulary and performance.

#### **Chapter Four: Reconsidering The Temporary Autonomous Zone**

Chapter Four examines the efficacy of theatrical dissent which attempts to rewrite and reconfigure the meaning of space through performing alternative versions of everyday life. It pays particular attention to the politics of space and environment through case studies which construct a Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ). Anarchist writer Hakim Bey, who coined the term, TAZ, describes the concept as being similar to ‘an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerrilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere’ (2011, 57). Perceived by many as an eruption of liberated culture, where life is experienced autonomously at maximum intensity, the TAZ provides a form of theatricalized dissent which deserves further attention. Focusing upon protest occupation and festival as performance (as opposed to performance within a protest environment), the research proposes to investigate the efficacy of the performance of dissent within the frame of a protest occupation or festival. The politics of space are considered; in particular, the attempts made by Occupy London and Burning Man to reclaim, subvert, and construct different meanings for the sites inhabited. In doing so, the chapter addresses a critical area of scholarship: theatricalized dissent which is staged through a reconfigured performance of everyday life. Whilst Occupy London presented to various audiences their performance of dissent in diverse ways, the chapter focuses upon their occupation of, and engagement with, the site. It does so through investigating their performance of everyday life (usually reserved for private spaces) within the public sphere, in this case, on the doorstep of London’s Stock Exchange. The performance of what has been termed ‘direct democracy’ (consensus-based decision making in Occupy’s General Assemblies) is examined too, with the aim of understanding the impact of horizontal forms in contributing to prefiguration. The efficacy of performing these actions or decisions in a public space is also

examined: a different notion of efficacy from that encountered in previous chapters. In the case of Burning Man, it is the performance of play *as* dissent which is scrutinized: the gifting culture, self-organization, and the extra-ordinary performances. Situated in the Black Rock Desert, Nevada, with the nearest large city, Reno, being 120 miles away, Burning Man provides what founder and organizer, Larry Harvey, calls a 'blank canvas' (Harvey 2000). The blank canvas analogy has gained traction with participants, capturing the notion that they are able to make their own mark without restriction. However, no space can be 'blank'. This chapter puts forward the argument that the distinctive site of the Black Rock Desert (a harsh, remote, uninhabited, and stark landscape), directly impacts upon the efficacy, methodology, and construction of the TAZ and its relationship with dissent. Understood by many as a rejection of mainstream culture, Burning Man purportedly offers participants an experience which is separate from the mainstream, whilst Occupy London sought to disrupt and challenge through its performance of dissent at the heart of the establishment. The chapter examines the politics and efficacy of creating a TAZ within these differing contexts, critically considering how far the case studies managed to subvert, reclaim, or construct different meanings for the space they inhabited.

### **Chapter Five: Theatricalizing Dissent in Practice**

Chapter Five provides an analysis of my main PaR component, the Research and Development workshops and the performance, *HOUND* (2016). Although other research has analyzed the efficacy of tactics used in performance, my PaR analyzes several performative modes within one performance. It presented to participants, unsuspecting members of the public, and local workers an unlikely and novel fusion of forms: Guerrilla Performance, Rough Music, pervasive gaming, and the attempt to construct a TAZ. By re-staging Rough Music, not as an historic, faithful performance but as one which related to the critical issues of austerity, *HOUND* sought to elevate the status of the practice, not as a dead art form, but one which speaks to contemporary audiences. Specifically, the PaR aimed to counter populist accounts of poverty and the widely shared belief that there is no alternative to austerity, whilst

examining how far the culmination of forms and the inclusion of gaming induced participants to engage in a Guerrilla Performance as a possible entry point to activism.

## **Chapter One: Contextual Overview of Theatrical Dissent**

Theatrical dissent is multifarious. It pervades the social, political, economic, and the everyday. It shares characteristics with a rhizome in ceaselessly establishing ‘connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles’ (Deleuze, Guattari 2003, 7). Like a rhizome, it has multiple entryways and exits. It can be practised and examined in many ways with varying vantage points. Sociologists, political scientists, media and communication scholars, for instance, may all find theatrical dissent a rich and topical subject. Theatrical dissent is not static, but in flux, constantly adapting and evolving, always ‘detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable’ (Deleuze, Guattari 2003, 21). Further, as with a rhizome, the fabric of theatrical dissent is not ‘to be’, but, rather, ‘and...and...’ (Deleuze, Guattari 2003, 25). Rather than focus solely on the main aim of an intervention, for instance, the theatrical dissent practitioners discussed in detail in this thesis are well aware of the multiple ways in which their performances have impact. Confronted regularly with defeat and failure, they often understand their works as part of a process, which, in turn, can reinvigorate wider networks and social movements. As David Heckman summarizes:

In this model [rhizomatic], culture spreads like the surface of a body of water, spreading towards available spaces or trickling downwards towards new spaces through fissures and gaps, eroding what is in its way. The surface can be interrupted and moved, but these disturbances leave no trace, as the water is charged with pressure and potential to always seek its equilibrium, and thereby establish smooth space. (2002)

Theatrical dissent also moves like water, trickling towards new spaces, through fissures and gaps, where it erupts and amplifies its presence. In this way, theatrical dissent must be understood through examining the context in which it appears, and this too relates to the rhizome, for theatrical dissent practitioners understand everything as being inter-related, making numerous connections, building upon historic cases, theories, and ideas, as well as drawing upon connections in the present.<sup>1</sup> It may be argued, though, that these historical connections which have

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<sup>1</sup>As part of my PaR, I have participated in a number of creative activism workshops with Beautiful Trouble (Nadine Bloch, Dan Glass), the Yes Men, and the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination. Without exception, each training has referenced, geographically and strategically, diverse historic case studies as a means of learning from, and building upon, previous forms of theatrical dissent.

influenced contemporary acts of theatrical dissent are, at times, marginalized; scholarship has not given them due consideration. It is my contention that, although theatrical dissent in protest shares many of the same elements of political theatre and performance which pre-date it and have undoubtedly influenced it, it has a fundamentally distinct form, which has received scant scholarly attention.

Initially, we turn to an area which scholars have indeed interrogated: acts of theatrical dissent created by practitioners who may have either had a background in art and performance or categorized their work as art, theatre, or performance (rather than as a form of protest). Contemporary acts of theatrical dissent are directly in the tradition of the historical avant-garde movement in challenging authority, and in making a ‘radical break with preceding formulae of artistic production [which] promoted creativity as part of a wider cultural-political revolution’ (Berghaus 2005, 14). Despite the notorious promiscuity of the term (Sell 2011, 4), the historical avant-garde movement, pioneered by diverse artists belonging to the Futurist, Dadaist, Epic Theatre, and Situationist traditions, can broadly be summarized as work which challenged:

disciplinary boundaries and institutional contexts through practices which emancipated art from galleries and theatre, as performance took to the streets, engaging its publics through social and collaborative modes which repositioned art as ‘work’ (rather than contemplative leisure), orientated towards political change and, at its most extreme, revolution. (Shaughnessy 2012, 15)

The rejection by avant-garde artists of culturally assigned spaces (museums, theatres, and publishing houses) and preference for merging art and life was critical to the flourishing mass of theatrical dissent which was heavily influenced by these movements. Significantly, these movements also turned to popular forms of entertainment such as vaudeville, the music hall, cabaret, burlesque, and songs, for their immediacy and status as low-art forms. This low status was capable of causing shock and scandal, as well as re-aligning the performance environment with the fun of the sports arena (as opposed to the temple-like atmosphere of the theatre). Such forms lent themselves to breaking the fourth wall and shifting the relationship with audiences, often with the aim of agitation and mobilization. Many of these movements also understood the importance of using the media and police force to

their advantage. Producing scandal and getting arrested was a means of attracting attention and reaching wider audiences.

It is important to be wary though, as Kershaw warns, when discussing avant-garde performance, of placing ‘too many aesthetic eggs [...] in the same historical basket’ (1999, 60). Although these practices situated under the avant-garde umbrella may broadly share aims and occupy similar territory in challenging the establishment and attempting to merge life and art, they were extremely different, aesthetically, politically, and socially, making, as Shaughnessy suggests ‘uneasy bedfellows’ (2012, 15). Nevertheless, each avant-garde movement, however different, made significant contributions to acts of theatrical dissent, influencing the case studies examined in this thesis.

### **Historical Precedents**

The activation and mobilization of an audience by contemporary practitioners may be traced to such theatrical movements as Futurism, known for its departure from the past, and advocacy of technology and speed as a form of beauty, its fondness for provocation, violence and involvement with the genesis of Fascism (Rainey in Rainey, Poggi, Wittman 2009, 2). We are indebted to the Futurists for their contributions in paving the way for contemporary performance which aims to provoke, disrupt and unsettle audiences. For instance, Cangiullo describes a performance where performers are planted in the audience with the aim of agitating its members:

*Stage and auditorium completely in DARKNESS for 3 BLACK minutes.*

Voices of the PUBLIC

1. Lights!

2. Lights!

4. Lights! [...]

(The obsession for lights must be provoked – so that it becomes wild, crazy – by various actors scattered in the auditorium, who excite the spectators and encourage their shouting). (Cangiullo in Kirby 1986, 254)

Further, there is a clear connection between contemporary acts of theatrical dissent and the break made by Futurists in rejecting traditional stage language, in favour of condensing the diversity of life in ‘dynamics, fragmentary symphonies of gestures, words, noises and lights’ (Marinetti, Settimelli, Corra 1998, 179). Critically, the manifesto culture, embraced by the Futurists, combined the forms of performance and

action, accompanied by text in the form of manifestos and pamphlets. This particular tactic is drawn upon in many contemporary forms of theatrical dissent and is utilized by case studies in Chapter Two and Chapter Five.

Dadaist tactics of subversion and humour are particularly relevant to theatrical dissent, as Hopkins notes, they ‘counterposed their love of paradox and effrontery to the insanities of a world-gone-mad’ (2006, xiv). Audiences therefore should not only engage, but be mobilized politically to action. The influence of Dadaism is also apparent in acts of contemporary theatrical dissent. Defiantly anti-art, the Dadaists assumed the role of cultural saboteurs, particularly focusing upon action: ‘the deed is everything’ (Jones 2014, 1). Dadaist performances created a different kind of Guerrilla Performance, with their focus upon events, actions, demonstrations, and declarations. Dadaists aimed to make visible and criticize the corruption, chaos, and violence which surrounded them. As Dada poet Hugo Ball notes, ‘for us, art is not an end in itself [...] but it is an opportunity for the true perception and criticism of the times we live in’ (1996, 58). Speck, for instance, acknowledges the intention of Dada’s iconoclastic performances as a tactic to subvert prevalent nationalist ideology (2009, 376), pointing towards their fondness for ‘mock-propaganda and fake titles borrowed from the military and commercial lingo of the day’ (Speck 2009, 375). Significantly, the Dadaists were also influenced by performative forms utilized in social movements. The Berlin Dadaists, for instance, created ‘public parades with music, costumes, banners, stickers, and posters’ (Grindon 2011, 90).

Brecht’s influence on contemporary political theatre and theatrical dissent is widespread: for example, his aligning of theatre with sport is a tactic utilized in the case studies examined in Chapter Three: ‘a theatre which makes no contact with the public is a nonsense. [...] It doesn’t contain five pennyworth of *fun*. [...] There is no “sport”’ (Brecht in Duncombe 2002, 184). Brecht’s bemoaning the lack of sport in theatre, the potential of offering audiences fun, is pertinent as a means of activating audiences of contemporary forms of theatrical dissent.

Perhaps more relevant to theatrical dissent was the work undertaken by the Situationists, who went further and, unlike their avant-garde predecessors, dismissed the notion of producing performance for an audience. There was to be no audience,

for there was to be no art. The spectacle had rendered the city an inauthentic and commodified experience, where reality collapsed into streams of images, products and activities sanctioned by business (Sadler 2001, 15). Instead, they embraced the interjection of play, pleasure, and participation into a reclaimed everyday life; merging what they understood as artificially separated spheres of life, with the aim of achieving a 'lived moment' (Merrifield 2009, 84). This particular approach is explored in Chapter Three through an analysis of *Climate Games* (2015). The transformation of everyday life would be achieved, therefore, by the construction of situations, defined as moments of life 'concretely and deliberately constructed by collective organization of a unitary ambiance and a play of events' (Knabb 2006, 45). Significantly, the principles of *dérive* and *détournement* were understood as tools in an attempt to transform urban life (Coverley 2010, 10). In utilizing the popular materials and forms within the spectacle, the Situationists aimed to disrupt and subvert their meanings: 'to jam their messages, to turn their rhythms inside out' (Wark 2009, 148).

Contemporary forms of theatrical dissent, which are often immediate, mobile, direct, and have strong links with social movements, are a continuation of the tactics of the Workers' Theatre Movement (WTM), which was unapologetically aligned with Socialist and Communist parties. Believing that all art was propaganda, it advocated a theatre that was a 'splendid weapon of struggle' (Samuel in Samuel, MacColl, Cosgrove 1985, 46). Critically, performers wielded this weapon in public environments such as the market, factories, and during strikes; creating performances which reacted against the illusion of theatre. Agitprop performances were mobile, immediate, with no stage, curtains, or props, embracing what we might now call a DIY aesthetic. As MacColl recounts, 'if we were due, say, to go to Wigan, in the bus on the way we'd write the sketch and we'd try it out for about half an hour, and then put it on at the market' (MacColl in Samuel, MacColl, Cosgrove 1985, 59). BP or Not BP (examined in Chapter Two), to a degree, works in a similar way, in creating responsive, mobile performances, often with only one or two short rehearsals; its work, like the WTM, prioritizes immediacy over the creation of polished performances.



The legacy of the historical avant-garde is vast and strongly influenced the explosion of radical political performances which emerged from the 1950s onwards, but particularly in the late 1960s (undoubtedly helped by the introduction of the 1968 Theatres Act in the UK, which abolished stage censorship). In what has been variously termed the ‘neo avant-garde’ (Buchloch 2003; Terraroli 2009), and the alternative theatre movement (Dicenzo 2006), the work of these practitioners continued to develop the practices of the historical avant-garde.

Appropriating popular and folkloric forms was also explored in multiple ways (further examined in Chapter Five in the performance *HOUND*). For instance, 7:84 (Scotland) drew upon the popular folkloric custom of the ceilidh, touring remote areas of Scotland, rarely visited by other theatre companies. Their work followed the tradition of the Workers’ Theatre Movement and Agitprop performance.<sup>2</sup> Dadaist influences can be found within Bread and Puppet Theatre and Welfare State International’s use of procession, parade, and visual material objects such as puppets and floats, which also drew upon the popular form of the procession. Pranksters such as the Yippies were also directly influenced by the Dadaists (Grindon 2011, 95). Many of these theatre companies continued the historical avant-garde tradition of collapsing boundaries between art, work, and the everyday, as well as associating their works directly with social movements such as the San Francisco Mime Troupe and the Living Theatre. Equally connected to social movements were activists and performers keen to use the stage as a means of heightening the visibility of marginalized communities, specifically bodies and identities which were not commonly depicted on stage: LGBTQ identities, women, disabled identities, and BAME identities.<sup>3</sup> Groups

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<sup>2</sup> The legacy of Agitprop performance obviously influenced the radical performances which emerged in the post-war period. Joan Littlewood and the Theatre Workshop, 7:84 (Scotland), CAST, Red Ladder, San Francisco Mime Troup, and El Teatro Campesino, for instance, all drew upon elements of Agitprop techniques embraced by the WTM.

<sup>3</sup> The scale of theatre and performance created with the aim of amplifying the visibility, place, and status of these marginalised communities was vast. Not unsurprisingly, however, considering how far away we are from achieving equality, these practices have ‘effectively been excised from history’ (Freshwater 2001, 310). Susan Croft’s project, *Unfinished Histories*, which aims to record the history of alternative theatre, has gone some way to write such performance *back* into theatre history. See, for instance, the interviews with Gay Sweatshop Theatre, Split Britches, Tamasha, Foco Novo, Black Theatre Co-Operative, Bloodlips, Brixton Faeries, Blood Group, Monstrous Regiment, and Spare Tyre (2016) to gain

such as ACT-UP, prominent in the late 1980s and early 1990s, furthered this aim in staging acts of theatrical dissent, in the form of die-ins, guerrilla subverting as well as actions such as the *AIDS Memorial Quilt* (1987, 1988, 1989, 1992, 1996) and the *Ashes Action* (1992); all of which aimed to, ultimately, end the AIDS crisis through changes in research, legislation, and policy.

We are currently in the throes of what art critic Claire Bishop calls the contemporary avant-garde, the Social Turn: socially engaged art, dialogic art, participatory, interventionist, research-based or collaborative art (2006b, 179).<sup>4</sup> This trend, she notes, continues the historical avant-garde project, as artists use ‘social situations to produce dematerialized, anti-market, politically engaged projects that carry on the modernist call to blur art and life’ (2006b, 180). And certainly, we can directly link acts of contemporary theatrical dissent with the principles and practices embraced in the historical avant-garde: punk and post-punk music (McDonough 2004, 8), culture-jamming and ‘adbusting’ (Duncombe 2007; Wettergren 2009; Shepard 2013), guerrilla gardening (Reynolds 2014), the Yes Men Collective (Bru in Buelens, Hendrix, Jansen 2012, 331), the Provos, the Diggers; and Reverend Billy, the Church of Stop Shopping, and the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination (Grindon 2011, 95) which are examined in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, respectively.

Although it is the case that avant-garde movements, as already mentioned, have received critical attention, such consideration has not been given, by either performance or social movement scholars, to the subject of theatrical dissent as protest. In many ways, theatrical dissent has been marginalized. Studies of theatrical dissent, outside of the historical and neo avant-garde, are few and far between, despite the fact that it has a rich, diverse, and evolving history. Instead, theatre scholars have crowded a relatively narrow area of research: the history and practice of British political theatre and performance (Itzin 1989; Bull 1991; Angelaki 2017; Kritzer

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a sense of how far the content, form, and approach of these groups was highly politicized, connected to social movements, and staged as a form of protest.

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, Bishop does not include what she defines as ‘activist art’ in her most recent study, *Artificial Hells* (2012), arguing that ‘these projects do not primarily involve people as the medium or material of the work’ (2012, 5).

2014; Patterson 2006, to name only a few).<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Morgan discusses the limitations of the field: ‘we can see how narrow our understanding of the political has become’ (2016, 3). Although Morgan argued for a more thorough investigation of context in studying political theatre, she did not go so far as to argue for a greater understanding of the relationship between theatre and dissent.

Forms of theatrical dissent, protest as performance, and protest dramaturgies have largely been overlooked in favour of research regarding political theatre and performance in culturally assigned spaces for invited audiences.<sup>6</sup> Undoubtedly, playwrights and theatre-makers alike have drawn upon, and continue to explore, critical issues. Yet, theatrical dissent which can be understood as protest or civil disobedience has not attracted such attention.<sup>7</sup> In making such a claim, however, I am not suggesting that theatre scholars understand theatre to be separate from its political and social context, nor have they neglected to consider the politics ‘of’, ‘in’, and ‘about’ theatre. These subjects have indeed been rigorously interrogated, but from the standpoint of what Kershaw calls the ‘theatre estate’ and ‘its disciplines’ (1999), or what Peter Handke calls the ‘theatre-theatre’, or, as he would have it, ‘falsifying domains of art’ (1998, 9). There is, therefore, a gap in scholarship in terms of examining how theatre has been used politically, in enriching protest, outside and beyond the theatre estate and its related disciplines. It is important to note, however, that theatrical dissent is not solely about re-locating the site of performance from the stage to the streets. It is also about acknowledging that theatre which is embedded within protest and social movements becomes a different form.

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<sup>5</sup> Although some of these scholars, such as Itzin, have examined work which was situated on the streets as well as theatres, this type of work was staged and understood as theatre rather than as protest performance.

<sup>6</sup> This thesis does, however, include one case study, a performance by Coney (Chapter Three), which was designed for a theatre. This particular performance is useful in providing a contrast to other case studies as it also uses play as a mode of resistance.

<sup>7</sup> As stated in the introduction, there are notable exceptions (Nield 2010, 2012, 2015; Kershaw 1992, 1999; Rowe 2013; Cohen Cruz 1998; Hillman 2015; Hughes, Parry 2015; Hughes 2016).

Engaging in theatrical dissent is different from performing in the theatre estate, aesthetically, politically, socially, and personally.<sup>8</sup>

1. Engaging in theatrical dissent is an entirely different prospect to performing in a play or performance. Theatrical dissent is nearly always unsanctioned, and often illegal. Performers are therefore frequently performing from a position of vulnerability. They are often threatened with arrest and violence by private security and police officers, with teargas and pepper spray; being taken off premises is not uncommon.
2. Theatrical dissent is not disseminated or understood as art, but as news. As theatre scholar Sophie Nield pertinently points out, ‘as soon as the ranks break, the teargas explodes, as soon as the damage is done – as soon as anything really happens – it is no longer called “pure theatre” or “political drama”’ (2010, 3). Theatrical dissent is therefore disseminated and discussed differently to performance: it is cast as being newsworthy.
3. Theatrical dissent assumes little control over the performance: there are numerous factors which are beyond the creators’ control. As such, it often pushes the notion of improvisation to a new level. Improvisation within the theatre estate certainly puts performers in a vulnerable position: they need to respond to material in the moment, with an audience watching their every move; yet, they work in a predefined performance space to a self-selecting audience. Within acts of theatricalized dissent, performers respond to an unfolding situation over which they have little control. Without verbal communication, performers need to assess, for example, the most effective playing space should security officers move them. In this sense, this work is

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<sup>8</sup> Although I highlight critical differences between Theatrical Dissent and the theatre estate, such an argument comes with an important caveat: none of the case studies examined in this thesis could have created their acts of Theatrical Dissent without the theatre estate. In this sense, the successes of Theatrical Dissent owe a great debt to the theatre estate and its disciplines. After all, each case study was overtly theatrical, often drawing directly upon the theatre estate, in terms of staging, practitioners, knowledge of audience reception and behaviour, performance practices, costume, characterisation, roles, plot, and dramaturgical considerations. In fact, the theatre estate, and, especially, the field of political plays and performance is so critical to acts of Theatrical Dissent that the very framing of these acts of resistance, in including the term, ‘theatre’ in my terminology, is an attempt to acknowledge this debt, and the strong relationship between with these forms.

not so far removed from many street performances. The difference, however, is that the response from the target figure or institution is often factored into the performance. The response from security officers, for instance, can amplify and make acts of theatrical dissent more efficacious.

4. Theatrical dissent prioritizes tactical disruption of everyday life over more conventional theatrical, dramaturgical considerations such as representation. Kelleher defines political theatre as a 'theatrical attempt to engage in social relations in ways that would have a direct political effect on the world outside theatre' (2009, 3). Theatricalized dissent, at its core, questions such a position. For there is no barrier between the 'world outside theatre' and performance space: they are one and the same thing. It is not separate to everyday life, but disruption and contention occurs within spaces and sites which are part and parcel of an everyday life which is theatricalized (Handke 1998, 8).
5. Theatrical dissent does not attempt to provoke reflection, thought, or action in the future, but exists in the present as action: a provocation. Kelleher discusses, for instance, a pivotal example of a performance, *Random*<sup>9</sup> (2008), as having political potential which is quite separate to political action:

having little enough to offer in terms of either political 'commitment' to a stated cause or organized 'resistance' to a state of affairs, and making no sort of promise at all in terms of political 'efficacy'. (2009, 22)

In developing point 5 further, however, when we look at theatrical dissent, it is just these criteria that are used as a benchmark: commitment, resistance, and efficacy. If quintessential examples of political theatre, as Kelleher suggests, promise none of these things, then it stands as being separate from theatrical dissent in intention, form, and realization. Whilst many may disagree with Kelleher's argument, it is significant that political theatre can be discussed as having political potential without a discussion as to how this may translate into action. He further points out that 'it may be in theatre's [...] tendency to cast a mask over its own face, and its inability – politically speaking – to stop the police when they march forward, that its greatest

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<sup>9</sup>*Random*, written by debbie tucker green, was performed at the Royal Court in 2008 and 2010. Performed by one female actor who performs multiple roles, the play focuses on one incident: the murder of a black schoolboy.

potential is to be found' (2009, 14). Theatrical dissent practitioners would certainly question such an understanding, suggesting that Kelleher presents a false choice between either affect or effect, for theatrical dissent promises both. It can be both direct and nuanced. Not only may it stop the police, it is also capable of casting a mask over its own face; of shifting perception, in Kelleher's words, in *untruthing* an issue (2009, 14).

Theatrical dissent differs from political theatre too, in that it supports a specific social movement, in alignment with activities associated with political organizing: demonstrations, meetings, campaigns, lobbying, and research. After all, how many plays invite audiences to participate in a protest the following week? Kelleher's position could well be part of a wider move from scholars to de-politicize practice and performance in splitting art from politics. Separating art from politics, and prioritizing the study of art, may also relate to the field of theatre and performance more generally. For, one could well ask why it is the case that scholars interested in political theatre have so often neglected to extend their studies to include acts of protest. It is significant that many books are framed as studies of theatre and protest, but do not present an equal platform or proportion of material. Jenny Spencer's edited volume, despite the title and framing of the study, *Political and Protest Theatre after 9/11* (2012), for instance, includes only three out of a possible fourteen case studies of performances which can also be understood as a form of paratheatrical protest; as tactical performances staged as provocation outside of a theatre in public space. Instead, the main focus is upon plays, and 'traditional political theatre' (Spencer 2012, 5) which, she argues, had become increasingly relevant. Attempts to examine the politics of the theatre estate are certainly welcome and have received a surge of interest more recently from scholars examining more egalitarian working models of devising (Heddon, Milling 2006; Govan, Nicholson, Normington 2008); the increasingly precarious working conditions of actors (Professionally Made, Professionally Paid 2017; SCUDD 2016/2017; Jennings 2016; Borchini 2016); and a much needed discussion regarding the lack of diversity both on and off stage (Act for Change 2017; Hillman 2016; Svich 2016). However, such focus does not take into account ways in which theatre challenges political realities outside and beyond the theatre estate. Kelleher takes issue with a movement from practitioners which seeks to instigate change *out of* and *beyond* theatre, 'as if theatre's political potential could be

realized only by somehow stepping away from the conventions – indeed the whole outmoded machinery of theatrical representation’ (2009, 65). Certainly, this is not what I am suggesting. Political potential may be realized, or may fail, in multiple ways, in and out of the theatre-theatre. It is clear, though, that theatre’s political potential in protest has not received the critical attention which, arguably, it deserves.

Social movement scholars too, have neglected to examine adequately the critical role which culture, and specifically, theatre and performance has had, and continues to have, in social movements. They have focused upon the efficacy of actions, which broadly fit into two camps: effect and affect. It is perhaps not surprising that effect has received more critical attention in social movement studies. Examinations of culture have tended to comprise smaller proportions of research (Johnston 2016, 4), and exist at the peripheries of social movement theory. Indeed, Johnston points out, ‘most protest scholars would agree that popular cultural elements in [social] movements (music, art, theatre) are usually never centre stage, and therefore are often included as part of “movement culture”, a term which [...] implies secondary status’ (2016, 18). Even though social movement theorists frequently use the vocabulary of theatre and performance studies to explore concepts (Tilly, Tarrow 2015), the status of the theatrical is diminished. Despite the title of Matthias Reiss’ book, for example, *The Street as Stage* (2007), it includes remarkably few references to, and no in-depth analysis of, theatre and performance utilized in protest. From examining the role of framing and mobilization theory (Johnston 2016; Tilly 1978; Oberschall 1974) to political process theory (Tarrow 2011; McAdam 2007), the focus is often upon the mechanizations behind, and the outcomes of, social movements. More recently, theorists have turned their attention towards affect, emotion, and action (Jasper 2011; Mizen 2015), going so far as to understand social movements as ‘emotional movements’ (Castells 2014, 13). But although the subject has, in recent years, garnered far more critical attention, becoming more prominent (Baumgarten 2014, 1), the role of culture and theatre is still to be adequately examined.

Further, the attention given by social movement scholars to cultural forms has proved somewhat problematic. Scholars have tended to simplify artistic cultural forms, misunderstanding the complexities and intricacies of each form. Juris states that social movement scholars themselves have ‘criticized the tendency towards reductive, static

views of culture' (2014, 227). Maney notes, for instance, that there is a trend to 'flatten culture to either some set of symbolic structures or a proxy for human agency' (2012, 287). Similarly, Baumgarten criticizes a move towards understanding culture uniformly, and notes that examinations are both 'limited and fragmented' (2013, 3) where scholars use 'culture as a "soft concept", filling in for questions left unanswered' (2013, 6). This tendency to flatten culture, as though all cultural forms are the same, may well connect with Charles Tilly's well-rehearsed argument, in relation to protest 'repertoires of contention [...], a limited set of routines that are learned, shared, and acted out' (1995, 26). If scholars understand the use of theatre and performance as one of a number of limited protest repertoires, then this may explain such flattening of cultural forms. This is obviously problematic. Cultural forms cannot be positioned together, perceived as though they are one; to do so ignores their histories, politics, identities, practices, and the contexts in which they are used. It remains critical, therefore, to interrogate the use of theatre and performance in social movements through a theatrical lens.

Social movement scholars have, in particular, underestimated the role of theatre, understanding it as being useful in 'bookending' more significant manifestations of protest. Theatre, for instance, is perceived as a precursor to action: 'high cultural artefacts, such as the plastic arts, poetry, literature, theatre, music, [...] often inspire and confirm protest themes' (Johnston 2014, 16). Baumgarten too understands culture as 'influencing movement actions' (2014, 7). In this way, scholars perceive forms such as theatre as separate to social movement practice. It is seen to both inspire and spur on action, and utilized as a way to end it; in bringing people together in celebration and provoking reflection. It is not, however, understood as being a critical part of the action; as embedded within it. Juris draws our attention towards the importance of bridging this gap in scholarship, by examining theatrical dissent in relation to social movements: 'a focus on protest performance allows us to move beyond the overly static and reified conceptions of social movement culture' (2014, 241).

Whilst scholars have widely discussed theatre which, imbued with revolutionary spirit, has spilled onto the streets, there has been comparatively little interrogation of protest which has used theatre to enliven, enhance, and revitalize British social



movements. In addressing the lack of scholarship which examines theatrical dissent in protest environments from a theatrical perspective, it is helpful to examine cases where theatre and dissent met on more balanced terms. If a theatrical perspective is missing from such cases, then it is certainly absent from cases where the relationship is less balanced. For example, if we look at the case of the Rebecca Riots of Wales in 1839-1843, when rioters drew upon the tactics of cross-dressing and performing satirical scripts using re-appropriated scripture to protest the payment of tolls for road-usage, we can find little theatrical study of these riots, although it has been examined by historians or sociologists (Williams 2011; Howard 2001; Thompson 2009).<sup>10</sup>

Treatment of the women's suffrage movement in Britain is typical in this context. Hill argues that 'the Suffrage movement was the first in British history systematically to organize the arts on a massive scale into a political sword and shield' (2000, 153). *The Women's Coronation Process* in 1911, for instance, 'appropriated the long tradition of English civic pageants for their own political purposes' (Cameron 2009, 149):

forty thousand women marched in their most spectacular and theatrically executed procession, a seven mile long stream of women with music, floats, hand embroidered banners, and historical costumes worn by women representing great women of history, such as Joan of Arc. (Hill 2007, 155)

The movement also utilized the press well as a means of disseminating information regarding its campaigns, and press releases and publicity stunts were common (Cockin 1999, 393). Although its actions were highly theatricalized forms of dissent, using diverse strategies which 'embraced every medium and field of popular culture' (Cockin 1999, 395), and as far ranging as burning feminist messages with acid into golf courses frequented by high profile politicians, to slashing Velázquez's *Rokeby Venus* in the National Gallery in protest at the treatment meted out to Emmeline Pankhurst (Hill 2000, 155), it has received much attention from historians but is still to be studied adequately by theatre scholars. A stark contrast emerges when considering the body of scholarship regarding plays about the theatre estate.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Theatre scholar Sophie Nield appears to be the exception in examining the Rebecca Riots from a theatrical perspective (2016).

<sup>11</sup> For instance, critical attention has been paid towards the Actresses' Franchise League (Dolgin 2015; Cockroft, Croft 2010; Stowell 1992; Cockin, Campling 2001) which produced suffrage plays, organized meetings, and distributed pamphlets.

Theatrical parades and processions dominated both historical acts of theatrical dissent and staged performances which confirmed the status quo; from the appropriation of the May Day procession, which reversed the message of governed order and fertility to one of revolution by the workers' movement (Joshua 2007, 67), to fascist parades, such as the Nazi Nuremberg rallies, which gave a performance of national power, of 'historical greatness, political legitimacy and promises of future grandeur' (Hagen, Ostergren 2006, 157). Acts of theatrical dissent, although examined by social movement scholars and historians, have not received the same attention from a theatrical perspective.

In situating the research within this thesis, I turn to the popular, folkloric custom variously known as Rough Music, charivari or a Skimmington, elements of which informed my own work *HOUND* (2016), as one of the earliest examples of theatrical dissent, and one which has received very little attention from theatre scholars. Whilst examining Rough Music's legacy, I shall at the same time analyze its performance from a theatrical perspective.

### **Rough Music as Precedent**

Considering how theatrical Rough Music was, existing as processional street theatre which drew upon diverse performative devices, it is perhaps surprising that so few theatre scholars have examined it. Instead, Rough Music has been largely interrogated as an historic and folkloric practice (Thompson 1992; Alford 1959; Cunnington 1930; Gunn 1954; Roper 2015; Tickell 2009; McKnight 2005; Favretto 2015). It is therefore critical to examine the practice not solely as the domain of an historic folkloric tradition, but as a form of theatre and performance, which, critically, also existed as a form of protest. Further, there is also a significant lack of scholarly acknowledgement regarding the parallels it has with contemporary forms of theatrical dissent. The practice stands as a strong example of pre-twentieth century theatrical dissent, bringing together the following performative devices: visual performance, object and effigy performance, gaming and participation, self-organized direct action, and the form of processional walking. These historic manifestations of Rough Music bear a striking resemblance to the devices and forms utilized by creative activists today, often championed as being innovative and novel. Rough Music, therefore, is worthy of further consideration by theatre scholars, both as an expression of theatrical dissent,

but also in acknowledging the parallels between it and contemporary theatrical dissent.

Defining Rough Music proves a difficult task. Despite considerable interest from historians, the practice has proven to be ‘an elusive performance to typify’ (Cashmere 1991, 292). Indeed, Rough Music remains an elusive form of protest performance and continues, in many ways, to resist categorization, as it was determined entirely by context. Bearing this in mind, it can be tentatively summarized as a form of processional street theatre where community members expressed their rejection or hostility towards an individual who offended community norms, or, more rarely, as a form of protest against more powerful figures of authority. We could take E. P. Thompson’s definition of Rough Music:

a rude cacophony, with or without more elaborate ritual. [...] The noise formed part of a ritualised expression of hostility [...] it might include the riding of the victim (or a proxy) upon the pole or a donkey; masking and dancing; elaborative recitatives; rough mime or street drama upon a cart or platform; the miming of a ritual hunt; or (frequently) the parading and burning of effigies. (1992, 3-4)

We can certainly see stark parallels between Rough Music and contemporary cases of theatrical dissent. Scholars have dismissed the legitimacy of Rough Music as a form of popular protest, pointing instead to its capacity for confirming the status quo and inciting violence and hostility. Certainly, as a general rule, Rough Music was practised as a means of community-centred ‘popular justice’ (Moll 2001; Meuli 1953), where ‘domestic’ issues pertaining to specific individuals’ behaviour were aired publicly and enacted upon. Adultery, domestic violence, marrying too early after a spouse’s death, and sexual non-conformity were commonly selected rationale for action (Alford 1959; Moll 2001; Tickell 2009). A number of scholars, however, have cited Rough Music’s long-standing function as a:

tool of popular protest against social and political practices regarded as detrimental to the welfare of the nation. [...] Over time the tone of political charivaris intensified and their scope expanded to include all manner of institutionalised injustice. (Bowles 2005, 439)

Thompson notes incidences of Rough Music which were employed against unpopular officials, and police officers in protest against specific actions (1992, 16). As such, it stands as a tool well suited for asserting conformist norms as well as subverting

authority. Nevertheless, Rough Music also engendered hostility, violence, and scapegoated minority groups (Kahane 1962; Thompson 1992; Tickell 2009). Alford notes that even in 1337 an Avignon Edict described it as ‘an obnoxious sport’ and a statute of Beziers in 1368 ‘an iniquitous game’, (1959 505) and a ‘folk theatre of cruelty’ (Tickell 2009, 6). Accounts of Rough Music demonstrate that there were cases of extreme violence: Alford notes five cases of the culprit firing on his accusers, two people blinded, two killed and one suicide. The capacity of Rough Music to incite hatred, then, cannot be denied; yet it was important historically and theatrically because it existed as dissent which was overtly theatrical, at the same time as being a form of protest.

Rough Music stands as a pivotal example of early theatrical dissent too, because, as with many manifestations of contemporary theatrical dissent, it was immediate and responded to real-time events. In this sense, Rough Music, arguably, provided the more potent tool when contrasted with other any other form of the time.<sup>12</sup> The practice has been described as having ‘carnavalesque features’ (Stallybrass, White 1986, 44): festivity, mockery, celebration, and play. Unlike carnival, though, it was not allocated a calendric date with a specific beginning and end. It is certainly possible that Rough Music may well have achieved the temporary cathartic release of tension which carnival offered, but, arguably, it stood as a more subversive form because its timing and duration were unknown.

Rough Music, described as both an ‘obnoxious sport’ and ‘iniquitous game’ (Alford 1959, 505), certainly brought together gaming, immersive performance, and role-play: all tools which contemporary artists and activists are keen to draw upon today (Flanagan 2013; McGonigal 2007). The intersection between gaming and protest is examined in Chapter Three. Existing as more than an excuse for festivity, Rough Music was often perceived as being a formalized game (Ingram 1984, 96). Far from being a spectator’s sport, Rough Music demanded full participation. Culprits often

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<sup>12</sup> Historically, Rough Music existed as both a sanctioned and unsanctioned practice. By the year 1700, Rough Music was deemed illegal (Ingram 1984, 100). Ingram also points out that ‘under church law charivaris had probably always been subject to censure, either as defamations or breaches of Christian charity, and occasional cases were prosecuted on these grounds’ (1984, 100).

‘rode the stang [pole] or paraded backwards on a donkey’ (Thompson 1992, 5), and participants fulfilled elaborate, complex roles in full costume. The most notorious was perhaps the Devon Stag Hunt, where a man ‘wrapped in sacking, horns on his head, ran through the town making whinnying noises pursued by the hunt, to end the chase on the doorstep of the person to be punished’ (Alford 1959, 511). The extent to which participants embodied such roles, exhibiting animal-like qualities, resembling horses and hounds, for instance, is noteworthy. Presumably, the performers were so immersed in their roles that they experienced few inhibitions and, importantly, those present were so preoccupied with creating raucous sound, parading with effigies and so on, that there were few spectators or observers to judge.

The importance of the decision processes behind Rough Music performances is also significant. Whilst it may be a stretch to discuss them as prefigurative actions, which utilized horizontalist models made famous in the late 1990s during the alterglobalisation movement and utilized by Occupy more recently (Adams 2014, 88), Rough Music performances were self-organized. They were not imposed, delegated, or bureaucratized by the Church or state officials but came *from* the community; in cultural language and gestures the community understood, and ‘asserted the validity of a system of collective values which were stronger than the vagaries of individuals’ (Ingram 1984, 99).

Although there has not been any detailed performance analysis of British Rough Music, it may be understood as an early example of visual performance: a folkloric practice which incorporated a series of meaningful signs (through specific objects such as horns, or the image of an effigy or person riding backwards on a horse or donkey). Participants could read and understand these images, which often reflected regional differences, without additional explanation.<sup>13</sup> Specific elaborate performances were also drawn upon according to the particular ‘crime’ that had been committed. Underdown, for instance, notes that Rough Music performances provoked by an unfaithful wife, frequently drew upon a procession to her house:

Headed by a drummer and a man wearing horns. If infidelity was the offence, poles or other implements, sometimes draped with a chemise, and surmounted

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<sup>13</sup> The style and content of charivari performances differed according to regional areas (Underdown 1987, 100).

by a horse's head or skull with horns attached, were shaken in front of the windows while the rough music was performed. (1987, 101)

Whereas incidents where a woman had presented 'dominant behaviour' would involve the 'husband riding backwards on horse or donkey holding a distaff, the symbol of female subjection, while the wife (usually a man in women's clothes) beat him with a ladle' (Underdown 1987, 102). To Rough Music participants, each object within the performed scenario had strong signification. Illiterate audiences, equally, were able to understand the visual clues offered through these practices. Ingram develops the semiotic meaning of Rough Music further, noting that each performance had, embedded within it, a series of images, objects, scenarios, and narratives that signified specific meanings:

Cognitively, charivaris helped to organize a variety of experiences (domestic, political, and festive) within a single conceptual framework. [...] Integral to the total pattern were the characteristic symbols which gave concrete expression to the underlying system of ideas and provided reinforcing layers of correspondence. The very existence of ridings or Rough Music demonstrations, which were in effect highly stylized representations of anarchy, pointed out the contrast between order and disorder, while representations of political power and the authoritarian motif of the horse and rider demonstrated that order was to be conceived in terms of dominance and subjection. (1984, 98)

We can see from these varied descriptions that the visual performative objects and tableaux utilized in Rough Music are also drawn upon in contemporary protest environments. Some scenarios have drastically altered; it would be unusual to spot a person riding backwards on a donkey, for instance, in contemporary protest. Yet, remarkably, some forms used within Rough Music are utilized today. The rude cacophony of Rough Music, the beating of 'pots and pans and other household utensils' (Ingram 1984, 86), for instance, is a well-known component of global protest repertoire. From the anti-war protest in London in 2003 to the use of *cacerolazos* in Argentina and Chile, pots and pans are used to express collective dissent and discord; literally to *make some noise* (a notion which is further developed in my PaR, examined in Chapter Five). It is also commonplace to see representations of the target (politicians and CEOs for instance) within protest environments, through multiple effigies and masks. Activists frequently seek to express and communicate theatrically the extent of violence and loss of life enforced by governmental actions or corporations, also using a proxy, through the form of the grotesque: effigies of

prominent politicians, hands stained with blood, are often found within protest environments; mock funerals are held, from Margaret Thatcher to Tony Blair, David Cameron to Theresa May. Miming and street drama often accompanies this, as was the case with Rough Music. Scholar Gene Sharp, in his well-known '198 Methods of Nonviolent Action', includes within the 'Honouring the Dead' section: 'political mourning, mock funerals, demonstrative funerals and homage at burial places' (Sharp 1980, 43). Such mourning rituals apply both to policies and wider ideologies, such as the *Legal Aid R.I.P* (2013) and *NHS R.I.P* (2015) protests. Far less common, but also a form of contemporary theatrical dissent, is the use of bodily fluids in protest. Ingram notes that, within Rough Music, the 'symbols of mud and excrement (cleaned by ducking) played on a contrast between purity and filth' (1984, 101). Similarly, excrement has been utilized in many contemporary protests: from students at the University of Cape Town, who threw faeces on the Cecil Rhodes statue on campus (Smith 2015) to Venezuela, where opposition to government has thrown faeces at security forces (Reuters 2017). What may be understood as novel in contemporary protest, then, is far from new; for centuries people have been expressing dissent in similar ways. Forms may be revisited and updated to suit different contexts, but the actions remain remarkably similar to historical forms utilized in Rough Music.

Social movement formations today are in the tradition of Rough Music in their use of moving towards the doorstep of the culprit in a dramatic procession where community members embark on a journey together. Often, protestors march and journey as part of a collective ensemble, usually to a politicized site: in London it might be Trafalgar Square, Downing Street, or Parliament Square. The nature of movement in Rough Music is important in that it drew together individuals who arrived with the intention of participating in a performance and forming a crowd whose purpose was to reach the politicized site: the doorstep of the victim. Despite the legal restrictions of organized protest marches and demonstrations, the recurring nature of people walking within a procession or parade and reaching the site of their destination remains an important feature of social movements.<sup>14</sup> This process impresses notions of agency

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<sup>14</sup> In 2005, the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act legislated that no demonstration was possible within a kilometre 'in a straight line' of Parliament Square, without the prior permission of the Metropolitan Police. It is now illegal to demonstrate outside Parliament without the express permission of the police being sought, in writing, a week in advance.

and shared histories upon its participants. As Teresa Brennan argues, in discussing the transmission of effect, being in a specific place ‘alters the biochemistry and neurology of the subject. The “atmosphere” or the environment literally gets into the individual’ (Brennan 2004, 249). In tracing and re-tracing the steps which political actors have trodden beforehand, for all manner of causes, activists recall the past and re-affirm their presence in a site which is deeply politicized (this idea is discussed in more depth in Chapter Three and Five). This negotiation may be especially powerful then, if an activist, once able to protest without written prior permission, experiences a protest which is constrained, bound by legal expectations and which infringes upon the right to protest. Whilst more traditional forms of protest, such as processional demonstrations, have been accused of being ineffectual, predictable, and institutionalized, there is potency, perhaps in *repeated* gestures, movements, and expressions of dissent. Rebecca Schneider, in *Performing Remains* (2011), pertinently asks:

might a live act even ‘document’ a precedent live act, rendering it, in some way, ongoing or even preserved? An action repeated again and again and again, however fractured or partial or incomplete, has a kind of staying power – persists through time – and even, in a sense, serves as a fleshy kind of document of its own recurrence. (37)

The live act of processional walking as part of a social movement protest today, then, is a significant one, as it binds together the actions of activists in the past with present causes.

It becomes clear that we must understand contemporary theatrical dissent in terms of its history. In situating these strands of practice and theory, we can see both continuity and divergence in the case studies in this thesis. The parallels between historic cases of theatrical dissent, such as Rough Music, are remarkably similar to contemporary ones. Theatre and performance, historically, have been critical as a means of expressing dissent and communicating ideas and, significantly, the performative tools utilized in the past continue to be used. The following chapters examine the influence of past performances on contemporary theatrical dissent as exemplified in case studies, which also, in responding to a different context, employ their own distinctive performative tools.



## **Chapter Two: Guerrilla Performance**

Art first; politics second. This may seem a crude way of analyzing performance. It is a common approach taken, for instance, by scholars and reviewers, as Barnett highlights, of Brecht's work (2016, 4). However, as Barnett, rightly points out, we cannot divorce Brecht's art from his politics, for it was his politics that informed his practice, process, writing, and performances. To absent Brecht's politics from performance analysis is to strip away context and intention, as well as the criteria Brecht identified for measuring success: mobilization, enjoyment, agitation, and perception. Of course, we can all say that efficacious political performance can be both politically driven, and received thus by audiences, and also of aesthetic quality. And some are. Nevertheless, it seems that some are guilty of creating criteria hierarchies, with aesthetic concerns being valued more highly than political concerns, even when discussing political performance: 'art is not activism nor is it education. To imagine art practice in terms of either is to do a disservice to art' (Jelinek 2013, 142). Such a hierarchy is neatly summarized by *New York Times* critic, Brenson, who argues that 'the best political art has always been art first and politics second' (1984). However, by prioritizing an artistic critique over a political one we are in danger of presenting a one-dimensional view that does little justice to either perspective; and of dismissing political works as heavy-handed, didactic, and 'lacking in nuance' (Jenkins 2011). It may well be the case that some performances are heavy-handed, perhaps even badly executed, but nevertheless it is a serious omission to fail to understand and analyze performances in political terms for several reasons. First, performance is understood as being divorced from the political reality in which it is made. The practices, policies, and processes of the theatre company and the venue in which it is staged are part of the performance audiences see and interpret, and from which they create meaning. Second, it has the potential of limiting the efficacy of the performance. If reviewers or venue programmers do not understand work in political terms, then audiences may frame their understanding in the same way. Let us now, in considering the efficacy of Guerrilla Performance, turn this approach on its head in prioritizing politics first and art second. For the central question underpinning this chapter is driven by political concerns: how far did performances staged by activist groups BP or Not BP and Liberate Tate dismantle and subvert the

performances of power and legitimacy created by corporate sponsor BP? <sup>1</sup> Whilst many activist-performers may disagree with the reversal of criteria proposed here, noting that their work may be understood as an artistic *and* political endeavour, it is, arguably, important to keep this frame. The impetus for creating these performances was political: practitioners aimed to put pressure upon cultural institutions to abolish BP sponsorship. They were staged, not for artistic reasons, but for political impact, existing as a creative intervention and direct action in the form of Guerrilla Performance.

### **Artwashing, Funding, and the Experience Economy**

Following Barnett in arguing against the de-politicization of performance and scholarship, we may argue for the re-politicization of cultural spaces: in this case, the British Museum and Tate Modern. Kritzer argues that there is a commonly perceived separation between cultural institutions and political life which:

arises from a model of culture as a quasi-sacred sphere dedicated to the preservation of works that exemplify truth and beauty, uncorrupted by political discussion. (2014, 3)

This separation leads to discussions concerning sponsorship of these spaces being seen as a form of mis-direction; as being ‘anti-art’ in replacing higher insight with the lesser questions regarding finance, for instance. Such separation, arguably, leads to de-politicization. Once again, art trumps politics. However, cultural spaces are deeply political; any form of subsidy is political. In considering BP’s sponsorship of cultural spaces, for instance, we can discern its pivotal performances of legitimacy, presented to global audiences.<sup>2</sup> Even if it were the case that BP is committed to promoting culture for its own sake, then, by so doing, it has the effect of legitimizing its

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<sup>1</sup> Both BP or Not BP and Liberate Tate are part of a wider umbrella campaign, entitled the Art Not Oil Coalition, seeking ‘an end to oil sponsorship of the arts’ (Art Not Oil 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Until 2017, BP sponsored five London institutions: the Tate, British Museum, National Portrait Gallery, Royal Shakespeare Company, and Royal Opera House. These sponsorships guaranteed that its brand reached global audiences through art and culture. According to BP, over 50 million people have experienced BP sponsored art over the last 36 years (BP 2015a). Further, these venues are extremely popular; of these five institutions, the British Museum is the most visited institution in the UK, the Tate Modern the third and the National Portrait Gallery the ninth (ALVA 2014).

corporate activities, whether this is the intention or not. It is also the case that there is nothing subtle or nuanced about BP's performances. Criticisms often directed towards political performances could just as well be applied to BP, whose attempt to reclaim space may be seen as both 'heavy-handed' and 'didactic'. In Spring 2015, for instance, Tate Britain curated a BP-sponsored exhibition: *BP Walk Through British Art*. BP held primacy of place; its name being highly visible in the title and framing of this exhibition in press releases, reviews, programmes, marketing, and curatorial captions. BP's staged works, then, are political performances of power and legitimacy, driven by economic interests. They therefore need to be analyzed in political and performative terms.

Liberate Tate member, Mel Evans, has coined the overall process of oil sponsorship of cultural institutions as artwashing, and frames it as a highly performative act:<sup>3</sup>

To artwash is to perform, to pretend, to disguise. [...] to do one thing in order to distract from another. [...] The wash is made possible in the act, the performative moment in which companies take on a thoughtful, refined, cultured persona. [...] Not only does art cover up the negative attributes, but the company re-performs its brand in a new disguise. (Evans 2015, 13)

BP aims, in sponsoring cultural institutions, to create memorable performances of legitimacy which have the potential to reach global audiences. The gains made by BP, in creating these relationships, are vast: culturally, socially, and economically. Ultimately, its aim is to establish and maintain a social licence to operate: 'a socially constructed perception that your company or project has a legitimate place in that community' (Black 2013, 5). Many have pointed out that the sponsorship which BP offers is far from one-sided, since cultural institutions, visitors, and taxpayers also gain from BP's sponsorship (Maltby 2017; Jenkins 2014; Bayley 2010). The scales, however, are rather imbalanced, as these gains are solely financial. Through artwashing its image, BP aims to use culture to cleanse its image and brand, achieving what is arguably a much needed social credibility after the Deepwater Horizon oil-spill (De Wolf, Mejiri 2013). It is significant too, that BP has identified the act of

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<sup>3</sup> Artwashing is also a term used by activists who understand the opening of art galleries as a symbol of gentrification (Jones 2016). However, Evans' understanding of artwashing expands upon the well-known concept of greenwashing.

experiencing culture as a means to enhance reputation. Through ‘piggybacking’ museum experiences, BP aims to utilize our affective responses, as Davis highlights:

Emotions and imagination are as real as labour and capital, creating and connecting are as real as manufacture and sales, and beauty and meaning are as real as fast and cheap. (2005, 50)

Davis tell us that experience sells: emotion, imagination, beauty, and *meaning* can be commodified to create better sales figures. What is invisible, difficult to detect, ephemeral, is embedded in marketing strategies and public relations initiatives. Business analysts Pine and Gilmore identified this shift towards experience in our economy as early as 1999. For instance, they advised businesses to orchestrate memorable events for customers, and argued that the memory of the experience itself becomes the product; creating experiences which are ‘inherently personal, existing only in the mind of an individual who has been engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual or even spiritual level’ (1999, 99). More recently, they identified art as a potential area to exploit, as art can ‘render authenticity in business’ (2009). In other words, art should be considered a vehicle for creating personal, emotional, and spiritual experiences in order to sell products, services, or, in the case of BP, perception. Significantly, the concept of understanding art in this way has been legitimized by both the government (DCAS) and the Arts Council, who commissioned this research through charity *Art and Business*. This particular initiative represents major corporate players aiming to ‘enhance and shape the UK’s cultural landscape’ (Art and Business 2014). These corporate players are not shy, then, in publicly acknowledging their expectations in return for providing sponsorship: status, influence, and authenticity for their businesses. It is worth noting that these corporate players include BP, Bank of America, World Gold Council, Merrill Lynch, Northern Trust, GlaxoSmithKline, Bloomberg, and JTI. The tobacco, oil, pharmaceutical, mining, and private banking industries, then, have funded research which lays out the best strategies to capitalize on cultural institutions which create memorable experiences for their visitors; in creating positive brand associations and in gaining social and ethical credibility. Such research, to a degree, discredits arguments put forward by advocates of corporate sponsorship: it is not motivated by generous philanthropy. Particular businesses suffer from increasingly negative associations and they want a return for their money.

As Evans suggests, the process of artwashing is a highly performative act. In sponsoring cultural institutions, BP constructs a persona, a character, which embodies the values which it wishes to share with specific audiences. In order to understand how far BP or Not BP and Liberate Tate were able to subvert and dismantle BP's performance of legitimacy, it becomes imperative to understand precisely what type of character BP creates through sponsorship.

First, BP presents The Generous Saviour. In sponsoring cultural institutions, especially in an environment dominated by austerity and precarity, BP gives the impression that its generous donations have saved the British Museum and the Tate. Further, BP perpetuates the myth that its 'sponsorship enables [museums] to remain free', as stated by BP Director of UK Arts & Culture (Violaris 2015, BP). This is simply not the case: BP sponsorship does not enable free entry, since this is guaranteed by the government.<sup>4</sup> The common misconception by visitors that free admission is due to BP suggests that cultural sponsorship works. It is also important to note that cultural sponsorships for BP are a sound economic investment. From 2000 to 2011, BP offered the British Museum an average of £596,000 a year, which amounts to only 0.8% of the museum's income (BP or Not BP 2015a).<sup>5</sup> The Tate galleries, too, received surprisingly little at £240,000 a year on average (Liberate Tate 2016).<sup>6</sup>

Second, BP performs The Human. As former BP CEO and current Tate Trustee John Browne points out:

[Cultural sponsorship is] a way for companies to demonstrate they are alive and not just an entity working to extract profit. It's also cheaper than sport. (Browne in Saner, Khalelli 2010)

Sponsorship works to question the notion that BP is a faceless corporation, humanizing BP as a brand. For instance, BP demonstrates its inclusive character through *BP Opera Summer Evenings*, as Pine and Gilmore note:

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<sup>4</sup> Universal free access to the British Museum, Tate, and the National Portrait Gallery is part of government policy and future funding for this is guaranteed (Policy Paper 2015).

<sup>5</sup> This information was discovered by BP or Not BP through Freedom of Information requests (BP or Not BP 2015a).

<sup>6</sup> To put this into context, for a whole year's marketing at the Tate, BP can buy 4 minutes' worth of advertising on prime-time television, or a 30-second advert during the *X-Factor Final* (Jeffries 2013)

individuals and families who would not traditionally be able to afford going to the opera, are transformed into opera-goers in a fun, relaxing, cheap, and engaging way that also modernises opera and breaks down the exclusivity barriers. (2009, 100)

Third, BP performatively constructs the identity of Storyteller. The company creates multi-faceted and contradictory personas through sponsoring different cultural institutions and exhibitions, appealing to targeted audiences. Significantly, BP seeks to establish a connection with Britain through sponsorship. This remains a priority for BP since it currently exists as a global enterprise and powerful conglomerate, based in North America.<sup>7</sup> BP is also able to capitalize upon concepts, values, and ideas which cultural institutions create for visitors. Associating with the British Museum gives BP gravitas due to the museum's presentation as 'an iconic national establishment' (Campbell-Johnston 2008) performing national identity, power, prominence, and legacy. The Tate Modern, on the other hand, shares associations with contemporary values and imagined futures in a British cultural landscape; providing an idealized vision of Britain, according to the *Telegraph*, 'relaxed seriousness, unstudied cool, classlessness, intelligence and sense of play' (De Botton 2010).

Further, through sponsoring specific exhibitions or events, BP not only heightens brand awareness but creates more sophisticated characterisations for the company through storytelling. It is able, for instance, to deliver specific ideas through the content and curatorial style of exhibitions. Pine and Gilmore argue that 'businesses need to state their identity and identify their statements vis-à-vis art' (2009, 41). They praise the success of an Indian themed marketing campaign where HSBC sponsored the *Indian Summer* exhibition at the British Museum. Such practice allowed HSBC to demonstrate its local insight into specific cultures, which potentially enhanced its future Indian business opportunities. BP uses similar strategies. From April to August 2015, it sponsored the *Indigenous Australia: Enduring Civilisation* exhibition.

According to then BP Director, Peter Mather:

[BP's] support for this exhibition is part of BP's wider contribution to the societies where we operate, enabling audiences to connect with a variety of cultures. [...] We hope [this exhibition] will inspire interest in Australia's indigenous people and culture. (British Museum 2015c)

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<sup>7</sup> Despite the company's historical associations with Britain, having been partially owned by the British government until 1979 (BP 2015c), the biggest workforce and most powerful stakeholders in the company today are based in the United States (BP 2015c).

This exhibition occurred at a time when BP's imminent plan to drill for oil in the Great Australian Bight had been met with widespread opposition by locals (Wilderness Society 2015). BP's support for the staging of this exhibition gave a performance of respect and concern for the welfare, intellectual knowledge, and histories of Australian indigenous communities: a justification for a social licence to operate. The majority of the exhibition reviews illustrate how successful BP was in its infusion of its own narrative in this event. *Guardian* reviewer Jonathan Jones argues:

Far from treating Aboriginal art as an aesthetic fetish, this eye-opening show sees it as part of a living and enduring civilisation with a unique understanding of humanity's place in nature. [...] Who today can call that a primitive way of life? Here is a wisdom the world needs to listen to. (2015)

The celebration of resilience and strength of indigenous communities against Western colonialism seems to be the narrative that is performed through this exhibition and disseminated by journalists. The *Telegraph* praises it as the 'first major exhibition in the UK to present a history of Indigenous Australia through objects, celebrating the cultural strength and resilience of both Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders' (Telegraph 2015). Meanwhile, the *Evening Standard* notes that 'works by the Aboriginal people of Australia and the Torres Strait Islands show the richness of their ancestral cultures and the devastating impact of Western colonisation [sic]' (Luke 2015). Reviewers share the narrative of a post-colonial world: although the West, historically, has exploited indigenous peoples, these times are well and truly in the past, and today we live in a world where the culture of indigenous peoples is valued. Significantly, this particular performative narrative excludes details of the current struggle of indigenous communities' attempts to repatriate objects from the British Museum and to resist BP's plans to drill on local land.

Fourth, BP presents The Networker. Through sponsoring specific events such as the *Days of the Dead* (2015) festival in the British Museum, BP utilized the venue as an impressive stage for networking opportunities.<sup>8</sup> This event, also sponsored by the Mexican government, was marketed as 'art, performance, storytelling, and talks to celebrate the Mexican tradition' (British Museum 2015d). In occupying iconic cultural space, BP is able to perform the role of a 'thoughtful, refined, cultured

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<sup>8</sup> On 23 January 2017, BP launched a \$1bn expansion project in Mexico entitled Thunder Horse in addition to announcing plans for the \$9bn second phase of the Mad Dog Field, also based in the Gulf of Mexico (Ambrose 2017).

persona designed for an audience of special publics – opinion-formers occupying an influential position in the media and politics’ (Evans 2015, 13). BP holds its annual business reception at the British Museum, thereby profiting from the cultural prestige and perceived political neutrality of the British Museum, and from inviting those who hold powerful positions in politics and media.<sup>9</sup> BP’s desire to shape the cultural landscape also extends to occupying prominent positions in the cultural sector, thus gaining the potential to wield influence and effect change. For instance, Lord John Browne had previously held the role of Chief Executive of BP, British Museum Trustee member and in 2017 held the position of Trustee at the Tate. Similarly, Peter Mather, currently BP’s Vice-European President, is an Honorary Director of the Royal Opera House. In 2015, Mather disclosed that BP also has influence artistically, holding the position of one of four judges of the BP Portrait Award (2015).

This chapter analyzes two specific performances: one staged by BP or Not BP, *Deepwater Spill Horizon* (2015), and one staged by Liberate Tate, *Time Piece* (2015), from two particular vantage points. Positioned as a member of BP or Not BP, I draw upon PaR methods in analyzing its work from the perspective of a performer and participant. Liberate Tate’s performance was, on the other hand, analyzed from the position of a spectator.

The efficacy of Guerrilla Performance, in these cases, can be assessed by looking at the impact on museum and gallery policy. We can look simply at whether sponsorship deals are renewed but we can also analyze how far commercial activities within the institutions are affected; at the degree of pressure felt from the disruption caused by the performances. We can analyze how far the work puts the institutions in a dilemma; how far collectives are able to use the performance as leverage and how far institutions are compelled to respond in a way that causes minimal damage in terms of public perception. We can also examine, not only whether the collectives achieved their stated goals, but also how far they exposed, dismantled, or subverted BP’s

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<sup>9</sup> These attendees were afforded an opportunity to perform their status as prominent members of the establishment. In 2015, for instance, attendees included member of the House of Lords Chris Patten (previously the Chairman of the BBC Trust, Governor of Hong Kong, and member of BP’s international advisory committee); House of Lords member Lucy Neville-Rolfe (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and Minister for Intellectual Property); and BBC Business Editor Robert Peston (BP or Not BP 2015e).



narratives and its performance of legitimacy. By implication, we can see that protest challenges the moral authority of an institution that associates with BP; compelling it to question the ethics of its position. The necessity of gaining widespread public support is, of course, a crucial factor. Here, the clarity of the collective's messaging is critical. If Schechner understands the form of Guerrilla Performance as 'wall posters or pamphlets' (1970, 166), then we need also to assess how clear, compelling, and persuasive the pamphlet is in gaining attention and support. Media coverage, official and social, may be examined to gain an indication of how far news of the performance is disseminated, and to which audience, and with what content. The affective dimension on the performers and wider social movement is also critical in terms of understanding whether performance strengthens social bonds and works to sustain activists for future actions.

### **Guerrilla Performance**

Whether or not scholars judge Guerrilla Performance politically, it is a theatrical form which prioritizes politics. Whatever the political efficacy or aesthetic value, scholars cannot dispute that Guerrilla Performance is art which, undeniably, *does* politics. The field unashamedly, and, at times, to the detriment of the performance (if analyzed according to traditional performance criteria), prioritizes political action above aesthetic or artistic value and, moreover, aims for action that is efficacious; well-meaning political gestures are to be avoided, performance labelled by John Jordan as 'art pretending to do politics' (2010, 34).

Guerrilla performers wish to place political action centre-stage. In offering actors guidance, Schechner, a champion of Guerrilla Performance in 1970, suggests that performers require a strong political motivation as the work itself may not be artistically fulfilling:

Guerrilla theatre scenarios should be [...] something you believe in [...] where there is little traditional aesthetic justification for a piece there must be a great deal of political and social conviction. (1970, 167)

Electing the term, Guerrilla Performance, to describe non-violent protest performances and theatricalized direct action is, in many ways, problematic. It is a term of extremes. On the one hand, Guerrilla Performance suggests the use of

militant, even violent, tactics. On the other, it is a populist term which has been commodified to such a degree that it is utilized as a branding tool for selling merchandise. There are, for instance, hundreds of recently published books about ‘guerrilla marketing techniques’.<sup>10</sup> Further critical attention directs us towards the gendered nature of the terminology, equating guerrilla actions with masculinist violence (Filewod 2011, 245). It could be argued, therefore, that Guerrilla Performance, has, as a term, been overworked, overused, and watered down: if it can dually suggest a militant, masculinist edge as well as a corporate one, then it lacks the precision required to analyze contemporary protest performances. For, even theatre practitioner R. G. Davis (who invented the phrase in an article in 1966) distanced himself from the term; describing it in 2003 as a past phenomenon, entitling his essay ‘what *was* guerrilla theatre?’ (Davis in London 2013, 443). If the practitioner who coined and disseminated the term widely in the 1960s now argues for its extinction, then what are the benefits of resuscitating it now?

The current terminology widely used by practitioners and scholars to analyze and capture protest performances and theatrical interventions is not sufficient. We could, for instance, use the following terms to describe and analyze performances by BP or Not BP or Liberate Tate: socially-engaged performance, Live Art, or participatory performance. Yet, none of these terms indicates the disobedient, mischievous, rebellious, and risky nature of their performances. It is, after all, work which is, more often than not, unsanctioned, existing outside of legal lines: no permission is sought to perform, no official risk assessment or Health and Safety regulations filed. Often, those engaged in such works risk being arrested or endure high levels of security infiltration as a result of their participation.<sup>11</sup>

My insistence on using and reclaiming the term Guerrilla Performance is two-fold. First, the original application of the term relates to the use of tactics which are critical

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<sup>10</sup> Using the search term ‘Guerrilla Marketing’ in the COPAC library catalogue, for instance, retrieves 425 results in a variety of formats (accessed 1 August 2017).

<sup>11</sup> BP or Not BP members, for instance, discovered through ‘Subject Access Requests’ that BP hired someone to survey and infiltrate their group for information (Worth 2014). Environmental activists have, for a number of years, experienced high levels of infiltration in the UK. Undercover police officers, for example, formed long-term relationships with environmentalists (Evans 2015). Journalists, comedians, and politicians, such as House of Lords member Jenny Jones (Jones 2015), and comedian Mark Thomas (Burrell 2014) were also subjects of interest to the police.

to interventionist performances. Political scientist Richard Samuels, defines Guerrilla Warfare as

a style of war in which groups of fighters harass their enemies instead of confronting them in great battles. With few exceptions, guerrilla groups are smaller than their adversaries; therefore, guerrilla tactics rely on surprise attacks and the ability to evade detection. (2005, 307)

This definition fits the tactics and dynamics of groups such as BP or Not BP. As a smaller organization, its use of ensemble techniques emphasizes the difference in power, status, and resources enjoyed by itself and those enjoyed by the British Museum and BP. Samuels highlights the importance of surprise tactics and covert operations, which parallels work undertaken by both Liberate Tate and BP or Not BP. Additionally, the term Guerrilla, even when divorcing it from warfare and applying it instead to performance, is suggestive of conflict. This intimation is helpful in contextualizing much of the work undertaken by activists, specifically in considering their aims and strategies. Although non-violent, unlike Live Art or socially-engaged performances, these groups engage with performance techniques to *combat* funding decisions undertaken by cultural institutions, highlighting both combat and power dynamics. Guerrilla Warfare, as with Guerrilla Performance, also focuses upon site and terrain; in this case the contested places of power and authority in which BP performs.

Second, Guerrilla Performance involves performers using their ‘bodies as instruments of dissent’ (Filewod 2011, 243). Filewod, here, captures the fundamental advantage in discussing work as Guerrilla Performance. For, the performance itself, comprised of performers using their bodies as instruments, at risk of arrest or being taken off property, compels a response from powerful adversaries.

### **Exposing and Unravelling Artwash through Guerrilla Performance**

Evans argues that the role of Guerrilla Performances lies in exposing the craft of artwash and staging opposition as a ‘performance of public rejection of oil’ which ‘exposes the disguise for what it really is. The potential efficacy of these groups gives rise to the unravelling of artwash’ (2015, 15). Yet, the Critical Art Ensemble puts forward the argument that *staging* opposition is divorced from power (Ensemble 1994, 61). The most efficacious option, therefore, is to create disturbances in

networks of power so these disturbances exist as oppositional forces. What role, then, can Guerrilla Performances staged by BP or Not BP and Liberate Tate play in creating such disturbances to BP's multiple performances and staged networks of power in relation to the British Museum and the Tate? I analyze two specific performances in order to understand, tactically and aesthetically, how far they expose, dismantle, and subvert BP's performance of legitimacy.

As members of the umbrella group Art Not Oil Coalition, BP or Not BP, and Liberate Tate, share core values in staging Guerrilla Performances with the aim of ending BP's cultural sponsorships.<sup>12</sup> Yet, the main sites in which they work (British Museum and Tate Modern) differ, as do their processes, approaches, and aesthetic references. As such, they provide useful comparisons in understanding the leverage, impact, and efficacy of their interventions in unravelling BP's performances.

### **BP or Not BP: *Deepwater Horizon Spill*, 2 May 2015**

*Deepwater Horizon Spill* (2015) was an unsanctioned Guerrilla Performance staged in the Great Court of the British Museum by BP or Not BP, Reverend Billy, and the Stop Shopping Church Choir on the fifth anniversary of the Deepwater Horizon disaster, as a protest against BP's sponsorship of the British Museum.

It stood in the tradition of earlier performances of 'anti-art' resistance. Indeed, the practice of performing in museum spaces arguably provides a critical analysis of cultural institutions, as practitioners historically have aimed to re-construct the space, and activities within it, in no longer understanding the 'museum as mausoleum' (Bishop 2006a, 100). Such resistance, however, has existed both as a gesture in terms of form and content and as direct interventionism. As early as 1882, for instance, Jules Lévy pioneered works which pushed the anti-art message into the public realm in the Incohérents movement, through 'monochromatic canvases, introducing real

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<sup>12</sup> The Art Not Oil Coalition 'represents a cross-section of people [...] who believe that oil company logos represent a stain on our cultural institutions. [...] The groups in the Art Not Oil Coalition invite others to work with us directly and indirectly to end public arts and culture bodies promoting oil company interests. This is an essential step towards ending the stranglehold these companies have on the corridors of power, which is a major obstacle preventing the transition to a fair and low-carbon society' (Art Not Oil 2017).

objects into space of representation, and use of unconventional formats and materials’ (Solomon 2012, 309). Unsanctioned acts of theatrical dissent have often focused upon the practices behind museums, from issues of representation to financial partnerships: from Suffragette Mary Richardson’s slashing of Velázquez’s *Rokeby Venus* in the National Gallery in 1914 (as discussed in Chapter One), to the 1960s Guerrilla Art Action Group’s (GAAG) staging of performances such as *Blood Bath* (1969) to ‘call attention to the complicity of [cultural] institutions with broader forms of social and political domination, such as the war in Vietnam’ (Kester 2002, 5).<sup>13</sup> Whilst radical feminist collective Guerrilla Girls has engaged in theatrical dissent since the 1980s, it is perhaps most well-known for its culture jamming tactics in satirical posters, ‘Do Women Have to be Naked to get into the Met. Museum?’, and ‘The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist: Working Without the Pressure of Success’ (Guerrilla Girls 2017). Fluxus and Happening artists also performed in museum spaces to provide a critique ‘that rejected the organizational and viewing habits of galleries and museums’ (Higgins 2003, 150).

We should be careful to differentiate these unsanctioned interventionist performances from officially sanctioned ones as the act of performing in museums is not always unwelcome. For example, Bishop points out that MoMA showed performances from the 1960s onwards (most notably, Jean Tinguely’s *Homage to New York* in 1960, Allan Kaprow’s *Push and Pull* in 1963, and Yayoi Kusama’s *Grand Orgy* in 1968) (2014, 64). Indeed, Marina Abramović’s retrospective exhibition at MoMA, *The Artist is Present* (2010), ‘with approximately fifty works spanning over four decades of interventions’ (MoMA 2017), demonstrates how welcoming cultural institutions can be in embracing performance within their walls. In recent years, perhaps aligning with the Social Turn in contemporary art, museums have sought to exhibit live performance in order to ‘enliven its mauseumal atmosphere and play into the demands of an experience economy’ (Bishop 2014, 72). Indeed, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points

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<sup>13</sup> GAAG was formed in 1969 in New York and staged protest Guerrilla Performances. In the case of *Blood Bath*, it aimed to expose artwash, as *New York Times* reviewer Kimmelman recalls: ‘two men and two women began to wrestle in the lobby of the Museum of Modern Art until they were prone in a pool of blood, then suddenly got up and left, scattering behind them papers printed with the demand that the Rockefellers resign from the museum’s board. The papers claimed that the Rockefeller family used art to “disguise” its involvement in the manufacture of weaponry for the Vietnam War’ (1997).

out that museums compete with other attractions that privilege ‘experience, immediacy, and what the industry calls adventure’ (1998, 7). A cursory glance at London’s cultural attractions demonstrates that performance is no stranger to museum spaces. In performance, curators have found one possible answer to Benton’s question, ‘how can we transport people out of the ordinary into a journey of the imagination?’ (1997, 25).

Whilst performances may be more common in cultural institutions today, unsanctioned performances are not; even though they may provide activists with access to the very same ‘elite circles’ that companies wish to reach, creating their own rather different association with the venue and its values. The politics of staging an unwelcome performance, designed to disrupt, rather than add a structured, experiential value for the visitor, remains radical in intention and reception. For such work is designed to shame and question the cultural institution whose practices it seeks to highlight. One such company staging unsanctioned performances is BP or Not BP. As its namesake suggests, it was initially created in response to BP’s sponsorship of the Royal Shakespeare Company (and was originally known as the Reclaim Shakespeare Company). It is structured as a collaborative group:

a merry troupe of players aghast that our beloved Bard’s works and memory have been purloined by BP in a case of greenwash most foul. We are like a drop of water that in the ocean seeks another drop. Together, we will make a flood. (BP or Not BP 2015b)

### **Performance Tactics: Spatial and Symbolic Networks in the Museum**

*Deepwater Horizon Spill* will be analyzed first in relation to space, and second, in relation to two specific performance devices: disobedient commemoration and object performance. Staged, as it was, in the British Museum, the performance existed as a site-responsive Guerrilla Performance, as both the content and form drew upon the environment and spatial expectations. The physical environment, felt through museum architecture, imposes upon visitors a series of spatial and symbolic networks:

Museum architecture emerges as a dynamic social and cultural production: physical material deeply rooted in and produced through the lives and politics of multiple groups, agencies, governments and individuals and active, at every level, in the production of (unequal) social relations, (varied) social

experiences and the formation of (specific) social networks and identities. (MacLeod 2013, 182)

All five cultural venues sponsored by BP are architecturally imposing buildings imprinted upon London's physical and cultural landscape: columns, courtyards, and wrought iron gates, visible from afar, impress the visitor, before entering, as monuments of power and prestige. Once inside, the visitor may experience the museum 'as a sacred space [...] a place of sanctuary removed from the outside world' (Marstine in Marstine 2005, 9). Other than excited groups of school children, in my visits to the British Museum, I have frequently observed visitors assuming a different sensibility once inside: a shift in rhythm, slower movements, quieter footsteps, more hushed conversations. What then, is the effect of staging a Guerrilla Performance in the sacred space of a museum?

The performative modes employed at museums are far-reaching. On the one hand, as Kirschenblatt-Gimblett argues, exhibitions are fundamentally performative, 'for they are how museums perform the knowledge they create' (1998, 3). Also embedded within these performances, we can see played out what Macleod has termed 'unequal social relations' (2013, 182). To those involved in BP or Not BP's performances, the inequalities are clear: the British Museum offers a prominent platform for BP to establish and maintain a social licence to operate, with access to elite circles; all at a small price.

The radical potential of performing in a museum space lies in the resistance to the dominant performative practices expected in museum spaces. First, the liveness of performance contrasts with the museum's consolidated relationship with the past. Maleuvre argues that, in collecting past artefacts, the museum 'gives space and presence to history, inventing it, in effect, by defining the space of a ritual encounter with the past' (1999, 1). This contrasts markedly with the ephemerality of performance, as 'museums traffic mostly in material designated as representing the past, while theatrical performance [with actors' bodies] takes place resolutely in the present' (Bennett 2012, 5). Performance creates an opportunity for visitors to encounter the *present*, rather than the past, as it literally disturbs and interrupts their museum visits. Furthermore, such a disturbance, if successful, may directly confront visitors with the potential future, as the devastating impact of maintaining the status

quo and supporting the fossil fuel industry in a time of severe climate change, is raised.

Second, staging an acted performance in the museum disobeys the rules of the space; we normally ‘willingly submit to the rule of architecture. We obey walls, barriers, lines, and signs’ (2015, 129), as Schwarte argues. Whilst BP or Not BP does not dismantle walls or barriers in its performances, it attempts to utilize the space in the museum imaginatively and disobediently, positioning performances as a dramaturg might – in gathering the maximum number of visitors and in exploiting large, public spaces. It also resists the behavioural expectations imposed upon the space, where hushed tones and slow footsteps give way to bold actions and loud songs.

### **Reading The Great Court**

If we are, indeed, subjects of architecture, as Schwarte suggests, it is important to examine the spatial politics embedded within the architecture of the Great Court in the British Museum in order to analyze the efficacy of BP or Not BP’s performance. Designed by Norman Foster and erected in 2000, the Great Court was designed to ‘reveal hidden spaces, revise old spaces, create new spaces’ (British Museum 2015a). Hailed as a ‘major new civic and social space’ (Foster and Partners 2015), the largest covered public square in Europe, the *Guardian*’s Jonathan Glancey reported feeling ‘dwarfed, transfixed, and dumbstruck’ (2015) by its architecture. Significantly, he notes that being in the Great Court is ‘rather like being Gulliver on his travels’ (2015), ‘struck with utmost Fear and Astonishment’ (Swift 1992, 77) on seeing a giant in Brobdingnag. We can deduce, then, that the Great Court may make visitors feel small, perhaps even insignificant.

The Great Court design aims to enhance public participation.<sup>14</sup> Described as a ‘civic artery’ (Lomholt 2014) and an ‘urban project’ (Sudjic 2000), the politics of the Great Court space signal a shift towards public engagement. Squares, historically, have been recognized as critical performative spaces, marking a boundary, physically and symbolically. They are associated with order and authority as well as sites for community, public protest and resistance. From Tahir Square in Cairo to Syntagma

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<sup>14</sup> Further examination of public space will be analyzed in Chapters Three, Four, and Five.



Square in Athens, from Occupy's presence in Zuccotti Park to Trafalgar Square, squares continue to be 'central for the manifestation of resistance, because they are places of power' (Wolfrum 2014, 17). It is significant, then, that the Great Court is also a public square. As such, manifestations of protest embodied in Guerrilla Performances, within the British Museum's Great Court, may well have echoes for spectators from a wider protest repertoire.

Moreover, the Great Court is designed for commercial interests: 'they've got the mall. They've got the food court. [...] [It is] a zone for milling, browsing, munching and gulping' (Moore 2014). The hub of the space, the site of the famous Reading Room, is indeed surrounded by opportunities for consumption, with shops, cafés, and a restaurant and this very enterprise offers further opportunities for disruption.<sup>15</sup>

The British Museum offers BP or Not BP a rich selection of performance spaces, but the Great Court particularly lends itself to performance, even sharing similarities with a thrust stage design. Indeed, sanctioned performances frequently occur in this area, as do unsanctioned performances: the space allows for large crowds and exists at the centre of the museum.<sup>16</sup> On the ground level, at the foot of two broad stone staircases which encircle the former Reading Room, is a wide expansive space. The two staircases operate as entrance and exit points, whilst the eye is drawn to the foot of the staircase, as the centre of the Great Court. Visitors in the upstairs gallery have an excellent vantage point looking down towards this space (see Figure 2.1). The stone Reading Room creates a clean backdrop for performance, and documentation, while any visitors caught walking down the staircase once the performance has begun, have to either make a statement by walking across the 'sacred' stage space, or wait until the performance has finished. For the design is such that, just as performers behave theatrically and occupy space as though it were a stage, so museum-goers adopt the role of a more formal audience, bound by the conventions of theatre, engaged in watching a spectacle.

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<sup>15</sup> During the *Festivoil* performance, for instance, the British Museum was quick to act in closing shops and cafés for the performance duration, and barring entry to activists and visitors from other parts of the museum.

<sup>16</sup> In 2015, for example, the British Museum hosted an event sponsored by BP which included sanctioned Days of the Dead performances.



Figure 2.1: Great Court, British Museum.

***Deepwater Horizon Spill, 2 May 2015***

As a performer present during rehearsals and the performance, I will draw upon participant observation as well as edited video footage for analysis of the performance factors that affect efficacy.

Lasting approximately thirty minutes, and framed as a memorial and a lament for the affected ecology of the region and the human cost involved in the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, the intervention retold the disaster through song, puppetry, and through a direct-speech sermon and congregation.

The performance begins with two singers, clad in black, positioned at the foot of the Great Court staircase, singing 'Over the Rainbow'. Gathering crowds see a dolphin jumping and crashing through imagined waves, manipulated by a puppeteer. A giant pelican, animated by two puppeteers, joins the dolphin, creating a performance space for the other performers whilst playfully interacting with the crowd. The two singers then shift the tone of the performance considerably, humming the tune of Michael Jackson's 'Smooth Criminal'. The audience then sees a mass of black umbrellas creating an image of the oil spill, halfway down the right staircase. Slowly, I contribute, as a member of the ensemble of fifty performers, in the creation of a mass of oil, as we join the singers in humming the tune and, as a choreographed mass, inch our way down the stairs towards the wildlife. The singers, in their delivery of the song, become visibly angrier in response to witnessing this. We cry, 'why?', until a loud shriek is heard as the pelican is finally enveloped by the spill. Activist, performance artist, and preacher Reverend Billy enters the space, whilst we create a series of five lines directed towards the audience, holding our umbrellas high. Two banners are unfurled on the far right and left of the performance space. One reads, 'BP: World's Biggest Corporate Criminal'; the other states, 'End Oil Sponsorship'. A large umbrella, painted with BP's 'helios' logo, is erected, placed in the centre of the space and held out towards the audience. We hand out leaflets explaining the campaign's aims. Reverend Billy directs his 'earthellujah' sermon to the audience. We then walk towards the museum exit singing: 'The whole gulf coast is dying / BP keeps on lying / We will not be silent / No, no, no / They've got to go, go, go.'

### **Disobedient Commemoration**

Remembrance underscored and framed the performance thematically, gesturally, and aesthetically. Whilst it shared similarities with a public memorial or monument in aiming to 'get the story straight, honour the dead, revivify the community, and ensure against future loss' (Henstra 2009, 4), and in contrast to physical monuments which 'affirm and reinforce memories providing people with a sense of heritage and identity' (Frost 2013, 13), the performance can be situated as counter-memorial. It issued a challenge to BP, the British Museum, and the audience in offering an alternative perspective on both the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and the networks of power between the museum and BP. The performance aimed to commemorate the loss of life *whilst* highlighting to the British Museum that BP is not a socially credible partner by bringing a representation of death, loss of wildlife, poor working conditions, and irreversible environmental damage to ecological regions into the museum.

Henstra pertinently asks, ‘what does it mean, in the context of loss, to resist commemoration or use it disobediently, with an eye to challenging the assumptions upon which it normally lies?’ (2009, 7). First, it is significant that the performance drew upon commemoration, but that its ultimate aim was to expose BP’s artwashing. Therefore, the collective’s use of a counter-memorial impulse worked very differently to the artists Henstra discusses, who designed counter-monuments to question the ethics of commemoration and mock traditional monuments’ versions of history. *Deepwater Horizon Spill*, then, cannot, strictly speaking, be defined as counter-memorial: its focus was not upon questioning commemoration. Rather, it drew upon a counter-memorial impulse, whilst framing it within the structure of a memorial service, and used it disobediently by shifting the temporal focus from the past, to the present and future. The commemoration service created a frame for the audience whilst exposing the ethics of oil sponsorship and artwashing, and directly asked the audience whether the museum should renew BP’s sponsorship.

Structurally, the performance was designed to defy audience expectations. It incorporated three significant shifts in tone, pace, and style: moving from the family-friendly (playful, gentle, and familiar) to a death scene (faster, angrier) to a commemoration service (jarring, direct-address, dark humour). These shifts, in content, tone, and technique, were designed to unsettle the audience, awakening a critical alertness. The audience, initially, is not offered any indication that death, commemoration, or remembrance will feature, but is lured by a gentle opening; ‘Over the Rainbow’ is heard, whilst a dolphin and pelican puppet luxuriate in the space, interacting with the audience. Its effect is a pleasing one, adults and children alike smile in response to the puppets; the pelican playfully pecks a child in the audience, who responds by ducking his head (BP or Not BP 2015d, 26 seconds). Visitors document the performance on their phones. The use of puppets and familiar songs signals to the audience that the performance is family-friendly. It is not challenging and there are no signs of protest paraphernalia: no banners, placards, or megaphones can be seen. British Museum employees, acting as representatives of Security, have not intervened and visitors are likely to assume that the performance is sanctioned.

The death of the dolphin and pelican, therefore, due to the stylized, gentle mode of performance enacted moments before, appears all the more violent (BP or Not BP

2015d, 1 minute, 20 seconds). It is unexpected. The tension is underscored by the singers' angry cries of 'why?' as the pelican is submerged into the oily mass, and a loud shriek as the pelican dies. Finally, we see the corpse of the dolphin, lifeless and without its puppeteer, abandoned on the ground.

The shift from the death scene to the commemoration service is also unexpected; moving from a performance based upon ensemble storytelling to a stylized commemoration service and direct address, led by performance artist Reverend Billy. From narrative told through song, animated objects, and puppetry, to human megaphone, banners, and satirical commentary, the shift is clear.<sup>17</sup> The audience is likely to have gathered that the performance was unsanctioned upon witnessing the oil spill and hearing performers sing, 'it started with a crude spill, off the Gulf Coast, from the Rig of BP', but there can be no doubt that the performance is staged as protest as soon as the commemoration service begins, with the symbolic opening out of the umbrella painted as the BP 'helios' logo (as seen in Figure 2.2).



Figure 2.2: Reverend Billy begins the commemoration part of the performance.

<sup>17</sup> The practice of marking different performance modes through such shifts is also examined in Chapter Five in a discussion regarding my main PaR component, *HOUND* (2016).

The commemoration service is disobedient in that it is laced with contradictions. The commemoration service does not commemorate, but looks forward. The larger-than-life persona of Reverend Billy is multi-faceted. On the one hand, he performs a charismatic character worthy of respect: clearly noticeable in a crowd, he is clad in a bright, white suit and clerical collar, complete with booming voice. On the other hand, his appearance is disorderly: his suit crumpled, his bouffant hair unruly. He gesticulates wildly and walks shakily. He has neither the composure nor measured movements which signal a television evangelist. Instead, he enacts human vulnerability for the audience. Whilst his performance is energetic, he also demonstrates the burden of the task ahead; his voice breaks slightly when passionately declaring ‘we need to change how we live’. His delivery style also contradicts the content of his sermon. For, his delivery is humorous and satirical, parodying television evangelists (through rhythm, gesture, and intonation), yet the content of his words is serious. He is earnest in his message and delivers his words with conviction:

One sixth of all living things are on schedule to disappear.  
BP giving money to the British Museum to sponsor a memorial of civilization  
that the company is actively killing – doesn’t go together.  
It’s absurd.  
Earthellujah. (BP or Not BP 2015d, 1 minute, 56 seconds)

Ending his sermon with the word ‘earthellujah’ punctuates the performance, cutting the austere message with parody and humour, reminding the audience that, although performed with sober intentions, the performers do not take themselves too seriously. After all, their protest form is playful; their humour self-deprecating, challenging stereotypes regarding environmental activists.

The effect of using the frame of a memorial service, undoubtedly, was to bring death and destruction into the museum. The fusion of storytelling, song, puppetry, *and* a memorial service was defiantly disobedient in luring the audience, before confronting them with the core message. Memorial was also thematically drawn upon in Reverend Billy’s sermon, which sought to shame the British Museum and its complicity with BP in its bid to secure the social licence to operate in an area occupied by indigenous communities in Australia.

Yet the form of commemoration could have been utilized further, for greater effect. There was no mention of the deaths of eleven oil rig workers which resulted from the disaster. If the aim was to question the ethics of oil sponsorship, then offering real-life examples of the human cost of the fossil fuel industry may have garnered more public support. Neglecting to mention these deaths within the commemoration service, then, potentially diminished the efficacy of the performance.<sup>18</sup> Drawing more directly on the concept of the counter-memorial by actually commemorating loss of life, rather than gesturing towards it, would have created a greater impact. Moreover, its inclusion would have highlighted BP's own silence regarding the loss of human life in this disaster.

The performance also ended abruptly, as performers exited the museum whilst singing. It did not, therefore, cater for mobilized audience members, who may have felt compelled to take action as a result of their work.<sup>19</sup> Although leaflets were handed out during the performance, the performers did not, for instance, encourage visitors to offer feedback to the British Museum regarding BP sponsorship, nor offer direct opportunities for people to participate in future actions. It could be argued that activists hoped that the association with BP alone would be enough to discredit the British Museum, or simply to shame it into abandoning its sponsorship. However, the decision not to mobilize public support does seem to indicate not only a lost opportunity but an example of how care for the aesthetic may undermine political intention.

### **Performing Objects: The Umbrella**

As a form, puppetry promotes transparency and a convention of collaboration.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, performers create an alternative, imaginative reality, whilst alerting audiences to the mechanisms behind their work. One could read the collective's

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<sup>18</sup> We did not directly discuss these deaths in preparation for the performance.

<sup>19</sup> The ensemble did not deface or destroy any BP logos, as many earlier protest interventions had done (as discussed earlier). BP or Not BP has, in the past, asked theatre audiences to tear out the logo from programmes but has not vandalized any logos in the British Museum; its approach is to create unsanctioned, but legal interventions.

<sup>20</sup> Arguably, puppetry relies upon collaboration more directly than other performance forms; this is especially the case when working in an ensemble to animate different parts of a puppet's body: the legs, the arms, the head. Bicat, for instance, perceives puppetry as being distinct from other forms precisely because its greatest strength is collaboration (2007, 25).

choice of puppetry as an implicit reproach to the lack of transparency involved in the co-performance of legitimacy by BP and the British Museum. The decision to use umbrellas, however, was not primarily made for aesthetic, artistic, dramaturgical, or semiotic reasons. Nor was it with the intention of reclaiming the everyday; nor a bid for accessibility (in that it would be an object that most people would already own). It was a practical decision, driven largely by the museum's unofficial policy of confiscating items that may be used in performance.<sup>21</sup> Umbrellas were used because of their very ubiquity; their ability to blend well into the landscape of the museum. Electing to use an everyday object which any British Museum visitor may have, then, was important in guaranteeing that the performance went ahead. People employed by the British Museum as security may safely confiscate Viking helmets or a banner, but banning umbrellas would appear absurd. The British Museum, then, albeit indirectly, helped to create the everyday aesthetic embraced by BP or Not BP in later performances. In other words, it helped to create a more memorable brand for the collective, and one which has gained traction in the media.<sup>22</sup>

However unintended, the choice of umbrella created a more efficacious performance, through its historical, artistic, everyday, and protest resonance. Into the sacred museum space, the performers introduced a mass-produced everyday object, a black umbrella, but also an object which has been used historically to challenge a world-view. Lautréamont's phrase, written in 1869 in *Les Chants de Maldoror*, 'as beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table' (1978, 217) became one of the most important principles of the Surrealist aesthetic: the enforced juxtaposition of two different realities that worked to challenge the viewer's perception. It is this everyday object that stands as such a challenge in opposition to, and also as a counterpoint to, the artefacts of the museum (especially the traditionally historical British Museum).

The fetishized museum object has been separated from its original context: temporally, spatially, politically, and socially. Objects are protected from dust and hands alike, behind glass which frames and renders objects worthy of examination. In

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<sup>21</sup> The history of the British Museum confiscating props was discussed in rehearsals by a core member of the group, and the idea of utilizing everyday objects was raised in this context.

<sup>22</sup> For instance, images of the *Festivoil* (2015) performance have been used multiple times in articles discussing oil sponsorship published at a later date (Webster 2016; Brown 2016a).



the selection and placing of artefacts the museum imparts a narrative which promotes specific values. As Naomi Stead points out, ‘objects play a crucial role as material evidence supporting a particular version of the world and events in it’ (2007, 38). From the objects on display a story is told; one which elevates the status of Britain upon the world stage (Duthie 2011, 15). In contrast, animating everyday objects in BP or Not BP’s performance may work to disrupt these narratives created by BP and the British Museum.

The manner by which the everyday is animated; in this case the animation of the umbrella, has an effect on how performers work and their relationship to each other. The performers came from diverse backgrounds; only half of the group had had professional performing arts training, and many new members (with no experience in direct action or performance) participated in *Deepwater Horizon Spill*. This diversity meant that, in working together, performers exemplified the value of collective action. One performer with an umbrella cannot create an image of an oil spill, but fifty performers, when working together, can (as demonstrated in Figure 2.3).

Furthermore, the tactic of bringing the lifeless alive, of animating umbrellas through puppetry, affected group dynamics: in rehearsal and performance, performers worked as one unit. With a strict time restriction of two rehearsals, there was no time for discussion.<sup>23</sup> In rehearsal we initially used our umbrellas to conceal our bodies in an attempt to create a joined-up image of an oil spill. Practising on stairs, it became clear, however, that when we did this, large gaps in the composition emerged, thereby destroying the overall image. In working with umbrellas, it became evident, almost wordlessly, that collaboration was necessary if the image were to succeed. Without speaking to those around us, we autonomously decided how to organize ourselves: a woman began to use her umbrella to conceal my body whilst I held my umbrella over a man beside me. A few adjustments were made to expand the image further, but very few words were spoken. Puppetry demanded such collaboration.<sup>24</sup> Bell argues that

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<sup>23</sup> There were two four-hour rehearsals, one taking place the day before the performance, and one on the day of the performance.

<sup>24</sup> Although some theatre practitioners engaged with animating objects understand their work as being separate to puppetry, many do not. In fact, object theatre is now widely accepted at puppet festivals (Williams 2014, 27). Further, as Williams states, ‘the distinction between the “living puppet”, with its basis in biology, and a theatre of purely material forms disappears [...] “The puppet” and a theatre of impersonal objects are not the extreme ends of a linear

using puppetry ‘assumes that inanimate matter contains agency not simply to mimic or mirror, but also to shape and create’ (Bell in Posner, Orenstein, Bell 2015, 5). What was created in this performance extended *beyond* the artistic medium, and into the social sphere: social relations were equalized in practice. In the case of Guerrilla Performance, the effect of the symbolism of this collaborative, prefigurative act should not be understated.



Figure 2.3: The ensemble use black umbrellas to create the image of a moving oil spill, inching its way towards the pelican in the Great Court, British Museum.

For audiences watching the performance, the umbrella may act as a reminder of its use in the wider protest repertoire: as a tool of resistance. Photographs from the Hulton archive, for instance, show suffragettes using umbrellas in Hyde Park in 1919 as a placard: ‘No Vote, No Tax’ (Hulton 2015). In 2007, protests in Latvia were termed the ‘Umbrella Revolution’ because of the widespread use of umbrellas used by activists as protection against harsh wintry blizzards. Perhaps the best known in recent history was the use of umbrellas by pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong in 2014

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dramatic spectrum, but on a continuum in which, from opposite directions, they come full circle to meet each other’ (2014, 27).

when they protected protesters from teargas, and pepper spray, and became a critical symbol for the social movement: the power dynamics of police, armed with teargas, shields, and helmets created a strong visual comparison with activists, armed only with the ‘humble broolly’ (Henley 2014). *TIME* published a memorable, iconic image of an activist, defiantly holding up two umbrellas in the face of teargas clouds (Beech 2014). Meanwhile, artists flooded both occupied spaces and social media with protest art in the form of images, photographs, installations, and performances featuring umbrellas. The umbrella, and particularly the yellow umbrella, in keeping with the colour adopted by pro-democracy activists, symbolized democracy, collectivity, and resistance. The prominence of the umbrella as a tool in BP or Not BP’s performance, used disobediently and not fulfilling its intended function, can be read within the wider context of the iconic image of the umbrella as a symbol of resistance.

### **Efficacy**

BP or Not BP, through its brand of ‘guerrilla Shakespeare’, aims to make a ‘significant contribution to ushering in the end of the oil sponsorship age by kicking BP out of the arts’ (BP or Not BP 2015b). More specifically, in the case of *Deepwater Horizon Spill*, it hoped to contribute towards a wider campaign, a culmination of performances which challenge the British Museum into ending BP’s corporate sponsorship. In this aim it has failed. The British Museum renewed BP’s cultural sponsorship in 2016 and whether *Deepwater Horizon Spill* exposed or dismantled BP’s performance of legitimacy is questionable. The performance script did not include the words ‘BP’ or ‘British Museum’ very often. Although attention was drawn to the disaster, its connection with BP and BP’s connection with the British Museum, and hence the museum’s connection to the disaster through association with BP, remained, arguably, understated. Nevertheless, there is, in the media and in the culture industry, a great deal more scrutiny regarding the ethics of accepting sponsorship from fossil fuel companies (Maltby 2017; Sunyer 2016; Adams 2016).

Moreover, even if the performance failed to secure the end of BP’s sponsorship of the museum, it was successful in other critical ways:

1. The performance went ahead, unhindered. BP or Not BP, in contrast to some activist groups, has a policy of being open about its plans; advertising

performances online whilst restricting specific details, such as timings, to a smaller group. The British Museum, therefore, may well have known the performance date. The collective, therefore, presented the British Museum with a dilemma: to prevent the performance from happening by barring entry to prominent performers, risking adverse publicity for the museum, and gifting the protest with a greater public platform or to allow the performance to take place. The fact that the protest went ahead despite the museum being forewarned may be deemed a success.



Figure 2.4: Crowd gathers for *Deepwater Horizon Spill* performance (2015).

2. The performance successfully caused disruption. If we examine Figure 2.4, for instance, we can see that the size of the crowd was fairly large and visitors did not walk into the performance space (the invisible circle created by the audience). During the performance, visitors did not walk down either staircase, but paused to watch. We, therefore, managed to attract attention and hold the space for the duration of the performance.

Many visitors also documented the performance as soon as it began, as seen in the footage of the performance (BP or Not BP 2015d, 1 minute, 40 seconds). Significantly, we found many audience members keen to accept pamphlets,

holding out their hands even before we had reached them, demonstrating their desire to receive further information.

3. The performance was disseminated to a fairly wide audience online, receiving 35,000 views online via *Facebook* and 48,272 views via *Youtube*. However, it received no attention from mainstream media, perhaps, because it was not planned as far in advance as other performances (the *Festivoil* performance, for instance, had been planned for a matter of months rather than weeks). In fact, the lack of official media attention is significant. *Festivoil*, occurring only four months after *Deepwater Horizon Spill*, attracted attention from the national media: *Guardian* (Brown 2015), *Evening Standard* (Proto 2015), *Business Reporter* (2015), ITV (ITV 2015); and also from international press outlets from France, North America, and Malaysia: *Libération* (Libération 2015), *Lonely Planet* (Smart 2015), *Breitbart* (Breitbart 2015), *I-D* (Hay 2015), *Observer* (Voien 2015), the *Sun Daily* (Sun Daily 2015). It is also significant that these sources were representative of the entire political spectrum, even attracting attention from the far-right platform, *Breitbart*. Such widespread attention is critical, both in reaching a wider, non self-selecting readership, but also in, quite literally, reaching the breakfast tables of those with the power to sever links with BP, such as British Museum board members. The contrast between these performances, in terms of news coverage, may also be partly attributed to *Festivoil*'s performance being part of a much wider campaign by *Art Not Oil* which included fifteen other campaign groups and much larger participant numbers of approximately 250. Such a contrast in reception, however, raises questions regarding the efficacy of *Deepwater Horizon Spill*, as the success of a Guerrilla Performance may be measured by its ability to reach a wider audience. It is also worth noting that *Festivoil* video footage received a very small number of views online: only 1697 views on *Youtube*. It may well be the case that *Festivoil* received so much news coverage because of the stark visual image it created: performers dressed in black, holding umbrellas, spelled the word 'NO' on the floor of the British Museum in the Great Court. The position of *Art Not Oil* was accessible, the meaning clear, whereas *Deepwater Horizon Spill* presented a

more sophisticated Guerrilla Performance, which was far less easily captured in one image.

4. It is significant that the *Festivoil* performance drew upon the same tools and aesthetics created in the *Deepwater Horizon Spill* performance: black umbrellas and black clothing. These were sufficiently successful for the ensemble to re-visit them. And perhaps more importantly, the same aesthetic has been drawn upon in different contexts. For instance, during the Conference of Parties in Paris, 2015, activists staged a Guerrilla Performance in protest against oil sponsorship of the Louvre Museum, and similarly utilized black umbrellas and black clothing. Since then, a protest group, Libérons le Louvre has formed, staging a series of Guerrilla Performances in protest against Total's sponsorship. As such, BP or Not BP has contributed to a wider social movement in creating a recognizable aesthetic.
5. Close bonds are formed in working collaboratively with communities directly affected by BP's activities. For instance, the collective created a performance in October 2015 where Colombian trade unionist Gilberto Torres spoke directly about his experiences.<sup>25</sup> From staging Guerrilla Performances and working with the London Mexico Solidarity group to the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), from the Indigenous Australian campaigners, First Contact 1770, to Justice Mexico Now, BP or Not BP has sought to create meaningful collaborations with international activist groups. By forging these reciprocal bonds and alliances, members contribute towards strengthening links between international activist groups in staging their concerns directly in the British Museum. Such collaboration works to sustain performers and activists who may be geographically dispersed but share a common goal.

*Deepwater Horizon Spill* is therefore experienced by performers in the UK and international activists not as a one-off event but as a contributor to multiple actions, and this, in the context of global resistance, validates their

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<sup>25</sup> Gilberto Torres is a former trade unionist representing workers in the oil industry: 'he was abducted and tortured by Colombian paramilitaries in 1992. He believes his abduction was ordered by Ocesa, a joint-venture pipeline company that was part-owned by BP. He is now taking legal action against BP' (BP or Not BP 2015e).

work and invests it with meaning and significance. This belief in the significance of their work sustains performers when achieving their aim looks like a ‘tall order’ (BP or Not BP 2015b). Such commitment to a common end has meant that BP or Not BP has created 42 Guerrilla Performances since 2012; 27 of these have been staged in the British Museum.

6. The methods used by BP or Not BP, inspired not only other performances but also activities in non-performative areas: in research, journalism, engagement, lobbying, and media work. Significant relationships have been formed with international academics and activists engaged in resisting oil drilling in their local areas. On several occasions, it has invited prominent activists to engage with, support, or directly join performances, research, and discussions. Members have also filed multiple Freedom of Information requests relating to BP’s influence upon exhibitions, including a request for the precise details of funding BP offered to the British Museum (which, until their request, was not public information). They have written articles for newspapers (Garrard 2016a, 2016c; Worth 2015, 2016), published reports about BP’s funding (Garrard 2016b), and spoken on panels regarding the ethics of accepting oil sponsorship (LADA 2015c). This diversity of activity may point to the inadequacy and impotence of performance per se to challenge large corporations; it might also point to its generative ability to provoke other forms of dissent. More recently, it has been involved in creating a tactical campaign, ‘Fossil Free £5 tickets’; providing alternative funding (through crowd-funding) for the BP-sponsored Royal Shakespeare Company’s scheme of providing £5 tickets for young people. As such, its Guerrilla Performances exist as the tip of the iceberg, and do not necessarily reflect the extent and diversity of organizing and campaigning which goes on behind the scenes. It is important, too, to note that the ensemble at the outset gave itself the goal of making a ‘significant contribution to ushering in the end of the oil sponsorship age’ (BP or Not BP 2015b); it aimed for no more than making ‘a contribution’ and it has indeed made a significant contribution.

## **Liberate Tate**

### **Taking the Tate at Their Word: Disobedience Makes History**

In January 2010, an art-activist and member of the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination, John Jordan, was invited by the Tate Modern to facilitate a workshop which explored the ‘most appropriate way to approach political issues within a publicly funded institution’ (2010). Jordan entitled the workshop ‘Disobedience Makes History: Exploring Creative Resistance at the Boundaries Between Art and Life’. Shortly before the workshop began, the facilitators received a message from a Tate curator stating:

It is important to be aware that we cannot host any activism directed against Tate and its sponsors, however we very much welcome and encourage a debate and reflection on the relationship between art and activism. (Jordan 2010, 34)

The curator’s email ostensibly supports Jordan’s belief that, within the art world, many galleries and curators ‘pretend to do politics’ (2010, 34) ; making gestures towards activism but halting proceedings when action is involved. This email, however, has far wider implications: the Tate is willing to censor its artists on behalf of BP or other sponsors. Despite its prominence in the British art scene, this email offers a glimpse of the power dynamics at play between the Tate and BP. The Tate, known for its progressive attitude, is willing to risk its reputation for fear of causing BP discontent; a far cry from its aim of ‘being receptive to new ideas, encouraging debate’ (Tate 2015b). The curator’s attempts at censoring and pre-approving workshop material, however, misfired as Jordan projected this email onto the walls of the Tate. The curator responded, according to Jordan, by trying to ‘sabotage the process of discussion, claiming it was limiting the participants’ experience’ (2010, 34). Workshop participants, incensed by BP’s powerful grip of the Tate, responded by creating the collective, Liberate Tate, and by staging a series of Guerrilla Performances, including *Time Piece* (2015).

## **Space in the Tate Modern**

O’Doherty draws our attention to the paradox of the modern art gallery: in presenting political artworks in a space frequently designed to emulate sacred, religious spaces,



‘untouched’ by time, it becomes divorced from both time and the everyday, and perhaps even from political action (2000, 7). Artist Jake Chapman, a ferocious Tate Modern critic, expresses the view that the sacred nature of the Tate elicits a passive, unchallenging response from visitors, thereby, not providing a suitable space to provoke dissent: ‘things that are sacred aren’t questioned’ (Chapman in Smith, 2003). However, it may also be thought that such a setting offers visitors moments of radical contemplation and reflection. Distanced from the everyday, visitors may be able to perceive political art with more clarity. Furthermore, Liberate Tate argues that it is precisely the ‘sacredness and neutrality of the gallery that we are able concurrently to utilize and disrupt’ (Liberate Tate 2012, 137).

Liberate Tate pertinently asks ‘to what extent does the site imbue the performances with the cultural value infused in the sacred space of the gallery, and thus give the work power?’ (Liberate Tate 2012, 136). *Time Piece* was largely understood as a commissioned performance. The disciplines of durational performance, as well as textual intervention, are not out of place with what Tate Modern visitors might expect. Because of this, some visitors may have missed its core message, understanding it as a sanctioned work. Here though, lies the power of *Time Piece*. Liberate Tate’s message was communicated using the same vocabulary, the same forms as other art works curated by the Tate.<sup>26</sup> The sacred space of the gallery dictates that Live Art, even when critical of the Tate, is offered protection to a degree not given to activists entering the Tate using traditional protest repertoires: chants, banners, and marches. By dissenting theatrically, Liberate Tate was not only able to complete its performance, but created an intervention which may even have started to unravel artwash, in inviting visitors to engage reflectively upon the issues through art.

Similar to BP or Not BP’s performance, the space in which *Time Piece* was staged contributed towards its success. However, the modern art museum, in this case the Tate Modern, operates differently to the British Museum, which, arguably, reinforces a sense of heritage and nationhood. From an architectural perspective, the Tate

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<sup>26</sup> The Tate frequently hosts durational performances within the gallery: *Creases With Bedfellows* (2016), *Uncounted (performance 9)* (2017). Indeed, during 2014-2016, the Tate commissioned a two year research project entitled *Performance at Tate: Into the Space of Art*, which included durational performance as one of its key areas of research (Westerman 2016).

Modern was designed as a civic statement. Rather than tear down a disused power station, the building was transformed as a ‘cathedral of cool’ (Observer 2000), an icon of the twenty-first century (Dean 2008). The Turbine Hall, the performance location, was designed with the intention of emulating a public street (Tate 2000). Here, ‘people can promenade, enjoy the view from the bridge and balconies, see and be seen as performers in one of the most dramatic spaces in London’ (Gale 2012). Such a design, then, may be said to be gesturing towards democratizing space, as Moore argues, the space ‘does not dictate to visitors how they should experience it, [...] in a time when public space is used intensively to market, to sell and deliver messages’ (2005, 30). Certainly, visitors break coded behavioural expectations of gallery spaces, as Dean points out: ‘you would not find visitors lying on the floor of the entrance to the National Gallery, but at Tate Modern this is acceptable behaviour, as is picnicking as you might in a public park or square’ (2008, 106).<sup>27</sup>

Similar to the British Museum, which also shares the notion of public space, the Tate, and Turbine Hall, is a private space surrounded by commercial outlets: a café, restaurant, and shops. Its doors are closed to the public after 10pm. And, unlike a public street, the Turbine Hall has members of Security policing the space.<sup>28</sup> The space is also far more remarkable than a public street: the Turbine Hall is a destination site. Approximately 56% of visitors cite architecture as their reason for visiting (Tate 2015c). The fact that the public perceive the Turbine Hall as open, public space, and treat it as such, provides Liberate Tate with an interesting paradigm in which to perform. What is the effect of performing in a private space, which is perceived as belonging to the people?

The Turbine Hall presented Liberate Tate with an effective stage. Though pitched as a street, the advantages of performing inside the Turbine Hall far outweigh performing in an actual public street, open to outside elements. Balconies and levels provide access points for audiences to witness performances, one another, and staff. When

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<sup>27</sup> The Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris is often perceived in a similar way: as a political statement which democratizes space. Indeed, the Centre was awarded the Pritzker Prize in 2007, and the Jury Chairman, Lord Palumbo, stated that the design had ‘revolutionized museums, transforming what had once been elite monuments into popular places of social and cultural exchange, woven into the heart of the city’ (Pritzker 2017).

<sup>28</sup> The relationship between private security employees, who police pseudo public spaces, and performers, is discussed in further depth in Chapter Five, in relation to my PaR, *HOUND* (2016).

performing in what is arguably the most iconic, and certainly most public part of the building, it is also difficult for staff to conceal performances. The hall may be closed but it cannot be hidden. Equally, if the space is perceived as a public street, and visitors treat it as such, then staging a protest within the same space places members of staff in a difficult position: removing performers would not only be widely witnessed but would also undermine the perceived democratic nature of the space. Therefore, the multiple meanings which the space imparts created ripe conditions for Liberate Tate to perform in and disrupt.

### ***Time Piece, Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, 13-14 June 2015***

The performance begins at high tide on 13 June at 11.53am. Liberate Tate performers, dressed in black, wearing black veils, and carrying black luggage trolleys, enter the Turbine Hall through the main Tate Modern entrance. Seventy books regarding art, politics, activism, climate change, the oil industry, and creative disobedience are positioned in a line at the far end of the hall.<sup>29</sup> Performers drape black veils over their faces, positioned in two lines at the back of the hall, looking directly towards visitors entering the gallery. Performers then begin to inscribe, using charcoal, upon the hall floor, quotations from the books on offer. Framed as durational performance and Live Art, visitors are able to watch performers whilst they read books, searching for quotations. The performers continue to read and inscribe the expansive Turbine Hall space until approximately 9pm. The gallery usually closes at 10pm. Uncertain of whether security intends to use force to compel performers to leave, ask the police to carry out an eviction order, or permit the performance to continue overnight, the collective begins to set up a self-sustained living space. Uniform black sleeping bags are laid out in a circle to imitate the BP helios logo. A compostable toilet is constructed, and performers eat dinner. After some discussion, the Tate agrees to allow the collective to stay until morning. Some performers sleep whilst others continue to inscribe quotations.

In the morning the Tate closes the main gallery entrance, instructing visitors to enter using alternative entrances. All direct access to the Turbine Hall is restricted. The balcony on the first

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<sup>29</sup> The full detailed bibliography of the texts used in *Time Piece* is available in Appendix One. A wide range of texts was present, including fictional works, official documents, and philosophy: George Orwell's *1984* (2008), Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *Building Tate Modern* (2004), the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (2014), and *Tate Ethics Policy* (2014).

floor, however, offers visitors an aerial view of the hall and the collective continues its performance for the full 25 hours, as originally planned. At 12.55pm, again high tide, performers leave the space whilst Tate visitors break into applause. People, employed by the Tate as cleaners, then use equipment to erase the words and markings created by the collective.

I will utilize various edited video footage of the performance, photography, articles, and social media responses to analyze *Time Piece* in terms of performance tactics: first, in its durational form and staging as an occupation; second, in terms of performing criticism; and third, in terms of agency and sustenance.

### **Duration and Occupation**

Time and space featured prominently in *Time Piece*. It drew upon time in terms of content, and referenced the philosophy of time and ethics of slowness in using the frame of durational performance. This frame was multi-faceted in terms of efficacy, and existed as a type of Trojan horse. Durational performance is often commissioned by the Tate and visitors may well expect to see work of this nature. Indeed, artist Frances O’Neill was initially unaware the performance was unsanctioned (O’Neill in Mathieson 2015a). However, as discussed earlier, the durational frame was also a defiant challenge to Tate management, a ‘stepping up of their protest’ (Tarman in Kaye 2015), in that it put the onus on the Tate to make a decision to sanction the occupation or remove dissenting voices from the premises.

Liberate Tate, in timing its performance in accordance with the Thames high tide, aimed to reference explicitly the vulnerability of the local landscape against rising tides: a well-known signifier of climate change. In its own words, the aim was to:

explore lunar time, tidal time, ecological time, geological time and all the ways in which we are running out of time: from climate change to gallery opening hours; from the Anthropocene to the beginning of the end of oil sponsorship of the arts. (Liberate Tate 2015a)

Equally important though, was the effect of bringing the outside *inside* the gallery. In framing the timed performance in response to nature, rather than ‘clock’ time, the performance also, arguably, raised the idea that it was staged in defence of nature. In working against linear clock time, associated with labour and production, the

durational nature of the performance aimed to shift the way in which the audience perceived time.

Durational performance offers diverse and layered perspectives, as Heathfield and Hsieh argue: ‘durational aesthetics gives access to other temporalities; to times that will not submit to Western culture’s linear, progressive meta-narratives, its orders of commodification’ (2009, 23). The effect of being in a museum, as discussed earlier, bestows a suspended sense of time to visitors. Arguably, then, durational performance may be understood as a challenge in reclaiming and even de-commodifying time. Shalson argues, for instance, that one of the most important effects of durational performance is in slowing down ‘an ever-accelerating pace of life’ (2012, 100). The ethics of slowness, embraced in durational performance, also has connections with the Slow Movement. Associated with preservation, conservation, and sustainability, this movement also attempts to counter the accelerated speed of capitalist society through practical means; by supporting the conservation of local food traditions, for instance. Within this context, durational performance may work to dismantle boundaries between art and life. Indeed, many visitors paused for a length of time to watch the performance. However, their spectating differed from that which we might expect to find within any gallery, in looking at an art work; watching live bodies moving within the space requires spectating of a different order. The visitors began to resemble more of a theatre audience, in this respect.

### **Performing Criticism**

Endurance, fragility, and commitment are also critical aspects of durational performance. In *Time Piece*, the performer’s body, as an instrument of dissent, endeavours and labours as hours passed. If we examine Figure 2.5, we can see performers writing with charcoal, on their hands and knees on the cool, hard flooring, their vision impaired through a black veil. Furthermore, performers continued to perform whilst experiencing a palpable concern that Tate employees, acting as Security, would remove them.



Figure 2.5: Visitor spectates *Time Piece*, reading the text whilst Liberate Tate performers inscribe the floor with quotations.

Political theatrical performance runs the risk of alienating audiences by taking a didactic and ‘heavy-handed’ approach and it is helpful to examine how Liberate Tate avoided this, and allowed the audience to interact with politics through art. In focusing upon silent action, the silent choreography of movement, through inviting audiences to collaborate, to collude with the performers in creating meaning through an active interpretation of disparate pieces of text, the collective staged a performance which audiences responded to as art first, and politics second. Far from alienating audiences, the performance managed to create a balance between drawing audiences in and confronting them with political argument.

In *Time Piece*, Liberate Tate made the decision not to utilize voice. The words inscribed upon the floor remain unheard and unvoiced. Liberate Tate had been staging Guerrilla Performances for a total of five years when it performed *Time Piece*. As such, its decision not to speak in the performance may have been a comment upon the Tate’s response to its protests, which, at the time of performance, in 2015, were unheard. Not speaking also placed additional emphasis upon the content and meaning of the written word. Writing as a form of protest, arguably, has more efficacy as it can reach wider audiences (who were not present during the live act of writing).

Liberate Tate describes its work as, ‘mostly silent, we speak through action and images; using our bodies in singularly direct and powerful ways to communicate our message’ (Liberate Tate 2012, 136). Liberate Tate avoided being didactic by performing criticism; the selected texts were all pertinent to its argument. The collective created ‘a tide of stories and narratives flowing in waves up the slope of Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall’ (Liberate Tate 2015) which required something from the audience. In literary studies, the practice of textual intervention or collage is seen as a ‘critical-creative’ practice, and this same creative process of intervention in *Time Piece*, textual re-writing and re-making, became a critical tool for analysis. For instance, a passage from Naomi Klein’s *This Changes Everything* (2015), in merging with a policy document such as the Tate Ethics Policy, creates an intertextuality and thus another layer of meaning as Klein’s words are seen in juxtaposition. Both intertextuality and textual interventions exist as literary devices, advocated as a means of gaining further insight and new connections between texts, but not as a performance staged for an audience. This unexpected use of text by Liberate Tate was effective in offering audiences the opportunity of creating connections between fragmented passages and assemblages, based upon their own references and personal knowledge. Audiences were invited to become co-creators of meaning.

Further, Liberate Tate treated the textual intervention as performance, paying special attention to materials and the body. Its textual intervention shares similarities with Hélène Cixous’ writing experiments, including the development of ‘l’écriture féminine’, as both push for understanding bodily experience to be as significant as text. It is the way in which the body expresses, inscribes, and even embodies these words which is significant to both Cixous and Liberate Tate. Cixous perceives the process of writing as bodily experience and art, relating it to painting, music, and philosophy (Cixous 1976). Liberate Tate, equally, staged the writing as an art form. Despite the pertinent nature of selected texts, it was the *act* of writing which drew audiences. Due to the vast size of the space, and the size of the written text, many visitors on the balcony were unable to read the text. Yet, crowds gathered as the action of performers writing upon the floor was, for many, an event worth witnessing. Artist, O’Neill, for instance, stated that she was ‘really, really moved. [...] I was just mesmerized by the visuals. I didn’t know what they were writing, I just got filled with a deep sadness’ (O’Neill in Mathieson 2015a).

Liberate Tate attempted to capture thought in the moving image of their bodies. Performers physically embodied criticism of BP's performance of legitimacy enacted through the Tate; all without uttering a word. Instead, in using the traditional drawing material of charcoal, performers created an amplified noise, as the awkward squeak of charcoal on concrete echoed around the hall.<sup>30</sup> The performers transformed the everyday experience of writing into an extraordinary one; the action of writing was heightened, both in scale and meaning.<sup>31</sup> Writing was elevated from a task-based exercise, becoming a highly performative act, a mass choreography of dissent which demanded attention from the entire body, rather than just the hand; the head, shoulders, arms, hands, knees and toes being engaged to maintain balance and keep the flow of writing even and large. Moments of action were contrasted with moments of stillness. The performers, in silently reading their texts in a stylized way, created moments of pause and stillness; thereby inviting the audience likewise to spend a moment in quiet reflection (as seen in Figure 2.6).

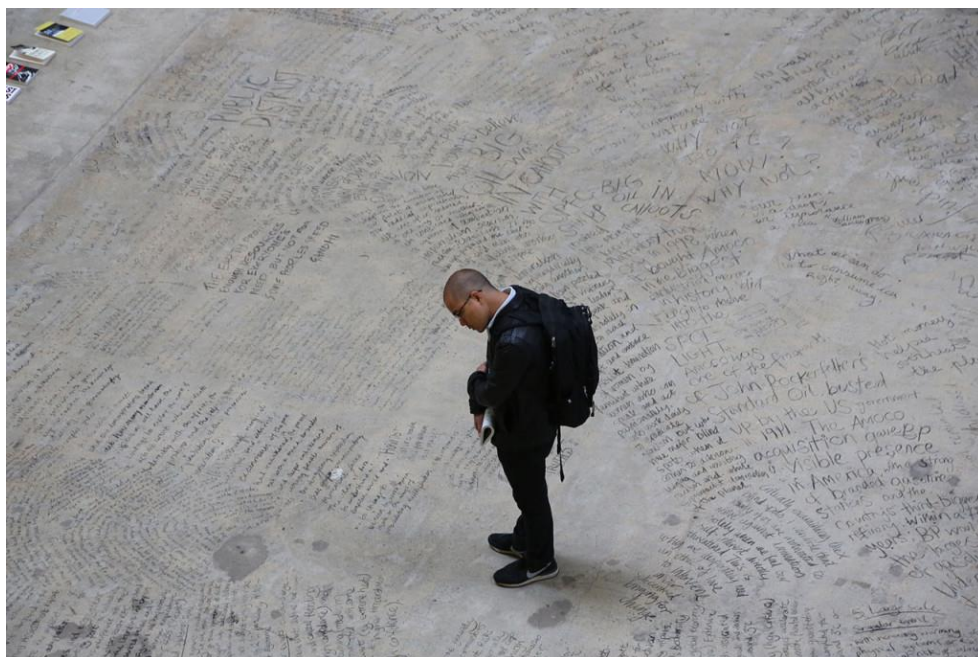


Figure 2.6: A Tate visitor reads passages written by performers during *Time Piece*.

<sup>30</sup> A recording of the sounds created by Liberate Tate is available online on *Soundcloud*, entitled 'Sound Art: Sounds of Willow Charcoal from Liberate Tate's *Time Piece*' (Bamber 2015b).

<sup>31</sup> We can draw comparisons between Liberate Tate's work here, which embedded action within art, and a whole tradition in art history: Action Painting and gestural abstraction. Utilizing text in art also has a rich and varied history, from the work of the Lettrists to Cy Twombly.





Figure 2.7: Tate Visitor moves across the floor of the Turbine Hall, taking large strides to avoid smudging the text.

Further, *Time Piece* also activated the audience, physically. If keen to read the text, visitors often had to move, as passages were written in different directions; from small spirals to six metres in length. This effect of activating audiences physically (as demonstrated in Figure 2.7) may have been accidental, but it embedded visitors within the work as part of a wider composition. From the balconies (at least, on the first day), other visitors would have been likely to understand the work as participatory, as audiences occupied the space, interacting with the performance. As *Liberate Tate* performed criticism, audience members performed their engagement with the work, visible from afar.

## Agency and Sustenance



Figure 2.8: Liberate Tate's 'living area'. Performers laid out sleeping bags and one Liberate Tate member updates social media.

What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life. That art is something which is specialized or done by experts who are artists. But wouldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or house be an object, but not our life? (Foucault 1991, 350)<sup>32</sup>

After 10pm, for twelve hours until Tate opened the following day, Liberate Tate performers used, as Foucault suggests, everyday life as art, as they 'lived as form'. Through engaging with everyday activities of eating and sleeping they blurred boundaries between art and life as Foucault desired, but perhaps more importantly, established the space as their own. At this stage of the performance, the public gaze shifts considerably; visitors and Tate workers have exited the building and only several security staff remain on site. The number of performers, then, outweighs the staff. Their only audience is the employees acting in the capacity of security and the mediatized lens of surveillance equipment. The Turbine Hall is theirs for an evening. This reclamation of space, arguably, enacted a political cause by de-commodifying

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<sup>32</sup> The utilization of everyday life in performance is discussed further in Chapter Four.

the gallery and democratizing the space in returning the public institution back to the people.

Occupying the space also played a critical role in affording performers agency. Activist and writer Rebecca Solnit notes that, in terms of measuring efficacy of protest, ‘what’s often forgotten is its impact on the protestors, who themselves suddenly become the public in literal public space, no longer an audience, but a force’ (2000, 227). In carrying out everyday activities in the gallery, the performers experienced a feeling of joy and celebration (Bell 2015). However temporary or symbolic this reclamation of space, bell hooks (1991) refers to such spaces as ‘homeplaces’ which have the potential to offer agency, empowerment, and solidarity.<sup>33</sup> Further, the fact that occupation of the Tate was illicit, even illegal, may have offered further agency to the collective. It was no longer an audience to the actions undertaken by BP and the Tate, but a force opposing it through engaging with everyday activities and occupying the space.

### **Efficacy**

According to Liberate Tate, the collective explores the

role of creative intervention in social change. Our aim is to free art from the grips of the oil industry, primarily by focusing on Tate [...] and its sponsorship deal with BP. (Liberate Tate 2012, 135)

In 2016, the Tate and BP announced that their partnership was due to end in 2017. Liberate Tate shared this news with a press release entitled ‘Liberate Tate Wins Six Year Campaign to End BP Sponsorship of Tate’ (Liberate Tate 2016). Many believed the campaign pioneered by Liberate Tate was largely responsible for the news. Naomi Klein, for instance, attributed the decision to the collective, stating that it was a ‘huge victory for one of the most creative campaigns in the world’ (2016). However, we cannot trace a causal link between Liberate Tate’s Guerrilla Performances and Tate’s decision to sever ties with BP. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that its performances made no contribution to public opinion’s growing unease with this partnership and to the increasing pressure exerted on the gallery to re-think its position. BP, whilst acknowledging that protesters are ‘free to express their points of view’, stated that ‘our decision wasn’t influenced by [performances]. It was a business decision’ (BP

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<sup>33</sup> The tactic of occupying space is examined in further depth in Chapter Four.

spokeswoman in Clark 2016). Whilst multiple factors will have contributed to this decision, the *Financial Times* points out a marked public shift towards supporting divestment, noting that the ‘fossil fuel divestment gathers pace’ (John 2016). Both the *Financial Times* and the *Guardian*, in their reporting of the end of the BP partnership, also specifically single out the performance, *Time Piece* (John 2015; Khomami 2015). Arguably then, a causal connection was seen, at least by these journalists, as well as by Liberate Tate itself.

If we cannot prove that the end of BP’s sponsorship of the gallery was a direct result of the performance, *Time Piece* (2015), or rather, the culmination of performances staged by Liberate Tate, we can argue that there were elements of *Time Piece* which achieved a successful outcome. Deliberately framed and reported as an occupation, *Time Piece* also caused disruption to the Tate for the total time planned: 25 hours. Furthermore, it placed those in management and those employed as security in a dilemma similar to the one created by BP or Not BP at the British Museum, but with higher stakes: evict us when the gallery closes at 10pm or allow the occupation to continue overnight. Whichever action the Tate took added legitimacy to Liberate Tate’s performance. If the performers were not evicted, then an overnight occupation gathers more traction in the press, and the Tate demonstrates its accommodation of civil disobedience. If the Tate evicted performers, then Liberate Tate would have gained video footage of arrests, rendering the Tate’s actions as potentially disproportionate, risking further media attention. Additionally, a shift in strategy from Tate management, in permitting visitor access to the Turbine Hall on the first day, and restricting it altogether on the second, is worth examining in terms of understanding how effective the performance was as an act of resistance:

**Day One:** Tate management made the decision to not interfere with *Time Piece*.

Instead, members of security watched the performance, and two Tate workers spoke to performers in advance of the closure of the gallery. Tate management contacted the Metropolitan Police, who confirmed that it would take action if the Tate wished it to proceed. After raising the issue of health and safety, the Duty Manager decided not to evict the performers, allowing them to occupy the Turbine Hall overnight (*Guardian* 2015a, 4 minutes, 23 seconds).

**Day Two:** The Tate restricted all public access to the ground floor of the Turbine Hall. This involved management re-directing visitors from the main entrance to a side entrance. Presumably, the Tate restricted access on the second day in an attempt to minimize attention. This decision, however, caused the opposite effect: Liberate Tate members, for instance, pointed out that when visitors realized access was restricted, there was often ‘a palpable sense of heightened excitement’ (Tarman in Vartanian 2015) and, as Evans noted, the closure of the hall ‘almost enshrines the performance even more’ (Evans in Guardian 2015a, 5 minutes, 26 seconds).

Undoubtedly, the Tate’s decision to restrict access to the performance also affected how visitors perceived the work. For many visitors, the main attraction of the Tate is its architecture (Tate 2015c) and specifically, the Turbine Hall. Through curtailing public access to this area, the Tate escalated the situation, heightening the presence and status of Liberate Tate’s unsanctioned performance (through a series of signs stating ‘Room Closed’, ‘No Entry’ and by installing security members outside the building to re-direct visitors to use alternative entrances).<sup>34</sup> Moreover, despite the hall closure, visitors were still able to view the performance from balconies, offering them an aerial view (as seen in Figure 2.9). Witnessing the performance from this position offered visitors a more complete vision of the overall choreography and composition of the work.

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<sup>34</sup> Footage of the performance, for instance, shows two signs stating ‘No Entry’ and ‘Room Closed’ (Liberate Tate 2015a, 4 minutes, 10 seconds).

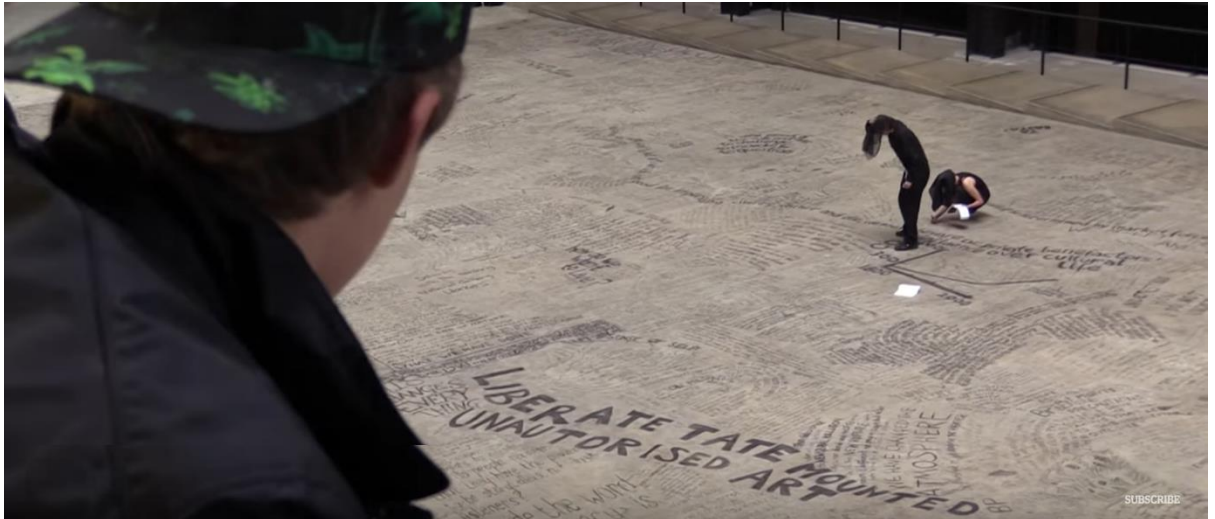


Figure 2.9: A Tate visitor watches the performance from a balcony when access to the Turbine Hall was closed by Tate management.

*Time Piece* received diverse attention from the media in the UK, Holland, Finland, Italy, and the United States (Mathieson 2015a, 2015b; Hunger TV 2015; De Standaard 2015; Kunst 2015; Helsingin Sanomat 2015; Exhibart 2015; Kaye 2015; Halperine 2015; Medland 2015). The performance also drew attention from two energy-industry news sites (Petro 2015; Energy Live News), signifying that the performance was deemed news-worthy to the industry. Utilizing occupation as a performance tactic was particularly efficacious; providing the focus for many articles, and appearing in multiple headlines (Mathieson 2015a; Watson 2015; Peers 2015; Petro 2015; Energy Live News 2015). However, it is worth noting that media outlets such as the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, did not cover the performance.<sup>35</sup> Further, the only British daily newspaper which covered *Time Piece* was the *Guardian*. As such, it was largely ignored by the mainstream British press. Because of the strong aesthetics of *Time Piece*, several sources provided image galleries of the event (Time Out 2015; Guardian 2016). Further platforms dedicated towards art also provided coverage (Muñoz-Alonso 2015; Artlyst 2015) reaching a targeted audience of potential Tate members, arts professionals, and regular gallery visitors.

Significantly, the majority of reports included information which the Tate had gone to great lengths to keep secret: the amount of funding BP offered the gallery. The campaign group, Platform, had previously spent three years in attempting to obtain

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<sup>35</sup> Although, six months later, these sources did report on Liberate Tate's performance, *Birthmark* (BBC News 2016).

these figures and it took a court case to compel the Tate to release the fact that BP offered a sum amounting to 0.3% of Tate's overall operating budget, amounting to an average of £224,000 per year; a sum so relatively small that Platform had difficulty in creating a visual graph where it was visible to the naked eye (2015b).<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, as only one out of twelve articles did not include these figures, the performance had helped to disseminate critical information which supported the divestment case that the Tate should drop BP sponsorship on financial as well as ethical grounds: 0.3% of the budget could be found elsewhere. Protest performance was utilized, then, as a more effective means of sharing information than a traditional press release, in attracting more attention from media as a news-worthy event.

Official media coverage was also largely neutral to positive in tone. *Forbes* was particularly critical of BP's relationship with the Tate, and drew upon Platform's research which noted that, due to Tate's public stance on sustainability

the reputational risk to Tate of retaining BP is significant [however] taking a moral stance on the ethics of the oil and gas sector [...] is outside of Tate's charitable objectives. (Platform in Medland 2015)

In response, Medland asks, 'does that mean that charitable objectives lack a basic moral compass in a world of austerity?' (2015). Whilst art magazine *Hyperallergic* pointed out the Tate staff had formally voted to end oil sponsorship and had approved of the action, even thanking performers (Vartanian 2015), the publication, *Petro*, described the performance as a 'new kind of crazy' (Petro 2015), although it did concede that the 'Turbine Hall was a profound location to stage the protest' and described *Time Piece* as an 'imaginative work of art'.

It is also significant that since the Tate and BP announced the end of their partnership, newspapers such as the *Financial Times* have written a number of articles discussing the ethics of oil sponsorship (Maltby 2016; Pickford 2016; Webster 2016). Even more importantly, and relevant to assessing the efficacy of Liberate Tate's work (of which *Artwash* author Evans is a member), journalists have begun to respond to Art Not Oil and Evans' arguments. For instance, Maltby in the *Financial Times*, structures her

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<sup>36</sup> The Tate had resisted three legal attempts made by Platform to release the funding figures BP offered. However, in January 2015, Tribunal Judges issued the ruling that it was in the public interest to release these figures (Galinka 2015). Through *Time Piece*, Liberate Tate was able to propel these figures, once again, into the public domain.

article to answer two arguments proposed by BP's critics, even citing Evans' book: first, that the company uses financial leverage for censorship: 'this is demonstrably untrue. [...] The second claim is that BP uses philanthropy to launder its reputation' (Maltby 2017). Although we cannot trace a causal link between the Guerrilla Performances staged by Liberate Tate or BP or Not BP (Maltby, in her article, discusses BP or Not BP's performance), it is significant that journalists are responding to BP's critics. It suggests that Art Not Oil has succeeded in making the ethics of oil sponsorship a topical subject, worthy of debate and discussion in the mainstream press. Its arguments have made it onto the political agenda.

In terms of dissemination on social media platforms, overall, *Time Piece* was less widely viewed than BP or Not BP's *Deepwater Horizon Spill*. For instance, video footage provided by Liberate Tate on Youtube received only 550 views (Liberate Tate 2015a), and 1,600 on *Facebook* (Facebook 2015), whereas video footage created by the *Guardian* published on *Facebook* received 45,000 views (Guardian 2015a). The performance, did, however, receive further attention on Twitter: *Timepiece* began trending as 295 people used the hashtag #*Timepiece* during the performance.<sup>37</sup> As such, the performance was viewed across multiple social media platforms as news of the occupation spread.

Public reception, live and online, was largely positive. Documentation of *Time Piece* shows many visitors interacting with the art. Significantly, when Liberate Tate exited the building, visitors broke into applause. This gesture not only publicly demonstrated their performance appreciation, but, arguably, expressed their dissent at Tate's relationship with BP. Many tweets commented that visitors were actively questioning Tate about sponsorship: 'Tate staff being asked to explain *Timepiece* [sic]. Staff having to explain BP sponsorship. Visitors now going to look closer at Liberate Tate's work' (Rouse 2015). Children were particularly critical in asking questions: 'adult visitor at Tate Modern explaining *Timepiece* [sic] to a small child: "It is called performance art. They're doing this because they're sad."' (Bell 2015a); 'overheard in *Timepiece* [sic], dad to son "These people are protesting because they think it's wrong for an oil company to sponsor an art gallery"' (Jay 2015a); and: 'What's revolution Mum? An innocent question with an important answer' (Liberate Tate 2015). Further

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<sup>37</sup> This figure did not include tweets written by the official Liberate Tate handle.



comments suggest that visitors were keen to participate: ‘wish I was wearing black’ (McCallum 2015), indicating an eagerness to perform. Visitors also actively discussed the work: ‘lots of people up here looking down and talking about *Timepiece* [sic]’ (Newman 2015); ‘100s of audience members questioning BP sponsorship’ (Bell 2015b); and, ‘visitors are pausing, intrigued, peering over performers’ heads to see what they’re writing’ (Jay 2015b).

The performance also attracted positive comments regarding the performance and its critical stance: from ‘Tate’s brilliant occupation of oil-sponsored modern art mecca’ (Bamber 2015) to ‘wow, check out Liberate Tate’s *Timepiece* [sic]...A bold and conscientious stand against BP. Incredible photos’ (Cameron 2015). Many framed it as inspirational (Marple-Horvat 2015; Aitken 2015; Dylan 2015). It is also significant that prominent artists and writers tweeted their approval of *Time Piece*: Naomi Klein tweeted, ‘completely amazing and beautiful. So moved’ (2015); ‘Tate opens its doors for the public to see the gentle, beautiful, peaceful *Timepiece* [sic]’ (Neal 2015) and artist Michael Newman, who called it the ‘best work so far in Tate Turbine Hall’ (2015b). There was also some international attention from Beirut, ‘nice work everyone. Solidarity from Beirut’ (Sadri 2015) to the Canadian Small Museums Association: ‘*Timepiece* [sic] is inherently poetic by virtue of materials, process. Refreshing to see something happening in a museum’ (Small Museums 2015).

Perhaps more importantly, members of the public also assessed the efficacy of *Time Piece*: ‘really impressed with Liberate Tate for creatively causing discomfort exactly where it’s needed’ (Simms 2015). Furthermore, people were quick to analyze the symbolism of Tate’s response; after the performance, staff literally washed away Liberate Tate’s criticism (as demonstrated in Figure 2.10): ‘if only it was this easy to clean up after the fossil fuel industry’ (Allot 2015); ‘photo says it all: BP, Shell and the voices they try to wash’ (Palliard 2015); and ‘the erasers [cleaners] pause to read the charcoal text left behind by *Timepiece* [sic]’ (Minio-Paluello 2015). This image provided the collective with a powerful metaphor regarding the power dynamics between Tate and BP: the Tate cleaned up BP’s mess, artwashing was enacted.

Further, it acted out social, economic, and political inequalities as the act of cleaning was not completed by those with the power to make decisions regarding acceptance of corporate sponsorship, but by those who would be amongst the lowest paid employees

of the Tate, whose workload was increased. Although the act of cleaning may be understood as a powerful part of the performance the merging of everyday inequalities with art, it also raises ethical questions. How to isolate the intended target, for instance, without causing any further work or harm on others as an unintended consequence. Certainly, as discussed earlier, Guerrilla Performance in particular, as a mode, relies upon an element of combat, of conflict. Liberate Tate, in creating efficacious work, relied upon creating disruption: commercial disruption, social disruption, and public-relations disruption. As this disruption disproportionately affected those without the power or status to make decisions in relation to sponsorship, such an act of dissent cannot be said to be prefigurative. Unless consideration is given to all the consequences of such actions, Theatrical Dissent cannot be said to be prefigurative; actions taken may undermine the very causes espoused.



Figure 2.10: Cleaners wipe away the inscriptions written by Liberate Tate.

Unlike BP or not BP, Liberate Tate does not appear to create collaborations with international communities or activist groups directly affected by BP's activities. This may be because the British Museum hosts exhibitions and events which relate to specific areas, such as Mexico and Australia (where BP has business interests), and the Tate does not. Liberate Tate does, however, have a prominent role in academic and arts communities, often being invited to speak at panels in university or performance settings (Liberate Tate 2014b; 2015b; 2015c; 2016). These links may work to provide support and solidarity for its members. In other words, non-performance based activity in professional and artistic environments may, in a similar fashion to BP or Not BP's work with communities, act to sustain the collective. Having such links, however, may be particularly helpful in eliciting support from individuals and organizations which have influence in the art world. Overall, Liberate Tate has a higher profile in terms of articles dedicated towards analyzing its work.

In summary, *Time Piece* was an efficacious performance in terms of bringing the Tate into the conversation regarding sponsorship and in presenting it with a dilemma. The stakes were sufficiently raised through introducing the tactics of occupation and durational performance. Tate management was, as demonstrated through its discussions with the police, uncertain how to respond (Guardian 2015a, 4 minutes, 29 seconds). In closing the Turbine Hall on the second day, Tate, arguably, escalated and added further legitimacy to the performance and cause. There were, however, several ways in which the performance may have caused further discomfort and disruption. First, visitors could have been invited to participate; as McCallum indicated, he would have been keen to perform. In providing people with a black veil and inviting them to write, Liberate Tate could have pushed the stakes further still, had visitors participated in its Guerrilla Performance. Undoubtedly, Tate management would have experienced further discomfort if hundreds of visitors had not only interacted with the performance but fully participated in performing criticism of Tate's complicity with BP. Second, Liberate Tate could have presented visitors with an opportunity to take action in support of its cause in participating in future performances; or through completing feedback forms to the Tate, noting disapproval of the partnership. Third, Liberate Tate could have exploited the fact that Tate sold books in its bookshop about politics, art, and activism, situated only a few metres from its performance. One member of the public made this link in a tweet, which included an image of books on a bookstand

entitled Empower and Inspire, commenting, ‘empower and inspire through active participation and activism, not through buying a book’ (McMullan 2015). Whilst very few of the selected performance texts were available to buy in the Tate bookshop, the collective did not explicitly connect the texts sanctioned by the Tate and those that are not. For instance, performers could have positioned performance texts in the bookshop at the end of the performance, perhaps by placing the *Tate’s Ethics Policy* (2014) in prime position, thereby making further comment upon sanctioned and unsanctioned art histories and practices.

### **Conclusion**

Both BP or Not BP and Liberate Tate’s Guerrilla Performances were efficacious in exposing BP’s performances of legitimacy. Both unravelled, to a degree, BP’s artwash. *Deepwater Horizon Spill* drew specific attention towards BP’s character of The Storyteller, pointing out the inconsistencies and problems in BP’s sponsorship of an exhibition which disseminated a narrative which BP was keen to air publicly. Liberate Tate’s *Time Piece* revealed the overall performative realm of BP’s sponsorship through its direct criticism of artwash. It did not specifically expose any of BP’s constructed characters: The Generous Saviour, The Networker, The Human, or The Storyteller. Nonetheless, its performance discredited BP and the Tate through the tactic of performing criticism. As to how far the Guerrilla Performances dismantled and subverted BP’s performance, this is perhaps, harder to ascertain. In the case of BP or Not BP, the efficacy of its work may seem to be negligible, as BP currently remains the major sponsor of the British Museum. Such a position, however, would ignore the fact that the amount of BP funding the British Museum will receive from 2017 onwards is likely to be substantially less than previous years.<sup>38</sup> It is important to understand BP’s cultural sponsorships as an overarching public relations strategy, rather than a series of individual contracts; a strategy, stretching back 26

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<sup>38</sup> BP announced that it was investing £7.5 million in a range of projects with the British Museum, National Portrait Gallery, Royal Opera House, and the Royal Shakespeare Company. This figure is substantially less than the amount received in 2011 of £10 million, even if we take into account the fact that the BP is no longer sponsoring the Tate (Brown 2016b).

years with the Tate, and 34 years with the Edinburgh Festival. BP has publicly stated that its decision not to renew sponsorship with the Tate was prompted by the ‘challenging business environment’ (BP spokesperson in Khomami 2016). When the Edinburgh Festival announced that its contract would also not be renewed with BP, only one month after the Tate’s announcement, BP repeated this argument. Whatever the reason, each time a cultural institution or festival ceases to have a financial relationship with BP, it becomes more difficult, arguably, for other cultural institutions to retain theirs. Critically, if BP were not concerned about the efficacy of BP or Not BP’s work, then, presumably, it would not have employed surveillance specialists to monitor the collective’s activities and plans (Worth 2014). Whether this monitoring of the collective was preventative or not, the fact that BP actively sought to gather intelligence on the collective is indicative that its work was having an effect; Worth, for instance, describes receiving a thick dossier of heavily redacted documents, all containing her name (2014).

It is perhaps easier to ascertain whether Liberate Tate dismantled and subverted BP’s performances, as BP’s performances no longer exist in the Tate. Whilst we cannot know, precisely, the reasons why the Tate and BP ceased their financial partnership, nor prove the decision to do so resulted from Liberate Tate’s Guerrilla Performances or other campaign activities, it is fair to say that oil sponsorship has been put firmly on the agenda. The ground is beginning to shift. And Liberate Tate, in addition to BP or Not BP, has made a significant contribution towards this. Prominent academics, artists, and actors have publicly spoken out against BP’s cultural sponsorships (Brown 2016b) in addition to mainstream media outlets, who deem the topic pertinent, and have begun to scrutinize the subject more rigorously (Mather in BBC 2015; Maltby 2017; Sunyer 2016). There are now more critics of BP, and of BP’s cultural sponsorships, who question the British Museum’s public naming of BP as its ‘best corporate friend’ (MacGregor in Brown, Macalister 2015).

Analyzing the efficacy of these two collectives, however, goes beyond the simple question of whether they stopped BP’s cultural sponsorships. Significantly, Guerrilla Performances acted to bring together a community of social movement actors. The performances, themselves, acted to nourish and sustain performers, activists, and audience members alike. Both collectives made critical links in publicly widening a social movement beyond the subject of divestment; from working with local and

international grassroots activist groups and unions to prominent members of the arts and media community. The performances were symbolic; collective members performed their commitment whilst other activists perceived their performances as a show of solidarity. In this way, Guerrilla Performances played a vital role in offering an emotional, affective dimension, in terms of providing activists agency, empowerment, and sustenance.

Both collectives, significantly, were not predictable. Their ability to adapt, demonstrate resilience, and experiment with alternative strategies is critical in understanding their efficacy; the cultural venues were unable to formulate a policy that applied to such diverse forms and performances. Liberate Tate, for instance, raised the stakes higher in later works; in using their bodies as instruments of dissent through a performance of tattoos. From staging an ephemeral performance to making a permanent and unequivocal statement, *Birthmark*, which involved each collective member being tattooed in Tate Britain with the numbers of CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations in the atmosphere in the year they were born: ‘Climate change is permanent; so are tattoos. [...] Each tattoo echoes the engraving act made by the oil sponsors in transforming the body of the gallery’ (Liberate Tate 2015e).<sup>39</sup> Liberate Tate, in many ways, had more leverage in staging Guerrilla Performances than BP or Not BP: the Tate, through reputation and policy, had publicly stated its ethical aims and commitment towards sustainable practices (Tate 2014). Further, the Live Art practices enacted by Liberate Tate were appropriate to the Tate: many audience members did not understand, initially, that the work was unsanctioned. As such, the work was representative of the art and activities that the Tate officially commissions. Performing in the British Museum, however, is different. Unlike the Tate, it is not known for its progressive and open attitude. Nor are visitors as likely to engage with performance or installations, coming instead to view historic artefacts. As such, BP or Not BP’s work, taking the form of performance, (as opposed to exhibition) already stands out as being slightly ‘out of place’. However, the British Museum may have been wrong-footed when the collective staged its first ‘disobedient exhibition’, *A History of Oil in 10 Objects* (2016), an exhibition that was very much ‘of the place’, based as it was on the use of artefacts. In working with artefacts, the collective was able to tread the line that

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<sup>39</sup> In *Birthmark*, there are echoes of historical atrocities, such as the Holocaust and the slave trade, where people have been marked or branded with numbers.

Liberate Tate's work held, in staging practice which the audience understands as sanctioned, before understanding that it is a form of protest; a protest which undermined BP's narrative of itself as The Human while, at the same time, extolling the value of international solidarity. In fact, since *Deepwater Horizon Spill*, BP or Not BP has staged performances more regularly, mobilized larger numbers of participants, and continued to work closely with British Museum staff members who support its cause; it shows no signs of stopping. It continues to use artistic means to secure a political end.

The interaction between the political impetus and the creative impulse, then, is a complex one. Although theatre and performance springs from political intent, it is not constrained by it. If experienced by both performers and audiences as purely political, a performance will have failed as art, but it will also have failed in achieving its political end, resulting in bad art and bad politics. The relationship between the two cannot be one of art serving the needs of the political but of a partnership resulting in a performance that started in politics but goes beyond the political whilst achieving a political end.

Challenging sponsorship through theatricalized dissent is examined further in Chapter Three, but from a very different performative angle. The efficacy of play and gaming is analyzed as a mode of protest and is developed further in the practical component, *HOUND* (2016).

### Chapter Three: Play As a Mode of Protest

Chapter Three explores a critical issue raised in the previous chapter: the sustenance of activists in their commitment to dissent. It examines the efficacy of play as a mode of performative resistance (determined differently, of course, to the case studies examined in Chapter Two), and whether play provides sustenance whilst igniting interest, and reflection, in participants and audiences.

OLDER EMILIO: We would sing and sing. How it annoyed them (*they laugh*). [...] Our festivals of pretence with our imaginary instruments [...] instruments they could not break. (Hartley 2005, 19)

This excerpt is taken from a one-act play, *The Art of Silence* (2001), which tells the story of Emilio Barreto's torture and incarceration as a political prisoner under the rule of Paraguayan dictator Alfredo Stroessner from 1965 to 1978. Barreto, Paraguayan actor, facilitator, and human rights activist, spoke, in his November 2005 lecture at Exeter University, of how play and games had played a critical role in his expression of dissent through the offering of hope.<sup>1</sup> Hartley notes that Barreto 'used his theatrical training to "remain sane". With other prisoners he invented games, and put on mini-shows by using his thumbs for puppets' (Hartley in *Theatre Vs Oppression* 2016).

Play sustained Barreto, physically and mentally; temporally, culturally, and politically. He drew upon play and games, using imaginary, unbreakable musical instruments to engage, inspire, and offer moments of an alternative reality. Barreto's case is certainly far removed from the contemporary cultural landscape of London and Paris but, nevertheless, if play is capable of sustaining someone in such extreme conditions, then it is worthwhile examining its efficacy as a mode of protest. Rather than utilizing play and games as Barreto did, as a means of escaping reality, might play have a vital prefigurative role in making visible and actualizing more democratic social relations? I investigate these issues through my examination of two case studies and through my own PaR, *HOUND*.

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<sup>1</sup> At Exeter University, I watched *The Art of Silence*. Emilio Barreto also facilitated a workshop and discussion based upon his experience.



My analysis of The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination's (Labofii) *Climate Games* (2015) and Coney's *Early Days (of a Better Nation)* (2015) examines the politics of participation and play; its efficacy as a mode of prefigurative resistance. Although I indicate ways in which it might fail to do so, my argument suggests that play has the potential to provide an effective means of resistance. Game designer Zimmerman argues that 'games are the dominant cultural form of the 21<sup>st</sup> [sic] century' (Zimmerman in Walz, Deterding 2015, 20). It may follow, then, that pervasive games can widen accessibility to social movements, attracting new members through a more compelling, popular, and creative format.

Both case studies aimed to shift social relations in creating a sense of community: through pleasure and enjoyment in *Climate Games* and through experiencing an alternative mode of communication and decision-making in *Early Days (of a Better Nation)*.<sup>2</sup> Following Bishop in her exploration of participatory art works, my analysis also values what 'is invisible: a group dynamic, a social situation, a changed energy, a raised consciousness' (Bishop 2012, 6); all values which are crucial in sustaining social movements.

Unlike the performances of Liberate Tate and BP or Not BP, which had the specific aim of ending BP's cultural sponsorships, these case studies have far broader aims. They both drew upon play with the intention of producing a distinctive effect upon participants. Therefore, the criteria selected to assess the efficacy of play as a mode of protest will differ, to a degree, from those used in analyzing Guerrilla Performance in Chapter Two. However, the impact of the performances will be analyzed in a similar way, through examining participants' responses.

Like Liberate Tate and BP or Not BP, the Labofii staged Guerrilla Performances using the tactics of direct action, and acts of civil disobedience. And I shall therefore use the same criteria, as identified in Chapter Two, to measure how far *Climate Games* (2015) was successful in achieving its aims of dismantling and subverting greenwash performances of power, causing disruption, disseminating performances

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<sup>2</sup> Producing a more egalitarian set of social relations and sense of community was also an aim of BP or Not BP and Liberate Tate, but one which was not specifically addressed through their use of Guerrilla Performance. It has not therefore been identified as a criterion in assessing efficacy as it does not relate to form.

through news outlets and social media, and encouraging the frequency of performances or future actions. Coney's work, however, existed not as a direct action, but as a performance taking place within a theatre venue for an invited audience. The analysis of Coney's work, as a theatre performance, will largely focus upon audience reception in understanding how far the gaming structure and use of role-play afforded participants opportunities to experiment with alternative modes of communication.

The broad methodology within this chapter follows Chapter Two in terms of participation and observation. I participated in *Climate Games*, both in collaborating in the design process, and specifically in performing in the *D12* performance.

Although I participated in the *Early Days (of a Better Nation)* performance, I fulfilled a similar role to every other audience member, rather than taking part in the rehearsal or design process. Whilst I engaged with role-play, I was not performing a prescribed, rehearsed role; therefore, this performance will be analyzed from the position of observer.

### **The Potential of Play**

Prankster and Yippies co-founder Abbie Hoffman argues that 'one of the worst mistakes any revolution can make is to become boring' (2001, 106). Undoubtedly, many radical movements have avoided such categorization, harnessing play, games, and ludic participation as a mode of resistance: from the Surrealists to the Situationists; the Fluxus Movement to Theatre of Oppression practitioners. Despite the connections between the two, few scholars have explored the politics of, and relationship between, ludic participation and activism. Art theorist Tim Stott, for instance, argues that 'ludic participation, for the most part, pursues neither social engagement nor activism' (2015, 3). Conversely, this chapter seeks to critique and disprove Stott's argument. Whether their work is effective or not is another matter, but undoubtedly, there are many practitioners who utilize play and games as a mode of protest. Further, Bishop, in her influential work, *Artificial Hells* (2012), notes that she has not dealt with 'activist or interventionist art, in part because these projects do not primarily involve people as the medium or material of their work' (2012, 5). Arguably, politically engaged companies such as the Labofii and Coney are drawn to ludic participation, play, and games precisely *because* the material and the medium are people. The work may be framed as ludic but the material of the work itself is

people engaging in an act of resistance through play. As games scholar Sicart notes, ‘playing is a form of understanding what surrounds us and who we are, and a way of engaging with others. Play is a mode of being human’ (2014, 1). It is a tool of sensory and motor development, comprehension, sociability, and imagination, which supports us in figuring out our physical and social worlds; in understanding how to be, and how to become, human. We cannot avoid its importance: it is who we are. Johan Huizinga notes the all-encompassing nature of play: ‘in this intensity, this absorption, this power of maddening, lies the very essence, the primordial quality of play’ (2014, 2). It is precisely the social and emotional effects, the maddening intensity and multiple qualities of play, which make it fertile ground for creating theatrical dissent.

The concept of play, however, is ambiguous; so ambiguous, according to play theorist Sutton-Smith, that ambiguity is its only certainty (2001). It is the appropriative nature of play, where ‘context becomes servant to the activity of playing’ (Sicart 2014, 1), that renders it a potent *and* problematic mode of resistance. Henricks argues:

At times, players seem spontaneous and fanciful; at other times, they behave in rule-bound, goal-oriented ways. Sometimes players compete; sometimes they cooperate. Many play activities exhibit noisy exuberance; others feature quiet calculation. There are times when players comply with the authority figures that try to control them; there are times when they defy those authorities. Players routinely spend hours constructing something in the most patient and fastidious way; moments later, they tear that construction apart. In short, players are equally the creators and the destroyers of orderly form. (2009, 13)

Play, then, is equally as adept at establishing and maintaining the status quo as it is at challenging it.

Games are not necessarily separate, removed or distanced from reality, but are complex and nuanced, and have a significant impact upon reality. Political ideologies and agendas are transmitted and embedded in the formalized play structures of games: ‘this is never more so than when such events purport to be spheres of neutrality’ (Tomlinson, Young 2005, 1). Some games overtly, for example, reinforce capitalist values (Monopoly), imperialism (Risk), or a government’s foreign policy (the free digital game, America’s Army); and others, as a contemporary example of ‘bread and circuses’, more covertly distract from the very dissatisfaction that might lead to

dissent, as in Candy Crush (Bown 2015).<sup>3</sup> The formalized play structures of games, then, can convey the political intentions or agendas of a government or corporation, creating an excellent form of propaganda, soft or otherwise. Using the same methods as a mode of resistance may, therefore, be problematic: politically, economically, and socially.

There is already, however, an established practice of utilizing ritualized games, such as public sporting spectacles, as a critical stage for expressing dissent. Athletes and spectators have used the sporting environment, habits, and witnesses to their advantage; from the now iconic clenched fist salute at the Mexico Olympics in 1968 to the disruptions of sports events in apartheid South Africa (Dart, Wagg 2016, 2), it has proved fertile ground for reaching a wide audience and creating an impact. Protesters, in these instances, have created a spectacle within a spectacle, in disrupting, and subverting the performances of Power and Nation being staged.

This chapter argues, then, that play is well-suited to fostering and sustaining activism. Although play might not, per se, engender resistance, it has the potential to undermine the status quo. If we accept Henricks' argument, that play exists between order and chaos, then playful disorder can serve to undermine ideologies, institutions, and powerful individuals. In playing imaginary instruments and singing, Barreto challenged the authority of his oppressors. The subtext of his actions was clear to his captors: you can cause me physical pain but you cannot break my spirit. Through play, Barreto embodied a sense of joy and laughter which challenged and mocked his incarceration as well as his captors. Such actions literally disarmed his captors, who had no control over the pretend, the imaginary, the realm of play. Barreto alone exercised control in this realm. Historically, we can see cases of play being used in this manner, from Rough Music or Carnival to Commedia dell'arte. As discussed in Chapter Two, the historical avant-garde also utilized play. The Situationists, for instance, positioned play and leisure as a site of resistance, opposing the capitalist structure of society; the production and consumption of goods. As Situationist Raoul Vaneigem stated, 'the desire to play has returned to destroy the hierarchical society which banished it' (1967, 257).

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<sup>3</sup> Monopoly, originally designed by Elizabeth Magie in 1903, was 'a protest against the big monopolists of her time' (Pilon 2015).



Figure 3.1: CIRCA adopts the tactic of undermining authority by mirroring the physical stance of officers, G8 Summit, Scotland, July 2005.

More recently, from 2003 onwards, the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA), by existing, according to CIRCA member Klepto ‘between chaos and order, obedience and disobedience, reason and madness’ (2004, 409) has confronted societal institutions with tactical frivolity and play. On the surface, it presented a gaggle of ramshackle and disorderly clowns, confronting the Metropolitan police and the army with ‘silly salutes, subversive slapstick drills, exhibiting the art of telling jokes that disarm’ (Klepto 2004, 404). The notion of disarming police or army officers was critical in its overall strategy, either through ridicule or by humanizing relations. Despite a disorderly demeanour, the clown ensemble was well organized and employed its training in clowning theory and practice to mirror the gestures, expressions, and choreography of police officers at protests, thereby undermining their authority. Police officers simply did not know how to respond to the tactics of clowning. If we examine Figure 3.1, we can see evidence of this mirroring technique. Both the expression of discomfort on the police officer’s face on the right, and the fact that he is staring straight at the camera is significant: he is fully aware that he has an audience documenting the ridicule. A humanizing of relations was effected on another

occasion when the CIRCA engaged the police in a game of Giants, Wizards, and Elves.<sup>4</sup>

### **Characteristics of Play Conducive to Dissent**

Augusto Boal saw such potential in games being a tool for countering oppression that he described them as the ‘arsenal of the Theatre of the Oppressed’ (2002, 48). If we return to Barreto’s ‘festivals of pretence’, to the playing of imaginary instruments in the confines of his cell, we can see that play, however fleetingly, offered Barreto an experience of liberty in transforming the space, and offering not only an escape from, but a control over, his surroundings. Play, generally, is regarded by scholars as synonymous with being free (Schechner 2002, 79; Marcuse 1987, 195; Caillois 2001, 10). In awakening and re-energizing, ‘in re-arranging rules and re-defining goals, [play] also re-shapes space, time, and modes of interaction; it has both an overturning and restorative function’ (Lushetich, Fuchs 2016, 1); thus liberating the imagination of participants and spectators, and this sense of freedom empowers and sustains those faced with oppression.

The theatrical form of play works in a similar way to art in freeing us from the past and future; to be fully in the present. As Zarrilli argues, the actor is in the ‘optimal state of awareness and actualization [...] with the actor’s mind/heart/awareness fully present in the moment’ (2011, 255). Such a state may be engendered too by theatrical forms of play which work in a similar way to art in freeing us from the past and future; to suspend time, ‘removing ourselves from the habitual stream of thought’ (Varela 1995, 333). To ‘play is to make a world’ (Sicart 2014, 17), ‘to step sideways into another reality, between the cracks of ordinary life’ (Henricks 2006, 1), an alternative reality which exists within a sphere; positing the possibility of better worlds, which in this way may foster dissent. By engaging in play, practitioners (Shepard 2013; Johnstone 1999; Boal 2002) contend that more creative and imaginative responses are elicited from less inhibited players. Not only are the players engaged in creating a world, but they are likely to be more imaginative whilst doing so, producing, according to Moore, an ‘experimental and sometimes joyful quality of

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<sup>4</sup> Giants, Wizards, and Elves is a team drama game which builds on a physical, character-based enactment of Rock, Paper, and Scissors.

activism in which participants imagine and enact new selves' (Moore in Shepard 2013, xv). The effect of this process upon the players, the 'feeling of being "apart together" in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, of mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms, retains its magic beyond the duration of the individual game' (Huizinga 2014, 12).

Critically, play affords participants freedom to behave differently, specifically through engaging with role-play. Schechner argues that performance is the home ground of playing (2002, 41) and that all of the multiple performances we partake in, the roles we play, 'performing onstage, performing in a special social situation [...] and performing in everyday life are on a continuum' (2002, 143). Engaging in real life, then, is often indistinguishable from role-play: we may perform slightly different roles according to the context in which we find ourselves, but it is still part of one overall performance. Engaging in formalized role-play, such as Live Action Role Play (LARP), however, affords further opportunities to experiment in playing a different role, not usually performed in the continuum of roles we inhabit. It gives us permission to behave differently, without engendering consequences for our everyday lives. Ludic participation, then, offers participants the possibility of becoming bolder, more energized, more able to interact freely and, perhaps, with fewer inhibitions, in a performance of a heightened, alternative version of themselves. It is this approach that Coney used in *Early Days (of a Better Nation)*. Sociologist Fine understood that within a role-playing game session, such as LARP, players constantly switch between three distinct frames: 'a) The social frame inhabited by the *person*, b) The game frame inhabited by the *player*, c) The gaming-world frame inhabited by the *character*' (1983, 59). The proposition, then, is that when engaging in role-play, switching between these frames we, unlike an actor performing a specified character role on stage, embody behaviour which is simultaneously an extension of our ordinary performing selves (frame a), yet feel freer to behave differently in engaging as ourselves, but also in the game-frame as a player and character (frames b and c). Games therefore allow players to explore social relationships: 'games are a dialogue [...] they are extroversion' (Boal 2002, 48). Games, such as the ones Boal proposes, are designed to shift relations during the game-play itself.

Pervasive games, such as those employed by the Labofii, denote gaming which uses everyday technology, playfully examining the politics of space, and moving *through* space, physically taking participants through different environments and involving more than one participant or player.<sup>5</sup> Such games are championed by game scholars and designers as a means of reconfiguration, not just spatially and temporally, but also in terms of modes of interaction (McGonigal 2003a; Kampmann 2007; Flanagan 2013); as acting ‘to empower, build community, and foster collaboration and cultural change’ (Flanagan 2009, 197). Further, McGonigal understands pervasive games as a catalyst for political action, ‘immersive gaming is actually one of the first applications poised to harness [...] network technologies for collective social and political action’ (2003a, 1). Arguably, these viewpoints may overstate the case for understanding pervasive games as an instrument of dissent especially if we consider that, within the field, relatively few game designers, either through content or structure, create work which aims to politicize players. What we do know, though, is that pervasive games have a history of embracing collaboration, to a surprising degree. McGonigal cites the pervasive multiplayer game, *Beast*, as an example of how well players created a network of intelligence that surpassed all expectations. She refers to a presentation made by *Beast*’s producer:

We created strings of puzzles that no single person could solve on their own, and we found to our delight that it was working. The audience was forming teams. [Included in the game] were the puzzles that we thought would take a day, a week, and some puzzles they would probably never figure out until we broke clues down and gave them the answers. So we built a three month schedule around this. We released. The Cloudmakers solved all of these puzzles on the first day.<sup>6</sup> (Lee in McGonigal 2003a, 3)

Completing these tasks required a diversity of knowledge and skills. Nowhere within the game had the designers stated that collaboration was required but players understood that the nature of the game required a networked intelligence, thereby successfully completing a complex puzzle within the time-frame of a single day.

Play and games can improve modes of collaboration, tactics, and the quality of communication to such a degree that they are as widely embraced in business and

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<sup>5</sup> Pervasive games are also referred to as locative games, ubiquitous games, urban games and alternate-reality games. Each terminology emphasizes a particular characteristic of this genre; urban games and locative games, for instance, highlight spatial dimensions.

<sup>6</sup> The Cloudmakers is an online group of players who created forums to discuss *Beast*.



industry away-days and training opportunities as they are in the field of drama and theatre studies.<sup>7</sup> Engaging in play may be seen both to strengthen social bonds, as Henricks argues, ‘to commit to one another, to affirm that these moments spent together (in what are often the silliest of endeavours) are valuable’ (2006, 14) and also to encourage a collaborative way of working. In my experience of playing games as a performer, social relations have indeed moved in this direction: encouraging participants to take care of one another, remaining alert and responsive, whilst fostering a collaborative ethos.<sup>8</sup> Boal understood this work, and specifically the model of Forum Theatre, as a ‘rehearsal for reality’ (Jackson in Boal 2002, xxiv). Henricks supports this view, seeing play as a potential training ground: ‘play is the laboratory of the possible’ (2006, 1). In many ways, though, such games can be perceived as more than a rehearsal for reality or for revolution, they can prefigure, in the present, equalized social relationships.

If such play takes place not in the theatre studio but in the everyday world, as with the Labofii’s *Climate Games* (2015), then the magic circle may be expanded, providing an opportunity to affect the outside world directly; from the interruption of everyday activities to disruption through direct action: ‘pervasive games pervade, bend, and blur the traditional boundaries of games, bleeding from the domain of the game to the domain of the ordinary’ (Montola, Stenros, Waern 2009, 12). In taking the magic circle with them, pervasive gamers are able to play with the realm of play itself, in working with the extraordinary and quotidian. It is the tension within play, between order and chaos, construction and destruction, collaboration and competition that, as Huizinga suggested, simultaneously absorbs and maddens. It is this tension and blurring of boundaries that creates an interesting terrain for political actions, framed as games, to take place.

Play and games can also be understood as a vital tool and a resource for sustaining resistance, as well as a mode of resistance, a ‘technique of survival’ (Barreto in Hartley 2005, 15), increasing resilience; a vital coping mechanism. Classical historian Herodotus describes play being used as a distraction from pain, as early as the fifth

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<sup>7</sup> Business correspondent Still notes, ‘whether it’s to increase morale, improve cohesion, or reward good results, team-building exercises are favoured by many businesses’ (2014).

<sup>8</sup> I have received actor training from *Complicité* (2013) and *Théâtre Du Soleil* (2014); and from workshops inspired by such practitioners as Augusto Boal, Clive Barker, Chris Johnstone, and Viola Spolin. All sessions utilized games as a critical tool.

century BCE, suggesting that this is nothing new. During the Persian Wars in Lydia, ‘the plan adopted during the famine was to engage in games one day so entirely as not to feel any craving for food and the next day to eat and abstain from games’ (Herodotus 1997, 56). This can be applied to ideological warfare as well as physical conflict. If absorption in games may stave off hunger, then framing interventions as games may equally serve to support players engaged in what may be harsh or stressful circumstances.

Understanding play as a resource, though, may not prove useful solely in terms of dealing with problematic issues such as hunger, but may also excite, inspire, amuse or offer joy to its players: all equally useful benefits to activists. Play theorists, such as Huizinga, argue that amusement and humour, in themselves, are not directly related to play, questioning whether play and humour share any commonalities, ‘in itself play is not comical’ (2014, 6). Others suggest that humour strongly correlates with play, existing as an extension of play, a sub-category (Morreall 2011; Boyd 2004). Tapley provides a concise and, in this case, very helpful distinction between the two, noting that ‘we can distinguish between what is play, that is, what is fun, and what is humour, that is, what is funny’ (2013, 153).

Montola asks, ‘are political actions in the form of games too much fun to remain political?’ (Montola in Montola, Stenros, Waern 2009, 209). Many activists may argue that some causes are simply too serious to be addressed in a playful way, fearing that play may undermine their cause in the public eye. This particular criticism is pertinent to the case study, *Climate Games*, discussed in further detail below. However, it is also the case that performances seen to be overtly political may alienate those who may not already share the political standpoint of the performers. The use of play may make politics more palatable. Further, experiencing joy and fun in engaging in a game which is also a direct action need not negate the efficacy of the action itself but could potentially enhance it in prefiguring, actualizing, and making visible a better alternative through improving social relations.

Play and gaming may promote participation and action; crucial factors in sustaining social movements. Political scientist Gene Sharp documented 198 forms of non-violent actions (1980); all of which required participation: from marching to singing, parading to boycotting. Whilst Sharp included performative forms of play such as

dramatized sketches, skits or mock funerals, interestingly, he did not include play or games as a separate entry in his apparently exhaustive work; neglecting ‘an optimal means of participation’ (Stott 2015, 1) which prompts a higher level of motivation. Further, the realm, or magic circle, engendered through play may also allow participants to act, learn and strategize.

### **The Labofii**

*Climate Games* was designed by the Labofii, whose name expresses the values and practices which underpin its work:

Laboratory *n.*

1. a facility for experiment, research and learning.
2. a space where small quantities of hazardous materials can have an effect greater than the sum of their parts.

Insurrectionary *adj.*

1. rising in open resistance to the established order.
2. the unknowable and unexpected nature of joyous rebellion.

Imagination *n.*

1. the ability to form images and ideas of things not yet experienced or seen.
2. a useful tool of survival, especially when liberated and shared. (Labofii 2015)

Its name thus brings together significant components of its ethos, approach, process, and practice. It has a collective focus upon pedagogy, collaboration, and resistance which afford participants pleasure, and understand the imaginary as an empowering tool, capable of forging new connections between ideas and practice. Currently a core collective of two practitioners, Isabelle Fremeaux, and John Jordan, proposes its work, not as pieces of art for the art-world, but existing ‘somewhere between art and activism, poetry, and politics’ (Labofii 2015).<sup>9</sup> Significantly, it frames its work not as art or protest, but as ‘experiments’ which ‘aim not to make art but to shape reality, not to show you the world but to change it together’ (Labofii 2015).

Fremeaux and Jordan acknowledge that their work is not complete, but in flux. It follows a more adaptive and flexible model, accepting and even embracing the notion that their experiments may not work as they envisage. Such an approach is a

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<sup>9</sup> The Labofii began to create work formally from 2004 onwards. Although it has a core team of two, it frequently works with a range of practitioners.

conscious move towards working prefiguratively: ‘at the heart of our experiments lie new ways of relating to each other and organising ourselves: working without hierarchy, taking direct action [and] practising self-management’ (Labofii 2015). They strategically embrace a politics of pleasure and joy within their rebellious works, countering the view that dissent ought to be a joyless harangue of the established order; of dissemination of information alone, as Jordan states, ‘Capitalism is monopolizing desire, fantasies, and one has to admit the left wing part revealed itself useless on these issues, it always thinks information will change people’ (Jordan in Chardronnet 2015). Its tools are not based on information, then, but imagination. The Labofii also dismisses the politics of representation, championing ‘artists who escape the prisons of the art world, who stop playing the fool in the corporate palaces’ (Labofii 2015) and work with grassroots organizations, applying creativity to the engineering of social movements. In other words, action, rather than gesture, is at the core of its work; but, crucially, action which draws upon creativity, art, and pleasure.

### ***Climate Games, a response to the COP21, the ‘Conference of Polluters’***<sup>10</sup>

In December 2015, just like in 1789 when the French Revolution gave great hope to the world, history can be written in Paris, this time for the future of the planet. (Hollande in AFP News 2015)

Very few environmentalists shared François Hollande’s hopeful outlook regarding the outcome of the Conference of Parties (COP21), in December 2015, in setting ‘a goal of limiting global warming to less than 2 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels’ (COP21 2015).

*Climate Games* was designed as a means of staging playful resistance in response to the COP21, a conference which many critics have since assessed as an empty and dangerous gesture. In a joint letter to the *Independent*, for instance, some of the world’s leading climate scientists launched a blistering attack on the agreement, warning that it offers:

false hope that could ultimately prove to be counterproductive in the battle to curb global warming. [...] what they disregarded were the deadly flaws lying

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<sup>10</sup> The Conference of Parties is commonly referred to as the ‘Conference of Polluters’ by many activists, such as, ‘Community people: COP 17 is a “conference of polluters”’ (Pillay 2008).

just beneath its veneer of success. As early as the third page of the draft agreement is the acknowledgement that its CO<sub>2</sub> target won't keep the global temperature rise below 2 degrees, the level that was once set as the critical safe limit. (Bawden 2016)

Sponsored as it was by fossil fuel companies, it was suspected of being merely a means of greenwashing companies which had their own agenda and which had scant interest in halting the rise in global warming.<sup>11</sup> That such sponsors were thought to be appropriate by politicians, demonstrating, as they did, the strength of ties between the fossil fuel industry and French government, further disappointed those who were sincere in tackling the issue.<sup>12</sup>

Jordan lays out, in no uncertain terms, our ecological, political, and cultural landscape, and asks how we can transform the concept of art for the Anthropocene:

Do we continue art as usual or do we radically transform the concept of art for this new era? (Jordan 2015b)

We need new forms of creative action and organizing that make disobedience irresistible, effective and fun. (Climategames 2015b)

In creating *Climate Games* (2015), however, the Labofii did not radically transform the concept of art for this age, but instead brought together strands of theory and practice from fields rarely united to create a new frame for resistance. In electing to work within the realm of play, the Labofii sought to utilize the same tools as politicians and the media, though for a different purpose: not as a means of persuasion but as theatrical dissent. What, then, affected its choice to use play? There were three factors that suggested this was an appropriate choice:

1. The Labofii had the relevant skills, knowledge, and experience to demonstrate that play offers multiple possibilities as a mode of resistance. It had drawn on play and games in many of its previous experiments, albeit on a different scale.<sup>13</sup> Jordan too, had been heavily involved in the Reclaim the

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<sup>11</sup> Sponsors for the COP21 included BMW, Renault-Nissan, Michelin, EDF, and Air France (Nelsen, Howard 2015); all companies with an interest in greenwashing their image. The Le Bourget conference site was worthy of note (Rees 2015c), being a former airfield hangar.

<sup>12</sup> The French ambassador, Philippe Delacroix defended choosing fossil-fuel sponsors: 'we didn't approach partners we considered incompatible with the spirit of the COP' (Delacroix in Nelsen, Howard 2015).

<sup>13</sup> In 2008, for instance, (with Camp for Climate Action and Space Hijackers) it organized the *Great Rebel Raft Regatta* (2008). *Operation Treasure Island* involved participants using a

Streets movement, which brought together party, protest, and carnival (Jordan in *Beautiful Trouble* 2017) as well as the CIRCA, discussed above in terms of its ludic tactics.

2. Paris, the site of the COP21, is an historic site of protest and creative forms of resistance, which arguably created a heightened sense of purpose and belonging. Hollande's rhetoric itself drew a parallel between the COP21 and the French Revolution in utilizing images of dissent (violent as well as peaceful), radical philosophy, and the implementation of the core values: 'Liberté, égalité, fraternité'. Jordan notes:

Many a revolution has taken shape in Paris and Paris has shaped our ideas of revolution for centuries. [...] It was on its medieval streets in the spontaneity of resistance that the rebel architecture of the barricade was invented. It was the first capital city of the modern era to experience a system of 'real democracy' and be run by its citizens independently of the state (the Commune). It was in its bars and cafés that the divisions between art and revolution were abolished (Dada, Surrealism, Situationism). [...] It was under its cobblestones that you could find the beach during a riot if you happened to be out in the spring of '68. (Jordan in Hickey 2015)

Jordan here makes explicit a genealogy I have discussed in Chapter One. It is also significant that within the Dadaist, Surrealist, and Situationist movements, the ludic was considered important in creating a bridge between examining and experiencing alternative possibilities. As Prager comments, 'Dada emerges as an early and visionary milestone in understanding play as a fundamental expression of humanity almost a century before academia would take adult play seriously' (2013, 239). Engaging in forms of play in Paris may have further efficacy still, for in tracing and re-tracing the steps which political actors have previously trodden, of encountering the 'fleshy kind of "document" of its own recurrence' (Schneider 2011, 37) in repeating again the actions of the past, participants are nourished by the past and re-affirm their presence in a deeply politicized site of resistance.

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treasure map to find inflatable boats and a bottle of rum, and then crossing the water to reach the Kingsnorth coal-fired power station in order to prevent its operation (Labofii 2015).

3. The Labofii had inspiration: a ‘direct action game’ model first introduced by Dutch environmentalist network, Groen Front, in 2014, and their action game for a busy European capital. In its second year, *Climate Games, Amsterdam* (2015) was replayed in the port of Amsterdam, with ‘twenty teams taking actions to disrupt the coal and agribusiness industries’ (EJOLT 2015). Several experienced core members from Groen Front, who had been involved in organizing the games in Amsterdam, were also involved in *Climate Games* (2015) in Paris.

### *Climate Games*

We do need to define *Climate Games* (2015) in order to ascertain whether, as a form, it can be categorized as an accessible, effective, and prefigurative mode of protest, capable of dismantling performances of power, causing disruption, and reaching wider audiences. However a definition is difficult to formulate. It has been described in many ways: from ‘neo-Brechtian theatre’ (Demos 2015) to ‘an innovative form of political engagement’ (Moses 2015); from a ‘mass participation transmedia action framework’ (EJOLT 2015, 53) to ‘a large-scale experiment in horizontalist and rebellious movement building’ (Demos 2015), and to ‘colourful protests’ (Nelson 2015). Morano, a well-known climate denier, however, described it as creepy: ‘Climactivists go creepy; channel *Hunger Games, Matrix* to mobilize “disobedience” anarchy for Paris’ (Morano 2015);<sup>14</sup> unwittingly drawing attention to its implicit use of accessible popular references, such as *Hunger Games*, through narrative and visual imagery. It remains a challenge to define *Climate Games*, partly because of the structure, which encouraged autonomy from participants, but also because it drew together strands of theory and practice which are rarely brought together: gaming, play, cybernetics, creative resistance, horizontal models, art, objects, permaculture, direct action, prefiguration, as well as scale.

The organizers themselves claimed *Climate Games*, devised by Labofii and a diverse range of collaborators, as ‘the world’s largest disobedient action adventure game’ (Climate Games 2015b). In response to the COP21 (30 November 2015–11 December 2015) it invited participants to devise their own direct actions autonomously, working

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<sup>14</sup> Marc Morano has been dubbed by the *Guardian* as a ‘climate science denialist’ (Readfearn 2016).

in affinity groups (or teams), following game rules or guidelines shared online. Participants were guided to devise actions according to specific criteria, such as ‘Best Crowd Choreography’ (Climate Games 2015b). The opposition, characterized as ‘The Mesh’, included real life opponents: ‘Team Blue’ (police) and ‘Team Grey’ (corporations, governments, and lobbyists). The narrative theme, ‘We Are Nature Defending Itself’, was disseminated online through a trailer as well as in written form on the Labofii’s website. With an onus upon affinity groups absorbing the characteristics of animals or using the gaming framework as inspiration for their action, the narrative served to offer players a theme or role which they could fulfil. Players were encouraged to share online any useful information regarding Team Blue or Team Grey (their geographical position or security presence, for instance). After players had completed their game, they were encouraged to submit a report to the *Climate Games* website team, which had the task of removing any possible incriminating information before publishing online.

*Climate Games* had three distinct rounds:

Round 1: The Opening Round (30 November 2015), which aimed to ‘greet the opening of COP21, the Games will scrub away all signs of greenwash’. (Climate Games 2015b)

Round 2: Pop up actions in Paris and beyond (1 December–10 December 2015).

Round 3: The Closing Round (11–12 December 2015) where teams would join the *D12* action, a day of mass disobedience, supported by diverse campaign groups.

And finally, after the action, on 13 December, the Labofii was to host an Award Ceremony, where teams could share documentation of their actions and give awards for: The Best Hive Mind; Ultimate Unexpectedness; and Best Crowd Choreography (Climate Games 2015b).

### **Gaming in a State of Emergency**

On 13 November 2015, seventeen days before *Climate Games* was due to begin, the terrorist attacks in Paris targeting the Bataclan Theatre, and restaurants and cafés in a suburb in Saint-Denis, occurred, killing 130 people. An attack of this scale and co-ordination was unprecedented in Paris and shifted the landscape considerably, as



everyday life came to a standstill. Not only did a period of grief and mourning take place, where public transport, schools, and places of work closed for a period of two days, but, shortly after the attacks, the French government issued a state of emergency. During this period, makeshift memorial sites were formed as people gathered, adorning sites such as the Place de la République with candles, photographs, letters, and flags. Shortly after the attacks, a social media campaign, ‘#Jesuisenterrasse’, emerged, which documented Parisians reclaiming the streets and continuing with everyday life: going to bars, restaurants, and cafés. *Telegraph* journalist Horton described this as a ‘peaceful way of fighting back [and] showing they [Parisians] aren’t afraid of Isil’ (2015).

Although the state of emergency forbade mass gatherings, public events such as the Christmas market and football games opened seven days after the attacks. Despite the gradual re-opening of such venues, the French government declared that the state of emergency applied to the protest planned for the 12 December 2015 (Round 3): it was not permitted and participating in the protest was therefore deemed illegal.

Undoubtedly, the terrorist attacks shifted the political landscape considerably, with many questioning how, if at all, *Climate Games* could continue in such a context. The Labofii released a statement in response:

These attacks must not change the conversation but deepen it. [...] We will not bend to the politics of fear that stifle liberties in the name of security. The biggest threat to security, to life in all its forms, is the system that drives the climate disaster. History is never made by those who ask permission. (Climate Games 2015b)

Its resolve was clear; however, Foreign Minister Fabius issued a press release, stating that ‘in order to avoid any additional risk, the Government has decided not to authorize the climate marches planned on public roads in Paris and other French cities on 29 November and 12 December’ (Fabius in Quinn 2015). In this context, the prospect of participating in *Climate Games* had shifted; the stakes had risen considerably. Not only had the police force received back-up from the army who had been deployed on the streets of Paris, but it had become a real possibility that forces would use more aggressive tactics, as well as employing stricter law enforcement. How appropriate was it to play in an environment where public gatherings had been banned and the army stood on street corners, armed with weapons? Moreover, the

prospect of playing in a context where local people were experiencing grief, mourning, and fear questioned the ethics of play and gaming altogether.



Figure 3.2: Alternative protest staged in the Place de la République which used the semiotic power of the shoe; and offered a striking visual depiction of the presence of dissent through the absence of the dissenter.

### **Elements Affecting Efficacy**

Although not part of *Climate Games*, nor an act of gaming or play, a protest took place in the ‘beating heart of Paris’ (Patel 2015), the Place de la République, on 29 November 2015, which embraced several significant principles of play, such as adaptation and resilience. Arguably, this action proved to be more potent than the original planned march, both in terms of efficacy, in attracting attention from a wider range of media outlets, and also in producing a specific affective dimension. Due to the protest ban, protesters sought to represent their dissent through objects as ‘more than 10,000 pairs of shoes were left at Place de la République, Paris, by people who were set to take part in the climate change protest’ (Mathiesen 2015d). Such an action

was deemed by *USA Today*, to ‘send a powerful message’ (Durando 2015). But what was the source of its power? Partly, it drew attention to the context, in exposing to media outlets what many protesters deemed a human rights infringement: the protest ban. It also illustrated the resolve of the organizers who adapted imaginatively: if people were not authorized to protest, then shoes left in a specific formation could represent their dissent.

Yet, it went further by drawing upon the symbolism of the shoe. The object of the shoe, especially when separated from its owner, has a specific semiotic charge. Upon first glance, viewers may be reminded of the survival of shoes owned by victims of the Holocaust. In her work, *Empty Shoes*, historiographer, E. C. Jones describes these shoes as:

abject survivors of the abjection suffered by the men and women and children killed in the Shoah, the shoes – derelict, decaying – figure the abandonment of European Jewry by the West, the decomposition of a people under the Nazis. (2001, 197)

Historian Kelly, similarly describes his shock, disorientation, and nausea when seeing a medieval shoe at the Museum of London’s exhibition *Shoes and Patterns* (2010, 58). The sight of a medieval shoe, a scrap of leather, clearly reminiscent in both style and material of that historical period, to Kelly, signified the Holocaust: the ‘empty shoe has become a signifier of the scale and human impact of Nazi crimes’ (2010, 63), even when seen out of context. The shoe, then, is capable of producing a profoundly affective dimension for the viewer. If we examine Figure 3.2 more closely, however, we can see that the formation of these shoes contrasts greatly with the images depicting the piles of individual shoes which are so evocative of the Holocaust. Historians Riello and McNeil point out that, ‘of all garments shoes are uniquely independent from the physical body. They have a shape that they keep even when the wearer is absent’ (2011, 9). These shoes, placed carefully in pairs, all facing the same direction, with adequate spacing in between, represented the absent: a crowd of protesters. Seen from this perspective (as in Figure 3.2) the shoes may signify a position of readiness, as though their owners were about to embark on the climate march. Arguably, then, the shoes, left as they were, did what the planned climate march could not. Not only did the shoes potentially produce a specific affective dimension which the image of a crowd of protesters would, in all likelihood, not have rivalled, but they also created a strong and lasting image of dissent. A crowd of

protesters would certainly have produced an image of resistance whilst they occupied the square, perhaps for an hour or two as the crowd gathered. These shoes, however, produced a longer and more unified performance of dissent: they not only occupied the square for more time than the protesters, but also created a frame for photographers. Any media outlets reporting on the climate march would have captured different moments from alternative vantage points, yet photographers who documented this particular action, due to the formation of the shoes and banners and fountain, produced very similar footage and images. From the *Telegraph* to the *Guardian*, *NBC* to *Elle*, news outlets depicted the image of the action from a similar vantage point, reproducing a more unified performance of dissent, repeated across diverse platforms. It is also significant that this action produced a counter-narrative. The *Daily Mail*, for instance, wrote an article entitled ‘Violence Flares on the Streets of Paris as Police Move In to Break Up Climate Change Protest Banned Under Emergency Laws Brought in After Terror Attacks’ (Allen 2015); yet its captions to images of the shoes, were far more supportive. Three images of the action, for example, were framed with the captions, ‘Looks fun: Hundreds of pairs of shoes have been left at the Place de République as part of a symbolic rally’, ‘Standing together’ and ‘Impressive’ (Allen 2015). In applying the principles of play, in adapting to the changing context creatively and seeking alternative ways to produce performances of dissent, the organizers created a powerful and affective action which expanded upon the more traditional form of a protest march, temporally, aesthetically, and even politically, in producing a critique of the protest ban. The explicit issue of climate change has resulted in a parallel protest about freedom of speech.<sup>15</sup>

### **Framing the Action as a Game**

In analyzing the efficacy of play as a mode of protest, it is important to understand how far participants perceived the structure as a game (rather than a direct action) in response to the Labofi’s invitation, which framed it as such:

It’s December 2015. You have a heart filled with courage, a mobile phone and plans for creative mischief.

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<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, this protest remained focused on the issue of climate change, with numerous banners explicitly stating the cause; supported by Climate Guardian Angels (protesters dressed in white, complete with angel wings). These protesters were also part of Round 2 and Round 3 of *Climate Games*.

The *Climate Games* are where action-adventure meets actual change. Anyone can play this real-time, real-world game and turn Paris and the world into a giant, direct action playing field for climate justice. [...] We have everything to play for [...]

We are not fighting for nature.

We are nature defending itself. (Climate Games 2015b)

The Labofii states the overall aim is to shift ‘the game against profit and in favour of life’ (Climate Games 2015b). This aim, however, remains vague but becomes more specific when an intention is made clear to expose the barriers to climate justice. We can ‘raise the curtain on the smoke and mirrors of false corporate promises and pierce through the Mesh’s hold on us’ (Climate Games 2015b). The video trailer emphasizes the narrative of the game by giving examples of the power, agility, and knowledge of ecological systems working as one unit; a pattern of behaviour that could be beneficially emulated by protesters. The slogan, found both on the video and online, ‘We Are Not Fighting For Nature, We Are Nature Defending Itself’ (Climate Games 2015b), described by activist and author Bloch as a ‘masterful reframing’ (2015), offers players a strong sense of narrative. It shifts the terms of the debate regarding climate change: protesters take a position of *defence* rather than *offence*. Rather than situating their work as part of the opposition, countering the position of the government, they have positioned themselves in a place of moral defence and power, suggesting that it is Team Grey (government, lobbyists, and corporations) who pose the threat as the opposition. Moreover, it reminds players that, human beings, as part of the natural world, are far from immune to climate-change threats; and being reliant upon thriving ecological systems for survival, must act, if nothing else, out of self-preservation. Practically too, the invitation offers players a theme for their actions and roles: ‘we are the foxes that wake up at dawn, the mushrooms that appear overnight. We are microbes and mountains, starfish and stardust’ (Climate Games 2015b).

There remains, however, a notable absence within the invitation. There is no logistical information: no details of potential ideas or sites for interventions. It mentions a smartphone, but no indication of how it may be used. The invitation refers to a ‘we’, but does not specify the campaign groups or activist networks involved. Due to the autonomous structure, there are many missing crucial details regarding participants: their numbers; demography; affiliation with campaign groups; as well as their reasons for participating. An element of mystery or secrecy is embedded within this invitation,

which aligns with a common theme amongst many pervasive games.<sup>16</sup> This acted both to pique curiosity and imagination and also to protect the game and its participants in legal terms (should their actions comprise any illegal activity, which, during the state of emergency, may have included activities not normally deemed illegal), and from infiltration and surveillance. As self-management of affinity groups was encouraged, only small groups of participants had any detailed knowledge of their action. As Belamir notes, this is the beauty of the format, as a ‘large-scale experiment in horizontalist and rebellious movement building’ (Belamir in Demos 2015):

prefiguration and democracy in action. However, it also meant that the organizers too did not know what to expect, having no prior knowledge of the actions nor the affinity groups: ‘it will be as much of a surprise for us as for everybody else’ (Belamir in Craw 2015) and most significantly, we cannot know if the prospect of play was compelling enough to encourage newcomers. Despite the belief that gaming structures would widen accessibility, it seems that, given the nature of the invitation, it would be accepted only by those already affiliated with activist communities. Without further detailed information about how to participate, people who were not already engaged with activism would not therefore be equipped to engage fully with *Climate Games*.

Whilst these omissions may seem frustrating, what we do know, is that the game framework hosted a surprisingly wide array of playful tactics and protest strategies across the globe, adding further credence to the notion that *Climate Games* was indeed ‘the world’s largest disobedient action adventure game’ (Climate Games 2015b). ‘Over 14 days, (19 November – 12 December 2015) whilst the UN summit played with words, 214 actions by 124 teams took place from Portugal to Paris, New York to Melbourne, Brittany to Switzerland’ (Climate Games 2015b). Undoubtedly, the diversity of actions was remarkable: from Brandalism’s contribution of ‘600 ad takeovers by 80 artists’ (Brandalism 2015a) across Paris, to a Guerrilla Performance inside the Tate Modern, and outside the Shell Headquarters in London; from the climate justice can-can direct-action dance (We Can Can) to the Toilet Interventionists placing toilet rolls printed with the IPCC AR5 report inside the COP21 toilets so that delegates ‘flushed science down the toilet’ (Climate Games

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<sup>16</sup> Blast Theory (*Operation Black Antler*, 2016) and Coney (*Adventure 1*, 2016), for instance, incorporate elements of surprise and mystery in interrupting the participants’ everyday, prior to, and throughout game experiences.

Report Toilet Interventions 2015).<sup>17</sup> These examples demonstrate only a fraction of the actions' incorporation of play following the *Climate Games* framework. The *Climate Games* website (which includes documentation submitted by affinity groups) acted as a resource to exhibit play and performance as a mode of protest, offering us an understanding of the scale and extensive range of tactics employed.

### **Ensemble Zoologique de Libération de la Nature (EZLN)**

The affinity group, EZLN, has been selected as a case study because it embraced both the narrative provided by the *Climate Games* framework, and the concept of play and non-violent civil disobedience.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the ensemble's work has flourished and developed after the *Climate Games*, with their most recent action, *Nature Versus Dirty Deals*, taking place in April 2016.

### ***Nature Versus Cars Performance, 30 November 2015***<sup>19</sup>

Based in Belgium, the ensemble's first performance, *Nature Versus Cars* was a Guerrilla Performance intervention which invaded a Volkswagen car salesroom towards the end of the working day in Brussels.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The IPCC AR5 report is a compilation of research which includes data and research providing evidence of climate change.

<sup>18</sup> Their name, EZLN, is a nod towards the Zapatistas, often referred to as EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional). From this, we can deduce that the Zapatistas are a source of inspiration for the ensemble, perhaps through their civil disobedience tactics, and association with the alter-globalization movement.

<sup>19</sup> The case studies have been analyzed in this order due to the chronology of events which took place within *Climate Games*.

<sup>20</sup> I was not present during this performance, nor did I participate. As such, the performance analysis is limited to examining only what EZLN captured and selected in the edited video footage (EZLN 2015a). Whilst the analysis cannot comment upon the performance process nor include details from the perspective of a participant, this was, nonetheless, the version of the performance which most audience members viewed.

It is dark outside, so it is likely that workers and security cannot clearly see the ensemble approaching. Armed with an array of vegetables and fauna (leeks, carrots, lettuce, and leaves) the ensemble of approximately thirty players, dressed as ‘animals of the forest, savannah and mountains’ (Climate Games Report EZLN 2015a), approaches the car dealership. A few bears enter, throwing leaves across the cars, followed by a performer, robed in a large fluffy carrot costume, who shouts, ‘What do we want?’. In response, the entire ensemble present (by now a giraffe, rabbit, tiger, zebra, chicken, and several penguins have entered the car salesroom) calls back, ‘Climate justice now! Climate justice now!’. An excerpt from Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons, Summer, Movement 3, Presto* plays as the animals, vegetables, and fauna begin to dance and transform the space; a giant banana places banana skins beneath the car wheels, a pair of giraffes move across the space in tandem, waving palm leaves, a rabbit chases a giant carrot and meanwhile, all the performers cast dried leaves and fauna across the cars and onto the pristine white flooring of the dealership.

A bemused sales representative sits behind his desk watching the intervention. Two others seem to be discussing what action, if any, should be taken; one looks confused but smiles at the action, whilst another looks directly at the camera operator, seemingly annoyed, hands on hips. Four others, perhaps managers, are located above the retail area on a balcony, looking on impassively. Another, on the ground level, has seemingly locked himself in his office. Posters depicted with the *Climate Games* slogan, ‘We are Not Fighting For Nature, We Are Nature Defending Itself’ are taped onto pillars whilst leeks and carrots are placed in the areas usually reserved for Volkswagen brochures. Several members of the public enter the car salesroom, take in the action, and smile but look uncertain, whilst another has taken out his phone to document the action. The ensemble then gathers together in one space where a performer, dressed as a rabbit, leads a mass choreographed chant in synch, each of the performers roar and then shout: ‘We...Are...Nature...Defending...Itself!’. This is followed by what sounds like a war-cry, juxtaposed with deliberately nonsensical high pitched wailing of specific animals as they exit the dealership. Lastly, their ‘signature snail’, depicted by a performer with a cardboard house on his back, slowly approaches the dealership muttering, ‘oh la la, I am always the last one [...] I must get to Paris for the *Climate Games*’.





Figure 3.3: Video still of the latter part of EZLN's performance, *Nature Versus Cars*, November 2015.

### **Performance: Efficacy**

EZLN's use of humour was potentially efficacious, as Rowe notes, 'performances that genuinely bring laughter to audiences are the most successful' (2013, 126). It drew upon play in both form and content in not only embodying the roles of animals and vegetables playfully (certainly, their performance cannot be said to be solemn) but in celebratory dancing, and commitment to transforming the space through a humour marked by 'incongruity between what we know or expect to be the case, and what actually takes place' (Critchley 2010, 3). It is not expected, for instance, for financial transactions in a car salesroom to be interrupted by performers dressed as vegetables, animals, and fauna. The intervention was absurd and incongruous, defying expectations of everyday life to such a degree that one staff member smiled nervously in response to the performance (as illustrated in Figure 3.4).



Figure 3.4: Video still of car dealership workers' differing reactions to the performance.

Clearly, the intention of their performance was not friendly, designed solely to amuse and entertain staff. Instead, it was staged as an intervention underscored with a sharp critique of Volkswagen. Yet, one staff member found the scenario to be humorous whilst others stood, fixed to the spot, uncertain how to proceed. Activist group, Code Pink, which also draws heavily upon incongruity, believes that this particular type of humour creates a 'disarming' effect, noting that this is a key attribute to its successes (Rowe 2013, 129).<sup>21</sup> This performance, similarly, was successful in disarming the staff. If EZLN had re-staged the intervention without incorporating incongruous performance elements: costumes, vegetables, fauna, choreography, and chants, but fulfilled the actions of pinning up posters and interrupting customers then it is likely that staff would have intervened, or at the very least, responded differently. It is quite likely they would not have smiled in response or remained fixed to the spot. The comic nature of the performance, communicated through the performance elements that specifically defied expectations and were incongruous in their context, created an effect of making the familiar strange.

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<sup>21</sup> Code Pink is a 'grassroots organization working to end U.S. wars' (Code Pink 2017). Its tactics draw on humour, including satire, and street theatre.

Its use of clowning, and drawing on performance and protest histories, also has a potential that was partially realized. The performer, dressed as a banana, who carefully placed a banana skin, for example, under the wheels of a car, borrowed heavily from traditional comic repertoire. The inclusion of the banana skin joke; the ‘scepter and emblem of slapstick comedy’ (Gunning 2010, 147), that we are so familiar with in clowning routines, from Charlie Chaplin to children’s cartoons, communicates to the audience that the performance is comic. In sharing a knowing look with the audience (staring directly into the video camera), the performer explicitly invests the present action with the cultural history of humour, making it a familiar and safe expression of fun but also making the audience complicit with the action. By responding to the humour, the audience becomes part of the protest, at least for that particular moment.

Its use of vegetables as performance objects allays fears in the audience that the action, whilst disobedient, may be violent. After all, a vegetable is incapable of causing great injury, even when thrown, but it achieves more than this. It has the effect of imbuing the present action with expressions of dissent within protests from the past; creating continuity between present and historic protests, from those protesting against poor performances to those protesting against those who violated a social, legal or moral code in the Middle Ages.<sup>22</sup> By placing leeks in shelving units for brochures and car windows, a rich connection between the past and present was established. An everyday object was re-purposed as one of protest, not hostile in intention but absurd in tone: it defies expectations to see vegetables positioned in incongruous places within a car salesroom. Using the performance objects in these various humorous ways was part of a wider aim: to mock the notion that companies, such as Volkswagen, were being touted as being part of the climate solution. To EZLN, the role of fossil fuel companies in supporting the COP21 was as absurd and incongruous as the performance they created.

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<sup>22</sup> The act of pelting vegetables is a well-documented practice in performance. From the custom of throwing rotten vegetables in Elizabethan performances, where ‘crowds were given to bombarding the players with missiles to demonstrate critical disapproval’ (Menzer 2011, 26) to the case of Futurist performances where audiences responded by fashioning vegetables into projectiles to such a degree that ‘the hail of vegetables turned the stage into a cesspit’ (Berghaus 2005a, 36).

Nevertheless, despite the use of playful strategies, the performance did not reach its full comic potential. Whilst the tone of the performance was clearly comic, it was not, arguably, very funny, resulting in my smile but not my laughter. Most importantly, the performance had not exploited clowning's most important device: the audience. If performers had interacted with the staff, in decorating and transforming them as they had done with the car salesroom, through a simple device such as throwing leaves over them, placing a banana skin beside them or a leek in a pocket, for instance, then the response from the staff would have become a key part of their performance, providing further potential comic opportunities. Overall, EZLN's humour was not sophisticated. It was not multi-layered and did not utilize audience response which limited its affective power as a comic performance. Nevertheless, the element of play, present in the framing of the *Climate Games*, can also be found in EZLN's performance. Its use of humour, and engagement with play during the performance is significant. It existed very much as part of the wider *Climate Games* framework.

The efficacy of the performance was also limited because of its chosen target and site: the car salesroom was not a site or an institution with multiple agendas. The purpose of the car salesroom had only one agenda: to sell cars. Customers who arrived at the site had a specific interest in purchasing a car. Situated as it was, on an industrial estate, there were no passers-by, thereby limiting any opportunities for the action to provoke a dialogue. If we compare the efficacy of this action with one situated in the British Museum by BP or Not BP, for example, we can see that there is less leverage, impact, and accessibility. The British Museum, is in a far more vulnerable position as it balances the demands of corporate sponsors such as BP, with the views of its main funders, British taxpayers. Further, any action attracts an audience composed of British Museum visitors, workers, and security, which offers the opportunity of attracting a range of new supporters. As such, it becomes more of a spectacle, where the British Museum's response to unsanctioned performances is scrutinized. In this respect, the ensemble's action works on one level, and is also less accessible.

EZLN's performance has been well disseminated, reaching a relatively wide audience. The video documentation of the performance, available on *Vimeo*, has been viewed a total of 13, 900 times (EZLN 2015a), whilst a shortened version of its video, highlighted by the *New Internationalist* magazine, has been seen a total of

320, 579 times (New Internationalist 2015). This may be compared with the *Climate Games* trailer video, available on *YouTube* which has been viewed a total of 7,577 times (Climate Games 2015c). The actions have also been discussed by a range of press outlets, with twelve articles covering all four actions, from *Le Soir* (Vernier 2015) to *Metro, Brussels* (Metro 2016).<sup>23</sup>

The fact that the ensemble has continued to devise and compose actions, engaging with the same narrative and format is significant. It demonstrates that, as a group, members remain committed to continuing their work beyond the framework and support offered through the *Climate Games*. Whilst still in its infancy, in existing outside of the framework, the group shows signs that this format may be sustainable. Certainly, the tactics adopted in the latest action have shifted considerably. Whilst the hallmarks of earlier actions are still present (the costumes, leaves, choreography, and text), also included are graffiti, painting text onto the exterior walls of the European Commission building. Certainly, this lends credence to Jordan's assertion that 'adventure is addictive' (2015b), and it demonstrates the ensemble's adaptability; but it also suggests that, perhaps, for the game to remain compelling, the stakes must be upped, as more personal risks are taken with tactics, and this, in its turn, may threaten its sustainability.

EZLN's performance can be perceived as a celebratory form of dissent, which remained more an expression of dissent than one having specific aims. I am not, therefore, analyzing its action in terms of its own aims in so much as seeing it as a means of assessing the efficacy of both *Climate Games*, and also of the utilization of the mode of play as protest.

The concepts and narrative offered by the framework of *Climate Games* directly influenced the aesthetics, tactics, and forms of EZLN's actions, and this, in itself, may point to the efficacy of *Climate Games*, in inspiring future actions by groups acting independently. The 'Mesh', defined by *Climate Games* as 'austerity-dictating politicians, fossil fuel corporations, industry lobbyists, peddlers of false solutions, and greenwashers' (Climate Games 2015b) has become the target of the four actions of

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<sup>23</sup> Full details of press articles and interviews regarding the EZLN's actions can be found on its website: <http://ezln-zoologique.be/la-presse-en-parle/> [accessed 20 October 2016].

ELZN : Volkswagen (fossil fuel corporation), BNP (fossil fuel corporation), International Chamber of Commerce (industry lobbyists) and the European Commission (peddlers of false solutions). The narrative of *Climate Games*, summed up by the phrase, ‘We Are Nature Defending Itself’, directly informed performance roles, embodying different aspects of nature, from animals to fauna. Thematically, this form of Guerrilla Performance disrupts, invades, and transforms corporate space by literally bringing nature (leaves, hay, flowers) *into* the space.

### ***D12 – Red Lines Are Not For Crossing: Pre-Performance Preparation***

Although included in the *Climate Games* reports, the *D12* action was not officially part of the event, existing outside of the gaming framework. The *D12* action, however, embraced significant components of play and, at least in part, the spirit of the games penetrated the *D12* action.

Shortly before *D12* was due to take place, Fremeaux and Jordan highlighted the risks of participating, ‘any more than two people will be seen as a demonstration [...] so we will be disobeying the state of emergency’ (Fremeaux, Jordan 2015). The journalist Lukas pointed out that, ‘charges for refusing to disperse from actions include up to one year in jail and a fine of €15,000 (£10,850)’ (2015). Throughout the duration of the COP21 pepper spray and teargas had been routinely used on protesters, as well as a number of house arrests and arrests for participating in actions (Eleftheriou-Smith 2015). I was first introduced to what Fremeaux and Jordan called the ‘climate of fear’ when I arrived at the training session at the Zone d’action Climat in Paris on 11 December 2015 which provided participants with legal advice and medical information, including advice regarding teargas attacks.<sup>24</sup> We were advised against bringing paperwork containing lawyers’ details as, in this context, it could be perceived as incriminating. Instead, we memorized the names of two lawyers, in case of arrest. We were offered conflicting advice about whether to carry a passport, as showing one may have helped us leave before arrests were made, but identification may also aid the police in potentially making charges. Despite these warnings, the mood was surprisingly cheerful. The Zone d’action Climat, based in a working class

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<sup>24</sup> The Zone d’action Climat was hosted at the Centquatre during 7-11 December 2015.

district in Paris, is an open industrial space. Thousands of leaflets regarding the COP21 and environmental campaigns were available to browse, situated on tables within the space. Art installations created in protest of the COP21 occupied the basement, whilst photographs were projected on opposing walls detailing other protest art works. At 6pm a crowd gathered to hear the plans for the proposed action, *D12* ‘Red Lines are Not for Crossing’, on the following day.<sup>25</sup> We were told that, despite several further discussions with the police, the demonstration ban was still in place. We were briefed about the action by Jordan, who outlined the timing and activities for the action. He ended with Alice Walker’s phrase, ‘resistance is the secret of joy’ (Rees 2015c).

The effects of the state of emergency were palpable. The original aim was for the climate justice movement to have the last word, visually and physically. In response to the terror attacks, heightened security, and the state of emergency measure, organizers decided to change the location, instead staging it at the Avenue de la Grande Armée near the Arc de Triomphe.<sup>26</sup> The *D12* mass demonstration action had shifted considerably, compared to the original aim of staging it as a blockade outside the COP21 conference centre.

### ***D12* Performance, 12 December 2015**

The *D12* performance involved:

- Thousands of metres of red material
- 5000 Tulips
- 15 DIY Fog Horns
- 50 giant inflatable cobblestones
- 20,000 people. (Fremaux, Jordan 2016)

These bare materials formed the foundation of the *D12* action, which, in many ways, embodied the spirit of play. The objects mentioned above were pivotal in creating an

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<sup>25</sup> ‘Red Lines are not for crossing’ was a phrase composed by climate scientists. It identified a series of criteria, ‘red lines’ that should not be crossed, as to do so would eliminate the possibility of reducing the effects of climate change. For further details see: <http://www.parisclimatejustice.org/sites/default/files/images/redlinesproposalsept.pdf> [accessed 28 November 2015].

<sup>26</sup> Whilst the Labofii helped to plan and execute this action, over 150 organizations were involved.

ebullience and spontaneity, which was surprising in an action which was unsanctioned and expected potentially aggressive tactics from the police.

I arrive at 11.45am on Saturday 12 December 2015, with thousands of protesters who gather along the Avenue de la Grande Armée, between Place Charles de Gaulle and Porte Maillot. As previously rehearsed, at midday, the signal of a foghorn is given: enormous red banners, 100 metres in length, are then unfolded and handed out to the crowd. These banners had the phrases, printed in English, 'It's up to us to keep fossil fuels in the ground' and 'crime climatique – stop' (350 2015a) inscribed in white bold font. At the sound of the second foghorn, participants hold red umbrellas and red tulips in the air, holding a two minute silence as a memorial to victims of climate change. This silence is followed by brass and samba bands. A blockade, formed through large silver inflatable cobblestones, erupts into the air, and the crowd respond to them as though they are giant volleyballs, keeping them in the air. The crowd of protesters dance and slowly meander along the Avenue de la Grande Armée. It is approximately 12.45pm when the crowd reaches the Arc de Triomphe, which is blocked by a long row of white police vans (several vans deep) and lines of riot police, situated in front of the vans, and at the two side streets that branch off the Arc de Triomphe. The police in the side streets begin to approach the main road. The back of the crowd decide, seemingly spontaneously, to create an impromptu and unsanctioned route towards the Eiffel Tower. The red banners are held whilst the crowd changes direction, and the inflatable cobblestones are continuously bounced in the air as the crowd moves. When we approach the Eiffel Tower, people stand, before a message is passed through the crowd, to sit down. An impromptu sit-in is created on the Pont d'Iéna, with the inflatable cobblestones being used no longer as giant balls, but as a blockade, held together by strips of Velcro. It is now 3.45pm and the majority of the crowd disperses.



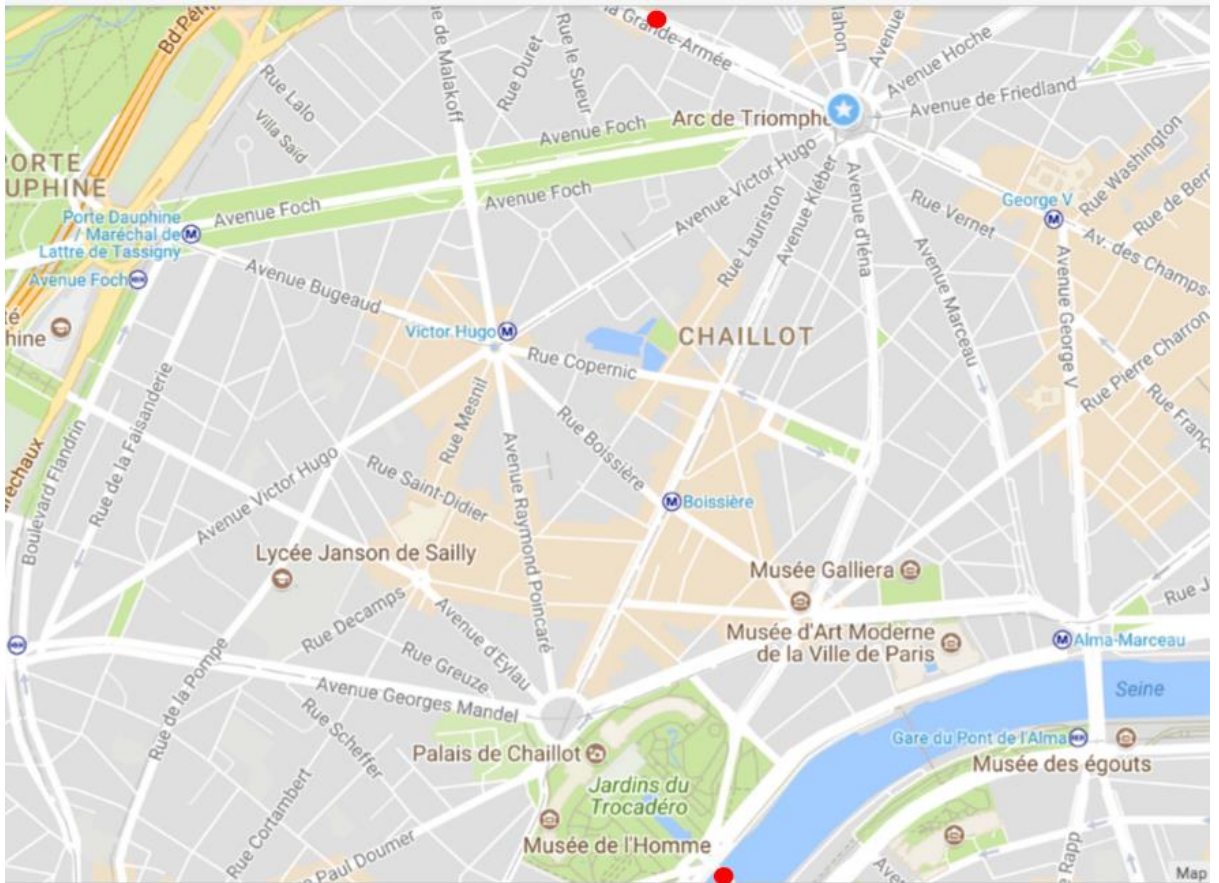


Figure 3.5: Map of area where *D12* took place. Red markers note the beginning and end points.

The choice and use of objects contributed most of all to the effectiveness of the action. *D12* held within it many signifiers of play: from a giant yellow ball, where protestors had written messages, to a group of rebel clowns. Yet, it was the inflatable cobblestones and red banners which arguably had the greatest impact in shifting both the environment and mode of participation from the purely political to the political and ludic; they managed to affect the mood of participants and bystanders alike.

During the two minute silence, the mood was reflective and sombre. The commemorative signifiers (flowers and stillness of the crowd) may not have been altogether clear to spectators; but it is likely to have given an impression of commemoration. At the end of the two-minute silence, a shift in mood was signalled by the sound of the bands and the use of the inflatable cobblestones, which acted to make this shift visible.



Figure 3.6: A shift in mood, as the inflatable cobbles, which held a strong semiotic charge, are playfully thrown into the air by protesters at the sound of live brass and samba bands, Avenue de la Grande Armée, Paris, 12 December 2015.

Most effective of all was the use of the inflatable cobbles. Inflatables have been used in both demonstrations and parades since the 1930s. The V&A's *Disobedient Objects* exhibition, for instance, mentions inflatables being used in Soviet Parades (Duarte 2014). The inflatable cobbles, in its adaptability, is a complex object, capable of shifting space and power dynamics, and of creating conditions for ludic participation. It may be dismissed by the police as a playful object with no practical purpose, but, when brought together, the cobbles can form a barricade the width of a street, capable of causing major disruption.

The use of cobbles went far beyond the mere practical, as they were transformed into symbolic objects. They invested the present isolated action with significance, framing it in the context of the struggles of a movement, imbuing it with the

significance of past and contemporary struggles, providing continuity with, and connections between, dissenting voices historically and geographically separated. In France, the cobblestone conjures the Paris Commune of 1871, when the people of Paris tore up cobblestones to build barricades in defence of government troops (Gould 1991, 719; Tombs 1999, 66; Ross 2008, 36); and the radical protests of 1968, when students and protesters unearthed and threw cobblestones at police (Seidman 2006, 94), as well as using them to build barricades, which, ‘in the mind of every educated French citizen was *the* mythic emblem of revolt, a living image of the revolutionary tradition’ (Miller 1993, 166). Further, its use correlates with the Situationist slogan, ‘underneath the cobblestones, the beach’. Described by Buchli as a ludic reference, he argues that this refers to new forms of consciousness and action, noting that an individual can dislodge the cobblestone within a collective action against ‘what would appear to be the overbearing and immovable structures of capitalist rationality and order’ (2013, 95).

By using inflatable cobblestones, ‘images and stories that counter the “dominant discourse”’ (Van Balen 2016), a counter–narrative is created. Frequently, environmental activists accuse the media of focusing upon the rare incidents of violence, rather than the majority of peaceful protests. Yet, the inflatable cobblestone ridicules the notion of aggressive tactics, being not only incapable of causing harm, but also allowing playful dynamics which show ‘how the balance of power on the street can be swung with just a bit of mischievous wit’ (Wainwright 2014). Curator Grindon dissects how easily power can be swung through the inflatable cobblestone, as police officers are confronted with a dilemma: ‘Do they [police officers] throw the inflatable back, in which case they are engaging in this weird performance? Do they try to bundle it into a van and arrest the cobblestone? Or do they try to attack it and deflate it?’ (Grindon in Wainwright 2014). Filled with air, it occupies space and cannot be deflated easily. It is difficult to handle and requires time and patience to deflate. The sight of police officers, for instance, on all fours, patiently deflating cobblestones or using equipment to pierce it, is comic and destabilizes power structures, as their authority is undermined. Equally important is the fact that the response of the police is scrutinized. Officers are no longer representatives of the state, controlling the action, but inadvertently become players within a game which is defined by the protesters. Such a tactic has been successfully drawn upon by many

activists. Rowe, for instance, discusses an occasion when the authority, power, and order usually associated with the DC police force evaporated when confronted by Code Pink's parody, *Pink Police*, where members would dress as police officers in pink. In a similar manner to the CIRCA, Code Pink shifted the power dynamics, by occupying the street, stopping traffic, and dancing: 'At first the DC police force were taken aback, but they struggled to hold back their laughter. In laughing, the barriers of authority and disobedience were broken down' (Rowe 2013, 79). The inflatable cobblestone in *D12* did not humanize relationships between activists and police, as with Code Pink's performance, but nonetheless, the potential to do so was there. On one occasion, however, the magic circle of play, demarcated by the cobblestones, expanded to include police officers. During the sit-in on the Pont d'Iéna, and during a game of volley ball, the wind blew one cobblestone towards police officers. Several smiled and one stepped forward as though to push it back, before consciously stopping himself. The humble inflatable cobblestone, then, finds the person behind the masked uniformed role by drawing upon an innate sense of play. This reaction of sharing with protesters the fun of the present moment may be explained by the unthreatening agency of the wind rather than a human agency, causing the movement of the cobblestone. However, this association dissolves as the person reverts to their uniformed role and the moment of sharing a common humanity is over, as sides in the protest are drawn again.

The cobblestone not only tempted participation from the police but also encouraged active and sustained participation from protestors. I was standing nearby when eight cobblestones, in the formation of a barricade, were suddenly launched into the air. All around, people shifted their gaze upwards, watching the cobblestones, and then, automatically reached for them. As a result, people stopped looking towards the ground or at their friends and looked upwards towards the cobblestones, whilst also taking in their surroundings. They became energized, moving to participate in the game. The expressions on people's faces too, had noticeably changed, as the act of playing caused people to laugh, smile, and talk. This shift was clear in my own behaviour; as I became absorbed in the game, my concerns regarding aggressive police tactics began to lessen.



Figure 3.7: Protesters playfully interact with red material banners for *DI2* situated on the Avenue de la Grande Armée, Paris, 12 December 2015.

Both the inflatable cobblestone and the banner require collaboration between people; the inflatable cobblestone, quite literally needs a group of people to handle it, whether as a barricade or as a volleyball, as does the banner. Not only do these objects bring people together, but the distinct materiality of each object acts as an invitation to the participants: to touch, explore, and play. Both objects are easily manipulated, one filled with air, the other thin cloth material. Each lift and drop I made when carrying the banner during the *DI2* action, for example, was in response to the participants around me. Figure 3.7 illustrates a moment where participants jointly lift the banner into the air, mirroring the effect of a parachute. As I quickly ran under the banner to capture this moment, nearby participants smiled. We were engaging in an act of play, reminiscent of the early childhood game of holding and running underneath a parachute. The cobblestones acted to shift social relations within the crowd, binding us together in a game. We were engaged in collaborative action, emphasized visually through the sight of cobblestones, which were continuously thrown into the air. This shift was not limited to protesters, however, but expanded to passers-by and tourists. When the crowd began to cover more ground as we walked towards the tourist attraction of the Eiffel Tower, for instance, clusters of people became an audience to

the giant playing field, keen not only to see the game but to communicate with protesters about the purpose of the action.

### **Efficacy of *D12***

*D12* demonstrated the ability of the climate justice social movement to respond and adapt within a short time frame. Estimates for participant numbers range from 10,000 to 30,000 (350 2015a) which, considering the state ban and incidences of aggressive police tactics just days before, are remarkable. Whilst many news outlets, likely to be focusing on the official outcome of the COP21, did not cover *D12*, the online video which documents the action, created by 350.org, has been viewed by 920,000 people via *Facebook* (350 2015b) and 14,376 via *YouTube* (350 2015c), whilst the video in French has been viewed 203,000 times via *Facebook* (350 2015d).<sup>27</sup> We can deduce from this, then, that despite the lack of official media coverage, news of *D12* was disseminated to a not insignificant number of people. It is likely, however, that due to the lack of official coverage, the majority of viewers had a specific interest in the COP21.

More important, though, is the fact that play has continued to have a vital role in more recent actions. The aesthetics of the *D12* action have already been used in other contexts: the performative language and objects which invite ludic participation, red banners, and inflatable cobblestones. The image of bodies creating red lines has become an accessible short-hand, to explain the ideas behind ‘red lines’. The Break Free from Fossil Fuels campaign, for instance, has embraced the colour red and continued to create images of red lines at actions across the globe, from the Philippines to Australia (Break Free 2016). As detailed in Figure 3.9, Reclaim the Power occupied the UK’s largest coal mine using red banners.<sup>28</sup> These signifiers, then, are being transformed and appropriated according to the contexts in which participants are working. Significantly, in continuing to use the red banner and inflatable cobblestone in future actions, participants demonstrate a commitment to embedding play within protest. As we can see from Figure 3.8 participants in the more recent action continue to embrace play, not only through performance objects,

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<sup>27</sup> The *Guardian*, *Independent*, BBC, and *The Times*, for instance, did not report on *D12*. The *Telegraph* included video footage of the action, but no article was published.

<sup>28</sup> Reclaim the Power is a campaign umbrella group which focuses upon climate, economic, and social injustice issues. Historically, its actions have included forms of civil disobedience.

but also in a game of football. They did not simply occupy the space of the mine, in being present they reclaimed the space by transforming it into a play arena.



Figure 3.8: Reclaim the Power Protesters play football during the occupation of the largest coal mine in the UK, 3 May 2016.



Figure 3.9: Reclaim the Power protesters utilize the performance objects and performative language created during *DI2* in creating a stark visual image during the occupation of the largest coal mine in the UK, 3 May 2016.

### *Early Days (of a Better Nation)*

Coney's work can be easily defined as existing within the realm of play: its performances draw frequently on adventure, immersion, participation, and pervasive gaming. Whilst some of its previous work has tackled political content, few performances have branched into becoming a mode of resistance.<sup>29</sup> *Early Days (of a Better Nation)* (2015), however, is an exception. It had political intention; it was the result of a collaboration between Coney and the Cultural Institution at King's College London (the Department of Political Economy). In working with academics with an expertise in liberalism, republicanism, disaster resilience, crisis, civic participation, and democratic theory (KCL 2015), Coney not only strengthened its work, creating significant relationships and networks, but also demonstrated its desire to bring political theory explicitly into its development process.<sup>30</sup> Significantly, the use of play, gaming, and ludic participation within the performance, can be perceived as a mode of resistance in shifting group dynamics and raising consciousness. Unlike *Climate Games*, the performance structure of *Early Days (of a Better Nation)* does not host or instigate creative forms of direct action. Any civil disobedience occurs only through role-play; there are no punitive consequences. It is a ticketed event which takes place inside the safety of theatres. Despite this, Coney's work cannot be understood as belonging entirely to the 'theatre estate'. Obviously, there are commonalities, but the tactics and modes utilized suggest Coney explicitly aims to push the boundaries of what can be done within a theatre.

The performance title echoes a phrase coined in the 1970s, by Scottish writer Alasdair Gray, who re-worked poet Dennis Lee's line, 'and best of all is finding a place to be / In the early days of a better civilization' (2012, 15) to 'let's work together as if we are living in the early days of a better nation' (2007). Embedded within this phrase is certainly a belief in the value of collective action, and of hope in the possibilities offered by a better future, but the inclusion of the 'as if' also introduces the ludic. And, it is through the realm of play, the game structure of the performance, and specific form of participant role-play that *Early Days (of a Better Nation)* seeks to

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<sup>29</sup> Coney has tackled political issues within its performances, from raising the impact of palm oil production on the orangutan in *The Green Gold Conspiracy* (2015) to exploring the impact of pervasive digital technologies in *Remote* (2015).

<sup>30</sup> Such a contribution may question my discussion regarding the marketization of the academy, discussed in the Introduction.



unravel the political ideologies of participants. Furthermore, it is an exercise experimenting with, and challenging, the ways in which we enact democracy. The format compels participants to focus upon communication, which implicitly brings the possibility of prefigurative politics to the fore, the ‘living in the early days of a better nation’ in non-better times.

### Performance Summary, 23 April 2015

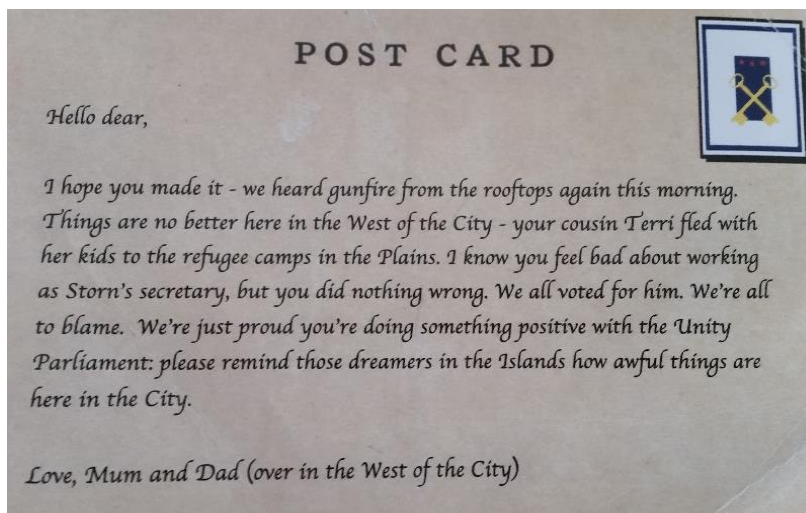


Figure 3.10: Front and back images of the performance postcard handed out upon arrival at the performance, *Early Days (of a Better Nation)*, 23 April, Battersea Arts Centre.

Upon arrival I am handed the above postcard which gives my role, and provides contextual information. As a City member I am met by performer, Angela, who seems concerned about a crisis: a ravaged country, civil war, and revolution.<sup>31</sup> I do not quite trust her. She seems keen to provoke panic, but appears evasive in answering questions. She encourages us to share personal stories; I venture that I am worried about my parents, but keep secret the fact that I personally worked for Storn, sensing that this information may work against me. A television broadcast then offers us an overview of the unrest. Dacia experienced a long period of civil war between the three nations when a military dictatorship gained power, installing a brutal and harsh regime. In response, the people expressed anger and began to protest, rising up against the regime. The government and military then fled. The country is still divided into three nationalities: the Plains, Islands, and City. The Plains people have access to important power supplies, whilst the Islanders provide food resources. It seems that, as City dwellers, we have nothing to offer; only memories of an opulent, luxurious, and powerful past. We are in a very precarious position. Angela tells us that we have been invited to represent the people from the City in the Unity Parliament, also comprised of Plains and Island representatives. We are ushered into a hall, where seating has been divided into three separate areas. A performer, the News Reporter, comments upon action as it unfolds in a live TV broadcast which is projected. He explains the purpose of the Unity Parliament: to create a government, a unified country.

Chaos ensues as participants debate how discussion should be organized. Participants as Members of the Plains, Islands, and City begin to stand up, shouting suggestions. The Plains people seem particularly angry with the City dwellers, while the Islanders tend to offer more consensus-based ideas. Suddenly a system is proposed by an audience member belonging to the Islands, whereby one person from each nation acts to represent the views of each nation. No alternative suggestions have been offered. A vote is in motion and the majority of the audience has voted in support of this system. The Reporter provides us with updates regarding pressing matters: we need to protect our power supplies and food, security is scarce. Discussion ensues but nothing is decided. We are interrupted by a broadcast from the International Security Council. A representative offers us aid and peacekeeping troops in exchange for a power-share. I am immediately suspicious. We are in the infancy of our new government and I am keen to hold on to the power that we have. The majority of representatives, however, feel differently, voting to accept her offer.

A series of dilemmas are presented: people are hungry and without power, hospitals are poorly equipped, and there is need for mass vaccination as disease is rife. We are given a number of tokens, representing resources. We are instructed by Angela to use our tokens wisely. However, there are not

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<sup>31</sup> In this context I use the term ‘performer’ to describe someone who was working for Coney and participant for someone who, although also a performer in a sense, had elected to play the game.

enough tokens, or resources, to offer everyone shelter, food, power, and medicine. Like figures in board games, towers are placed upon the floor. Each tower represents a resource: hospital, vaccination centre, security. A number is attached to each tower: the number of tokens needed to secure the resource. The hospital needs seven tokens, for instance. It seems we need to pool our resources with other nations, identify priorities, and agree on a strategy. Our representative is lacking in confidence. From my perspective, she is not stressing the urgency of the medical situation. When she returns, I query this and a fellow City-dweller shouts, ‘fuck the NHS’. Our representative looks overwhelmed. The Islands’ and Plains’ representatives dominate the discussion, whilst the majority of participants are not part of the main discussion, but quietly discuss options separately. At the sight of a final countdown, projected onscreen, and without any form of voting or consensus, tokens are hastily placed onto towers by the representatives, who have responded to dominant participants.

### **Efficacy of *Early Days (of a Better Nation)***

Coney’s aim was to ‘trigger change in the audience which has a genuine impact on how they interact with politics in their real lives; it’s just that we don’t want to pre-define what that change will be’ (Bowtell in Alston 2015). The question of how this change is manifested is left unclear as is the nature of the change envisaged. This creates an extra level of difficulty when assessing the efficacy of the performance.

Moreover, even perceiving this performance as a mode of protest is problematic, if we examine Coney’s partnerships. One incarnation of the work was performed in 2014, produced in association with the House of Commons. Coney also received funds from the Garfield Weston Foundation, which is funded by British Associated Foods plc. A subsidiary of this company has been accused of tax evasion and, as owner of the Primark brand, has been criticized for humans rights violations too.<sup>32</sup> While Liberate Tate, BP or Not BP, and the Labofii work to expose art and greenwash enacted through sponsorship, Coney accepts sponsorship from financial supporters who are

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<sup>32</sup> In 2015, the *Guardian* reported that, ‘a subsidiary of ABF has been accused of tax avoidance in Zambia where ActionAid claimed it had made \$123m in profits between 2007-13 and paid “virtually no corporate tax”’ (Butler 2014). One of Primark’s suppliers, for instance, was based in the Rana Plaza factory in Bangladesh, which collapsed killing 1,100 workers (Butler 2014). Criticisms of workers in sweatshop conditions have also been directed towards Primark, as items of clothing have had messages such as ‘forced to work exhausting hours’ and ‘degrading sweatshop conditions’ sewn into the labels (Dearden 2014).

part of the establishment. How far, then, can Coney's work be understood as a mode of protest? Indeed, the fact that the House of Commons supported Coney's performance means that its work exists in direct opposition to the other case studies as a sanctioned performance.

Certainly, the timing of the performance (close to the British election in 2015), as well as Coney's use of play, warrants a closer examination of how play was utilized and may be understood as a mode of protest. The fact that the performance was sanctioned need not, however, negate its efficacy. For the performances existed to comment upon, and delve beneath, the performances staged by politicians, directed by spin doctors, and reported upon by the media. With a focus on staging performances for young people and first-time voters, it is significant that the game structure offered participants the illusion of power. They were required to make decisions and engage with political discussions. Coney offered participants freedom: to play, to break rules and, significantly, to fail. Yet, despite participants' expression of a wish to 'win' (Bano 2014), Coney denied them the comfort of this familiarity by making winning an impossibility (Alston 2015). Although the format was a game, the purpose of competition was to provoke political debate and reflection. There was not, in fact, a 'successful' outcome. As such, it was an experiment that allowed the group to determine the outcome, without imposition: 'it's up to the audience to decide [...] what kind of institutions they want to have and how they want them to operate' (Dacombe in Cultural Institute at Kings 2014). We may, then, perceive this performance as an alternative to Boal's Forum Theatre (albeit without a facilitator). For participants are able to share ideas, tactics, and strategies. Rather than playing out different scenarios, as with Forum Theatre, Coney compels participants to suspend their disbelief. There are no reminders that what is happening is an exercise, nor opportunities to test out different solutions if strategies fail. Instead, participants are forced to respond in real time, sharing tactics and strategies *whilst* attempting to explore communication modes. The game structure offers participants an opportunity to experiment with, as well as experience, power.

Such engagement was achieved through devices which aid the modes of play employed by Coney:

1. The scarce information given in the postcard intrigues participants, prompting questions such as: What is the Unity Parliament? What is the danger my mother speaks of? What happened to Storn? Why have I been alerted to be suspicious of the Islanders? Before the performance started, I was already engaged in playing the game, largely through role-play.
2. The few details given about an individual's role invited speculation and a fleshing out of the role. This led to my initial suspicion of Angela, and my decision not to tell anyone of my character's support for Storn.
3. The use of props increased accessibility, making complex, abstract ideas more concrete.

The modes of play used were successful in providing participants with an opportunity to pose questions and experiment with ideas which Coney regards as particularly pertinent: nationhood and democracy (Bowtell in Gardner 2014), with 'nation-ness' being 'the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time' according to Anderson (1991, 3). Not only could we examine how well democratic principles fare when confronted with extreme circumstances: depletion of resources, rivalry, and lack of security, we could also see how the concept of nationhood developed through Coney's creation of a divisive game structure (the creation of rival groups). Issues relating to belonging, identity, and conformity were raised through the design of the game, affording participants an opportunity to make connections with the rise in nationalist politics in Britain. This could affect 'how they interact with politics in their real lives' (Bowtell in Alston 2015).

The context in which the performance took place is significant. In separating audiences into three distinct groups through the device of a postcard, a name, and a group, Coney created conditions whereby audiences performed their political beliefs (or their allotted political beliefs) regarding nationalism, without necessarily even being aware of the devices. It was surprising, for instance, to see how quickly participants identified with their fictional tribe, even to the point of purposefully baiting other groups. The need to belong to a community, one's own group, has been well documented, as have the effects of group conformity. Just one example of this

was history teacher Ron Jones' unsanctioned experiment in 1967, 'The Third Wave', which demonstrated the strong appeal of conformity, and how far the need to belong will affect an individual's behaviour (Jones 2014). The ways in which the gamification of the structure shifted audience behaviour was significant. In the space of fifteen minutes, and the allocation of a tribe, participants began to identify with their affiliated group. Such behaviour emulates the strong affiliations of sports spectators in terms of identity:

around the world sports teams are most frequently identified with a specific city or region. [...] In the psychological sense, sports spectators seek, through a process of identification, a refuge from urban anonymity, an imagined return to an imagined small community. (Kennedy 2011, 157)

And critically, these formed identities change behaviour to such a degree that it would be uncharacteristic in any other context: embracing, shouting, swearing. If we recall the moment that a participant shouted, 'fuck the NHS', then, we can see that the competition and rivalry between the Dacian people seemingly gave him permission to behave not within the confines of expected behaviour as an audience member, but indeed, as one spectating a game.<sup>33</sup>

At one stage, several participants from different nations began to engage in a discussion, when an Islander shouted out, 'why are you talking with them?' (Rees 2015a). Bowtell notes that Coney 'deliberately create situations where historic tribal rivalries are drawn up between different audience groups and they are encouraged to compete with each other for resources' (Bowtell in Alston 2015). This scenario raises the appeal of belonging; an issue identified by Coney:

in potentially highlighting a desire to identify with, and conform to an 'in group' defined in opposition to an 'out group', even within a fictional dystopian game setting. Stereotyping of the 'outgroup' was evident on several occasions, as when the mother gave her instruction 'to remind those dreamers in the Islands how awful things are in the city'. (Coney 2014)

Further, in a discussion concerning the allocation of resources, following the City representative's contribution, the following rebuke made by a Plains participant was made: 'what would you know? You wasted your resources. We don't need you' (Rees

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<sup>33</sup> Coney, in locating us in Dacia, offered a direct comparison with Ancient Dacian society. For 'Dacian society was internally sharply divided into two groups. The elite group [...] and their subjects' (Mabry 2017). The sense of rivalry between groups, therefore, is particularly relevant.

2015a). The participant, whether as part of an embellished form of role-play, or indeed, as an improvised but genuine response, has implied, in a public forum, that the City people were more ignorant and less prudent. They were worthless.

As an audience member and participant in the *Early Days (of a Better Nation)* on 23 April 2015, the work operated, not necessarily in changing audience beliefs, but in offering an immersive experience where participants engaged with politics. It provided an opportunity to understand, first-hand, the complexities of power structures involved in decision-making in a safe space. Actions may be explored and consequences examined without anyone suffering from their impact, and the reflection resulting from this may lead to more responsible political decision-making outside the game. Participating within this safe space achieves four objectives:

1. It offered participants an opportunity to experiment with ideas in a laboratory environment. One participant described the performance as a ‘beautiful rehearsal’ (Dima 2015). For Dima, the performance became a space to experiment in, and significantly, to rehearse. Dima suggests, then, that the experience with Coney was a precursor to further action: the performance was a rehearsal for reality.
2. The performance exemplified Bowtell’s argument that the realm of play and fiction affords people the freedom to focus upon communication modes, in exploring how decisions are made (Bowtell in Alston 2015). As Tomlin notes, the first third of the performance is dedicated to this: ‘we now had to decide how to decide’ (2015, 28). How this plays out, however, is decided by participants. The structure is open, which affords participants an equal opportunity to experience either ‘direct democracy’ first-hand or systems of governance, based on hierarchy.
3. Bowtell agrees with Hirschhorn’s view that political art must be accessible: ‘to make art politically means to choose materials that do not intimidate, a format that does not dominate, a device that does not seduce’ (Hirschhorn in Bishop 2005, 124). The participatory, gaming component of the format is, indeed, an

accessible one. Gardner defines the performance as being somewhere between ‘a political seminar and a role-playing game [...] a live version of SimCity and a deranged edition of Question Time’ (2014). Essentially, the storytelling element of the game becomes crucial here, as it draws participants in, using dramatic tension and announcements from the Reporter to create extra pressure points and dilemmas.

4. Each performance composed by the participants was unique, driven by the decisions made by that particular group, who demonstrated, in action, that its collective voice had an impact. It changed the outcome of the game. As reviewer Brennan, pointed out, ‘our Islands, for instance, advocate a women-only council – men can only be heard if they pass the Beyonce lyrics test’ (2015).

Fundamentally, Coney’s game structure afforded participants an opportunity to create an alternative form of politics. Many performances did demonstrate a willingness to adopt an alternative system, from a system of one person / one vote to consensus-based models. Several performances too, provoked more proactive responses from participants, from the anarchists who voted to eject the News Reporter, to a sit-in protest, staged to prevent balloting (Bowtell in Alston 2015). My experience, however, resembled more of what artist Bye highlights: ‘people have been given the task of doing politics, and actually what they’re doing is Acting Like Politicians’ (Bye in Nicklin 2012). Rather than engaging in politics as themselves, or even as their given roles, participants mimicked the type of performances we see by politicians on television, complete with hand gestures and rhetoric. This interestingly highlights the fact that people, in their everyday lives, are perhaps not usually presented with the power to make decisions on behalf of others. They returned to the familiar, enacting formal performances of power they had seen elsewhere in the realm of politics, in Acting Like Politicians.

Arguably, the audience on 23 April 2015 suffered from a crisis of imagination. As a collective group, we could not imagine an alternative governance system, even when in the midst of an imaginative, outlandish, role-play scenario. Let us examine these contradictions further. We, as an audience, imagined that we belonged to a fictional



nation: the City, Islands, and Plains. We imagined that we had been selected to represent people in a fictional parliament. We imagined that we had been propelled to the future year of 2034. We imagined that we had experienced a civil war and had joined the resistance. We imagined that the military dictator had fled, there was civil unrest, depletion of resources, and a vacuum of power. We imagined all of this far more readily than we could imagine an alternative system of governance. Obviously, inventing a political system demands of us, an entirely different mode of engagement from that of accepting a narrative. However, in the performance I participated in, there was, arguably a distinct lack of imagination in experimenting with alternative modes of decision-making.

Bowtell notes that approximately ‘50% of our audience groups do elect to use a recognisable form of representative democracy in their parliament’ (Bowtell in Alston 2015). Such a statistic is revealing; even when the mode of play presents audiences with freedom to choose differently, the fact that 50% of participants return to what is familiar, both in terms of how people behave when in a position of power, and in terms of governance structures, supports the suggestion that we suffer from a crisis in imagination. Play may help to unravel and disrupt the conscription of our imaginations; after all, 50% of audiences *do* adopt an alternative governance system. As a mode of dissent, though, the performance has revealed something significant in its failure to provoke dissent or radical action, even within the distinct frame of the game, for dissent requires imaginative responses which actualize and make visible viable alternatives to the status quo.<sup>34</sup>

The question of whether the game structure affords participants agency relates directly to their experience of power and decision-making. Breel notes that the discourse relating to agency is problematic as it risks overlooking the radical potential of participation, instead reinforcing the concept that agency is possessed by one person who gives it to another, as something that is ‘given’, ‘offered’, ‘provided’, or ‘introduced’ to participants (Breel 2016). Certainly, the game structure does not offer participants agency simply through playing the game. Rather, it is the group dynamics which dictate whether agency may be possible. Sociologists Gallagher and Zahavi argue:

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<sup>34</sup> The notion of making visible viable alternatives is discussed in more depth in Chapter Four.

we understand agency [...] to depend on the agent's consciousness of agency. That is, if someone causes something to happen, that person is not an agent (even if they are a cause) if they do not know they have caused it to happen [...] it does not have to be of a high order though, it could be a very thin, pre-reflective awareness. (2012, 177)

This experience has the potential to offer empowerment and agency, which can then, in turn, affect the actions of participants, post-performance. Bowtell, for instance, claims that '75% of those not intending to vote [in the UK General Election, 2015] changed their minds after playing' (Bowtell in Alston 2015). However, in the performance I attended, very few people seemed to experience agency, as a minority dominated the decision-making process. I felt powerless to affect decisions. However, even if an individual experiences a lack of agency, then, in terms of Coney's aims, such an experience still has value in highlighting the nature of unequal relationships and this may have an impact on how participants 'interact with politics in their real lives' (Bowtell in Alston 2015). Moreover, the efficacy of Coney's work goes far beyond its aim of promoting engagement in the electoral system; any analysis of its efficacy needs to consider the multiple ways in which the experience potentially affords participants moments of critical realization, and an opportunity to experiment with alternative forms of decision-making, as well as politically engaging in activities which may work to challenge the established system.

In avoiding a directly didactic approach which may alienate, but in making 'art which lets politics happen' (Bowtell in Alston 2015), Coney, Bowtell argues, does not focus on creating political art or making art politically. Such a comment, though, may seem disingenuous, due to its collaboration with political researchers and mode of performance. It was, after all, a political performance, in content and form. Whatever the intention, it can be argued that *Early Days (of a Better Nation)* did create political art whilst making art politically, in embedding political dilemmas and ideas within the performance form and content and in having a political impact. The impact of the performance may spring from the game itself but may not be confined to the game narrative; indeed, it can be argued that, once the confines of the narrative are breached, a deeper political understanding occurs, as the audience no longer plays at politics, but actually takes action. The performances which disrupted the narrative or play structure (the Reporter being asked to leave, the sit-in) see the lines between play

and reality blur as participants break the frame and go beyond the script.<sup>35</sup> Far from performing actions that ‘break the show’ (Trueman 2015b) this type of action can transform the show as participants question the game format and structure, as well as the authority of the creators. As such, play can be used to draw people into participating, but becomes most effective as a form of protest, when the boundaries of play are also pushed, and merge with reality.

In part, the efficacy of *Early Days (of a Better Nation)* can be traced to the dramatic tension and pressure placed upon participants, which forced us to challenge our political beliefs, as reviewer Hutchison states, ‘confronted with your own political ideals, [the experience] reveals just how easily you may abandon them’ (2015); as demonstrated by my fellow city dweller, who had previously stated his concerns for the citizens’ welfare before shouting ‘fuck the NHS’, when under pressure to distribute resources. Bowtell recalls one performance where a ‘single unelected voice emerged to impose order and essentially became a dictator’ (Alston 2015). Whether this participant simply relished the opportunity to perform, or whether it was a more genuine response to the situation, we cannot know. Such a turn of events though, certainly offers participants an opportunity to examine more deeply what our political beliefs are when confronted with the need to make difficult decisions.

Understanding the game component and role-play of *Early Days (of a Better Nation)* as a form of dissent, however, is problematic. The game format, for instance, does not provide participants with the knowledge or tools to organize themselves, or resist familiar societal structures. Coney states that it drew inspiration from the ‘2011 England riots, Arab Spring, Iceland’s crowd-sourced constitution and the rise (and fall) of Occupy’ (Coney 2014). Each example offered by Coney is strikingly different. From responding to dictatorships to recession, from being part of a grassroots wider social movement to a singular, disparate act of resistance: geographically, demographically, socially, politically, tactically, aesthetically, we can see differences. In drawing upon Occupy as inspiration, Coney does not mention which Occupy movement was the source of its inspiration: Occupy London, Occupy Wall Street or Occupy Democracy; and whether it was its use of assemblies, consensus decision-

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<sup>35</sup> The notion of blurring lines between play and reality in relation to agency and obedience is picked up in *HOUND* (2016), analyzed in Chapter Five.

making, or tactical occupation, which inspired the performance. The only commonality between Coney's examples is that they all involved an *expression* of dissent. In drawing inspiration from them, as a group, Coney was unable to delve into the intricacies or strengths of these acts of protest, nor was it able to delve into precisely what was being protested against, or campaigned for.

As such, the ways in which expressions of dissent or narratives of social movements are woven into the performance is, arguably, pushed into the background. We, as participants, are not offered a clear narrative that propels our experience forward. We are told, for instance, that, after the civil war, the people rose against the brutal military dictatorship, but we are not offered any information in terms of how the Dacian people achieved this. The tactics or strategies employed were not mentioned. We may have engaged with violent acts, or we may have achieved it through acts of non-violent civil disobedience. Nor do we know whether we worked collaboratively, or as separate nations. Such details would have created important connections with social movements and offered a rich backstory to support role-play. It is worth noting that the performers seemed to dissuade expressions of dissent: instead of directly responding to comments, performers returned to scripted narrative. Others, however, have noted that the structure was open and flexible, affording many opportunities for expressions of dissent (Alston 2015; Trueman 2015b; Breel 2016), suggesting that performers may have taken a different approach on various occasions.<sup>36</sup>

In not offering participants tools to organize themselves within the game, the format also inadvertently privileges participants who have prior skills, knowledge, or experience in alternative communication models. Any participant who has engaged with actor training, Open Space, or consensus-decision making, for instance, would be able to draw upon specific alternative models.<sup>37</sup> This raises the issue of accessibility: arguably, the performances which offered participants the most agency and empowerment were those where participants discussed alternative models, as they were able to make informed decisions. The question of accessibility here becomes

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<sup>36</sup> I participated in a performance (23 April 2015) which was towards the end of the run, which began in October 2014 and ended in May 2015.

<sup>37</sup> Open Space is an approach where 'participants create and manage their own agenda of parallel working sessions around a central theme' (Open Space 2017). Theatre company Improbable draws upon this approach in its successful *Devoted and Disgruntled* national and regional events.

more complex when we consider how these tools or models could be shared as part of the game, without encroaching on the game-frame. It is also important that Coney created an open structure, leaving the decisions to the audience. Any training in modes of interaction provided by Coney may well have directed the narrative and curtailed the spontaneity of participant response, especially towards the end of the run.

Whilst the unfixed outcome structure created opportunities for autonomy for Coney's audiences, the freedom of the format also risked disempowering participants. During the performance I attended, I observed patterns of white, male, middle-class participants dominating the discussion, both audibly and in terms of the amount of time they spoke. The open structure risks repeating wider societal inequalities. Further, the narrative, in embedding a series of complex political and moral dilemmas with a backdrop of revolution, military dictatorship, and civil unrest, is very far removed from the types of political decisions British politicians make. One performance outcome was that participants felt sympathy for politicians. Arguably, such a reaction, in thinking that some participants personally 'couldn't do a better job' (Rees 2015a) may prevent them from using the impetus of the performance to take action beyond the game: writing to an MP, signing a petition, voting, or even engaging in an act of dissent, such as joining a local political group or participating in a direct action.

## **Conclusion**

Play is, as discussed earlier, ambiguous. It is appropriative; malleable enough to be analyzed according to the specific context in which it was used. Both Coney and the Labofii had an agenda in utilizing play and games within their performances. Yet, in working in such different contexts, the acts of play shared very few similarities. This, alone, is revealing. It tells us that play and games are extremely adaptable forms, capable of shifting behaviours in theatre and protest environments.

How far play can be understood as a mode of dissent within Coney's work is questionable. Play is used to encourage audiences to engage actively with performances of power, in this case through democratic engagement and role-play, rather than to resist performances of power (as with *Climate Games*). Rather than challenge and instigate systematic change, as with the Labofii, Liberate Tate and BP

or Not BP, Coney's use of play focuses instead upon reform. That is not to claim that it does not challenge the status quo: its work actively pursues civic engagement so that decisions are not made by the few, but by the many.

Coney's performance sought to produce a distinct effect: through role-play and the gaming structure, a heightened sociability took place. This type of engagement was emotional, provoking everything from jubilation to frustration. We, as an audience, felt both pressure and thrill as time passed and we were confronted with further challenges. This tension though, was generative. It is within these shifting emotional states that we are confronted with our own ideologies. It revealed to us whether we were, in that moment, pragmatists, socialists, or capitalists. At the same time, however, it removed us from party politics and illustrated, through our own actions, the ethical implications of the most minute decisions; on one issue we may be more willing to compromise than another, for instance. It exposed to us that our actions do not necessarily tally with our beliefs. Its efficacy, then, is in creating a transformative situation in which we forgot our ideological beliefs; through play, we responded more freely. Role-play and narrative distanced us from reality and allowed us to hear other opinions on more equal ground. Within the game, we were not discussing Right or Left but re-considering politics through the frame of the City, the Islands, and the Plains.

It is also the case that *Early Days (of a Better Nation)*, to a degree, changed reality. Its aim of being an 'engine which triggers change' (Bowtell in Alston 2015) has been achieved: a figure of 75% of participants not intending to vote changed their minds after participating. Of course, we cannot know how many of these audience members did vote in the General Election, nor how far the opportunity to play at governance had an impact upon how they then interacted with politics. We can, however, tentatively relate the statistic to agency, empowerment, and a raised consciousness. Through being directly engaged in decision-making, audiences felt more compelled to engage in our democratic system. Moving from a position of not intending to vote to the direct opposite remains an impressive outcome in terms of encouraging more active civic engagement through a stand-alone performance: a potential step towards engaging in dissent.

The Labofii understands play and gaming very differently: explicitly using it as an attempt to dismantle, subvert, and challenge performances of power (greenwash) through disarmament. Whilst it may partially agree with Bowtell and Hirschorn, in that it too wanted to make art politically by choosing materials that did not intimidate, and a format that does not dominate, it did in fact intend for play to ‘seduce’ participants. Seduction very much aligns with its belief that mobilization depends upon engaging with the politics of pleasure, summarized by Jordan’s note that ‘adventure is addictive’ (2015b). Play was utilized as a means to attract new participants and sustain others, in compelling them to establish and maintain an active relationship with civil disobedience. It is worth recalling that the stakes were high, as *Climate Games*’ participants risked arrest, violence, a fine of £10,850, a ban from entering France for a year, and a criminal record. This raises the question of accessibility, as such a risk automatically removes potential participants, although it is worth bearing in mind that the political landscape changed considerably and that the risks for participation during the design process were considerably lower.

The question of affect, then, is as critical as that of effect: what was the affect of participants having taken part in *Climate Games*? Certainly, as I witnessed and experienced, the use of inflatable cobblestones and red banners induced play and noticeably heightened sociability and positivity. It also played an important role in creating a sense of community and establishing links for future actions.

Approximately 600 people attended its Awards Ceremony (13 December 2015) which provided an opportunity for collective celebration of its performances. Responses, on social media, of participants of *Climate Games* were overwhelmingly positive and triumphant: ‘one of my fav [sic] protests! Brave, beautiful performance calling oil-sponsored culture’ (Figueria 2015), ‘my favourite kind of activism!’ (Winterlik 2015), and ‘Did we take the Arc de Triomphe roundabout? Oh yes we did!’ (Brighton Co-Op 2015).

Although impact is difficult to measure, *Climate Games* had efficacy in widening participation, encouraging diverse tactics, and in helping to sustain activists. It managed, to a degree, to create a Temporary Autonomous Zone ‘a guerrilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination)’ (Bey 1991, 95).<sup>38</sup> Through

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<sup>38</sup> The Temporary Autonomous Zone will be examined in more depth in Chapter Four.

*Climate Games*, participants experienced a rupture: a liberation of space, time, or imagination.

According to organizers, the gaming framework widened accessibility for participants: *D12* ‘was a success in that we managed to normalise civil disobedience with groups that would never normally support this type of action [...] yet they felt safe enough to do so’ (Fremaux, Jordan 2016). The Labofii further notes that many people have since stated that the gaming framework was a ‘gateway for new activists’ (Fremaux, Jordan 2016). We cannot be certain how many new participants were attracted specifically because of play and gaming due to the autonomous structure, yet it is clear that the framework encouraged a remarkable diversity of tactics, where creativity played a key role. Significantly, such a breadth of actions taking place within one frame suggests that the gaming framework may produce more sustainable and more immediate actions than traditional protest repertoire, such as marches. Not only do such actions require far less time, organization, and funding, but critically they depend on fewer participants. Work which was created as part of *Climate Games*, such as Oil out of the Louvre, has continued to flourish. Its most recent performance, for example, took place on 22 May 2017 (Libérons le Louvre 2017). *Climate Games* therefore illustrated that self-organized autonomous groups have the potential of producing sustainable, tactical performances which dismantle power, cause disruption, and are relatively widely disseminated.

It is important to understand *Climate Games*, too, not as singular acts of resistance, but as a framework which created links between acts of resistance within a wider social movement. Dissemination of the *Climate Games* performances was relatively wide. For example, two of the more prominent actions (by pre-established groups), Oil Out of the Louvre, received 878, 510 views (the highest number of views on the *New Internationalist* page) through their *Facebook* page (New Internationalist 2015) whilst the Brandalism action received 182,000 views (Brandalism 2015b). Media outlets, too, showed considerable interest as organisations such as the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, the *BBC*, *Sky News*, *New York Times*, *Metro*, and the *Business Insider* all reported on these actions separately. Significantly, unlike Coney, *Climate Games* was reported, not by arts journalists or reviewers, but by news commentators. As such, the



Labofii's work was perceived not as belonging to the realm of the arts, but to that of politics and news, thereby reaching a wider and more mainstream audience.

Overall, it would appear, then, that play has efficacy as a mode of resistance, harnessing the innate sociability and emotional response evoked through participation. Concerns regarding potential commodification of play and games were unfounded within these case studies. Whether working to reform the current system, as with Coney's *Early Days (of a Better Nation)* or in overthrowing, disrupting or dismantling performances of power, as with *Climate Games*, the actual mode of play is capable of creating transformations, both during and after game-play. How helpful play is in sustaining social movement is yet to be seen, but certainly, the ways in which participants have since embraced play in using the performative vocabulary of the *D12* action suggest that there is further potential to be harnessed.

Issues relating to site, space, and environment have played a critical role in creating more efficacious theatrical dissent in the case of *Climate Games*: the use of inflatable cobblestones, for instance, opened the space beyond street level, and changed the way participants behaved within that space which – significant for the cause in question – is usually dominated by cars. Chapter Four is dedicated to examining questions pertaining to space, in particular, the creation of a Temporary Autonomous Zone, and how this alters theatrical dissent. The notion of how space performs ideologies, social constructs, and inequalities is examined in the analysis of my main PaR, *HOUND*, examined in Chapter Five.

## Chapter Four: Re-considering The Temporary Autonomous Zone

Are we who live in the present doomed never to experience autonomy, never to stand for one moment on a bit of land ruled only by freedom? [...] Must we wait until the entire world is freed of political control before even one of us can claim to know freedom? (Bey 1991, 92)

Arguably, Hakim Bey's motivation for researching the Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ) is linked to prefiguration: a desire to experience freedom and autonomy in the present. He proposes the TAZ not as an end in itself, but, frustrated by the lack of change which revolution has brought historically, focuses on moments of liberation. However, once one has tasted autonomy and freedom, how far does this affect change in the individual who has experienced it? And what impact might this experience have upon wider social movements? This chapter examines the political efficacy of the TAZ as a performance of dissent. It analyzes how far experiencing liberation within a TAZ can sustain participants in engaging with further actions after that zone has dissolved. Additionally, it identifies the characteristics of a TAZ which may be conducive to achieving this result. I take as my case studies, Burning Man, and the protest camp, Occupy London Stock Exchange (OLSX).<sup>1</sup>

Previous chapters brought together two vantage points: that of participant, and that of spectator. However, I was not involved with OLSX nor have I attended Burning Man. And so this chapter analyzes the case studies using secondary sources. As such, any conclusions I draw regarding efficacy are necessarily tentative, as the evidence utilized is based upon the experience of those participants who elected to share their experience with others. The majority of participants, however, have not, and so the evidence may well be skewed. Despite this, the research is indicative that, in distinct ways, for some, at least, both Burning Man and OLSX were efficacious precisely because they both displayed elements of a TAZ.

Although there is some debate regarding how far the case studies can be categorized as TAZs, and indeed how to define a TAZ, I am taking them as such, to provide further insight into understanding the efficacy for participants of reclaiming, subverting, and transforming space and time. Both case studies, to a degree, fulfil Bey's definition of a TAZ, as that which 'liberates an area of land, of time, of

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<sup>1</sup> Burning Man is an annual festival; 'an experiment in community and art' (Burning Man 2016a). OLSX was situated near London Stock Exchange, outside St Paul's Cathedral. It began on 15 October 2011 and occupiers were evicted on 28 February 2012.

imagination and then dissolves to re-form elsewhere, else when' (1991, 95). I argue that both Burning Man and OLSX can be understood as examples of a TAZ since they liberated land, time, and imagination. Both the festival and protest camp were born from a desire to embed freedom and prefigurative politics into the present. Bey proposes that the TAZ is self-evident, understood best in action; and, indeed, action, labour, and participation are at the core of both case studies. The ephemerality of Burning Man and OLSX also offers participants an intensification of everyday life: a 'peak experience, as opposed to the standard of ordinary consciousness and experience' (Bey 1991, 94); moments of intensity giving shape and meaning to the entirety of a life: 'you can't stay up on the roof forever – but things have changed, shifts and integrations have occurred – a *difference* is made' (Bey 1991, 94). This part of Bey's argument is central to our understanding of the implications of the creation of a TAZ in Burning Man and OLSX for sustaining social movements. Rather than understand the efficacy of a TAZ as having a massive impact, the focus of this chapter is upon the smaller changes, shifts, and connections which may have occurred as a result of creating and experiencing a TAZ.

Bey discusses the importance of central features of the TAZ: the liberation of land, time, and imagination.<sup>2</sup> Since 1991, the significance of liberating land and space has only heightened, due to gentrification, the housing crisis, and the increasing privatization of space. In light of this, the politics of 'liberating space' will be examined in the context of a festival and a protest: both Burning Man and OLSX participants attempted to transform the space and construct different meanings for the sites they inhabited. An understanding of play as dissent and an exploration of the politics of pleasure will be pivotal in analyzing Burning Man, whilst OLSX can be most usefully examined as a performance of dissent through a reconfiguration of everyday life and a performance of direct democracy.

In many ways, the case studies are very different. Burning Man, for instance, takes place in a space dominated by nature and the environment, a remote desert in Nevada. OLSX, on the other hand, took place in the highly populated City of London: 'a seat of power – political, institutional, economic, and cultural. [...] It is a heartland of that socio-political economic formation that goes by the name of neoliberalism' (Massey

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<sup>2</sup> Issues concerning the TAZ are raised in previous case studies: *Climate Games* (Chapter Three) and, to a degree, the work of BP or Not BP and Liberate Tate (Chapter Two).

2007, 8). Burning Man exists as an annual event; it has a definite beginning and end. OLSX existed as an ongoing protest camp; its end, decided by the courts, when participants were evicted, and some forcibly removed. Burning Man's organization is hierarchical, its task being to organize the fee-paying festival. OLSX was a non-hierarchical social movement and protest camp, sustained by donations. The identity of Burning Man participants is associated with hedonism and creativity whereas the OLSX identity was exemplified by horizontality and protest.

Despite these differences, however, both cases involved the construction of a TAZ which required participants to occupy space and perform a role which sustained the performances of dissent, through play, direct democracy, and everyday life. Both cases also 'liberated time' in suspending time and shifting temporal perceptions for participants, potentially heightening political awareness. And perhaps, most importantly of all, both cases created, for their participants, a community which offered an intensification of everyday life which made visible and actualized a more joyful or egalitarian daily experience. What, then, is the efficacy of creating a TAZ and how far can it, if at all, sustain social movements?

## **Burning Man**

### **Origins of Burning Man**

The event now understood as Burning Man was not devised as a political gesture inspired by counter-cultural politics. The action of lighting the effigy of 'the man' was not an anti-establishment symbol of 'Sticking It To The Man.'<sup>3</sup> Instead, it began in 1986 as a social gathering. Approximately twenty people attended, all friends and family of Larry Harvey and Jerry James. The effect of burning the effigy, though, according to Harvey, shifted the event from a private gathering in a public space, Baker's beach in San Francisco, to a public event, worthy of attention. As soon as the effigy was lit everybody 'came running [...] and suddenly, our numbers tripled' (Burning Man 2016b). Whilst the event attracted diverse crowds, it remained more of a social affair, until the anarchist collective known as the San Francisco Cacophony Society became involved, and the locale was shifted to the Black Rock Desert. In

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<sup>3</sup> This phrase is defined as 'taking some action intended to defy a source of oppression' (Wiktionary 2017).

occupying a new site, far from the nearest city, Burning Man developed an identity, strongly influenced by the Cacophony Society:

A randomly gathered network of individuals united in the pursuits of experiences beyond the pale of mainstream society through subversion, pranks, art, fringe explorations, and meaningless madness. (Cacophony Society 2016)

A shared belief in the importance of play, and confidence in performing became principles of Burning Man. As Evans, Galbraith, and Law note, Burning Man ‘still claims a philosophy that has its roots in Cacophony’s mores, such as Leave No Trace and No Spectators’ (2013, xiv). Despite the insistence that their collective was neither political nor spiritual (Gilmore 2005, xi), their motivation, to pursue experiences beyond the pale of mainstream society, and use of playful tactics, in a similar vein to the Situationists, aimed to challenge the mundanity of the everyday and were anti-establishment in nature. Aside from their contributions to Burning Man, many of their actions were, arguably, overtly political. For instance, they staged, *Let Them Eat Cake* (1993), where ‘fantastically costumed 18<sup>th</sup> Century French aristocrats [gathered at City Hall] to give away cake – to the homeless’ (Evans, Galbraith, Law 2013, xi) and ‘crumbs on a silver platter to the Mayor’ (Cacophony Society 2016). Similar politically motivated actions included culture jamming advertisements as part of *The Billboard Liberation Front*, targeting media sexism and racism. As part of the San Francisco counter-culture, the Society’s presence in organizing Burning Man had a significant impact in shifting the event from a purely social gathering to one having political undertones.

### **The Principles**

The politics of Burning Man are complex. It is perceived by many to be a counter-cultural festival (Yeganey 2012; Chen 2009), shunning consumerism and embracing an egalitarian ethos through adopting the event’s principles; principles which are consistent with Bey’s understanding of a TAZ, in liberating land, time, and imagination:

1. **Radical Inclusion**  
Anyone may be a part of Burning Man. We welcome and respect the stranger. No prerequisites exist for participation in our community.

2. Gifting  
Burning Man is devoted to acts of gift-giving. The value of a gift is unconditional. Gifting does not contemplate a return or an exchange.
3. De-commodification  
In order to preserve the spirit of gifting, our community seeks to create environments that are unmediated by commercial sponsorships, transactions, or advertising.
4. Radical Self-reliance.
5. Radical Self-expression.
6. Communal Effort  
Our community values creative cooperation and collaboration. We strive to produce, promote and protect social networks, public spaces, works of art, and methods of communication that support such interaction.
7. Civic Responsibility.
8. Leaving No Trace  
We are committed to leaving no physical trace of our activities. Our community respects the environment.
9. Participation  
Our community is committed to a radically participatory ethic. We believe that transformative change, whether in the individual or in society, can occur only through the medium of deeply personal participation. We achieve being through doing. Everyone is invited to work. Everyone is invited to play.
10. Immediacy. (Burning Man 2016a) <sup>4</sup>

These principles, to a degree, created what Burning Man is today: a seven-day arts festival, created by participants, with no official programme. Doherty offers an indication of the diverse activities undertaken:

Changing the world through art cars, bone towers, Danger Ranger [...] pulsing soundscapes, neon skies, and metal dragons – the rise of a new American Underground. (2004, 1)

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<sup>4</sup> This is an edited excerpt from the ‘Ten Principles of Burning Man’. For full details, see Burning Man 2016a.

However, many would deny that Burning Man forms part of the Underground, arguing that, approximately 70,000 participants arrive each year to participate in what has become an established festival, even part of the mainstream. Nevertheless, the harsh desert environment, the gift economy, lack of advertising and money on site, the presence of art works, performance, and installation, and the nature of the participation, often involving alternative Playa identities, work together to create a community, a heightened sociability, and awaken an awareness. However, no matter how much the principles may enhance the counter-cultural credentials of Burning Man, it is riddled with contradictions (as we will see): this chapter examines how far the event may foster dissent, and identifies the factors that promote and militate against its efficacy.

### **Characteristics Conducive to Efficacy**

Even if we accept that the fundamental principles of Burning Man have been compromised, we can still maintain that it affords participants an experience of being within a TAZ: in liberating land, time, and imagination. Such an intense experience, in many ways, may contribute towards raising consciousness and politicizing participants.

### **Liberating Time**

Religious festivals and Burning Man share the attribute of suspending time. Huizinga suggests that it was not merely the sacred, religious aspect of festivals which marked the events as *different*, but the actual rejection of mundane, everyday time: the suspension of 'normal social life' (2014, 31). In fact, Yeganey argues that the most significant aspect of festivals was not the types of activities or festivities, but the 'negation of the everyday routine' (2012, 32). It is open to question whether offering Burning Man participants an experience of inverting, suspending or even liberating time, acts as a safety valve or otherwise. What it does offer participants, though, is an opportunity to experience time differently. However, as noted in Chapter Two, when discussing Liberate Tate's performance, this suspension of time is afforded to those experiencing all art forms, so this alone cannot distinguish Burning Man.

In temporarily suspending time though, Burning Man may be understood as a potential site for respite and sanctuary, distinct from, and separate to, daily life. This

retreat offers far more than a re-charging of the batteries: it affords participants an opportunity to live an alternative experience of community, labour, and daily life. This may be important on a personal level for activists who experience ‘burn out’, but also in sustaining social movements. Artist Bill Roberts notes that Burning Man offers people ‘a chance to just slow down, think and reflect, away from the daily rat-race [...] just as deciding to spend our labour and capital [...] is a political act in its own right’ (Roberts in Jones 2011, 204). Burning Man, (with no advertising on site, few opportunities to spend money and little digital access) presents participants with an opportunity to experience an alternative reality without reminders of the rat-race Roberts mentions. Cultural theorist, Stephen Duncombe, argues that such experiences are not simply an escape but can be productive, describing them as:

free spaces [where people can] develop ideas and practices. Freed from the limits and constraints of the dominant culture, you can experiment with new ways of seeing and being and develop tools and resources for resistance. (2002, 5)

Similarly, social justice campaigner and co-director of Beautiful Trouble, Nadine Bloch, argues that ‘making time for reflection is 50% of the work’ (2016). In this time we can learn from past failures and successes in order to strengthen future actions.

### **Liberating Space: Transformation**

Anthropologist Lee Gilmore argues that deserts have a long history as loci of transformative possibilities:

Participants today often speak of being ‘on the Playa’ in a way that references this sense of environmental and cognitive otherness, helping to set the stage for transformative experiences. (2010, 20)

Attending Burning Man, for many, is indeed a spiritual endeavour. The Temple, which first emerged in the year 2000, has become a spiritual site of remembrance and celebration, hosting memorials and weddings. As Gilmore suggests, it is the backdrop of the desert, the space itself, which sets the stage for such transformative experiences.

The Black Rock desert landscape in Nevada is significant. It is the polar opposite of urban space. Harvey points to it offering ‘an enormous blank canvas’ (2000), however, although vast, it is not blank, but imbued with meaning. The desert has a



particular resonance in our cultural imagination in its scale and impermanence, demanding initiative, choice, and personal effort:

this dramatic landscape can seem like the surface of an alien planet and presents numerous physical challenges. In its seemingly endless expanse and otherworldly terrain, the Playa evokes feelings of both fantastic and limitless possibility, and the austerity of the desert stirs up the themes of hardship, sacrifice, mystery, and boundlessness that are deeply ingrained in the Western cultural imagination. (Gilmore 2010, 20)

It is a space which is ‘inherently theatrical’ (Bowditch 2010b, 117). The scenography is dramatic: the desert becomes a stage which demands participants confront a beautiful and destructive nature; to respond viscerally to an environment which is constantly shifting in response to weather, and the passing of time. The winds, torrential rain, dust storms, and sunlight radically alter the way in which participants engage with the festival and with one another, but also change perception. With no permanent structures, elongated shadows upon the Playa are uninterrupted by buildings or streets, rendering ‘city eyes hopeless’ (2014, 1), according to regular attendee Jennifer Raiser who, in her struggle to make sense of scale and perception, reports a change in her physical and emotional state; a transforming of her behaviour, her very ‘cells shift [on a] truly limitless possibility. [...] There’s nothing to break your line of sight’ (Raiser in Raiser, Chase 2014, 1). This experience demanded an answer to the question, ‘what do I want to do?’ (Raiser in Raiser, Chase 2014, 1). The space, then, potentially offers critical moments for reflection and a shift in behaviour.

### **Liberating Imagination**

The space of Black Rock Desert is transformative: it shifts people’s temporal and spatial perceptions as well as altering social interactions, and frequently encourages heightened performances from individuals. This particular effect is something which gaming can engender, and indeed was discussed in Chapter Three, in relation to Coney. As with pervasive games, which can bleed into players’ everyday lives, the heightened performances at Burning Man may also bleed into the everyday, beyond the intensity of the event.

Burning Man, in constructing and dismantling Black Rock City as well as producing large quantities of diverse art works in a short time period, is critical in demonstrating

the strength of collective action. Participants construct a city, fit for 70,000 inhabitants, and create and build structures. Hence, they gesture towards urban theorist Jane Jacobs' discussion of cities: 'cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody' (2000, 312). Although critics may point to the spatial layout allowing excellent surveillance potential, the city plans were designed to encourage social interaction (as we can see from Figure 4.1).<sup>5</sup> It stands as a visual example of what can be achieved through collaboration and action: critical principles for sustaining social movements.



Figure 4.1: Aerial View of Burning Man showing the semi-circular layout, plazas, and the central focus of the effigy, viewable from all vantage points. The structure encourages social interaction.

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<sup>5</sup> Architect Rod Garrett designed the layout of Burning Man to encourage 'social interaction' (Fairs 2015).

Further, the ephemerality of Burning Man art mirrors the space: just as the desert has a temporary and ever-changing existence, so do the art works, lasting only for the duration of the festival.<sup>6</sup> Such a process has a distinct effect upon individuals engaged in constructing and then dismantling elaborate art works (following the ‘Leave No Trace’ principle). It echoes the cycle of work undertaken by Buddhist monks in creating sand mandalas. Both processes teach the significance of presence: nothing is fixed; instead, everything is temporary and in a state of flux, and if this is the case, then present societal and political structures are not inevitable, as they too may change, they too may be ‘let go’. It is a message which, arguably, may prompt a familiarity, in some, with the notion of dissent. The City is equally temporary and the cycle of construction and destruction extends this message further. Doherty notes that:

A true city arises, develops, evolves, catches fire, then disappears, built on a back-drop of nothing, imbuing it with a rich metaphorical resonance and also summoning an extraordinary and ever-shifting visual panorama as the city is constantly either growing or dissolving. (2004, 3)

Due to the actions of thousands of people, the City is never static: it is built, burnt, and dismantled, enlivened by the mass movements of thousands of people.

### **Characteristics Limiting Dissent**

#### **Performances of Power and Wealth**

In many ways, the dominant cultural norms and behaviours of the ‘default’ world permeate Burning Man; the same performances of wealth and power are performed on the Playa, re-creating the inequalities and disparities prevalent in the wider society.<sup>7</sup> For example, there were only 1.3% black participants in 2015, and 90% of participants identified as white (Afterburn 2015). How far, then, can Burning Man’s principle of ‘Radical Inclusion’ be practised? Harvey infamously responded to calls for racial quotas and attempts to attract more diverse participants by stating that, ‘I don’t think black folks like to camp as much as white folks’ (Harvey in Thrasher 2015). A strong relationship with the State suggests a conscious compromise with,

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<sup>6</sup> The ephemerality of art works at Burning Man may bring to mind Auto-Destructive art and the artist Gustav Metzger. Unlike Metzger, though, many Burning Man artists do not perceive the ephemerality of their work as an explicit political protest against the destructive forces prevalent in society.

<sup>7</sup> Burning Man participants refer to the world outside of the festival as the ‘default’ world.

and accommodation to, the default world: in 1997, the organizers created a legal structure, the Black Rock City LLC, ‘to do business in the world’ (Harvey 2014), at the same time working directly with the Pershing County Sheriff to create their own ‘peace keeping entity, the Black Rock Rangers’ (Bowditch 2010a).<sup>8</sup>

Burning Man is a festival affording plentiful opportunities to perform wealth. Market values and forces exist on the Playa as they do in the default world, creating, according to Bowditch, a ‘theatre of consumption, a temporary enclave that represents a lively, expressive, and creative model for consumption’ (2010b, 108). It is, after all, a prosperous multi-million dollar business which has simultaneously reduced the number of affordable tickets as well as increased the most expensive ticket price to \$1,200 in 2016. This seems a far cry from Burning Man’s claim to embrace ‘radical inclusion’ and raises significant questions regarding accessibility. The introduction of what are known as ‘turnkey’ camps too (often complete with air conditioning, famous chefs, and luxury accommodation) has seemingly divided the festival into the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’. Regular participants have criticized and protested against the growing gentrification of the event. In 2016, a turnkey camp reported vandalism (White Ocean 2016). A result of this shifting demographic is an unofficial two-tier system. The festival may exist, then, not necessarily as an alternative culture which celebrates counter-cultural, marginalized voices, but simply as an alternative version of the establishment; complete with the disparity between social classes.

Burning Man’s CEO, Marian Goodell, even describes the event as:

a corporate retreat. The event is [a place] to think of new ideas and make new connections. Burning Man on the outside has very liberal principles, but I’ve been running it with very fiscally conservative policies. (Goodell in Morris 2015)

Although participants largely survive at the event for seven days without money, signs relating to money and wealth permeate the event, exemplified by the turnkey camps as well as by the costumes. The exchange of money is not permitted during the

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<sup>8</sup> In 2014 the Black Rock City LLC transitioned to become the ‘Burning Man Project [which] is the legal name of the non-profit umbrella organization for all of Burning Man’s programs and activities’ (Burning Man 2016b). Previously, Burning Man organizers had stated that ‘as lifetime activists [...] we felt uneasy with the legal structure such an entity [non-profit status] would impose’ (Burning Man 2016b).

event (except for the purchase of coffee and ice); however, this may lead to more intense bursts of spending before and after the event.

Raiser argues that, ‘creativity replaces money [at Burning Man] as the currency of significance’ (2014, 15) but the view that money and wealth are somehow left behind is misleading. Creativity is, indeed, highly prized, but, money also buys the image of creativity. Journalist La Ganga, for instance, discusses the demand for personal stylists who charge up to \$12,000 to provide creative looks (2016). The value of gifts too, at times, aligns with monetary value: Burning Man tickets, an art car, a plane ride, for instance (Jaenike 2014), all a considerable cost. The significance of the gesture of giving may differ between people of differing wealth and the recipient may use the same value system as in the default world in valuing the gesture. Further, labour contributions towards building the city vary greatly, with some affluent participants simply ‘flying in for 24 hours’ (Thrasher 2015); offering very little labour. The gifting culture itself has thus been criticized on ethical grounds, in creating an unequal two-tier system between participants who volunteer and those who do not.

Further criticisms state that the organization has attempted to ‘theatricalize’ the most arduous tasks on site, in order to attract volunteers. In response to the unpopular task of hauling ice, Robinson commends the organization in incorporating ‘an element of play and theatricality simply to make the work more attractive [...] this is the secret to mobilizing the crowd, for it is easier to foster motivation when the work feels like play’ (2015, 124). In this sense, Burning Man organizers have understood the efficacy of using theatrical forms to transform mundane tasks and heavy labour into enjoyable activities and participants are, thereby, seduced into providing a labour which seems to be more an act of compliance than dissent.

Increasingly, Burning Man is perceived as a ‘corporate playground’: a good business and networking opportunity, where multi-million dollar deals are struck. Businesses, although not welcome at Burning Man (through sponsorship) have profited enormously from what Seiler has termed the ‘commodification of rebellion’ (2000, 218). He identifies marketing companies who:

mimicked and nurtured the counterculture’s sense of itself as oppositional, characterizing a product or service as hip, nonconformist, or even radical

became a common technique; ads would often speak in the voices of the ostensible enemies of mainstream consumption. (2000, 218)

Companies, in this way, have tapped into the Burning Man mentality, from selling hand-crafted 'gifts' to handy kits from storage van companies which include instructions on how to cover up their own companies' logos safely. Some companies, such as Google, go further still and draw upon the cultural experience directly for networking opportunities and to gain inspiration for digital development.

Communications scholar, Fred Turner, argues that it:

drives new forms of wealth creation [...] its bohemian ethos supports new forms of production. [it] serves as a key cultural infrastructure for new media industries. (2009, 73)

Similarly, journalist Vanessa Hua notes that Burning Man has become so embraced within digital industries that it 'alters work rhythms, shows up on resumes, [and] is even a sanctioned form of professional development' (2000). Critically, Burning Man affords participants an opportunity to perform an identity, which may forward their career opportunities post-event. The growing confluence between the corporate business model and Burning Man is problematic for those who argue that the festival has an innate subversive character.

The structure of the Burning Man organization is also worth examining, in order to understand how far, in practice, the festival performs an alternative society; a challenge to the status quo. Although Harvey has written at length about authority, power, and hierarchy, even advocating the use of consensus-based decision making, the organization is based on an hierarchical business model. Harvey argues that this model is a:

series of horizontally based networks or platforms, each equipped with its own subordinate threads of delegation. Moving through the centre of these horizontal platforms is a vertical axis of managerial leadership. (2014b)

The vertical axis of managerial leadership consists of six board members who manage the entire organization, and make all decisions:

[It] is not a consensus organization. Larry is the leader, and Marian is his second. And consensus is only used in a situation in which Larry or Marian

agrees with apparent consensus of the organization. (Harrison in Chen 2009, 61)<sup>9</sup>

### **Distraction from Political Activity**

Further, critics claim that Burning Man is a political distraction. For instance, during the election cycle in 2003, essayist Barlow argued that:

If someone like Karl Rove wanted to neutralize the most creative, intelligent, and passionate members of the opposition, he'd have a hard time coming up with a better tool than Burning Man. Exile them to the wilderness [...] and ignore them. It's a pretty safe bet that they won't be out registering voters, or doing anything that might actually threaten electoral change, when they have an art car to build. (2003)

Pinchbeck echoes this sentiment, categorizing Burning Man as another spectacle which 'sucks a huge amount of energy and time from people who could re-focus their talents and genius on what we must do to escape ecological collapse in building a resilient or regenerative society' (2016). Although there are, no doubt, drawbacks to the performances seen in Burning Man in terms of dissent, there are nevertheless, elements of the festival that suggest a different conclusion.

### **Efficacy of Immersion**

#### **Changing Behaviour**

In offering a glimpse of an alternative way of living, the immersive nature of Burning Man, lasting at least seven days, allows participants to enact the society they may wish to see within the everyday. The experience of living differently may indeed sustain their belief that such a life is not mere wishful thinking but a real possibility. It is critical too, that engaging in this different life requires labour, physical suffering, and risk. Water, food, and shelter are not provided and cannot be bought on site. Heat stroke is common. Ticket terms and conditions state, 'I acknowledge and fully understand that as a participant, I will be engaging in activities that involve risk of injury, including permanent disability, and death' (Burning Man 2016e). Participants too, are sometimes given Playa Names to create a different persona, an identity

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<sup>9</sup> Katherine Chen interviewed volunteers about their experiences working in the Burning Man organization.

associated with Burning Man (Burning Man 2016d). There is an expectation that participants will adorn spectacular costumes; a point made clear to Ruth Yeganey when she was ‘castigated for [her] comfortable, though distinctly plain attire’ (2012, 113) during her initiation. At the core of Burning Man is the expectation that participants will play with the materials and structures on offer. The tenet: ‘There are No Spectators’ (Burning Man 2016a) frames Burning Man as a performance, and the participants, as performers.

### **The Effects of the Gifting Culture**

The gifting culture encourages participants to perform dissent in various ways: through challenging the status quo by offering a rehearsal of an alternative societal model, and promoting a shift in social relations. The gifting culture, therefore, specifically promotes dissent in the following ways:

1. Through affording participants an opportunity to perform anti-commodification: challenging the values of commodification, and behaviours associated with it.
2. In presenting an alternative social system based on a community model which everyone contributes to, and benefits from. As already identified in Chapters Two and Three, one of the challenges facing social movements is that of working within a group, whose membership is diverse and constantly changing, whilst engaged in sustaining a long-term campaign. A sense of solidarity with, and a sense of belonging to, a larger community may counteract the inherent difficulties, encouraging people to persist in their dissent post-event.
3. In promoting creativity. Theatrical dissent certainly relies upon creativity. The creation of art may encourage participants to develop a belief in their own creativity; and to value the act of creation itself.

Burning Man affords participants an opportunity to live, for the duration of the festival, without the need or pressure to engage in consumerism, to purchase items or experiences, but to engage in a gifting culture based on an ethos of sharing. In this



way it challenges the values of consumerism and affects how people work with, and think of each other; social relations are interrogated.

Burning Man directly confronts one of the signifiers of capital: advertising, which, according to McFall, ‘helps render the specific, historical condition of contemporary capitalist economies as natural and inevitable’ (2004, 20). Existing for one week without the constant reiteration of such signs and reminders offers participants an ephemeral, alternative way of living; one that disproves the inevitability of ‘contemporary capitalist economies’; an opportunity to experience life without the pressure to signify social status through consumption of material items. In creating ‘social environments that are unmediated by commercial sponsorships, transactions, or advertising’ (Burning Man 2016a), Burning Man aims to change social relations, agreeing with Dyer’s argument that:

Advertisements do not simply manipulate us, inoculate us or reduce us to the status of objects; they create structures of meaning which sell commodities not for themselves as useful objects but in terms of ourselves as social beings in our different social relationships. (1982, 116)

Perhaps more significant though, is the way in which this alternative existence provides an opportunity for people to perform their return to the everyday (complete with ubiquitous advertisements) with renewed awareness.

The gifting culture affords participants a significant opportunity to experience life according to a set of social, rather than economic, guidelines. The number of 70,000 people participating in an alternative form of economy without money creates a strong political statement which explicitly criticizes the dominant neoliberal values.

However, this statement is not without its contradictions; after all, commerce and access to money are required before, and immediately after, the event. Nevertheless, it remains a challenge to the status quo because self-organization, the power of collaborative effort, creativity, and generosity, in the context of Burning Man, have more clout than money.

We have seen in earlier chapters the importance of a community of dissent in terms of sustainability; and Burning Man’s use of gifting works to create a cohesive community. Existing without monetary transactions necessitates a different approach to the performance of everyday tasks in social interaction with others. The influential

study of Vohs, Mead, and Goode on the psychological consequences of money provides evidence that introducing money into various scenarios worsens behaviour, encouraging an individualistic outlook and isolated behaviours:

Reminders of money, relative to non-money reminders, led to reduced requests for help and reduced helpfulness toward others. Relative to participants primed with neutral concepts, participants primed with money preferred to play alone, work alone, and put more physical distance between themselves and a new acquaintance. (2006, 45)

Existing without monetary transactions necessitates a different approach to the performance of everyday tasks in social interaction with others: ‘since nothing is for sale, this means virtually all human interactions take place in social markets’ (Crockett 2014.) The gifting culture aims to promote a sense of community rather than the individualism of capitalist society. Social interactions which exist in social markets are imbued with emotion and meaning as the gift brings together the gesture of generosity, the human interaction involved in giving and receiving, and the effort the giver made. Magister summarizes this as the ‘economy of goodwill’ (2011a). Sociologist Marcel Mauss’ influential work regarding the power relations and mechanisms of gifting culture emphasizes the obligatory nature of gifting: ‘the obligation to give, the obligation to receive and the obligation to reciprocate’ (2011, 50). As such, the act of giving a gift, and in response, receiving and reciprocating, can be understood as a social contract which binds together the community. ‘Burning Man is like a big family picnic. Would you sell things to one another at a family picnic? No, you’d share things’ (Harvey in Limbach 2014). Participants are forced to interact socially beyond their immediate social circle because, ‘gifting does not contemplate a return or an exchange’ (Burning Man 2016a) but ensures that the receiver is keen to reciprocate elsewhere; gifting is not linear but exists as a chain: if one person offers another a meal, then the expectation is not for the recipient to offer something in return, but to offer a gift to another. The gifting culture, according to attendee Karli Jaenike, contributes to social cohesion, as the ‘underlying fear of rejection that most of us unconsciously harbour isn’t a factor at Burning Man because it’s unlikely anyone would reject a gift’ (2014). Magister suggests that the gifting culture is like ‘social lubricant’, noting that other festivals are an ‘unnervingly quiet experience. No strangers were stepping out to ask me if I wanted to play a game, or have a drink. [...] Without that gifting culture there was no excuse to talk to anybody’ (2011a). (The

notion of existing in a social market, bound by a social contract, is further examined in Chapter Five, where I discuss my PaR component, *HOUND*).

Individuals, stripped of the status of their possessions, are accepted, not as an object of consumption, but as a subject in relation to other subjects. People may be valued, not in terms of what they possess, but in terms of what they can give, and all may give something, with gifts ranging from material objects to art, experiences and services: ‘a neck massage; a shot of absinthe; your portrait, taken by a professional photographer; a snow cone; a pancake breakfast; a pair of vintage sunglasses; a pot of crème brûlée; a yoga lesson’ (Crockett 2014). The object, as a gift, is afforded further meaning and higher status than a similar object which had simply been bought as a commodity.

The art at Burning Man, understood by Harvey as a gift, in necessitating and promoting communal effort, exemplifies the value of community action.

Anthropologists Dan Ariely and James Heyman argue that, ‘people sometimes expend more effort in exchange for no payment (a social market) than they expend when they receive low payment (monetary market)’ (2004, 787). The notion that collective effort can accomplish the improbable is extremely significant for the promotion of dissent. Artists Cesewski and Giles, for instance, note, ‘no other place in the world offers the opportunity to create on a giant scale, [...] we learnt the power of coming together as a community to accomplish the improbable’ (2007, 304). Determination and participation make the seemingly impossible happen in harsh conditions, and the fruition of participants’ labours, the construction of an entire city, is no small feat. Undoubtedly, the working conditions are difficult and the work may be relentless, but frequently, artists argue that the communal work environment is instrumental in their decision to create art for Burning Man. If we examine Figure 4.2, for instance, we can see collaborative labour in action. Not only are there twenty participants (composed of men and women) helping to build a geodesic dome; but seemingly, there is no leader, separate to the action. Although some participants are wearing protective masks and eyewear, most people are dressed in usual Burning Man attire, suggesting a response to a call for help rather than an intention to build a dome on site.



Figure 4.2: A group of Burning Man participants collectively build a geodesic dome (2009).

Further, not only does the elevated positioning of art at Burning Man critique how wider society values art, it also challenges the bias against a politics of collaboratively authored work: ‘as the number of authors increase, the perceived quality of an artwork decreases’ (Smith, Newman 2014, 303).<sup>10</sup> In a similar way to contemporary devising theatre companies, the art works at Burning Man discredit these perceptions and stand as visual statements of the achievement of communal effort.

### **Promotion of Creativity**

The practice of creating art at Burning Man rejects the binary categories of ‘artist’ and ‘non-artist’, embracing, instead, the notion that ‘everyone is an artist’.<sup>11</sup>

Understanding the art at Burning Man, not as valuable commodities, but as a critical part of the gifting culture has a dual effect: of criticizing the ways in which art in the

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<sup>10</sup> Obviously, such a bias against collaboratively authored work does not take into account historic examples such as cathedrals.

<sup>11</sup> Artist Joseph Beuys and director Joan Littlewood have both discussed the idea that ‘everyone is an artist’; Beuys in relation to an immediate incitement for action (Bodenmann-Ritter, 2007, 189) and Littlewood in her plans with Cedric Price to create a Fun Palace.

default world is dominated by market exchange, and of reassigning the value of art.

Harvey argues:

This is not art that can be viewed independently of the process that fosters its creation. It is the fruit of self-expression elevated to civic duty, a medium of gift exchange within a relentlessly social environment. (Harvey in Raiser 2014, 13)

The quantity of art works at Burning Man also points to a significant effect of the gifting culture. Despite the absence of financial compensation, Burning Man has been credited with creating ‘more artistic expressions in more media per square foot than anywhere else on earth’ (Doherty 2004, 2). The lack of financial payment suggests that, for many of these artists, their motivation to create was not financial.<sup>12</sup> Art works begin to take on further meaning as objects of dissidence when artists refuse to profit or gain public recognition from them, and reassert their motivation as being ‘for the joy of creation, for the fulfilment of working with others to pull off the grand gesture’ (Doherty 2004, 3). It affords participants an opportunity to perform against the establishment. Whilst it is important not to overstate the political significance of this, as many artists may use Burning Man as an opportunity to showcase their work to a mass audience, it is also fair to say that many of these artists perceive their work as contributions to the gifting culture of Burning Man (Burning Man 2016f).

### **The Efficacy of Burning Man**

In its various performances, from building accommodation structures such as geodesic domes to offering and receiving gifts, Burning Man aims to offer transformative experiences that may provide long-term effects:

Our annual rendezvous in the desert is a feast for the senses. It offers something — in fact, many, many things — for everyone. But what happens after the dust clears? How can our daily lives in the default world pay homage to our experience together in the desert? (Buttar 2015)

Jan Cohen-Cruz echoes Buttar’s question as she asks what happens *after* an event such as Burning Man: ‘is any acting out of utopia just a letting off of steam? Is there a

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<sup>12</sup> Most Burning Man art works are not funded but the organization does provide grants for up to twelve installations each year. Recipients have included established artists such as David Best and Jack Haye (Burning Man 2016f).

way to capture that energy, stay grounded in that longing and make permanent change?’ (1998, 168). This question underscores any discussion of Burning Man as having any meaningful connections with activism and sustaining social movements. Burning Man may well work as a safety valve, offering people an opportunity to lose their inhibitions temporarily, thereby, facilitating their return to their everyday routine.

Moreover, for many participants, leisure time is scarce. The Mercer Employee Benefits Guidance reports in 2014, for instance, that American citizens received the lowest allowance of paid leave in 64 countries (Mercer 2014). Some Burning Man participants use a large proportion of their annual leave in attending. It, however, does not meet the usual definition of a holiday. It requires participants to offer their labour (cleaning, cooking, performing). The conditions are harsh, with soaring daytime temperatures of up to 100°F, contrasting with night-time temperatures of below freezing. Winds and dust can dismantle accommodation. It also requires considerable expense, both in time – planning and preparation, and in terms of finance – the average person spends \$1,200 on expenses alone (Afterburn 2015). Can it be justified, and if so, in what terms?

We can say that some, at least, have thought such an outlay of time and money has been justified in terms of the experience and also in terms of its having a long-term effect. Some, at least, have responded to the challenge of activist and performance artist Reverend Billy (discussed in Chapter Two):

What about the other 51 weeks of the year? Something very strong and honest and magical happens [at Burning Man] and we have an obligation, don't we, to see how it can manifest in our communities? (Talen in Jones 2011, 94)

He notes that, at Burning Man, ‘we became a community about collective consciousness and radical self-reliance. We became much closer. [...] We were transformed by our week on the Playa’ (Talen in Jones 2011, 94). His aim, after Burning Man, was to find new ways of bringing the ‘Playa’ ethos into the everyday, and there is some evidence to suggest that some long-term socially engaged projects or campaigns have resulted. Reverend Billy’s question is, to some degree, answered, if we consider Burning Man in 2005. Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast on the first day of Burning Man. Participants responded by organizing a food drive and donation effort, and immediately took this to the affected area, setting up headquarters

in a car park; constructing what would soon become a distribution centre for Oxfam and the Red Cross (Burners Without Borders 2016). ‘The very skills needed to survive at Burning Man are the skills needed to respond to a disaster’ (Harvey in Jones, 95) and participants, skilled at organizing infrastructure in hostile environments, applied themselves to the situation they found themselves in, where running water, electricity, communication channels, and sanitation systems were not available. As Harvey claims, ‘if that isn’t applying our ethos, I don’t know what is’ (Harvey in Jones, 95).

Whilst the volunteers certainly possessed much needed skills, it was their compulsion to respond which is notable. Tom Price argues that this initiative brought Burning Man principles to the wider society, creating:

disruptive culture. We’re demonstrating the ability of [...] anybody to make real substantial concrete change in the world and do it from a values-based place, do it with a focus on the social, rather than the financial. And that’s destabilizing, and empowering. (Price in Jones 2011, 178)

Burners Without Borders argues that its work, ‘coalesced from a spontaneous, collective instinct to meet gaping needs where traditional societal systems were clearly failing’ (Burning Man 2016d). Since then, it has emerged as a community-led, grassroots civic organization working globally with the aim of creating lasting change. Further, it is worth considering that responding to a crisis when immersed in Burning Man, in the midst of experiencing a TAZ, may have instigated a very different response from people had they returned to their everyday lives when the disaster occurred.

Despite the exclusivity, inequalities, and business links, Burning Man has strong ties with activism. It has a history of hosting protest performances, and participants have applied the practices of Burning Man elsewhere, in ‘seeding’ social and political projects outside of the event. Interestingly, however, organizers appear keen to distance themselves from politics and activism, arguing that:

[It] is not an activist boot-camp. It is an incubator for extraordinary experiences [...] and it doesn’t promise that they’ll hue to any particular ideology. Its only promise is that something astonishing will happen. [...] It is that connection to the extraordinary that makes Burning Man valuable, and makes it unsuited to a political movement. [It] is an engine of possibility, a

connection to our collective unconscious, and if you bend it to any other purpose it will break. (Magister 2012)

Conversely, it is precisely because Burning Man is not perceived as an activist boot-camp with a specific agenda but as a place for extraordinary experiences to occur *collectively*, as Magister suggests, that it creates the conditions ripe for people to experience activist art and to experience first-hand an alternative way of living. As Dolan argues, it may be the experiencing of the ‘utopian performative’, of the feelings evoked through an experience of the pursuit of pleasure that may have more efficacy than the formulation of a social plan. Rather than preach to the converted, the event creates a social environment where a range of people with differing opinions make visible more egalitarian social relations. It is affective, rather than effective. As Magister states, Burning Man is an ‘engine of possibility’ (2012).



Figure 4.3 *Helco* (1996) staged by the Seemen Troupe. The devil figure depicted here, ‘Papa Satan’, represented the threat of commodification; performing in a farcical way he attempted to purchase participants’ souls.

Burning Man, throughout its history, has produced multiple protest performances. It is highly significant too that the political art is not only driven by artists but is also formalized by the organization, which sets an annual theme. The years 2006-2010 were noteworthy in this respect as each theme was politically provocative: ‘Hope and Fear: The Future (2006); The Green Man (2007); American Dream (2008); Evolution



(2009); Metropolis: Life of Cities (2010)' (Burning Man 2016b). It is perhaps unsurprising that, in response to these themes, artists created works that mocked the well-rehearsed voices (incidentally given plenty of media airtime) of the establishment: climate deniers, property developers, and right-wing Christian creationist conservatives. The fact that these protest performances played to mass audiences, both live at Burning Man, and online, disseminated through media outlets, is highly significant. As Peter Hirshberg notes, the themes are a way to encourage 70,000 people to 'contemplate major social themes in a collective, almost dream-like manner' (2014, 73). In 1996, for instance, in response to the theme 'inferno', a collective called the Seemen Troupe performed the threat of commodification; playing out the internal politics and ethical considerations that the Burning Man organizers confronted at that time. Staged as agitprop, it created an elaborate installation and performance called *Helco* (as illustrated in Figure 4.3), a supra-national conglomerate, which attempted to purchase Burning Man and failed spectacularly. The troupe even created a satirical infomercial, which offered viewers an opportunity to redeem their souls (Helco 1996). The installation consisted of mock corporate signage and structures (Caca Bell, Submit, Starfucks), satirical newspapers, news reports and even involved an encounter between a performer, playing the role of 'Papa Satan' and Harvey. Doherty noted how he 'laid the hard sell on Larry. "Think of what Burning Man could accomplish with some serious corporate money behind it! [...] It could be the greatest show on Earth"' (2004, 46). Doherty explains that:

the *Helco* pageant touched on anxieties that were real for those who made Burning Man happen, both in the organization and in the crowd; the corruption and selling out of their experience, their community, their reality, to large, sinister forces. (2004, 47)

*Helco* existed as a social commentary upon Burning Man and the attempts by numerous corporations to commodify the experience.



Figure 4.4: *Burn Wall Street, Occupy Black Rock City, 2012.*

In terms of content, Burning Man has produced many protest performances. *Crude Awakening* (2007), for instance, involved artists Karen Cusolito and Dan Mann creating a 90-foot tower entitled Reverend Oil Derrick. There were ‘nine steel sculptures of humans from cultures around the world, many thirty feet tall, all worshipping at the altar of fossil fuel’ (Hirshberg 2014, 79). In 2012, Burning Man artists brought activism to the forefront of the festival. In response to the Occupy movements, artist Von Danger created *Burn Wall Street, Occupy Black Rock City* (as demonstrated in Figure 4.4). Participants constructed Wall Street, complete with the Bank of UnAmerica and Goldman Sucks. Participants were invited to engage in political discussions using Occupy’s General Assemblies model, with representatives of all political persuasions speaking. Far from being confined to the Burning Man audience, this particular performance went beyond the event, sparking widespread debate and discussion from mainstream media outlets (similar to performances examined in other chapters) responding to the controversial image of Wall Street going up in flames: *Huffington Post* (Bennett-Smith 2012), *Business Insider* (Lopez 2012), and *NY Mag* (Roose 2012).

Socially driven initiatives, borne from Burning Man, are not unusual. If Burning Man creates the social conditions for business networking then it follows that this may also

be the case for people interested in creating non-profit organizations and campaigns. Such initiatives include Black Rock Solar (a non-profit organization that promotes renewable solar energy) and Freespace (initially started by Mike Zuckerman who persuaded landlords in thirteen countries to ‘gift’ unused space to the community as a temporary place to launch new projects). It is important, as well, to acknowledge that some activist groups perceive Burning Man as an opportunity to reach new audiences whilst others understand it as a space of sanctuary. Code Pink (discussed in Chapter Three), for instance, used their time at Burning Man in 2011 to publicize their campaign ‘Create Not Hate’ whilst the Church of Stop Shopping found the event to be transformative.

Burning Man is an event which is hungry for resources, imagination, money, time, labour, and effort. Certainly, it is not sustainable environmentally and it has a sizable carbon footprint.<sup>13</sup> Participants engage in a performance of excess. If we consider the claims of Liberate Tate, and BP or Not BP, that the function of art is distorted through its association with its sponsors, then, we need to consider how far the decisions made by Burning Man, in staging its various performances, may display a lack of congruence with its basic tenets; thus emasculating its efficacy in presenting a challenge. Recent changes in organization, such as the fee increase and expansion of turnkey camps, have ensured that the event today is even less counter-cultural than it has been in recent years. Much of the practice and way of life at Burning Man displays inequality. Harvey argues, in response to discussions about the gentrification of Burning Man, that such debate ‘misses the mark. Scan Burning Man’s Ten Principles and you will not find radical equality among them’ (2014), claiming that its foundation is fellowship and common ground, noting that ‘common ground is not a level playing field and should not be interpreted as mandating equal living conditions’ (2014).

Furthermore, critics questioning the political undertones of everyday life at Burning Man return to the notion that it is merely a hedonistic festival (Leonard 2014; Thrasher 2015; Pinchbeck 2016), a site of debauchery or simply ‘a vacation. It’s a bit

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<sup>13</sup> Annually, 70,000 participants arrive, from various destinations, for a seven-day event. If organizers wished to limit the festival’s ecological effects, then, arguably, they would not have constructed an airport. Even Burning Man’s Environmental Director acknowledges that, ‘the idea of making a temporary city in the middle of nowhere is inherently unsustainable’ (Price in Wenzel 2007).

of a party, an escape from reality' (Jones 2011, 2012). The aim to satisfy one's desires may indeed be self-indulgent, individualistic, simply one additional mode of consumption. And, Burning Man is not a festival of dissent. It is far too entangled with capitalist values and practices. Yet, it manages to create, in the vein of the TAZ, a space where participants feel liberated enough to play and pursue pleasure. This may seem insignificant but it indicates a desire to experience life differently. Critics may say that such a desire acts simply as a safety valve, a 'letting loose', so that individuals may then return to everyday life and continue to work and live exactly as before: the festival quashes dissent rather than promotes it.<sup>14</sup> This may well be the case for many. Arguably though, the political efficacy of Burning Man is that it offers participants (albeit for a short time) an opportunity to experience life according to different values. It offers them a space to rehearse life which challenges the everyday.

Such an argument precisely pinpoints the success of Burning Man as fertile ground for dissent. The pursuit of pleasure for pleasure's sake may, in many ways, be an extension of the commodification that Burning Man purportedly seeks to challenge. However, if we examine hedonism's relationship to everyday life, and labour, then, the decision to favour the pursuit of pleasure, may in fact be understood as a subversive and even productive form of action. On the one hand, it can be an escape from reality, but, as Duncombe suggests, it is an escape which can shift perceptions and even generate new ways of being; it does not involve slipping into an already constructed reality (as imagined by a company) but involves the creation of an alternative reality, a city, a community. It offers people an opportunity to experience life differently, with an emphasis upon transformation, generosity, and collaborative effort. Such an approach is not selfless, as people expect similar acts of kindness or gifts in return. Yet the act of stripping money from Burning Man propels other social forces to the forefront of the festival. Online discussions regarding the gifting culture frequently refer to the most valuable gift as being one which establishes meaningful relationships (Reddit 2016). The model of gifting is not sustainable, nor is it applicable to the wider society, but it offers participants an opportunity to prefigure an

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<sup>14</sup> We can see parallels here with the debate regarding carnival; whether it existed as a 'safety valve', a reconstitutive event which re-established the status quo (Barber 2012, 6) or whether it was a 'vehicle of plebeian social protest and resistance to the dominant ideology and its institutional constraints' (Bristol in Stevens 2014, 83) as articulated by Mikhail Bakhtin and Michael Bristol.

alternative. This is what Bey points to when, despite the attacks on the concept of the TAZ, he argues that participants may still experience significant elements of rupture, the 'eruption of culture where life is experienced at maximum intensity, to then dissolve itself to reform elsewhere' (1991, 95). The City dissolves, and eruptions of political and social activity have indeed occurred elsewhere.

Dolan's writings on what live performance can offer, a utopian *performative*, are particularly useful when applied to Burning Man, which 'provides a place where people can come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world' (2005, 2). Rather than understand Burning Man as utopian, it is perhaps, more useful to consider it as being in flux, in working towards utopianism. Scholar of anarchism Patrick Reedy highlights the significant distinction between the two, the fictional utopia and utopianism which can be defined as 'thinking and practice motivated by a longing for a better future' (2002, 171). Burning Man may also be understood as a 'social sculpture', which, according to Joseph Beuys, can be understood as 'how we mould and shape the world in which we live' (2004, 10). The aim of shaping society and the direct surrounding environment is not at odds with the practice of Burning Man, which exists as an ephemeral community, driven to shape the world around it, for the duration of Burning Man, at the very least.

Burning Man, after all, is not a form of direct action, protest or social movement. It is a hedonistic festival, where joy, pleasure, and play are championed. Within this frame, however, Burning Man is arguably more useful existing in this form than as a social movement. It offers people opportunities to practise prefiguration through pleasure. In a small way, this may help to sustain future social movements, practically and ideologically. In gathering 70,000 people in the desert, the event is a mass rehearsal and ongoing practice of a utopian performative. Despite the contradictions and ongoing gentrification, for one week a year, participants live according to principles which are prefigurative and ideologically counter-cultural. Dolan argues that, 'utopian performatives spring from a complex alchemy of form and content, context and location, which take shape in moments of utopia as doings, as never finished gestures toward a potentially better future' (2005, 8). Burning Man too is a never finished gesture. It is a living exercise, where participants make gestures towards an alternative.

The political efficacy of Burning Man lies in its ability to act as a catalyst. It can have a seeding effect, where ideas are dispersed far beyond the context of Burning Man. Significantly, it embodies resistance through the mode of cultural experience, collective action, creativity, and celebration to capture fleeting intimations of a better world. It acts to make visible a better world beyond Burning Man, confirming Burning Man's claim that 'what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. What happens in Black Rock City goes everywhere'.

### **OLSX as a Temporary Autonomous Zone**

I argue that OLSX, in common with Burning Man, created performances of dissent which, with varying degrees of success, attempted to create a TAZ in liberating land (or, more precisely, space), time, and imagination. Activists attempted, through their occupation, to express their dissent; to challenge the status quo. The occupied space is transformed for, as Nield argues, 'by occupying space, one changes it' (2012, 232) as different meanings are constructed for the space inhabited. The meaning of occupation, which in itself is a reminder of the legal ownership of space (Pickerill, Krinsky 2012, 279), is transformed into 'something that is beautiful, something that brings community together' (Davis in Taylor, Gessen, Schmitt 2012, 133). If Burning Man were geared towards transforming the perceptions of participants, then OLSX was geared both to sustaining and mobilizing participants but also to attracting attention from the wider world. Somewhat ironically, many have criticized Occupy as being a protest movement whose remit was to 'say no': no to capitalism; no to privatized space; no to economic injustice. On the contrary, the performances of dissent, enacted by Occupy, whilst existing as a protest movement, created a visible alternative, enacting a lived space of 'impossible possibility' (Halvorsen 2014, 411), prefiguring an alternative way of life. In other words, the protest camp performed an alternative and more egalitarian version of everyday life and democracy. Despite the criticisms directed towards the Occupy movement, which pointed out that hierarchies, based on class, gender, race, and age, were forming, the performances of dissent were attempting to create alternative systems based on egalitarian principles.

Protests in London in 2011 were not unexpected. There had been an upsurge in social movement occupations earlier in the year: from Tahrir Square to Syntagma Square,

from the Puerta del Sol to Tunis. Student protests in London the previous year had also branched beyond demonstrations into direct action and civil disobedience. Words used to describe the occupations which spread in Europe and America, included a ‘swarm’, a ‘spark’, a ‘revolutionary wave’ (Beck 2014); all of which suggest that there was something ‘catching’ in the way these occupations were working. The role of digital communication was an important tool, as Castells suggests, ‘the movements spread by contagion in a world networked by the wireless internet’ (2012, 2). And indeed, the tactic of protest camping became a global trend. What was happening in Egypt, New York, and Madrid was raised, discussed, and mirrored, to a degree, in London too. The scale of the movement and number of activists involved in sustaining the occupations and participating in direct-democracy assemblies was unprecedented. This extended to the grammars of the protest camps: horizontal decision-making (HDM), leaderless assemblies, and digital communications.

One of the main issues which puzzled journalists writing in mainstream media publications at the time was the idea of Occupy as a leaderless movement which resisted setting concrete demands. And, since its demise in 2012, the focus of academic and media attention across the political spectrum, has largely been on its failure. However, the criteria used to measure such failure were too crude, according to social movement theorists Feigenbaum, Frenzel, and McCurdy, as they were unable to ‘capture the complexity or dynamics of the diversity of protest camps’ (2013, 4). The focus of this research will not be upon the impact or efficacy of the Occupy movement in London, but in exploring the efficacy of creating a TAZ in the public sphere of St Paul’s churchyard, in liberating an area of land, time, and imagination.

### **Methodology: Analyzing and Reading OLSX as a Visual Grammar**

Understanding Bey’s argument regarding the creation of a TAZ is critical in offering further insight regarding the two performances of dissent (everyday life and direct democracy) and Occupy’s central tactic: taking space. How far OLSX can be understood as a TAZ is questionable: there were many ways in which the protest camp at St Paul’s did not adhere to Bey’s theories. Both Halvorsen and Burgum offer important insights regarding the plausibility of understanding OLSX as a TAZ. Halvorsen notes that Bey’s argument places a strong emphasis on the ‘ephemerality of

[...] ruptures, understanding them as “nonordinary”, clandestine, and even invisible space-times separated from everyday life’ (2014, 404). He argues that such a description does not accurately describe the Occupy movement, due to the relative longevity of the protest camps and the fact that the occupied space was situated in highly visible sites. OLSX was not clandestine; it was, instead, made as visible as possible by the occupiers, and the performances of dissent worked to emphasize and amplify their presence. Further, Burgum denies that social movements are capable of creating a TAZ at all since there is no such thing as a ‘free space’ existing outside of predominant power structures (2015, 39). The widespread belief that convergence spaces can, and do, exist outside of (or separate to) such power structures, according to Burgum, not only prevents critical reflection, but also acts as an obstacle to the creation of more egalitarian structures.

Nor did their performances escape establishment capture, to such a degree that *TIME* magazine’s person of the year in 2011 was named ‘The Protester: From the Arab Spring to Athens, From Occupy Wall Street to Moscow’ (Stengel 2011). To put this into context, the runners up in this category were Kate Middleton, Republican representative Paul Ryan, and Navy Admiral William McRaven: all members of the establishment. Advertising campaigns used the language of Occupy to market their items: for instance, Rimmel’s cosmetic campaign ‘#A Lipstick Revolution’ (complete with an appropriation of the symbol for Anarchism), and Maybelline’s cosmetic television campaign in 2012, ‘Baby Lips’ which included images of women marching with clenched fists, banners and megaphones, protesting for ‘smoother lips’.

Notwithstanding the above reservations, I argue that OLSX shares critical aspects of a TAZ: the liberation of land, time, and imagination. Further, by analyzing OLSX as a TAZ, we can gain critical insight into the efficacy of these particular components in theatricalized dissent.

Rai and Reinelt propose that the structural similarities between politics and performance can be understood as grammar: ‘a set of recognisable rules or codifications that facilitate communication’ (2015, 2). This definition, arguably, can also be applied to OLSX, as it befits the work undertaken by the protest camp. Indeed, I propose that perceiving the expressions of dissent (the two performances of



everyday life and direct democracy) as two particular grammars employed by Occupy may be helpful for analysis for the following reasons:

1. Grammar forces us to consider what OLSX's performances communicated, and particularly, what punctuation, or performative components were put in place to allow the meaning of the performance to be read.
2. It places the onus upon space: the space *between* performance materials, objects or performers, the significance of the space, and the ephemeral ordering of the space in particular. As Rai and Reinelt pertinently argue, grammar never stays still. Instead it 'shifts and changes over time, and thus allows for a space to re-form and re-enact rules through everyday subversion of some codes and renegotiation of others' (2015, 2). In discussing performance grammars, politics scholar Michael Saward asks, 'what do they [grammars] seek to make perceptible, temporally, spatially, and otherwise?' (2015, 217). Saward's question is particularly useful if we apply it to the work undertaken at OLSX: what do the performance grammars of OLSX seek to make perceptible, temporally, spatially, and *performatively*?

The grammar of everyday life can be understood as a set of codifications which communicated the message that activists were willing to re-stage their everyday existence in a protest camp in the City of London for the purpose of protest. The grammar of direct-democracy included the use of General Assemblies, hand-signals, and the human microphone which became such a recognizable language that it was widely used in Occupy movements across the globe.<sup>15</sup> Two performances of dissent, staged and enacted by OLSX activists, will be analyzed: everyday life and horizontal decision-making (HDM).

### **Characteristics Conducive to Efficacy: Liberating Space**

The tactic of occupying space or organizing protest camps obviously has a rich and varied history with multiple origins.<sup>16</sup> However, in liberating space, activists created

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<sup>15</sup> These performance grammars did not originate in Occupy London, having been widely used in the protest occupations in 2011, and in the alter-globalization social movements from 2000 onwards. They have also been linked to communication methods of decision-making utilized by the Quakers (Seeds for Change 2010), which are also cited in my PaR, *HOUND* (2016), examined in Chapter Five.

<sup>16</sup> Feigenbaum, Frenzel, and McCurdy, for example, direct our attention from nomadic cultures to the 'seventeenth century Diggers movement, from indigenous people's resistances

arresting performances which had the potential to provoke the interest of spectators. Arguably, the efficacy of this tactic, in occupying space, relates to the performance of 'double-ness' (Rai, Reinelt 2015, 14). An Occupy activist, quoted by Nield, concisely summarizes how this double-ness can work in action: 'it is exciting that people [...] have claimed a public space as both a symbol of distress, and a practical means of organizing' (2015, 125). For, one factor that aided OLSX was this choice of grammars; a grammar which, according to Nield, resisted definition or categorization:

In the autumn of 2011, a new form of protest began to be performed around the globe. It did not communicate a coherent 'message', nor did it initiate any widespread disorder. It did not pronounce its duration and politely go home after an acceptable period, nor did it summarise its demands in the form of easily readable and recognisable symbols. (2015, 121)

As such, OLSX, Nield argues, 'came and it said little' (2015, 121). On the contrary, I argue that OLSX said a great deal through its use of grammars. It was just this lack of coherence, this ambiguity in its use of symbols, this 'double-ness', the making visible and the covering over, the tension between the heightened spectacle and the clandestine acts, that proved to be a critical factor in both sustaining participants and provoking interest. I argue that, in terms of space and activity, the London Stock Exchange, St Paul's Cathedral, and OLSX were involved in creating such performances of heightened spectacle as well as more clandestine acts: the visible media briefings made by the City of London, representatives of St Paul's Cathedral, and Occupy activists, for example, and the discussions or activities held in private by all three parties. Equally 'double' was the nature of the space itself: the role of public space was both a stage for political legitimacy and also for contestation. The space allowed for multiple performances to occur simultaneously within one site. The presence of tourists (attracted to the iconic site of St Paul's Cathedral), police officers, local workers, worshippers, and occupiers simultaneously created performances of the Nation, the State, the City, the Church, and Dissent. These visual grammars, punctuated by more complex performances, became integral to Occupy as its protest camp expanded and drew further attention.

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to colonial land grabs, to the birth of the boy scouts' (2013, 1). In the UK, the significance of occupying space has been widely discussed (Roseneil 2000; Duncombe 2002; Cortright 2008; Fairhall 2006) and has been amplified further by social movements such as Greenham Common and Reclaim the Streets.

## **Response to Authorities**

The response to the beginnings of the Occupy movement in London visibly demonstrated the allegiance of the State to the interests of the City and acted to heighten awareness and provoke further questions and dissent regarding what constituted public and private space, both within OLSX and the wider media establishment.<sup>17</sup> Burgum points out that the response by the Metropolitan Police:

acted as a material and spatial assertion of the market as ‘private property’ where political appearance should not appear. In other words, the neoliberal premise that the state should protect the autonomy of the market from politics, as well as underpin private property, was materially re-designated at the gates of Paternoster. (Burgum 2015, 94)

Similarly to the cases of BP or Not BP, Liberate Tate, and the Labofii, the legal and security responses had a direct impact upon the site, staging, and even, to a degree, the content, of OLSX. The organizers’ first choice for occupation was the London Stock Exchange in Paternoster Square. However, a High Court injunction ordered the eviction of occupiers and prevented public access to the privately owned site. The police aimed to create an intimidating sight and impenetrable barricade at the square, as rows of officers, complete with dogs, horses, and riot equipment, greeted activists on arrival. This performance of force was staged with a promise of violence, should anyone attempt to occupy the square.

Just as the activists and performers discussed in Chapter Two (Liberate Tate and BP or Not BP) showed flexibility in their responses to the authorities’ attempts to thwart them, so too did the occupiers. Nield pertinently poses the question, ‘how should protest speak when it is not allowed to speak; what language could be available, when acts of both speaking and not speaking are consistently regulated, restricted, and stage managed?’ (Nield 2015, 129). The activists’ answer was to exploit fully the hand they had been dealt. Arguably, then, the police, inadvertently, pushed the activists into an optimal stage for positioning their occupation, and one which allowed the camp to

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<sup>17</sup> Some sources, such as the *Guardian*, raised the subject of increased privatization of space in London through interrogating OLSX (Vasagar 2011; Minton 2012; Sackman 2012), whereas others reported on unfolding events such as St Paul’s Cathedral’s legal proceedings against the occupiers (BBC News 2011a; Smith, Sears, White 2011). Whatever their angle or political stance, issues regarding space, public, and private ownership were raised within the public sphere due to OLSX.

increase in size and longevity. Presumably, the police performance on 15 October 2011 was created in order to deter activists. The organizers changed tack and moved into the nearest available open space: St Paul's churchyard, a mere few metres away from the London Stock Exchange. Overall, the accidental stage of St Paul's Cathedral proved to be a far more dramaturgically rich playing space than Paternoster Square, which was, in contrast, closed in, exclusive, and limiting. Burgum argues that the site of the Cathedral was perceived as '*expanding* the potential of their resistance' (2015, 96). The site of St Paul's, on the cusp of the City, and embroiled symbolically with the State, offered ideas for dissenting performances which the occupiers could use: the juxtaposition of the opulent surroundings and people inhabiting tents, for example. Occupiers were able to occupy far more space. The site was far more open, public, and benefitted from footfall and diverse audiences. The occupiers were also able to put the church in what Boyd calls, a 'decision dilemma; a tactic which leaves a target with only two options: 1) negotiate with you / meet your demands or 2) react with force' (2016). This dilemma may well have contributed to the longevity of the OLSX movement, ensuring that it was one of the longest of its kind in 2011-2012.

### **The Stage**

The staging itself made the performances understandable to an audience whilst allowing for a multiplicity of meanings. According to politics scholar John Parkinson, it had been assigned not only with a script which may relate to the financial sector in the City, or to the Church, but significantly, its protest benefitted from following a spatial and behavioural script:

The script usually has stage directions: because one of the purposes of protest is to cloak claims in the symbols of authority, protest sites are often full of the symbols of nation and authority. [...] These spaces help people cloak themselves and their claims with the same symbols and dignity that the powerful do when claiming the symbols and status of high office. (2015, 30)

St Paul's cathedral offered OLSX a rich, layered space and narratives, evoking strong associations, which could be exploited and subverted through an adoption of the tactic of double-ness that Rai and Reinelt identify. It 'overlapped in material space, the spaces of imagination, and the representational space' (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, McCurdy 2013, 18). Situated between the overlapping spaces (material, imaginary, representational) of the City, the Nation, the Church, OLSX attempted to cloak itself,

as Parkinson suggested, with the authority assigned to these particular institutions, with the backdrop of St Paul's creating a particularly powerful environment for its performances of dissent.

The site (more than any analyzed in the case studies in my thesis) had resonance for the following reasons:

1. St Paul's Cathedral is undeniably iconic, embedded within our cultural imagination as a symbol of Religion, the State, and the Nation. It is a symbol of London, positioned amongst the financial glass-faced architecture of the City, its 300-year old dome creates a marked contrast on the London skyline. The image adorns many postcards of London. It is, declares journalist Harry Mount, a 'symbol of the city: for all the Shards, Gherkins and distorted walkie-talkie shaped skyscrapers that puncture London's skyline these days, Wren's dome is still the silhouette that your eye settles on whenever you cross the Thames' (2011). Jardine points out that it was such an iconic building that its being hit during an air-raid in the Second World War was concealed. The widespread belief that it was untouched during the Blitz was based on a falsehood. Due to its iconic status, all resources went towards saving and preserving the myth that it was untouched:

Wreathed in billowing smoke, amidst the chaos and destruction of war, the pale dome stands proud and glorious – indomitable. At the height of that air-raid, Sir Winston Churchill telephoned the Guildhall to insist that all fire-fighting resources be directed at St Paul's. The cathedral must be saved, he said damage to the fabric would sap the morale of the country. (2008, 23)

Indeed, this myth is so well preserved that reporters discussing the 300-year anniversary of the building continue to discuss St Paul's cathedral as a national symbol of resistance against Nazism which, remarkably, was untouched during the Blitz (Saeed 2011; Mount 2011). It is still, then, an important symbol in our cultural imaginations.

2. St Paul's Cathedral has strong associations with the State. Former St Paul's Canon Chancellor Giles Fraser argues that, 'part of the reason why Occupy captured the public imagination was that it was played on the steps of St Paul's, which made for a natural and compelling stage' (Fraser 2015). Official

occasions such as the funerals of Lord Nelson and Winston Churchill, the royal wedding in 1981, and remembrance services for the victims of the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 and the London tube bombings in 2005, all took place in St Paul's Cathedral.

3. St Paul's exists today as a major tourist attraction, significant for commerce. It is a 'must see' for many visitors and is included on numerous city tour itineraries. During the years 2011 and 2012, which included five months of occupation at the site (between October 2011 and February 2012), it remained one of London's most visited attractions.<sup>18</sup> Such a space, a thoroughfare for Londoners (pedestrians, cyclists, and those using public transport) and visitors, created a diverse and large audience base for OLSX performances. Additionally, Marshall points out that, as the Cathedral receives 'little money from the government [...] it is also a thriving business' (2012, 1), highlighting the different commercial avenues it pursues in order to attract funds.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the assigned space for OLSX not only attracted a diverse audience within an open setting from multiple vantage points, but also disrupted the commercial transactions that the cathedral depended upon.
4. Occupying a religious site, in particular, created a moral frame for OLSX performances. The OLSX newssheet, *Occupied Times*, reported on this unique context, 'no other protest in hundreds of cities across the world is so passionately engaged with the church' (Occupied Times 2012k, 10).<sup>20</sup> Staging OLSX within this site, not only provided occupiers with multiple opportunities to appropriate religious symbolism effectively (Burgum 2015, 102), but also drew attention towards the role of the Church, in responding to the societal and moral implications of the crisis. Activists utilized the religious language and narratives which the space offered, casting themselves as the underdog David fighting against the might of the Goliath of government and finance.

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<sup>18</sup> The Association of Leading Visitor Attractions, for instance, recorded it as the tenth most visited attraction in London in 2011 and 2012, receiving 1,819,925 and 1,609,325 visitors respectively (ALVA 2013).

<sup>19</sup> St Paul's attempts to attract revenue through entrance fees, public concerts, meeting and conference facilities, a café, restaurant, and shop.

<sup>20</sup> The *Occupied Times* was created during the OLSX protest camp. It documented events and issues relating to the Occupy movement. Organizers have continued to produce copies 'dedicated to socio-political, economic and environmental justice' (Occupied Times 2016).

Another activist pointed out: ‘St Paul was actually the patron saint of tent-makers [...] where do you think St Paul the tent-maker would be, in the Cathedral or in the tents?’ (Burgum 2015, 101). One protester enacted the role of Jesus, dressed in robes, wearing a crown of thorns, and held a sign which stated, ‘I Threw Out the Money Lenders for a Reason’; whilst many protesters adorned their tents with the slogan, ‘What Would Jesus Do?’. Giles Fraser too, argues that this was a legitimate question (Fraser 2015).<sup>21</sup> The proximity of their performances to the Cathedral, as well as the fact that so many of their performances drew upon Christian narratives and imagery in order to challenge what they largely saw as the silence of the church in the face of a moral, economic, and social crisis, led to increasing criticism of the ‘possibility that force and violence will be used to evict the camp. The church also experienced wider condemnation for failing to properly and publicly agitate on the excesses of finance and global banking until prompted to by the camp’ (Walker 2011).

Indeed, if institutions perceive themselves to have ethical foundations and strive to act ethically in their everyday dealings, then they create a vulnerability that activists may exploit. It becomes possible to challenge the moral justification of institutions; leverage is provided for activists to utilize, as exemplified by Liberate Tate who drew upon the Tate’s own ethical policy within their Guerrilla Performances (examined in Chapter Two). OLSX activists, in a very similar way, were able to draw upon the moral and religious frames and narratives in relation to St Paul’s Cathedral, borrowing the authority of the church and its religious imagery, narrative, and histories for their own ends and using them against the very institutions from which they sprang (issues relating to the creation of a moral frame through the choice of specific sites and environments are examined in further depth in Chapter Five, in a discussion of my PaR, *HOUND*).

The fact that OLSX staged a performance of direct democracy in a site partially owned and controlled by the City of London Corporation, drew attention to the

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<sup>21</sup> At the time, Giles Fraser held the position of Canon Chancellor of St Paul’s Cathedral.

ownership of land, and the increasing privatization of space: the issue was picked up by mainstream media outlets such as the *Mirror*, the *Guardian*, and *BBC News* (Wynne-Jones 2013; Quinn 2012; Monbiot 2011; BBC News 2011). It highlighted too the interests of the City of London Corporation, which, arguably, are to undermine all ‘attempts to curb the excesses of finance’ (Monbiot 2011) and the often unrecognized hidden power of the City of London Corporation. Economist Nicholas Shaxson notes that few British people are aware that the City of London Corporation is the strongest armory the global offshore system has, being a ‘lobbying organization for the financial sector’. It is:

so deeply embedded in the fabric of the British nation-state that it has become impossible in Britain, even after the greatest financial crisis since the Great Depression, to confront or even seriously check the power of finance. (2012, 66)

Further, the arcane nature and rituals of the City of London Corporation contrasts sharply with the attempts made by OLSX to perform and exhibit transparency.<sup>22</sup> It is not accountable to parliament and exists outside many of the laws and democratic controls which govern Britain. The fact that OLSX performed an alternative form of democracy in a site which is not even bound by the rules and regulations of the British democratic system made its performance all the more subversive and radical. Whether occupiers knew how pertinent their occupation might be, in highlighting the deficiency of debate surrounding the undemocratic status of the City of London Corporation, is unknown. What is known is that these issues were raised in many OLSX General Assemblies, and that their occupation did compel further interest in the privatization of space.<sup>23</sup>

### **Characteristics Conducive to Efficacy:**

#### **Everyday Life and Direct Democracy Performances**

In considering the efficacy of OLSX, I focus on the occupiers’ aim to reclaim, subvert, and construct different meanings for the site they inhabited. The potency of

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<sup>22</sup> Shaxson, for instance, discusses its ‘bizarre connections and series of rituals: there are 108 livery companies, including the Worshipful Companies of Broderers, and or Cordwainers. There are Sheriffs, Aldermen, the Court of Common Council’ (2012, 66).

<sup>23</sup> OLSX General Assemblies on 10 November 2011, 11 November 2011, and December 8 2011 all discussed the undemocratic nature of the City of London Corporation.



each of these performances – a) the re-staging of everyday life and b) direct democracy in that space – relates to the following two points:

1. Both performances presented a symbolic challenge to the status quo.
2. Both of these performances were prefigurative.

In adopting a model of direct democracy OLSX demonstrated, to spectators and participants alike, an alternative form of decision-making, based on power sharing, which was also designed to question and challenge. Far from being the tasks which fill the time in between eventful moments of rupture, the uneventful, (the performance of the everyday tasks in public) illustrated how what is understood as ordinary within the private sphere, can indeed become a political action when performed in public. It becomes the event. The efficacy of OLSX relates to the double-ness of the two selected performances of dissent: everyday life and direct democracy. Although each performance could be analyzed in isolation, separated into the ordinary (tasks which sustain everyday living such as food preparation, recycling, upkeep of toilet facilities), versus the more extraordinary ‘rupture’ tasks of making speeches, HDM, and direct actions, such a move would neglect to understand the nuanced nature of these performances which were, at the same time, ordinary and extra-ordinary. Critically, it made the familiar strange through presenting an alternative lifestyle which sees the everyday on the same arc as that of direct democracy. It blurred the distinction between the ‘political’ and ‘non-political’ just as it did ‘the public’ and ‘the private’ by demonstrating the power of carrying out everyday actions in an extraordinary setting, and, by so doing, issuing a challenge to the established centres of power. In this way, OLSX created a performance of community, which exposed the power struggles at the heart of everyday life.

The everyday is ‘frequently associated with the domestic sphere, and can be seen as antithetical to politics and the public domain. Hearth and neighbourhood are its spatial parameters’ (Sheringham 2006, 24). OLSX’s enactment of the everyday draws upon the domestic sphere to place it in a different sphere entirely. In enacting everyday life, the OLSX activists are once again, as we saw in Chapter Two regarding Guerrilla Performance, using *their bodies as instruments of dissent* by re-creating daily ‘life out of a place that serves as a questioning of the status quo’ (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, McCurdy 2013, 60). This re-creation of life did far more than question the status quo.

It attempted to re-configure and transform our understanding and expectations of what everyday life entails. In performing private life within the public sphere in occupied space, it functioned ‘as a symbol. It translated itself into a representation of what it actually was’ (Nield 2015, 130). It also made strange the practice of everyday life for the local workforce.

Arguably, by elevating the mundane to the political sphere, it allowed all to participate in dissent. Just as all go about their daily lives, so all may participate politically if that is their choice, as the everyday is reclaimed, re-purposed, and re-staged for political reasons. The undertaking of everyday tasks became a provocation, to the State, the police, the financial sector; and was *out of the ordinary*, gaining the extra-daily dimension that Alan Read argues, belongs to theatre (1995, vi).

Sheringham suggests that participation in everyday tasks ‘places us in a sphere of anonymity, a fluid, undramatic present’ (2006, 16). However, OLSX activists were far from anonymous, enacting their daily lives on the stage of St Paul’s courtyard and playing to a diverse audience. Arguably, this may have been most effectively targeted at spectators who worked in the local area; positioned, as it was, in close proximity to the financial sector, the site existed as a thoroughfare for many workers in the surrounding area, ensuring that they either witnessed the protest camp several times each day, or had to divert their path. For five months, local workers were confronted by the presence of a social movement on their doorstep. It interrupted their everyday in multiple ways. Many local workers also engaged in the protest camp: participating in General Assemblies, offering donations, attending lectures or debating issues in smaller Working Groups. Journalist Patrick Kingsley recounts a football match at St Paul’s where two businessmen joined the game with OLSX activists: ‘we were just on our way back from our gentleman’s club, the ball rolled in our path, and we thought we’d have a quick match’ (2011). For the local workforce, the presence of the protest camp became embedded within their everyday; their everyday too had been transformed.

### **Exposing the Structural Implications of Capitalism: Austerity**

Occupiers re-staged an everyday life aligned with precarity, hardship, and vulnerability; performing the ‘structural implications of capitalism’ (Tyler 2013, 11)

and, by so doing, providing geography scholar Kathryn Yusoff, with an answer to her question: ‘how might we make visible the state of precarity as a collective attack and begin to stand against it so that precarious unknown lives do not disappear without a trace?’ (2011). OLSX’s unpegged tents, flimsily propped on concrete, visibly signified precarious living conditions.<sup>24</sup> Their temporary accommodation and shelters were not suitable for the environment: tent pegs could not be used on slabs of concrete. Their tents, as a result, were not stabilized: wind, rain, and increasingly low temperatures ensured high levels of discomfort. Every quarter of an hour, the bells of St Paul’s Cathedral rang, interrupting sleep. The floodlights from Paternoster Square were so powerful that photographs taken at 1am in the morning appear to depict an image of activists in daylight (Kelly, Gayle 2011), as seen in Figure 4.5. Noise and light disruption created an environment which was inhospitable and extremely draining, emotionally, physically, and mentally.

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<sup>24</sup> Although both OLSX and Burning Man included temporary structures, they created distinct performances. OLSX, unlike Burning Man, did not attempt to create visually striking structures; instead focusing on staging precarity, infrastructure, and a re-creation of the domestic sphere.



Figure 4.5: Photo from the *Daily Mail*, depicting activity at OLSX at approximately 1 am.

Multiple tent structures, taken out of the context of a campsite or scenic spot, also frequently signify a crisis. Recent examples include the public health Ebola crisis, the Calais ‘jungle’, and what is frequently referred to, in urban areas, as ‘Tent City’, referring to the housing crisis and the increasing numbers of homeless people living on the streets. The precarity of their shelters was made more apparent due to the staging. It took a theatre critic to point out the sharp contrast being drawn between ‘the beautiful blue-grey enduring dome [of St Paul’s Cathedral]’ and ‘the canvas domes of tents, shabby and transient’ (Clapp 2015). The fact that people who had elected to engage with OLSX and camp in occupied space gained far more attention from the media, police, and public than those who did not have a choice, those experiencing the full impact of austerity measures, is a cruel irony. Arguably, the very victims of capitalism, the inspiration of OLSX, are invisible; their plight understood, not so much as exemplifying the consequences of political decisions, but as personal tragedies or as the result of personal fecklessness (Afoko, Vockins 2013); they are not seen to merit the same attention.

The small gestures made by occupiers, in marking tents with objects associated with the idea of ‘lived’ space or ‘home’ are also significant: the sofas in the hot drink tent,

the bunting in Tent University, the art work in the library tent. Such gestures created a clear contrast with the surrounding areas whilst heightening the visibility of the everyday; through re-staging the domestic in a public sphere for political intentions. Feminist scholar bell hooks identifies the homeplace as a site of resistance; a safe space, where succour and healing are provided. In the context of racial segregation in Kentucky in the 1950s, she discusses her grandmother's house as a 'place where all that truly mattered in life took place – the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls' (hooks 1991, 41). This context is far removed from the public staging of the occupation in London, yet the attempts made by activists to transform occupied space into lived space strongly relate to the politicized re-staging of the everyday. Occupiers attempted to create a homeplace in offering the comfort of shelter and food and the healing through empowerment and prefiguration.

The ways in which OLSX attempted to re-create the domestic sphere, through objects and gestures, may also remind audiences of the disparity between the financial sector and the protest camp, in terms of resources and power. This contrast is heightened further still if we consider architecture. The fabric of the tents is met with the anonymous glass and steel of the buildings, such as those in Paternoster Square. The tents, placed on the ground, are dwarfed in size, stature, permanence, and height by the buildings nearby. Indeed, a House of Commons Committee, in regarding the impact of tall buildings, reported that, 'tall buildings are more often about power, prestige, status, and aesthetics than efficient development' (Parliament. House of Commons 2002). In contrast, it may then follow that temporary structures occupying the lowest part of the public sphere are read as lacking in power, prestige, and status. The everyday lives of people working in the financial sector are, quite literally, elevated to a far higher position in the City of London which afforded an aerial view of the protest camp. The occupiers' attempts to create lived-in space, then, heighten the performance of precarity and unity against this backdrop.

Arguably, this performance becomes richer still, and more efficacious, if we consider the occupiers' attempt to re-stage everyday infrastructure. Such a move sought to highlight the failure of the State to provide critical support. From 2008, austerity measures have been responsible for the reduction in many local services in the UK, from the closure of libraries to the shutting of Sure Start children's centres (Levitas

2013; Blyth 2013). This decrease in services has been matched by an increase in housing, food, and fuel costs as well as university fees. OLSX attempted to enact an alternative everyday which provided, or at the very least, gestured towards providing, what the State was failing to offer. The attempt to re-stage infrastructure played an important part in transforming and reconfiguring the everyday at OLSX. This transformation was both symbolic and prefigurative, as Graeber points out:

All encampments became spaces of experiment with creating institutions of a new society – [...] libraries, clinics, media centres [...] all operating on anarchist principles of mutual aid and self-organization: a genuine attempt to create institutions of a new society in the shell of the old. (2012, 145)

The support services on offer (as demonstrated in Figure 4.6) were fairly comprehensive. They sustained and supported the protest camp in its direct political campaigns and direct actions, but they also acted to demonstrate visibly the wide-ranging effects of austerity; the absence of critical services whilst demonstrating an alternative to the status quo (Pickerill 2012, 282). Staging the everyday in this way created a dual performance of precarity and unity. The aesthetics of OLSX were make-shift, transient, shabby even, articulating a performance of precarity. Yet, the process of creating and maintaining the infrastructure created a performance of unification and strength. With very few resources, the occupiers managed to provide services which the State failed to offer, such as food; and the precarious and unstable nature of these structures only strengthened their position as the underdog.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The use of food banks has increased since the introduction of austerity measures: ‘almost 350,000 people have received at least three days’ emergency food from the Trussell Trust foodbanks during the last twelve months, nearly 100,000 more than anticipated and close to triple the number helped in 2011’ (Trussell Trust 2013).



Figure 4.6: Occupy LSX Map (2011).

### **Creating Alternative Social and Political Relations**

Engaging in OLSX, in fulfilling both everyday tasks and participating in direct democracy, provided a distinct, affective dimension for participants and strengthened community cohesion. Feigenbaum, Frenzel and McCurdy highlight the ‘sustained physical and emotional labour that goes into building and maintaining the site’ (2013, 18). Occupiers engaged with such physical tasks, which may be understood as part of the everyday: the mundanity and tedium of recycling, disposing of waste, preparing food, cleaning equipment, and making hot drinks, were not only performing necessary tasks but tasks that were emotionally charged, as occupiers understood their actions and labour as contributing towards sustaining pressure on their targets and working towards change. Additionally, by so doing, activists understood themselves to be part of the global imaginary, the overarching Occupy movement which ‘made people feel part of something transcending the boundaries of their everyday surroundings’ (Freng-Dale 2012, 27).

Further, in completing tasks together, strong social bonds were forged; as Sara Ahmed argues, collective formations are created through everyday practices, ‘the

conversations, the doing, the work' (2004, 188). It is through the daily repetition of such tasks in a protest environment, from going through a meeting agenda to deciding whose turn it is to get the tea, that occupiers form attachments to one another and to the protest camp (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, McCurdy 2012, 20).

The efficacy of OLSX's performance relates specifically to its decision to adopt the performance grammar of the prefigurative practice of horizontal decision-making; it became a performance of direct-democracy which aimed to challenge the ways in which the British democratic system was working. Activists 'did so specifically by developing not only new political practices but also new socialities, new ways of living at the same time' (Lorey 2014, 48). In 2011, there had been a shift towards horizontalism. Political theorist, Isabelle Lorey notes that in early 2011:

Strange things were happening in Casbah Square in Tunis and Tahrir Square in Cairo. The many who assembled there elected no leaders; they set up sit-ins and camps, and with support from friends and neighbours, in no time they organized an infrastructure in the central public square. (2014, 48)

A subvertisement by Adbusters, identified by many as one trigger of the Occupy movement, attempted to create an occupation which was leaderless, networked, and self-organized, renouncing the leftist tactics of attacking the system: 'like a pack of wolves [where] there was an alpha male, a wolf who led the pack, and those who followed behind. [...] Today we are one big swarm of people' (Rohgalf 2013, 155).<sup>26</sup>

HDM is a complex and often contradictory process. Cultural anthropologist Maekelbergh defines it as:

a term that is used to refer to a fiercely egalitarian, decentralized, networked form of democratic decision-making and it is offered by this movement not as a demand, but as an alternative political system to replace representative democracy. (2012)

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<sup>26</sup> Adbusters is a magazine and collective based in Vancouver; well known for its culture jamming campaigns. Culture jamming is a tactic which is related to *Détournement*, at times referred to as guerrilla communication or subverting. The aim is to subvert media communications, to 'alter the meaning of a target's messaging or brand; packaging critical messages as highly contagious media viruses' (Malitz 2017). Its aim was to 'fight back against the hostile takeover of our psychological, physical, and cultural environments by commercial forces' (Adbusters 2016). Its subvertisement depicted a ballerina dancing on a bull statue in New York's financial district with the question, 'are you ready for a Tahrir moment? On September 17, we want to see 20,000 people flood into lower Manhattan, set up tents, kitchens, peaceful barricades, and Occupy Wall Street for a few months' (Adbusters 2016b).



Such a political system would entail ‘neither compromise nor unanimity’ but would aim ‘to go further by weaving together everyone’s best ideas and key concerns – a process that often results in surprising and creative solutions’ (Seeds for Change 2010). How far horizontality brings everyone’s best ideas together is highly questionable. The model does, however, aim to make decisions through a consensus. As a fiercely egalitarian form of decision-making, it aims to break down hierarchies. Such a model may be seen as a direct contrast to the forms of decision-making examined in Chapter Three, in relation to Coney’s work.<sup>27</sup>

The expression of dissent by OLSX, in creating an alternative version of democracy, aims to counteract the official performance of democracy with its actors, roles, stages and scripts (Parkinson 2015, 19) by staging its own performance. Out of precarity, Lorey argues, ‘a political form is emerging at last which responds to the process of normalizing social, economic and legal insecurity’ (2014, 48). ‘However absurd it appeared to the outside, it prized itself on a famously horizontal style, a will towards a co-operative commonwealth, a repertory of ritual and repertories of playful, sometimes confrontational, action’ (Gitlin 2013, 4); and it is precisely these repertories that established a sense of identity.

Despite the problems of horizontality, the attempt to work prefiguratively is surely significant; whilst ‘horizontality is not a programme that immediately cancels out and ends hierarchies and verticalities’, it may, as Lorey suggests, create ‘a process in which verticalities are specifically not negated, but must first be recognized in order to change them’ (2014, 51). The act of recognizing inequality as it happens, and acknowledging it, is, like the existence of the protest camp, an attempt to make strange what we understand as normal.

Moreover, the process of engaging in direct democracy fostered a sense of unity amongst participants, creating different social relations, and allowing participants to experience an alternative political reality. Žižek’s criticism that OLSX failed to produce any concrete action (2011) ignores the very real labour and organizing which took place. Given the inhospitable conditions, just establishing, maintaining, and

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<sup>27</sup> However, its performance was sufficiently open to allow for HDM should participants have the knowledge and desire to utilize it.

sustaining the protest camp at St Paul's, including its infrastructure, is testament to its collective action. (As identified in Chapters Two and Three, the sense of community experienced by activists is a crucial factor in sustaining commitment and the creation of such a group identity is explored further in Chapter Five where I examine my own work, *HOUND*).

The performance grammars used at OLSX's General Assemblies helped to create this sense of unity by demanding that participants perform differently, through engaging in hand signals (to indicate support for instance) and using the human microphone (where participants would repeat what a speaker said to amplify their message further).



Figure 4.7: OLSX General Assembly, 10 January 2013.

Psychologist David McNeill argues that gestures, otherwise known as emblems, recurring forms or quotable gestures can perform all the functions of language. In fact, compared to language, gestures often have a far more direct relationship to meaning (2005). They allowed a visual display of opinion at any given moment and created a sense of unity among participants. Through hand signals, such as holding arms up and waving fingers (as illustrated in Figure 4.7) participants demonstrated their assent. A facilitator was responsible for creating an order of proposals for discussion and facilitating any counter-arguments. At a moment when participants agreed with a particular point or future action, the image of a crowd with arms lifted, all participating in the same action is, perhaps, another example of a utopian

performative, ‘a place where people can come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world’ (Dolan 2005, 2). Existing as a form of choreography (powerful when participants engaged, as an actor might, embodied, passionate, and committed to that particular action or moment) such a gesture also directly affected participants emotionally. The image of an ensemble, participating in the same physical action, may also, for audiences witnessing the action, demonstrate a unified collective, or even a chaotic assembly of people. For the participants, however, acting as an ensemble in an occupied site ‘alters the biochemistry and neurology of the subject. The atmosphere literally gets into the individual’ (Brennan 2004, 1).



Figure 4.8: HDM gestures used in OLSX’s General Assemblies.

From an audience’s perspective, the use of hand signals (as illustrated in Figure 4.8) can be dismissed as silly or strange; as journalist Gary Younge suggests, they are easy to ridicule (2011), especially as they are often referred to as ‘Twinkles’ or ‘Jazz Hands’ (Seeds for Change 2010). Interestingly though, he labels them as

cumbersome. Despite the fact that using hand signals to aid consensus decision-making is indeed time consuming, the model may be quite efficient in offering a visual image of what the group thinks about a particular issue; what resonates and what does not. It demonstrates visually what an alternative form of democracy might look like to both participants and spectators.

The effectiveness of the use of hand signals may be demonstrated by examining the minutes of a General Assembly at OLSX on 2 November 2011 which show how far the consensus of the assembly (demonstrated through a temperature check of hand signals) changed the outcome of a proposal.<sup>28</sup>

Item 6 on the Assembly agenda stated that, ‘the Corporation of London have [*sic*] invited us into a dialogue. Let’s form a Corporation of London Working Group and listen to what they have got to say’ (Occupy GA Minutes 2011a). The minutes suggest that when participants proposed the creation of a new Working Group (which included legal advisors), others suggested that this new Working Group should be streamed online at 10.30am the following day in order to open the discussion further. A participant blocked the proposal. The minutes note that the participant who blocked stated that, ‘we don’t need a Working Group with the Corporation of London – we need an attack group! We can’t work with these people’ (Occupy GA Minutes 2011a). In response to this, one participant asked for a temperature check in blocking potential communication, noting that this received ‘some warmth’ (Occupy GA Minutes 2011a). As a counter-proposal, another participant then suggested asking someone from the Corporation of London to address the General Assembly, at which point the minutes note there was ‘warmth’ (Occupy GA Minutes 2011). After further discussion, the initial blocker agreed to stand aside and one participant stated that, ‘in light of this conversation, we’re running assemblies in an aggressive, militaristic, alpha-male, unfriendly way. Let’s not fight amongst ourselves, but talk and find a way together’ (Occupy GA Minutes 2011). Whilst the minutes detail some conflicting opinions, and debate which certainly appears drawn out, arguably, it was the use of hand signals, temperature checks, and counter-proposals which shifted the discussion from words to a specific action: asking the Corporation of London to address a General Assembly directly. As Lorey identified, the horizontality model creates

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<sup>28</sup> A Temperature Check refers to a moment during a General Assembly when the facilitator gauges how close the Assembly may be to a consensus through the use of hand signals.

opportunities for participants to acknowledge hierarchies as they develop, as in this case when one participant analyzed the tone of speech and power dynamics and raised them as being obstructive.

The use of the human microphone was certainly problematic in preventing complex arguments or ideas being shared (as speakers were limited to making short, staccato statements). However, it was highly effective in solidifying an Occupy identity for participants and spectators alike. Earl describes it as one of the most ‘striking, visible and moving forms of co-operation within the movement’ (2015, 54). It not only demanded that participants acted as an ensemble, but also created ‘an embodied performance of the Occupy identity’ (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, McCurdy 2013, 64). People were compelled to widen their perspective from that of an individual to that of a collective, according to Seong:

The human microphone was a viable way to construct and negotiate multiple identities. The moment when the crowd shouted ‘I’ following the speaker, the ‘I’ literally became a ‘We’. Such a shift could help group members negotiate their identities and come to understand others’ perspectives on areas of disagreement. (2014, 73)

This device was utilized by Occupy movements across the globe as a type of human chorus: the words of any speaker were re-spoken in waves across the assembly in order for everyone to hear. The function of the human microphone is highlighted by Feigenbaum, Frenzel, and McCurdy who point our attention towards an interesting dilemma for participants at the OLSX site, when the question was raised, ‘if a camp does not face a ban on amplified sound, does the affective force of the “human mic” outweigh the functionality of a PA system of megaphone?’ (2013, 64). Many of the archival videos of General Assemblies depict participants using a PA system rather than a human microphone, suggesting that in the case of OLSX, functionality was more important than creating a performative ensemble affective force. However, this was by no means always the case. Feigenbaum, Frenzel, and McCurdy argue that, despite the difficulties involved with the human microphone, its use allowed ‘occupiers to enact and embody a practice linked to what it meant to be an “Occupier”’ (2013, 64).

## **Characteristics Conducive to Dissent: Liberating Time**

In returning to the concept of performance grammars, in understanding what they seek to make perceptible, temporally, spatially, and performatively, I have identified the use of hand signals and the human microphone as two such critical grammars which liberated time. Both devices shifted participants' temporal perceptions and, to a degree, managed to create a TAZ in liberating time. Yusoff argues that this 'taking up of time' is as critical as the strategy of taking up space as it 'slows things down in the fast flows of capital and its labouring city workers' (2011). By liberating time participants were forced to re-evaluate their everyday lives as time is slowed down by the two performance grammars to the point of being 'tedious' (Lorey 2014, 53), 'painfully and excruciatingly slow' (Seong 2015, 73): a source of some frustration to those who led 'double-lives' by participating in General Assemblies in the evenings, after completing a day at work. Such workers would experience a stark temporal contrast between work and the Assembly because HDM slows down time considerably.

Nevertheless, whilst these devices may have resulted in a negative response from some participants, politics scholar Ananya Roy argues that the slowing down of time was politically motivated, and an important part of the social movement as such devices interrupt the

temporality of financialized futures. Note for example the unfolding of time that is the daily General Assembly, a ritual of democracy so deliberately slow that it becomes a type of unthinkable space. (Roy 2011)

Such an 'unthinkable space' may prefigure new time regimes, re-configuring our understanding of 'free time' as Van de Sande argues (2014), suggesting that the slowing down of time acts to challenge the increasing societal pressure for our everyday lives to be more productive, efficient, and flexible. To a certain degree, then, the occupation of time worked to de-commodify time, as participants volunteered their time and labour within their 'free time', a precious and scarce resource for many in today's economy. The act of spending 'free time' in this way, in engaging with direct democracy, an admittedly slow and painful experience at times, also politicizes free time, which is usually associated with rest and leisure. Roy's assertion that the slowness of direct democracy creates a type of 'unthinkable space', is significant too.

It became an unthinkable space to the media, the authorities, and the financial sector, as the protest camp refused to use strategies or tactics that did not, in the occupiers' view, contribute to prefiguration. And, the OLSX camp was, as Halvorsen points out, one of the longest. It became unthinkable to the authorities as it did not adhere to what they understood as an acceptable or legitimate form of dissent. Liberal Democrat MEP, Sarah Ludfor, for instance, commented:

Protests should not morph into tent cities. The right to protest is too precious to be undermined by long-term encampments which disrupt normal life to an unacceptable extent, beyond the inevitable and legitimate inconvenience of a one-off demonstration. (Ludfor in Feigenbaum, Frenzel, McCurdy 2013, 16)

Ludfor advocates the one-off demonstration, which significantly occupies the least amount of time and, as she suggests, does not disrupt normal life to what she considers an unacceptable extent. Ludfor here unwittingly provides evidence for the efficacy of staging occupation as a tactic. Indeed, disrupting normal life, arguably, is the overarching aim for the majority of protest forms. Nield argues that the intransigence of the Occupy movement, 'its resistance to producing messages and manifestos, its sheer stubborn silent claiming of the space – might be read as doubly subversive' (2015, 128). Instead, the protesters attempted to produce a horizontal and leaderless movement and their performances of dissent challenged the status quo by enacting an alternative of everyday life and democracy.

### **Efficacy**

Despite the surge in activity elsewhere, the tactic of protest camping in the heart of the financial sector, the City of London, and the prefigurative practices that accompanied it, were not expected to survive beyond a day or two, let alone thrive for five months. The scale of participation and longevity of the Occupy London camps (OLSX and Finsbury Square) were therefore surprising, becoming two of the 'longest-standing Occupy camps worldwide' (Halvorsen 2014, 402) and it can be argued that its survival alone points to its efficacy.

However, at a more fundamental level, ascertaining the efficacy of OLSX is problematic precisely because the movement did not, in fact, have a universal

overarching aim. As a self-organized, leaderless movement, participants were reluctant to make specific proposals for a number of reasons:

Demands may implicitly endorse existing structures of power; there was no consensus among protestors; the movement had no leaders authorized to speak on behalf of others; the existence of the Occupy movement was more important than producing a manifesto. (Levitas 2013, 219)

Evaluating how far OLSX achieved its aims, then, is difficult. Certainly, capitalism is still in crisis. In terms of overthrowing a political system, or reforming one, or creating a new one, OLSX failed. However, such thinking is too binary. Whilst any arguments regarding efficacy may be tentative, I propose that the protest camp did create social, economic, and political impacts.

OLSX provided particularly interesting material for the stage and, thus, entered the public imagination in art forms.<sup>29</sup> Issues regarding social and economic inequalities were, thereby, thrust into the public domain:

1. Not only was the media coverage of the protest camp high (Chomsky 2012; Townsend 2014) but the content of this coverage also reflected the language of the movement (Chomsky 2012, 9). In particular, journalists repeated the critical framing of the movement as ‘We Are the 99%’, in contrast to the wealthiest 1% in society. It has been argued that such framing was Occupy’s biggest accomplishment as it:

elevated the issue of growing economic inequality to the centre of public attention, and also highlighted the creators and beneficiaries of that inequality: the ‘1%’, the wealthy elites whose interests were opposed to those of the other 99% of the population. To a degree unprecedented in recent public memory, social class became a central focus of political debate. (Milkman, Luce, Lewis 2013, 2)

Indeed, OLSX had captured the public imagination to such a degree that, ‘from the Prime Minister down, with his public condemnation of “crony capitalism”, politicians have expressed the view that the protestors may have a

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<sup>29</sup> For instance, Steve Waters’ production of *Temple* (2015) was staged at the Donmar Warehouse, Paul Mason’s stage adaptation of *Why It’s All Kicking Off Everywhere* (2017) at the Young Vic, *A Living Newspaper About the Occupy Movement* (2012) was staged at the Arcola Theatre, London, and Anders Lustgarten’s *If You Don’t Let us Dream, We Won’t Let You Sleep* (2013) was inspired by the Occupy movement, staged at the Royal Court in London.



point, even if they take it too far' (Humphrys 2012). David Cameron's discussion of crony capitalism may well have been rhetoric. However, the fact that he felt compelled to make such a point regarding greed and capitalism, in those terms, suggests that it was a pertinent subject at the time. Public sentiment changed to such a degree, Humphrys argues, that the boss of RBS refused a bonus of nearly a million pounds whilst Lloyds Bank took back some of the bonuses previously awarded to staff (2012). Much more significantly, the framing of the 1% and the 99% was critical in making explicit connections between the wider social, political, and economic concerns, often perceived in isolation: it worked to show that there is far more that unites us than divides us.

2. By the end of OLSX in February 2012, there had been a slight change in the percentage of the general public supporting the aims of the protesters documented in a YouGov poll. When asked, 'do you support or oppose the aims of the protesters?', the percentage of those in support increased from 39% in October 2011 to 43% in February 2012 (YouGov 2012). Furthermore, although the numbers sampled were small at only 1778 people, the demographics of the people polled were very different from those engaged in the occupation with over half of the interviewees being over the age of 39, and disproportionately from the South of England (excluding London).
3. OLSX compelled third parties to respond, with direct consequences. Not only was there a considerable police presence but representatives of St Paul's Cathedral and the City of London Corporation were highly active in negotiating a response. The spotlight cast upon the church by OLSX and the media, for instance, resulted in three resignations: the Dean of St Paul's, Graeme Knowles; the Canon Chancellor of St Paul's, Giles Fraser; and Cleric, Fraser Dyer. The resignations demonstrated the deeply divided stance of the church, with Knowles reportedly keen on pursuing legal action to evict the occupiers and Fraser and Dyer resigning on the grounds that an act of eviction would constitute 'violence in the name of the Church' (Fraser 2015).

In fact, the Counsel (David Forsdick) who represented the City of London Corporation in the legal action identified by Fraser, has very helpfully

published his summary of the impact of OLSX. Initially, he points to the elevated status of the protest camp, ‘the public profile was so high that the public authorities could not leave any “t” uncrossed’ (2012, 11). Further, he discusses the preparation that financial institutions had taken prior to 11 October 2011 through obtaining High Court injunctions to protect their buildings from occupation (2012, 6), but also the extent of the evidence which the City of London Corporation compiled about OLSX:

evidence was collected with care [including] a. extent and number of protesters; b. extent of obstruction of the highway; c. extent of criminal and anti-social behaviour; d. complaints from public, businesses; e. interferences with A9 rights of those attending St Pauls; f. sanitation and cleanliness issues; and g. equality issues relating to the needs of vulnerable residents at the camps. (2012, 8)

Forsdick also considers the critical role of the Church: ‘[City of London Corporation] had to have the church onside with any action because otherwise the protest could simply move onto the forecourt of St Pauls’ (2012, 7). He further notes how efficacious the OLSX staging was, in association with the Church:

By accident, the Occupy protest had created a focal point for the worldwide Occupy movement on the steps of one of the world’s most recognizable buildings; the location giving rise to some iconic photos which spread across the world. (2012, 6).

Although Forsdick provides a summary of impact particularly for the purpose of stating legal arguments in favour of eviction, it nonetheless points out the various impacts of OLSX:

It was impossible to reconcile the presence of the protest camp with the lawful function and character of the highway. [...] there was a considerable impact on other uses on the highway. [...] major interference with the rights of others wishing to worship at St Pauls. [...] loss of trade to local businesses and the length of time the protest had gone on. (2012, 8)

And perhaps most significantly of all, he points out that the St Paul’s case ‘has now been used successfully by various public authorities to stop long term camped protests across the country’ (2012, 11); such was the perceived threat of OLSX inspiring occupations elsewhere. Despite the fact that long term protest camps have not, since OLSX, been as successful in the UK, in terms of participant numbers and longevity, the privatization of public space continues

to be discussed, five years later. In 2017, for instance, the *Guardian* conducted an investigation regarding pseudo-public spaces, mapping out how far public spaces in London had been privatized. Further, the investigation acknowledged Occupy's role in bringing the subject to wider scrutiny, stating that 'the nature of pseudo-public space in London was highlighted in 2011, when protesters from the Occupy movement initially attempted to rally in the open space outside the London Stock Exchange in Paternoster Square, only to be removed by police on the grounds that they were trespassing on private land' (Shenker 2017).

The concepts of prefiguration, and the horizontalist tools (such as the ones employed by OLSX) have become much more commonly used in dissenting groups. In engaging in a practical context with BP or Not BP and the Labofii (discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three), for instance, it was unremarkable to see participants using these tools and discussing these ideas with familiarity and confidence. Such use confirms Solnit's view that the heightened attentive mode of sociality which can occur as a result of participating in HDM, whilst small, may also act as a type of chain reaction (2013a). Certainly, the effect of participating in direct democracy survives the act of participation itself, as illustrated by Occupier, Mike Andrews:

It pushes you toward being more respectful of the people there. Even after General Assembly ends I find myself being very attentive in situations where I'm not normally so attentive. So if I go [and] get some food after General Assembly, I find myself being very polite to the person I'm ordering from, and listening if they talk back to me. (Andrews in Schneider 2013, xi)

4. OLSX has, like a TAZ, dissolved. However, also like a TAZ, some of the activists engaged in the protest camp have reformed elsewhere into newly formed, autonomous groups. As Townsend points out, 'Occupy groups tend to have spin-offs and splinters' (2012), citing examples such as the anti-fracking movement, and Save the NHS.

## **Conclusion**

Both Burning Man and OLSX created (and, in many cases, continue to create) experimental spaces or laboratories which envisage a radical reconfiguration of everyday life. Such experimentation, centred upon the TAZ in liberating land, time, and imagination, might be said to create ‘blueprints for alternative worlds’ (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, McCurdy 2013, 220). However, rather than understanding Burning Man and OLSX as offering anything as concrete as a blueprint, we can see that both do provide space, a critical component in experiencing an alternative practice of everyday life.

As identified in earlier chapters, one of the difficulties in producing efficacious theatricalized dissent is that of avoiding the charge of alienating audiences through heavy-handed didacticism. I argue that both Burning Man and OSLX avoid lapsing into this approach. Burning Man quite simply avoids the problem by having no spectators. All those who attend the festival are participants; and moreover, participants who are not ‘taught’ anything but who potentially learn a great deal; what is learnt depends on the unique experiences of individuals who make their own responses to the festival. They are not passive onlookers being instructed. Similarly, for the participants of OSLX, their performances were lived. Through using HDM and through their performance of everyday life, participants shared in an experience of an alternative society which aimed to prefigure a more equitable way of relating to one another. Both Burning Man and OSLX offered a prefiguration: a concrete experience, not a mere abstraction or an intellectual argument.

It can, however, be argued that that the discussions in the General Assembly bordered on the didactic at times, and some speeches may have been experienced by participants as ‘hectoring’. Nevertheless, the horizontality model could at least counter this tendency. All had an equal right to contribute and various opinions did receive a hearing.

OSLX did, on the other hand, have an audience who might not have been engaged in the issues raised by its performance. However, this does not seem to have happened in practice, precisely because the spectators, in encountering the action, went further than merely spectating: they became witnesses. In this way, the audience can be said

to become either complicit in the performance of dissent or placed in the position of ignoring the performance completely; neither position being prone to didacticism. In fact, in choosing to ignore the protest camp, spectators were put in a position where they were forced to perform their disengagement. Although the activists desired media publicity and support from members of the public, their main concern was not so much to convert the views of passers-by, but to compel them to act as witnesses to the situation as they saw it by living in the way they were: a life of precarity exemplifying the results of the status quo, at the same time as making it visible to others. The creation of a TAZ provided ample opportunities for participants to experience an alternative practice of everyday life, transforming the space they inhabited, making strange the everyday realities we understand as normal (this will be examined further in Chapter Five).

Understanding Burning Man and OLSX as separate entities, however, is perhaps a mistake. In terms of sustenance, each performance may work to support the other. OLSX, for instance, did lose momentum over time: activists ‘burnt out’, and fewer numbers occupied the site. It may well be the case that retreat or escapist type events which are separate from everyday life, such as Burning Man, offer the inspiration, beauty, and nourishment required in order to sustain activists for future work. Festivals or events such as Burning Man may also work to politicize and mobilize people, even attracting their involvement in more direct protest actions such as occupations. Each event, then, may work to support the other in sustaining social movement activity and may well have a ‘spillover effect’, where the ‘innovations of one movement may diffuse into others’ (Myers and Whitier 1994, 291). Scholars such as Lorey have already commented upon the persistence of the occupation movements, like TAZs, in cropping up elsewhere, and dispersing across society (2014, 44). The very transience of both Burning Man and OLSX may well support the sustenance of other movements, in dissolving into new, less detectable zones. Moreover, according to Bey, therefore, we are on the wrong track in questioning whether the construction of a TAZ creates a more sustainable movement: we should be asking how far it is transformative in and *during* the moment of rupture. Arguably, then, the role of the TAZ is an important one, in promoting and igniting theatrical dissent in both Burning Man and OLSX.

The notion of transforming space through performing unexpected behaviours, and, to a degree, re-configuring it, thereby making strange the everyday for spectators, is further developed in my PaR component, *HOUND* (discussed in Chapter Five).

## Chapter Five: Theatricalizing Dissent in Practice, Practice as Research

### Methodology

Whilst some activists are wary of the academy, or indeed of the written word, the case studies explored in this thesis prioritized action over gesture, words or discussion. My final Practice as Research (PaR) component, *HOUND*, sought to discover what my practice-related methodologies may reveal that is not unearthed through the use of theory alone.

This PaR component aimed to assess the efficacy of performance modes and forms examined in the thesis: Guerrilla Performance; the folkloric practice of Rough Music; pervasive gaming; and the attempt to construct a TAZ, in liberating time, imagination or space. By combining these forms this PaR had the intention of dismantling and subverting the staging of austerity through theatricalizing dissent. Specifically, my PaR aimed to counter populist accounts of poverty and the widely shared belief that there is no alternative to austerity, whilst examining how far the culmination of forms and the inclusion of gaming induced participants to engage in a Guerrilla Performance as a possible entry point into activism.

Baz Kershaw pertinently asks, ‘what are methods for, but to ruin our experiments?’ (2011, 9). He contests the belief that research methods exist to boost the cultural authority of researchers, arguing instead that methods should create diverse, dynamic research ecologies. The term ‘ecologies’ is important, as it suggests understanding practice (and the research methods underpinning that practice) as having a direct relationship to others, and to the environment it works within. The frame of ecology also creates the impression that research methods are not static, but continue to change. My own PaR aimed to work within a similar frame; rather than perceive PaR as a stand-alone project, existing only to prove or disprove theory, it was designed with the premise that the practice would unearth new results and different insights, in a sense perhaps even ‘ruining’ the theory. Kershaw also crucially considers PaR as being process-based, in that it may not give a definite outcome, be part of a finished product or yield specific results. Instead, he frames it as an experiment. This approach was especially important for my own PaR, existing, as it did, as an unsanctioned Guerrilla Performance (with multiple uncontrollable factors). The unpredictability of

my PaR meant encountering the ‘confusing mess’ and ‘swamp’ described by Hughes, Kidd, and McNamara (2011, 207), yet I hoped to investigate the subject from this explorative perspective and discover findings that simply could not be made without practical experimentation. In the words of Bailes, ‘the body is a way of thinking, and intellectual work can be a creative practice’ (Bailes in Gómez-Peña, Sifuentes 2011, 3). Bailes cautions against fixed binaries in either direction (the body or intellect), and reminds us that the combination of PaR and theoretical research, although complex, can be an endeavour which yields rich and unforeseen results.

### **Performance Grammars of *HOUND***

Understanding the different performance modes within *HOUND*, in a similar vein to the analysis of the OLSX protest camp in Chapter Four, as distinct performance grammars, may be helpful in ascertaining the efficacy of the forms, as well as the composition of the overall performance.<sup>1</sup> The aim of this experiment was to understand how far these forms complemented or worked against each other; whether the ‘fusion’ I composed acted to weaken the potency of each form, or whether there was something to be gained from bringing them together. A further intention was to discover whether one form proved to be, by far, the most efficacious. Any conclusions drawn would necessarily be context-bound, but might be indicative of a general pattern.

The emphasis, therefore, was upon precisely what *HOUND* communicated through the chosen performance modes, and how spectators read these grammars, in order to assess its efficacy as theatricalized dissent, in terms of affect and effect: heightening awareness, raising consciousness, changing social relations, engaging in a public performance of dissent and creating disruption. This particular PaR component attempted to explore practically: to stage each of the forms which have been examined within one composition. In *HOUND*, participants experienced, to a lesser or greater degree, each form discussed in Chapters One to Four. Participating in the performance

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<sup>1</sup> Rai and Reinelt propose that the structural similarities between politics and performance can be understood as grammar; ‘a set of recognisable rules or codifications that facilitate communication’ (2015, 2). Further details regarding the use of performance grammars to frame analysis is included in Chapter Four.



would, of course, be an entirely different experience to reading the thesis, but nonetheless, would include some of the arguments and findings it contains (including those derived from my participation in other forms of theatricalized dissent), disseminated through performance.

## **Stages of PaR**

*HOUND* PaR was comprised of three stages:

### **1. Research and Development (January - February 2015)**

I delivered four workshops with participants (some of whom had performing experience, whilst others did not) who had responded to an invitation to explore the efficacy of creative forms of resistance. Each workshop was framed with a specific provocation: what is the efficacy of a) Rough Music b) puppetry and object animation c) street parties, and d) mourning rituals as resistance? The intention was to discover which form particularly resonated with participants and myself in order to plan future PaR.<sup>2</sup> I employed La Pocha Nostra's exercise, 'Exquisite Poetic Corpse' (Gómez-Peña, Sifuentes 2011, 79) within each Research and Development workshop (Stage One) as a means to 'chart territory that is extremely difficult to define' (2011, 79).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes frame it as a 'creative form of call and response' (2011, 79):

start by posing a simple, open-ended rhetorical statement. One by one, in no particular order, people begin to complete the 'trigger' statement with brief poetic words or phrases. (2011, 79)

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<sup>2</sup> It had been my initial intention to continue to devise the PaR, from Stage One to Stage Three, with an ensemble of artists and activists and potentially develop a pedagogical approach to working with people with a range of experiences, but due to time and scheduling constraints for my initial participants (Stage One) it became clear that this was not feasible. Therefore, I designed a PaR project, *HOUND*, where I was able to plan and design the performance before the rehearsal stages, in order to minimize rehearsal time for performers. Although we had less rehearsal time than I had initially intended, we had far more time than ensembles such as BP or Not BP usually have for rehearsals.

<sup>3</sup> La Pocha Nostra is an interdisciplinary arts organization 'devoted to erasing the borders between art and politics, art practice and theory, artist and spectator. La Pocha Nostra has intensely focused on the notion of collaboration across national border, race, gender, and generations as an act of radical citizen diplomacy and as a means to create "ephemeral communities" of rebel artists' (La Pocha Nostra 2017).

The exercise not only served as a means of documenting participant responses to my provocations, but, significantly, it was not separate to practice; it was collaborative and physical.

## **2. Test Performance (21 July 2016)**

The test performance included working with three performers and six participants. It did not include the Guerrilla Performance section, however, in order to increase the possibility of this part taking place during the performance in September, without interruption from members of security. As with other forms of unsanctioned performance, it was important not to publicize the performance.<sup>4</sup> Audience members were asked to complete a performance questionnaire and participated in a post-performance discussion.<sup>5</sup>

## **3. Performance of *HOUND* (14 September 2016)**

The performance included a cast of six performers and eight participants (this group was largely composed of people unknown to me, to avoid bias and a personal relationship skewing the results). I facilitated a post-performance discussion and audience members were asked to complete a questionnaire.<sup>6</sup>

### **Workshop and Test Performance Findings**

As one of the participants (workshop 1a) commented, this work was ‘explorative’ (Rees 2015a) and it raised new possibilities and developments for the performance

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<sup>4</sup> Case studies which have staged unsanctioned works (BP or Not BP, Liberate Tate, *Climate Games*) have taken precautions regarding the sharing of event information (timings, locations) in order to exploit the element of surprise and maximise the possibility of the performance going ahead.

<sup>5</sup> Participant feedback from the test performance was helpful in developing the final performance. The main differences between the two performances were as follows: music was incorporated into the second version; more live interactions were included; an image of Tolmers Square was sent to participants’ phones; the instructions from Tina detailing Charlie’s whereabouts were communicated via Tina’s voice (public telephone) and not through a note; there were three more performers and two more participants. Overall, descriptions relating to the route were clearer, with more landmarks referenced.

<sup>6</sup> One audience member was known. Her role was important in terms of documentation; she had previously agreed to her journey being documented.

(Stage 3).<sup>7</sup> Being ‘a good way into different techniques’ (Rees 2015a) the workshops in Stage 1 aimed particularly to explore whether the techniques employed in Rough Music could successfully channel dissent; to identify the pitfalls it generated and devise ways of avoiding them in the final performance.

Participants’ feedback was, at times (in workshop 1a), contradictory, but, in discussion, it generated rich ideas relating to theatrical dissent which resonated with the group. Responses related to factors which have been identified throughout this thesis as being conducive to creating efficacious theatricalized dissent:

1. The view, put forward in Chapter One that Rough Music was well-suited to the expression of dissent, was confirmed. It was designed as a highly theatrical, confrontational form which aimed to draw attention, and was perceived by workshop participants (1a) as: ‘messy [...] attention-grabbing [...] ballsy [...] sending up [...] asking for answers [...] not for the faint-hearted [...] takes no prisoners’ (Rees 2015a). Furthermore, by using such a ‘loud’ performance mode I could investigate the boundaries of the ‘non-didactic’. If such a performance could avoid the danger of didacticism, then it might be possible for ‘quieter’ forms to do so.
2. Another form I identify in this thesis, as being conducive to generating dissent, whilst avoiding didacticism, is that of play, as discussed in Chapter Three. Workshop participants (1a) perceived that Rough Music could be a playful form, describing it as: ‘spontaneous [...] fun [...] instinctual [...] playful [...] energetic [...] child-like’ (Rees 2015a).
3. Theatrical dissent needs to attract spectators and/or participants. Some participants found Rough Music brash and provocative, something that not ‘everyone would enjoy’, not ‘always welcome’ (Rees 2015a). Nevertheless, other participants framed the form in such a way that replicates elements of popular performance: ‘not inaccessible [...] rough [...] not high-art [...] not for the concert hall [...] not technical [...] not aesthetic [...] not expensive’ (Rees 2015a) and importantly it was a form that allowed participants to be ‘un self-

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<sup>7</sup> Although each of the four Stage One workshops regarding different performance modes offered potentially interesting material to develop, the form of Rough Music resonated most with all of us.

conscious' (Rees 2015a). In designing my work I would need to consider how to ensure that all participants could enjoy taking part.

All performances examined in this thesis have involved people working together, from the Guerrilla Performances staged by Liberate Tate and BP or Not BP (Chapter Two) to the collaborative art works created at Burning Man (Chapter Four), and it is a central tenet of this thesis that a sense of community is needed to sustain activists. I believe that Rough Music, whilst allowing individuals freedom to improvise and play, also demands group action. Despite their best efforts to create a disharmonious cacophony of sound, workshop participants (1a), for instance, created rhythmic beats, harmonies, and patterns with their noise-making on pots and pans: 'it was hard to not be rhythmic' (Rees 2015a). It relied upon collective action: 'collaborative [...] accidentally about community and communication' (Rees 2015a). I aspired to cater for both the individual and the collective in framing my performance in terms of the individual undertaking an experience independently, before gradually joining with others in a collaborative scenario.

During the Research and Development workshops I facilitated, Rough Music posed the most problems. It was the form that no one knew, and, taken out of the context of a protest environment, it was the most challenging to stage. Participants' attempts to create discordant sound, for instance, using pots, pans, and wooden spoons, seemed to lack intention. It is a form fuelled by emotion: the intention to shame a culprit (Thompson 1992, 5). Without a culprit, the expressions of dissent were loose, even meaningless. Perhaps, because it was a form that was so context driven, this particular workshop raised more questions than it answered. It was frustratingly elusive, for myself and the participants. However, it did focus my attention on the need to provide an absorbing context and a suitable culprit. I needed a strong narrative.

### ***HOUND: Processes of Production***

As the creator of this PaR component, I solely undertook all the tasks included in the design, composition, and preparation for the performance:

1. Mapping of the route
2. Writing the script
3. Recruiting performers

4. Directing performance rehearsals
5. Performing the narrative voice of the character Tina
6. Editing the audio files
7. Providing technical support and stage managing the performance
8. Performing the role of security liaison
9. Performing and facilitating post-performance discussion

Summary of Activities			
Stage	Date	My Role	Activity
Stage 1 2016	11 January	Director	Research and Development Workshop: Mourning Rituals as a Creative Form of Resistance
	21 January	Director	Research and Development Workshop: Street Parties
	1 February	Director	Research and Development Workshop: Rough Music
	15 February	Director	Research and Development Workshop: Puppetry and Object Animation
Stage 2 2016	2 May	Producer	Create performance budget (two performances of <i>HOUND</i> )
	7 May	Researcher	Research sites in Brighton: Hove Town Hall, Churchill Square, Old Steine, Brighton seafront
	9 May	Producer	Apply for performance funding (Theatre, Performance Department / Goldsmiths Graduate Fund / AHRC RTSG fund)
	10 May	Researcher	Research sites in London: British Library, Somers Town, Chalton Street, Russell Square, Regent's Park, Regent's Place, Riding House Street
	15 May	Researcher	Research sites in London: The City, Canary Wharf
	20 May	Researcher	Research sites in London: Westminster
	26 May	Producer	Apply for PaR funding (Graduate Fund, Goldsmiths)
	2-4 June	Researcher	Research sites in London: Euston, Regent's Estate, Regent's Place
	10 – 15 June	Writer	Compose audio script
	4-5 July	Producer	Casting call for performers
	6-8 July	Performer Sound Engineer Producer	Perform voice of Tina (audio script), Goldsmiths University, London Record audio script, Goldsmiths University, London Organize audition for performers
	9 July	Editor	Learn to use Audacity programme (for editing audio tracks)
	10-12 July	Editor	Edit audio tracks
	12 July	Director	Audition for <i>HOUND</i> test performance
	12 July	Stage Manager	Scratch test with one participant for first draft of audio-tracks
	13 July	Editor	Edit audio tracks according to feedback from participant
	13 July	Producer	Invite participants to test performance of <i>HOUND</i>
	17 July	Producer	Send participants email from Tina, audio tracks, and staggered start times
	19 July	Director	Rehearsal for <i>HOUND</i> : structured improvisations
	20 July	Director	Rehearsal for <i>HOUND</i> : development and composition of improvisations
21 July	Director Stage Manager	<b><i>HOUND</i> test performance</b> <b>Post-performance discussion and questionnaire</b>	
22 July	Researcher	Compile and transcribe feedback from participants	

Figure 5.1a: Activity Summary Table for *HOUND* (2016).

Summary of Activities			
Stage	Date	My Role	Activity
Stage 3 2016	27-29 July	Researcher Writer Designer	Research, write, design, print, and prepare collaborative game
	10 August	Writer	Research and re-write sections of script at location
	12 August	Designer	Design and print map for performance
	27 August	Director	Audition for <i>HOUND</i> performance
	28 August	Producer	Research and recruit videographer and photographer
	29 August	Writer Designer	Write, design, and print <i>HOUND</i> programme
	31 August	Performer	Record audio script, Goldsmiths, University of London
	1 September	Performer	Record audio script, Goldsmiths, University of London
	2 September	Performer	Record audio script, Goldsmiths, University of London
	3-5 September	Editor	Edit audio tracks
	3-5 September	Producer	Invite participants to performance of <i>HOUND</i>
	6-9 September	Director	Rehearsal for <i>HOUND</i> : structured improvisations, exploration, and development of Rough Music performance, scripting of each section and rehearse
	1-9 September	Producer	Source, purchase props, costumes, and audio equipment for performance
	11-13 September	Producer	Send participants email from Tina, audio tracks, and staggered start times
	14 September <i>HOUND</i> Performance	Director Stage Manager Security Liaison Researcher	10am: Discussion with performers, videographer and photographer 11am: Set up in Triton Square for stage managing performance 12.25pm: Perform role of security liaison during Guerrilla Performance 1pm: Host post-performance discussion 2pm: De-brief with performers (collect props, costumes, and expenses receipts)
	14-18 September	Researcher	Compile and transcribe written feedback
	18-30 September	Producer	Organize and make payment claims for performers, videographer, and photographer from the Theatre, Performance fund and AHRC RTSG fund

Figure 5.1b: Activity Summary Table for *HOUND* (2016).

<i>HOUND</i> Performance Summary, September 2016		
Modes	Structure	Technical
Email, Tina to participants	Tina sends participants an email, introducing the character of Tina, offering details regarding the performance. The email contains instructions for downloading the audio tracks to the participants' device.	Create email address. Compose email from Tina. Record audio tracks. Edit audio tracks. Format audio tracks for phone and Mp3 devices and send with email.
Participants prepare for <i>HOUND</i> (12-13 September 2016).	Participants download the audio tracks to their device. They listen to the first track to test sound levels and to ensure the files have downloaded correctly. They also send Tina their mobile phone numbers.	Participants download audio tracks. Respond to any participants who have written to Tina. Source and purchase two Mp3 devices for participants who require them.
Text, Tina to participants (12-13 September 2016).	Tina sends participants specific start time and the location (Euston Station, by the information stand, near Platform 9).	Text participants their specific start time, according to the stage management schedule.
Performers and myself prepare for <i>HOUND</i> , 10am, 14 September 2016.	Performers are led by myself in a warm-up and run-through of performance details.	Arrive at rehearsal studio near Regent's Place with props and costumes (set up costume and props table). Performers get dressed into their first costumes, taking appropriate props with them. Locate to location for stage management task.
Occurs simultaneously	Section A Audio-walk, 11am onwards (staggered start times).	Participants are instructed at the end of the first audio track to text Tina the word 'start'. Participants then continue with their audio walk, completing when they reach the New Diorama Theatre café.
	Section B Live Interactions	Performers are instructed by Tina to engage in two interactions. The first encounter takes place in Euston station (upper level), the Friends Meeting House café or Caritas Café (Royal College of Practitioners) depending on the route the participant has been given. Their aim is to find out as much as they can about the character of Charlie and obtain phone number. The second interaction involves the participant approaching someone who they think is Charlie (either in the Square Tavern Pub or in Tolmers Square).
Section C Collaborative Game	Participants are asked to complete collaborative card game.	Performer who plays the role of the fox is stationed in the New Diorama Café, and texts me to alert me when participants arrive. She also texts me to confirm that they have left the New Diorama in order to begin the Pervasive Game.
Section D Pervasive Game	Participants use their objects to locate where to go. They answer a public phone box, relay a message told to them by Tina to pursue the fox, who is located in the forest. Participants then pursue the fox with the aim of taking the tail. When they have the tail (in Triton Square) they listen to the final audio track.	Ring public telephone, perform the role of Tina instructing participants. Text performer (fox) to go to start positions, wearing fox's tail. Text performers (in studio) to prepare to leave. Performer texts me when the tail has been taken. Text performers to cue them to starting positions. Text performer to cue them to begin the next performance section.
Section E Unsanctioned Guerrilla Performance, Rough Music	Performers perform the hunting scene. Initially they approach the participants and then encourage them to join their hunt. They spot a figure in the crowd, a masked George Osborne, and approach him, lift him into the air whilst chanting. Two performers lead Osborne off site, whilst the remaining performers lead participants back to the New Diorama Theatre.	Liaise with security regarding their concerns about the performance.
Section F Discussion	Facilitate a discussion with participants regarding the performance.	Meet with audience to engage in performance discussion. Text performers regarding props, costume, and rehearsal studio get-out. Discuss details with photographer/videographer.

Figure 5.2: Performance Summary Table for *HOUND* (2016).



### **The Theme: Narrative and Austerity**

One aim of *HOUND* was to test whether it was possible to use the same frames relating to austerity which have been frequently drawn upon by the media and government to secure public support for the austerity programme, with the opposite intention: to expose and debunk austerity-related myths.

Despite the efforts of academics, journalists, activists, and campaigners, the subject of austerity, and its cultural staging, as Bramall frames it, has not been given the attention it deserves (Bramall 2013; Levitas 2013; Negra, Tasker 2014). A comprehensive study, for instance, suggested that austerity measures were a strong factor in the EU referendum for the British electorate; putting forward the view that just a slightly less harsh regime of austerity aimed at cutting benefits could have substantially reduced support for the Vote Leave campaign and over-turned the result of the EU referendum (O’Becker, Fetzer, Novy 2016, 4). Additionally, areas which had experienced higher fiscal cuts in the context of the recent UK austerity programme are strongly associated with a higher Vote Leave share. We are yet to understand fully the impact of austerity measures in the UK.

It is significant, though, that we are living in times where emotions, beliefs, and stories seem to trump statistics, facts, and academic language. The fact that the online *Oxford Dictionary* awarded the term, ‘post-truth’, as the 2016 ‘Word of the Year’ is telling.<sup>8</sup> This is nothing new; after all, the attempt to ‘win hearts’ has always been at the forefront of social movements (at whichever end of the political spectrum), but what is new is the willingness to openly publish and share information in more recent times which may not be factual. The report ‘Framing the Economy: the Austerity Story’, published by the New Economics Foundation in 2013, puts forward a similar argument regarding facts and myths in relation to the politics, and staging, of austerity. The authors argue that anti-austerity campaigners failed to produce accessible and meaningful narrative frames with which people could identify, instead

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<sup>8</sup> Post-truth is an adjective defined as ‘relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief’ (Oxford English Dictionary 2016). It has continued to be a subject which has drawn attention (Davis 2017; D’Ancona 2017; Ball 2017).

favouring statistics and complex metaphors. Those in favour of austerity, on the other hand, were producing simple, persuasive stories which supported their policy programme. Afoko and Vockins identify the frames which activate the belief that austerity is common-sense:

1. There is No Alternative. Austerity is a necessary evil, like a tough medicine.
2. Welfare is a drug which we are addicted to.
3. There are two types of people: Strivers and Scroungers.<sup>9</sup> (2013, 2)

*HOUND* includes multiple references to these particular frames, with the aim of discovering whether the austerity narrative could be reversed and turned on its head by creating a performance composed of the following performance grammars: Guerrilla Performance, Rough Music, pervasive gaming, and the construction of a TAZ.

### **The Performance Grammars of *HOUND***

#### **Section A: The Audio Walk, Inspired by Play, Temporary Autonomous Zones**

Eight participants engaged in *HOUND* on Wednesday 14 September 2016. They were introduced to the performance through an email, sent several days beforehand, by a character called Tina Tritons, who addressed participants by name and, if anything, was a little intrusive. She intended to introduce a sense of mystery; she raised the idea of playing games; and stated that she would be available to help.<sup>10</sup> Participants were provided with very little information about the performance.

Participants were asked to pre-download tracks onto their devices. They were provided with an individual start time and destination: Euston Station, in front of platform 9. The start times were staggered, each approximately 10-15 minutes apart. The first participant began at 11am. At this stage, the participants did not know whether they would engage with the performance independently, or as part of a larger group.

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<sup>9</sup> The three frames which are referenced are a selection and the report identifies multiple frames relating to austerity.

<sup>10</sup> Within the Appendix, a script of *HOUND* is included, as well as the personal email communications which Tina had with participants.



Figure 5.3 Map of Route

Tina, whilst referring to her own unwell state, informed them through audio of their task: to find Charlie, ‘a risk taker; a pleasure seeker; hedonistic’ (Rees 2016, 2). They were to search sites Charlie had visited, and speak with Charlie’s acquaintances. Throughout the audio walk, she reminded them of this quest.

From the outset, participants were asked to assume a role while Tina guided them to specific locations; a trail of contemporary and historic resistance sites: from protests regarding the HS2 rail route and proposed demolition of parts of Drummond Street to the squatters’ movement at Tolmers Square in the 1960s-1970s. Tina took participants to the designed corporate space of Regent’s Place (a cluster of offices inhabited by companies as well as leisure facilities, cafés, and restaurants) and what used to be a social housing estate, Regent’s Place Estate, now a combination of social and private housing. The participants were then told to enter the New Diorama Theatre and ask for Charlie.

The narrative was fragmentary, blurring together Tina’s opinionated thoughts regarding Charlie, her illness, architecture, the economy, and quotations from newspapers and academic articles. She directed participants’ gaze, from the CCTV framing the roof of Euston Station to the unkempt paving stones of Camden Council.

## **Section B: Improvisation, Inspired by Play: Live Interactions**

Embedded within the audio walk were two live interactions with performers. First, Tina asked participants to approach one of Charlie's acquaintances (situated in a café on an upper floor in Euston Station, the Friends Meeting House café or Café Caritas, in the Royal College of Practitioners, depending on the route taken). Participants were asked to formulate a loose narrative in order to explain their connection to Charlie and the reason why they needed Charlie's phone number. The second interaction was situated by the Square Tavern pub in Tolmers Square (one performer was positioned inside the pub and one was based outside). Tina asked the participants to find Charlie:

Go inside the Square Tavern and see if you can find Charlie. [...] Approach and ask, 'Are you Charlie?' (Rees 2016, 7)

Charlie was not, in fact, to be found. Instead, participants interacted with one of Charlie's acquaintances, who was also keen to find Charlie. The participants were given an object, wrapped in brown paper. Written on the parcel were instructions not to open until directed. Participants then continued with the audio walk until they arrived at the New Diorama Theatre.

## **Section C: The Collaborative Game, Inspired by Play**

Given the staggered start times, participants would enter the New Diorama Theatre at different times. It was important to maintain the frame of the game for participants, to prevent them from discussing their own realities, and to maintain engagement with the ideas behind the performance, until everyone was present and ready for the next game. As such, I designed a card game taking inspiration from a consensus exercise called Four Word Build, whereby, through negotiation, participants would seek agreement regarding the associations of such concepts as: Home, The Future, Britain, Work, Austerity. Overall, this game was designed as a precursor to the following sections, which involved a higher degree of collaboration.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, on the day of the performance, one performer did not lay out the game instructions, but left them inside a plastic wallet on a table in the New Diorama Theatre. As such, participants were unclear as to what the cards were for, and what they had to do. Instead, some participants engaged in an improvised version of the game whilst others participated in a general discussion.

### **Section D: The Pervasive Game, Inspired by Play**

When the eighth participant arrived, participants were told to open an envelope containing a slip of paper stating:

Inside each parcel is a section of a map.  
Work together to find the mark X.  
When you arrive at the mark X, text me saying 'We are Here'.  
Then, follow the instructions. (Rees 2016, 9)

Inside each parcel was an object (a riding crop, coconuts, a *Financial Times* newspaper with the phrase 'We Are All in This Together' written on the centre fold, and a small horn) and part of a map of the local area. Through pooling resources and piecing the map together, participants were able to locate the mark X, located on Osnaburgh Street, near a public telephone box. When the participants arrived, the telephone rang. One participant answered and was told by Tina to pass on the following message to the others:

It's time to play the hounds, and go on a hunt.  
Charlie is nearby.  
In the forest. (Rees 2016, 10)

Nearby, a performer wearing office wear, complete with a bushy fox's tail, waited in a metallic sculpture, weaving in between pillars: 'the forest'. When she caught their attention she ran to Triton Square, pursued by participants, making her way between office workers, jumping onto stone seats.

The participants, upon grabbing the tail, realized it was fashioned as a purse. Inside they found the sum of £15.27 and a note asking participants to listen to the final audio track.<sup>12</sup>

### **Section E: Unsanctioned Guerrilla Performance, Inspired by Rough Music**

Section E of the performance – unbeknownst to the participants, informal audience, and onsite security – existed as an unsanctioned Guerrilla Performance. It incorporated elements of Rough Music (discussed in Chapter One) as performers

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<sup>12</sup> The sum of £15.27 relates to the average amount deducted from Housing Benefit due to what has commonly been referred to as the Bedroom Tax. 'At the end of November 2015, 442,933 Housing Benefit claimants in the social-rented sector in Great Britain were affected by the under-occupation deduction' (Wilson, Keen 2016).

created discordant noise to grab attention, performed the scene of a hunt, fulfilled specific roles, and worked within the frame of a game.

In Triton Square at approximately 1.30pm, surrounded by office workers eating their lunch, participants listened to the last audio track. Tina exposed the corruption of the companies based in the buildings surrounding participants: Atos, Facebook, Santander, British Land, and JP Morgan, paying specific attention to companies which profited from austerity. Tina recalled her latest health report, an economic forecast; revealing her identity as the personification of the economy, and the medicine she has been consuming as the austerity-driven cuts. She ended with an extract from the poem, *Red Fox*, by Margaret Atwood:

To survive  
we'd all turn thief  
and rascal, or so says the fox,  
with her coat of an elegant scoundrel,  
her white knife of a smile,  
who knows just where she's going:

to steal something  
that doesn't belong to her –  
some chicken, or one more chance,  
or other life. (1995, 16)

During that time, members of onsite security had approached participants and asked what they were doing.<sup>13</sup> They answered that they were participating in a performance. At that stage, four performers dressed in fox hunting attire appeared at the corner of Triton Square. One blew a large hunting horn. The performers, as though on horseback, trotted over to participants and instructed them how to use their object; with one performer asking participants to use coconuts to make the noise of horses' hooves, for instance.

The performers blew the hunting horn once again and directed participants towards another corner of the square, where the figure representing George Osborne, complete with a large full-headed mask and black suit, was found reading the *Financial Times*. The performers excitedly circled Osborne, clamouring to grab him, whilst encouraging participants to create a cacophony of sound. Osborne, in response, held

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<sup>13</sup> During this time, I fulfilled the role of liaising with security in order to occupy its time, with the aim of allowing the performance to continue.

open the *Financial Times*, which read ‘We Are All In This Together’. The performers then lifted Osborne, moving him forward, before dragging him off whilst two performers led participants towards the New Diorama Theatre.

### **Section F: Post-Performance Discussion**

Using a series of open ended questions to guide the discussion regarding *HOUND*, the participants were invited to assume a reflective and collaborative mode in sharing their experiences, associations, and interpretations. Situated inside a public theatre café, participants no longer had informal audiences or security members watching them. The discussion, therefore, was an important part of processing *HOUND*.

### **Analysis of the Efficacy of *HOUND***

#### **Reading *HOUND*: Shifts in Tension**

*HOUND* was designed as an experience composed of a series of distinctive performance grammars. Each modality, illustrated in the Summary Performance Table (Figure 5.2), from the audio walk to live interactions with performers, the pervasive game to the Guerrilla Performance, situated participants firmly in a specific performance mode, complete with its associated behaviours, histories, and legacies. Just as BP or Not BP’s performance, *Deepwater Horizon Spill* (2015), discussed in Chapter Two, utilized shifting performance modes to create juxtaposition, so *HOUND* employed six distinct shifts. Significantly though, the aim here was not to offer a varied experience, but to afford participants different experiential degrees of dissent. If we consider the role of the participant, for instance, we can see how far this role was expanded, redefined, and re-configured during the performance in response to the performance mode employed:

- a. Anonymous participant (audio-walk)
- b. Improviser and performer (live interactions)
- c. Performing a version of themselves (collaborative game)
- d. Collaboratively engaging in play in public (pervasive game)
- e. Performing a role in a Guerrilla Performance with performers to an informal audience (Rough Music)

- f. Re-performing a version of themselves in a reflective mode, with no bystanders (post-performance discussion)

Affording participants an experience of these shifts was designed, each time, to increase both the gradient of risk, and also commitment to dissent. *HOUND* utilized six significant shifts; each of which produced a distinctive tension, effect, and, crucially, affect. These shifts were different in approach, mode, tone, and style: moving from the audio-walk (independent, personal, intimate) to live interactions with performers (interactive, improvisational, collaborative); from the card game in the New Diorama Theatre (collaborative, based on discussion and negotiation) to the pervasive game (playful, performative, public, secretive); from the Guerrilla Performance (dissonant, highly performative, including performers, costumes, script, choreography, and props, playing to an audience, disruptive, loud) to the post-performance discussion (reflective, collaborative, discussion-based). Each of these shifts was designed to unsettle and provoke the participant, renewing a critical alertness, and so engage the participant in the joint creation of a new reality.

Whilst these shifts were distinct, they were designed as part of a wider composition to be experienced as a whole. Although these modes were diverse, the aim of each mode was to draw upon the same tactics, in a way which was appropriate for that particular form. The efficacy of the performance (in encouraging individual and collaborative commitment to dissent) is analyzed in terms of the tactics employed by the performance modes which provided a through-line and remained consistent throughout the performance.

### **Commitment to Dissent by the Individual: Walking, the Audio Walk**

Those participating in the case studies that appear in earlier chapters were often already activists, committed to a particular cause; the problem highlighted in these chapters was that of sustaining commitment.<sup>14</sup> The difficulty I faced in devising

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<sup>14</sup> Coney (Chapter Three) and Burning Man (Chapter Four) are the exceptions to this, as participants were not activists. However, unlike *HOUND*, these participants were self-selecting, in that they had opted to engage in these experiences and had had prior knowledge of what it might entail (through reviews, personal recommendations, and marketing in the case of Coney, and through popular cultural references, articles, social media, documentaries, word of mouth, and books in the case of Burning Man).



*HOUND* was in inspiring an initial interest from those who previously had no interest at all; or in confirming the interest of those who were sympathetic to seeking an alternative to austerity. *HOUND*'s participants were not expecting to become involved, nor necessarily were already involved, in social movement activity. The structural performance design was crucial, therefore, in fostering a commitment to engage fully in an act of theatrical dissent. The aim was to introduce varying degrees of engagement activity to participants: to sequence activities to increase levels of risk gradually, whilst at the same time demanding a personal commitment from the very beginning which would have a direct impact on the latter parts of the performance and on the expression of dissent.

The performance mode of walking provided a through-line for *HOUND*: it is the one consistent mode that carried participants from the beginning to the end. Unlike the walking in *Climate Games* and *Rough Music*, participants were asked to walk independently (Section A), rather than as part of a group, therefore placing the onus upon a personal participatory experience. In a similar vein to Burning Man's trope, 'No Spectators', participants were placed in a position where they could not rely on others. Instead, they had to listen attentively to instructions, observe their surroundings, and take active responsibility for their experience as individuals in a controlled experience.

Walking through the sites during *HOUND*, the act of listening and reacting to the narrative became an immersive mode that aimed to establish and reinforce participants' commitment to dissent in the following ways:

1. The act of walking is useful both in terms of revealing information and heightening awareness of the surrounding environment. Keinänen, for instance, cites empirical research which indicates that walking enhances cognition in terms of memory, divergent thinking, cognitive control, reducing stress, and enhancing creativity (2016, 593). If, as Keinänen suggests, there is a strong correlation between walking and thinking, then the act of walking in performance may aid critical awareness; and I needed participants to be alert. In asking participants to follow instructions (from audio tracks) and walk according to a pre-set route, the performance required a high level of awareness of the surroundings, which allowed participants to experience the

landscape physically, through the senses, as Tina exhorts, ‘Breathe deeply in and out. [...] If you turn your back to the road can you block out the smell of exhaust fumes?’ (Rees 2016, 6). As Myers illustrates, the role of participants in an audio walk expands beyond what may be expected by other forms, as they engage their senses and bodies: they walk, listen, perform, and participate in the performance (2011, 70). And this performance mode appears to have been successful in creating heightened awareness, with one participant commenting on feeling, ‘hyper-aware of what was going on around me’ (*HOUND* Participants 2016e).<sup>15</sup>

2. The shifts between purposeful, directed walking (as illustrated in Figure 5.4) and moments of stillness and self-direction, together with the direct and very private relationship with Tina achieved through the narrative – ‘when you see some engraved paving stones, feel free to pause me and take a look’ (Rees 2016, 6) – all directed attention to sites and offered moments of quiet, critical reflection. Figure 5.5 illustrates such a moment of pause well: the participant physically touches the environment in Tolmers Square, absorbed in the narrative, and also in her own thoughts as she surveys her environment.

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<sup>15</sup> Music was embedded into the audio track for sections of walking without narrative. This was designed with the aim of creating an immersive environment; to direct focus upon the audio walk and the environment which surrounded the participant, without having the distraction of exterior sounds. The music track used to delineate walking was ‘Chillin Hard’ by Kevin MacLeod.



Figure 5.4: Purposeful walking by the Friends Meeting House.



Figure 5.5: A moment of quiet reflection as the participant physically engages with her environment, whilst listening to the audio walk in Tolmers Square.

Such moments were, arguably, crucial in establishing engagement. I needed to give participants time to engage with, and reflect upon, the narrative and the

environment; the journey needed a slow pace to allow that to happen.

Listening to the narrative while traversing the route on bicycle, for instance, would have created a very different experience.

3. Utilizing walking as a performance mode may help participants to engage with dissent. In walking, the participant is already engaging in an activity that is, in itself, political and politicized: from a woman walking home alone at night to a wheelchair user whose path is determined by the inclusive or exclusive policies of the local council; from a mass of protesters marching on an anti-war demonstration to hikers walking a route to claim the right of public entry; we can see how far the act of walking is driven and shaped by context, identity, geography, and intention.<sup>16</sup>
  
4. Walking acts as a symbolic and powerful expression of dissent (as with Rough Music, discussed in Chapter One), having rich associations with resistance and social movements. Historically, many social movements were ‘defined by walking or marching as a form of protest and political speech’ (Bonilla 2011, 313); from the Jarrow March to Gandhi’s Salt March, the Freedom Walks of the Civil Rights movement to the Argentinian Mothers of Plaza de Mayo. There is power in walking: it can reclaim space, reinforce identity, and heighten visibility for a cause or marginalized group.<sup>17</sup> The walk was devised to raise questions about the nature of private and public space, just as Liberate Tate, BP or Not BP, and OLSX had done with their performances, and this was achieved particularly during the pervasive game element of *HOUND*.
  
5. As discussed in Chapter Three, the individual activist, in participating in the latest in a long line of protests, in experiencing theatrical dissent through the prism of historic protest, may feel part of an ongoing struggle; part of a greater

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<sup>16</sup> There is currently an onus on walkers, for instance, to record public rights of way due to the Right-to-roam law which means that ‘pre-1949 rights of way that are not on official maps must be recorded in the next ten years or will no longer be protected’ (TLIO 2016). In this instance, a campaign group called ‘This Land is Ours’ has taken steps to protect as many rights of way as possible through a campaign of walking and recording routes.

<sup>17</sup> Recent examples of this include *Reclaim the Night*, which is a ‘national women-only march against sexual violence and for gender equality’ (RTN 2016). Similarly, Gay Pride and Black Lives Matter are recent examples of groups which have sought to reclaim space and heighten visibility through the act of walking as a group.

whole: a community of dissenters. Theatrical dissent takes on the significance and authority of the past. Similarly to the way in which *Climate Games*' activists, in walking through the streets of Paris, took on the mantle of past protestors, so too participants in *HOUND* experienced a walk, albeit as an individual rather than a mass of protestors, which provided a topography of historic and contemporary resistance. Drummond Street, for instance, is currently under threat from HS2 expansion (observant participants may well have noticed a series of chalk graffiti stating slogans such as 'Homes Not HS2').<sup>18</sup> The Friends Meeting House, too, commemorates historic protest campaigns engraved on paving stones in the garden area.<sup>19</sup>

6. I was able, through the narrative and choice of sites, to present a juxtaposition of the present with the past; providing a commentary on the present by examining the past so that the present is seen anew. By creating a walking route through the London urban landscape, across different spatial zones, such as the transport hub in Euston, the corporate space of Regent's Place, the housing estate, Regent's Place Estate, participants encountered sites of resistance (Tolmers Square, Euston Station, Friends Meeting House, and Drummond Street). They also encountered sites directly affected by austerity measures, such as the social housing tenants in Regent's Place Estate, and sites which profited from these policies such as the company Atos, at Regent's Place.<sup>20</sup> Participants' experience of Tolmers Square, for instance, was

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<sup>18</sup> This example of protest was not included in the audio, but there were, on the day of the performance, a number of chalk graffiti protest slogans in the spaces included in the audio-walk.

<sup>19</sup> Many protests, such as the Campaign to Abolish Slavery and the Quaker Campaign for Same Sex Marriage, were engraved on paving stones outside the Friends Meeting House. Participants were invited to read these as part of the audio walk.

<sup>20</sup> Atos is a consulting, services and systems provider. Whilst the company's services are wide ranging, it also rendered contracts for the government's Work Capability Assessment (WCA) and the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) applications. In August 2015, the Department of Work and Pensions revealed that 2,380 people had died between 2011-2014, after being found capable and fit to work by the company. In 2014, Atos negotiated an early exit from the existing contract after concerns were raised about company ethics and practices. It is currently still providing the government with services which assesses whether unwell and disabled people are offered the PIP. According to Disability Rights UK (2016), 3 out of 5 cases which appeal the decision to reduce or stop the PIP are successful in re-instating the funds.

reported as being one of the most affective parts of the performance.<sup>21</sup>

### **Commitment to Dissent by the Individual: Liberation of Time, Space, Imagination**

Such particular moments may be understood as relating to the temporary creation of a TAZ (examined in Chapter Four) in liberating time, space, and imagination.

In order to liberate time, the narrative makes constant references to the past. For example, Tina remarked, ‘what used to be the Lord Nelson pub on your right’ (Rees 2016, 14); encouraging participants to feel ‘out of time’ whilst experiencing the concurrent co-existence of past and present. This was further emphasized when Tina instructed participants to turn:

Anti-clockwise, as though with each step you’re dredging back the hours and minutes and pushing against the relentless march of time. We will go back in time in a moment but for now can you be in the moment? Look at the skyline, look at nature. What jars for you? What works? What are you thinking? (Rees 2016, 10)

The contrast between the present day reality which confronted participants, and the story that it was once a hotbed of resistance and a vital community within an attractive nineteenth century square, is surprising. At this point in the performance, Tina asked participants if they would like to be texted an image of Tolmers Square taken before property developers had bought the land the participants were currently occupying (as illustrated in Figure 5.6a). This, arguably, encouraged participants to reconstruct and conjure the past out of the physical environment of the present, morphing space and time-zones. This effect was further enhanced by the playing of an excerpt from Moby’s ‘Look Back’, with the constant, insistent beat of the track resembling the ticking of the clock, the irrevocable passing of time, and, over which, swells the melody, the ephemeral instances of human endeavour. The layering of sound which, ‘encompasses us, mothers us, feeds us and greets us with sound and meaning’ (Pavis in Kendrick, Roesner 2011, x) had connected with everyday images which confronted the participants, and had allowed for, as Ingold proposes, ‘the very incorporation of vision into the process of auditory perception that transforms passive hearing into

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<sup>21</sup> Feedback has been compiled from participants through a post-performance discussion and online questionnaire at the test performance (21 July 2016) and the performance of *HOUND* (14 September 2016).

active hearing' (2000, 277). Although such a view may be contested (visual and aural experience may not guarantee a transformation from passive hearing into active, attentive listening) the audio walk did offer participants freedom to engage with their senses in order to experience their environment differently.



Figure 5.6a: Tolmers Square (1976).



Figure 5.6b: Tolmers Square (2016).

As a liberation of space, the square felt, in comparison to the busy and noise-ridden streets previously experienced by participants, relatively peaceful. It is enclosed and separate. There are tall, glass office buildings which dwarf the low-lying houses but nonetheless, it has an air of seclusion and apartness; of an unknown, secret, hidden space (Ravish London 2016). Unlike the streets they had just traversed (Drummond and North Gower Street, dominated by Victorian townhouse architecture), Tolmers Square is representative of British social housing architecture. Whilst the square may be surrounded by business and residential prime real estate, the square is occupied by social housing tenants and, as a result, the space is determined by low socio-economic status. And finally, it is at this square, in this context, whilst participants are contemplating the significance of their surroundings and history of the square, that Tina brings the fictional, imagined character of Charlie and the frame of the game to the forefront of their experience, when she encouraged participants to conjure their own space: 'when you look down at your feet are you in London? Do you have to be?' (Rees 2016, 6).

The freeing of spaces from their contexts in telling a new and different story allowed for the freeing of the intellect of participants but also had an emotional charge, as experienced by this participant:

I really loved the link between geography and economic/class struggle, with stories about hidden parts of London I hadn't previously considered. [...] The juxtaposition of walking through an estate (where I did indeed feel uncomfortable) immediately followed by a modern, clean square of tall buildings inhabited by secretive corporations was very powerful. (*HOUND* Participants 2016c)

It was not just that the locations were freed from their context by being juxtaposed with each other. It was the juxtaposing of the narrative with the location which achieved a similar effect of engagement. Another participant noted that 'it was really powerful to hear the figures of tax paid by Facebook while looking at the building and how close it is to the HMRC offices' (*HOUND* Participants 2016c). And, furthermore, it was a narrative partly constructed by the participant. Tina invited the participant to collaborate in the telling of the story through emotionally engaging with it; making connections between the narrative, the spaces, and the socio-economic effects of austerity, as one participant stated: 'for me it was enormously moving actually, the whole quietness of the engagement between the two of us, the scenes, the relationships' (*HOUND* Participants 2016d).

To enable the liberation of the imagination, *HOUND* was designed to afford participants an opportunity to re-write the space by constructing alternative meanings for the sites they inhabited, just as the occupiers discussed in Chapter Four did, through their performance of the everyday in occupied space. I intended to intrigue participants by placing them in a position of calculated risk, in order to experience the exhilaration of being in control by using their imagination to improvise, but, at the same time, feeling slightly off kilter in reaction to a world that had been 'made strange' and to circumstances outside their control. I hoped that the tension between the two would generate a creative dynamic that would allow for an inner personal commitment to the performance: a first step in making a commitment to dissent.



## **Commitment to Dissent: Making the Familiar Strange through the Audio Walk (Section A)**

The tactic of ‘making the familiar strange’ has been a continuous thread running through the case studies examined in this thesis, but particularly exemplified by those living the everyday in an extraordinary way, by those involved in Liberate Tate, the OLSX protest camp, and Burning Man.<sup>22</sup> The intention, cause, context, and location of the theatrical dissent is, to a degree, immaterial, in that each case study has worked to unravel, debunk, and reveal to us, that what we deem as ordinary, normal, and natural is, in fact, none of these things; and, moreover, that the world, as commonly perceived, is susceptible to change, should we choose to act. *HOUND*, too, was designed with the aim of making strange; the making strange of the politics and cultural staging of austerity, with the intention of encouraging participants to question the inevitability of austerity.

Interestingly, none of the case studies examined in this thesis drew upon the particular performance mode of the audio walk; since they focused, instead, on collaborative expressions of dissent. However, by ‘creating virtual spaces anchored in reality’ (Fleming 2013), Fleming argues, in relation to Janet Cardiff, that the participant is taken to ‘the crossroads of fiction and reality, the actual and the virtual, things remembered and newly experienced’ (2013). The meeting of the two worlds transforms the experience of the everyday. The familiar act of walking, a form of necessary transport taking us from one geographical point to another, takes us to the extraordinary.

Such shifts in perception can be advantageous in making strange through reinforcing a sense of presence and absence for the participant who can, at the same time, experience both a dislocation and a feeling of heightened presence. The effect of ‘double-ness’, discussed in Chapter Four in relation to the Occupy movement, raised by Rai and Reinelt (2015, 14), is relevant here: the absence of the performer and the presence of the participant, the ‘disembodied voice and embodied walker’ (Tomkins 2011, 237).

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<sup>22</sup> The technique of defamiliarization, or *ostranenie*, was developed by Russian Formalist, Viktor Shklovsky: ‘the purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects “unfamiliar”, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important’ (Shklovsky 2004, 16).

The imaginary (narrative) which was experienced aurally and the everyday reality the participant faced, in negotiating a busy pavement, for instance, created in this performance, a sense of dislocation. Agreeing with Tomkins that the mediated interface of the audio walk and disembodied voice, ‘stitched together via the city, its map, its history, our collective histories and futures [...] is particularly powerful’ (2011, 237), a participant commented:

I had the sense of dislocation, being de-familiarized almost in a Brechtian sense, being whacked away, by the city, by the glass, by the heat, by things I haven’t seen and things I’m trying to process. (*HOUND* Participants 2016d)

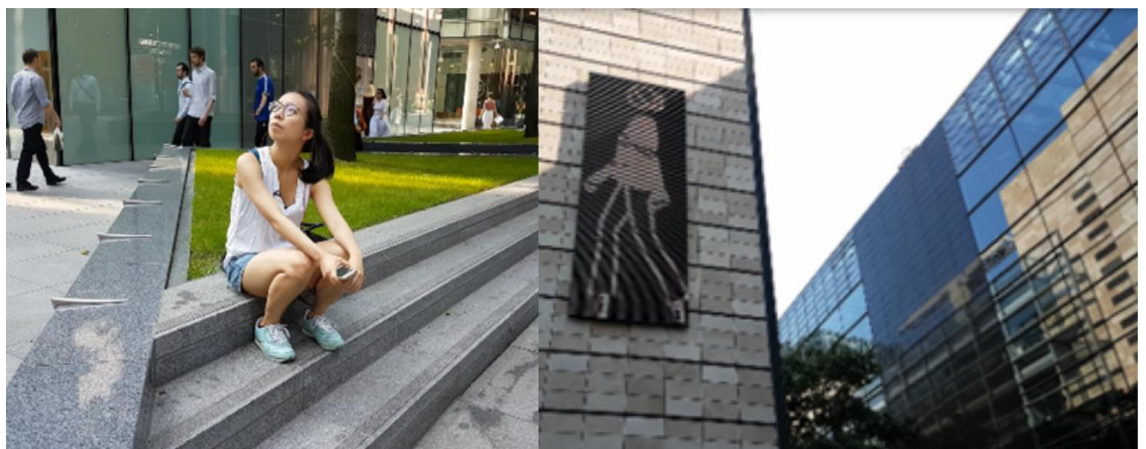


Figure 5.7: A participant encounters the ‘glass’ and ‘the heat’; reflecting on the implied critique of the corporate world exemplified by the projected walking woman who goes nowhere, outside the New Diorama Theatre.

Such an experience may well, then, have been overwhelming, a form of over-stimulation, as the body and mind struggle to process the environment, sites, and experiences. However, this feeling of making the familiar strange, this dislocation, is critical in affording participants opportunities to question society’s given truths. As the participant, illustrated in Figure 5.7 watched the projection of the walking woman, the audio stated, ‘Soon you should see a woman walking, walking, walking. Sit in front of her and watch. She never seems to get to anywhere, does she?’ (Rees 2016, 15). Such a moment aimed to activate the participant, in making the familiar strange, to question the value and purpose of the given world: preparation for her participation in engaging in dissent in Section E.

The audio walk was intended to unsettle; to create a sense of unknowing; of suspicion, puzzlement, mystery, and confusion. The sense of mystery was created at

the start of the performance from Tina's initial contact, 'I can't tell you too much about it [*HOUND*]. I don't want anyone else to know what I have planned' (Rees 2016, personal communication, 12 September) to the first instruction, 'part of today involves being unseen, so let's pretend you are waiting for a train' (Rees 2016, 3), and maintained throughout the performance with Tina intimating that 'I haven't quite told you everything' (Rees 2016, 4) in anticipation of the live interaction with performers.



Figure 5.8: The stillness and performance of a participant 'pretending to wait for a train'.

The participant was encouraged to accept the challenge to enter the uncertainties of this world, with its shifting realities; being given the license to imagine by Tina who also provided the security to engage with the narrative; to partake, for example, in behaviour which, she said, 'you wouldn't normally do. [...] Be sly. Be brazen' (Rees 2016, 7). This strategy appears to have successfully secured engagement, with a participant recording that she felt, 'intrigued, slightly creeped out but not overly, and excited' and 'loved the audio tracks. Would have loved them to be even more cryptic and lasted for longer!' (*HOUND* Participants 2016f). The aim was to create an experience where the participants had a heightened sensitivity to the possibility of change, in preparation for their engagement in dissent; and empowerment would play a key part in this process:

I felt special and that I had to really rely on myself and being brave to accomplish some of the tasks (like approaching strangers, navigating around areas of London). That was awesome. [...] It was really refreshing to have no plan and try and figure out where to go and what to do. (*HOUND* Participants 2016f)

The content of Tina's script was therefore integral to this process, with her voice becoming the 'sound of inner speech' (Myers 2011, 73), which the participant may resist or welcome, in response to the considerable shifts of Tina's narrative of mood, pace, and rhythm. The making strange of the landscape through the narrative worked particularly well in unsettling participants. The encouragement to enter a state of high alert, and to be suspicious, 'it seems we don't always know people as well as we think we do' (Rees 2016, 7), arguably created a closer bond with Tina. Some did not feel safe with Tina; as one participant commented, 'it wasn't clear if Tina was a character to be trusted, as she sounded quite menacing at times, so you don't necessarily take her bad judgements of Charlie seriously' (*HOUND* Participants 2016d) and another felt, perhaps, too threatened, 'you are aware that no one around you knows what you are doing, then you feel very alone' (*HOUND* 2016f). But for others, the balance between risk and security worked well: 'I loved the asserting opinion coming through the voice which brought me to places that I hadn't discovered before in the area [...] I really enjoyed being accompanied by the voice throughout the journey' (*HOUND* Participants 2016f).

One participant embraced the mystery: 'it was cool because it was like you had a secret mission and no one else knew what you were up to!' (*HOUND* Participants 2016f). Another illustrated how far the narrative in the audio walk shifted her perception and behaviour:

You need to be unseen. Glasses, headphones, listening to music. I was suspicious of everyone and anyone. This [Charlie] could be anyone. I think that there are other people involved but I am not sure. Yes it is a bit intimidating and scary, but I quite like that, being a bit of a spy. (*HOUND* Participants 2016d)

The experience of being illicit, an observer, alienated from the rest of society, allowed for a different perspective on, and appraisal of, the everyday world. Being an outsider, after all, implies dissent from the prevailing social norms and values.

There were some reports of participants feeling a sense of unease that Tina knew what they were thinking, where the fictional pervaded the everyday. Tina's narrative voice,

although ambiguous at times, was all knowing and controlling: she directed their precise movements, for example, even guiding their gaze upwards or downwards. The participants, in contrast, were situated in the unknown. For many participants (who did not know me personally) both the performance and the performance-maker were indeed unsettling. One such unsettling experience resulted from the audio walk script which instructed participants to:

Keep walking straight ahead, but instead of taking the ramp, take the right fork, passing a concrete sports court. Anyone playing there today? Thought it wasn't likely, but you never know. (Rees 2016, 14)

A participant reported feeling a sense of dislocation, as, indeed, no one was playing on the sports court in Regent's Place Estate and this produced a sense of confusion as Tina was clearly not present, nor watching the participant, and furthermore, the tracks were pre-recorded. Moments such as this one, resulting from almost throw-away comments, arguably re-asserted the authority of Tina's narrative voice as being all-knowing, and also caring, 'I will be here to help you' (Rees 2016a, personal communication, 12 September) as participants learnt both to trust and to question the voice, which was both absent and present. Similarly, another participant discussed a reluctance (of the sort seen in Figure 5.9) to follow the instructions from a 'random voice on the internet' (*HOUND* Participants 2016d), particularly in relation to going through an underpass on the Regent's Place Estate. She reported a likewise uncanny feeling as Tina accurately anticipated her feelings asking:

How do you feel? Are you comfortable here, or more comfortable back in Regent's Place? Is there something about polished corporate space that makes you feel safer than the space people eat in, sleep in, live in? Is it odd to feel at home there, when here, you're amongst homes? In a square where you're just a statistic, did you in fact feel more anonymous than you do here? Where nobody cares at all. (Rees 2016, 14)

In response, the participant stated:

it did freak me out a bit and then the voice said, 'How do you feel?' and I thought – ah, you got me because I *am* more comfortable in a space where I am being watched and which is corporate. (*HOUND* Participants 2016d)



Figure 5.9: Two successive shots of participant approaching the underpass, looking in several directions before she enters the next space.

Forced Entertainment's Terry O'Connor describes these moments as 'happy accidents' (O'Connor in Heddon, Milling 2006, 198). Certainly, not every participant will have experienced a similar sense of the uncanny, or strange, but when such happy accidents occurred, with the narrative pre-empting what was happening or how a participant was feeling, these moments worked to emphasize further the doubling, layering effect where the imaginary in *HOUND* pervaded participants' reality, in essence, making strange the everyday.

### **Commitment to Dissent: Making the Familiar Strange Through Live Interactions (Section B)**

The performance created a sense of dislocation through the rupturing of the everyday by the fictional, and also by the everyday breaking into the fictional, which may be seen here in this participant's response, in reference to the chasing of the fox during the pervasive game:

To be honest, I didn't expect to see the 'tail' so literally. I thought it was a more metaphorical symbol. Therefore, I didn't really know what to do when I saw it as somehow it changed the world of the audio files into reality - because the tail just appeared in front of us. I was a bit confused and didn't really know where I was. (*HOUND* Participants 2016f)

Just the everyday presence of other people, of other participants, and of the informal audience, composed of passers-by and those relaxing during their lunch-break, underlined participants' consciousness of what was perceived as normal or subversive behaviour within any given environment. This sense of discomfort was enjoyed by

some, but not by all, according to this participant: ‘I don’t mind seeming weird in a corporate environment but I understand it might make others uncomfortable’ (*HOUND* Participants 2016f).

The rupturing of the everyday by the fictional occurred from the start of the performance during the audio-walk as Tina warns, ‘there are thieves everywhere. Probably some of the people around you right now are thieves’ (Rees 2016, 4) and, ‘keep your wits about you. You have no idea where Charlie might be’ (Rees 2016, 6). If we examine Figure 5.10, for instance, then we can see that the participant, seen here standing, is surrounded by two people, also listening to headphones; neither was participant nor performer in *HOUND*, but by occupying the space, they may have been perceived as participants, or indeed may have been imagined as Charlie.



Figure 5.10: Participant listens to audio track in Tolmers Square, surrounded by two people also listening to headphones, who, unknown to her, were not part of the performance.

The rupturing of the everyday by the fictional continued during the shift to live interactions, with performers demanding an increased level of commitment from participants and a different response: action and quick-thinking following moments of listening and reflection. Within the realm of play, participants had already been given a task: to find Charlie. Now the performance required participants to assume and

perform roles; to improvise and create a narrative and back-story regarding Charlie; perhaps discomforting some participants, but in a way designed to be enjoyable.<sup>23</sup> As a precursor to the unsanctioned part of the performance (Section E), it was structured so that participants experienced a gradual rise and shift in the gradients of risk.

The balance between risk, freedom, and creativity, through incorporating live interactions with performers, was achieved, according to one participant:

I enjoyed the aspect of interaction, especially making up an excuse [for how I knew Charlie]. I liked having to take a bit of control and improvise. It was slightly daunting, but I like a challenge and enjoyed having to think creatively. (*HOUND* Participants 2016d)

Whilst another pointed out, ‘we found ourselves [her and the performer] having an improvised conversation for so long that I almost forgot I had places to go’ (*HOUND* Participants 2016c).



Figure 5.11: Participant improvises with performer in Café Caritas, in the Royal College of Practitioners.

The tension between the known and the unknown, arguably, was particularly rich in alerting participants to the imaginary and the real. The sense of uncertainty was increased by the very real uncertainties involved in staging the performance in both

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<sup>23</sup> Participants may have found this an easier task to complete depending on which performer they met with, and their previous experiences in engaging in role-play.



public spaces and in outside private spaces with public access. Furthermore, *HOUND* was an unsanctioned performance. No permission was requested and no venues or institutions were informed about the performance. As such, participants were placed in a position where they questioned what was planned within the domain of the game, and what was unplanned, and part of the everyday. There were many incidents during *HOUND* which I was unable to control or predict. Unlike many immersive or participatory performances which provide safe environments for participants to explore (Bucknall 2016, 54; Stott 2015, 2), the bleeding from the domain of the game (the fictional) to the domain of the ordinary (real life) was one of the main features of *HOUND*, and there were also times when the everyday pervaded the fictional sphere of the audio walk.

For instance, participants who began their experience at 11am heard a loud and recurring emergency alarm in Euston Station, when an announcement was heard: ‘due to a reported emergency, all passengers must leave the station immediately’ (*HOUND* Participants 2016f). For those participants, then, their whole experience was immediately shaped by reality as the everyday overtook the fictional. They may well have questioned whether the performance would be postponed, or whether they needed to evacuate the building, or whether it was part of the performance.<sup>24</sup> Another situation arose in the Square Tavern pub (in Tolmers Square), where, several weeks prior to the PaR, the landlord had experienced issues with drug deals taking place on the premises. The sight of someone, a performer situated in the pub, passing packages wrapped in brown paper was, therefore, extremely suspicious. The performer and participants were asked to leave, creating a scenario once again where reality took precedence over the performance.

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<sup>24</sup> Fortunately the alarm was a precautionary measure and stopped after several minutes.



Figure 5.12: Participants pursue the fox in Regent's Place; watched and followed by a member of security, in the far left of the photo.

As previously identified in earlier chapters, the reaction of security to the performances of dissent may highlight the need for protest, but may also be exploited by activists to promote their own goals.<sup>25</sup> At an early stage during the pervasive game the photographer Hugh Warwick contacted me to inform me that security had, as he said, 'clocked' participants, who reported feeling watched by security as soon as they left the theatre. A member of security traced their movements from this stage onwards, as illustrated in Figure 5.12. It is worth noting that the only unusual behaviour exhibited by participants at this stage was their holding of small objects, and their moving together as a group; whilst, unprompted, one participant blew a small horn, and another rhythmically tapped coconuts. Security followed the group to the edge of the property, on Osnaburgh Street (where participants received the phone call from Tina), and once again, to Triton Square. Although several participants burst into a mid-paced jog, the instructions from Tina had encouraged the ensemble to stay together like a pack, and participants, on the whole, were mindful of this. By the stage at which participants had reached Triton Square and grabbed the fox's tail, two

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<sup>25</sup> Such a tactic, in exploiting the response from people employed as members of security, may well be criticized for being ethically dubious: treating security members as representations of powerful entities, rather than as workers, who, similarly to the cleaners employed by the Tate, are likely to be poorly paid, in a position of precarity, working anti-social hours, and certainly not responsible for the decisions made by the powerful corporations which *HOUND* intended to criticize.

members of security had begun asking questions. Indeed, one participant was asked, by the same member of security who had previously followed the group, to show identification (illustrated in Figure 5.13) and questioning only stopped when she had shown it to him, and the photographer intervened.



Figure 5.13: Security approaches participant, asking to see a form of identification.

The participants were not trespassing and were within their legal rights to be in Regent's Place.<sup>26</sup> The suspicion levelled by security towards participants, therefore, was significant: what grounds were there for security to ask for identification and why did they approach only one participant? One other participant reported a feeling of being made aware of her race:

All of a sudden I was aware that I am a mixed race person and that security were coming over – and I was carrying a riding crop and security came over,

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<sup>26</sup> The legal definition of trespass: 'Section 68(1) CJPOA formerly provided that a person commits the offence of aggravated trespass if he trespasses on land in the open air and, in relation to any lawful activity which persons are engaging in or are about to engage in on that or adjoining land in the open air, does there anything which is intended by him to have the effect: a) of intimidating those persons or any of them so as to deter them or any of them from engaging in that activity, b) of obstructing that activity, or c) of disrupting that activity' (CPS 2016).

and it was only after that, I was like, wait, is this ok? (*HOUND* Participants 2016d)<sup>27</sup>

One participant stated:

I wonder how much of it is about health and safety and how much of it is about ownership of space – this is *our* space, and this is how *we* behave. They [the local work force] have sanctioned things [table tennis]. They are allowed to have fun, but chasing a tail becomes outrageous. (*HOUND* Participants 2016d)

Through a personal experience of performing a minor act of unusual behaviour, which had provoked such a reaction, one participant had become aware of the nature of ownership of space and of the potential power of dissent.



Figure 5.14: Sanctioned Play: table tennis and Unsanctioned Play: the hunt.

Just as play wrong-footed the workers in the car showroom in EZLN's performance (Chapter Three), so playing in the wrong way, by the wrong people, was sufficient to

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<sup>27</sup> The fact that bodies are treated differently, especially according to race, class, and gender, has been raised on numerous occasions in relation to protest performance. A member of Platform, for instance, discussed a workshop where it presented images of Liberate Tate's work (Trowell 2015). A black audience member pointed out that walking into 'Tate VIP Party' would not have been possible for a black person who would have been highly visible amongst the guests, and security would have responded more aggressively. This issue has important implications for protest performances and is especially pertinent when considering the privileged spaces that people in powerful positions inhabit. The need to acknowledge how power structures and spaces treat people differently is an important factor to recognize.

create a difficulty for security. Members of security rushed past people playing table tennis, a sanctioned example of play encouraged in the space – ‘all sorts of fun activities to get involved with [at Regent’s Place], where the action is at’ (Regent’s Place 2016) – in order to follow the participants engaged in the pervasive game, suggesting that the issue was not necessarily the activity of play, but of *who* was engaged in play, and the precise form of play. Sanctioned forms of play are embedded within the architectural design of Regent’s Place, depicted to a degree in Figure 5.14. Participants were engaged with modes of play that certainly mirror gentle childhood games, such as treasure hunts and chasing, but arguably, the threat is not play itself (as play is regularly a feature in that environment) but play which has not been sanctioned by the companies who own Regent’s Place.

As one participant pointed out, Triton Square was a:

Remarkably ordered space, unusually so for a city [...] if you look back at that artificial green grass you will see ordered rows of an almost Kafkaesque kind. If you took a photograph of that, you couldn’t find a more orchestrated space of pleasure. (*HOUND* Participants 2016d)



Figure 5.15: Image of Triton Square, 10 May 2016.

One participant had learnt of the nature of power, but also of its fragility and vulnerability, in feeling threatened so easily: ‘what we are actually doing is child’s

play, but because we are adults we become threatening' (*HOUND* Participants 2016d). As one security officer stated to me: 'usually we love all of that stuff. We do lots of creative, artistic stuff here. It's just we're not sure if it fits in with our branding' (Rees 2016b). Any attempts to affect the 'branding', to disrupt such an ordered and orchestrated space, then, need not be grand in gesture, but can effectively cause a rupture through smaller, gentle actions such as the pervasive game, 'an alarm went off – me, just prancing through a square' (*HOUND* Participants 2016d). (This relates to the analysis of harnessing play and games in political actions detailed in Chapter Three).

The impact of the rupturing of the everyday is experienced here but, unlike that caused by the overtly political breaking into the everyday world by the Occupy movement, this rupture was caused by a gentle shift in behaviour. In the context of such a restricted and designed space, actions undertaken by *HOUND* participants were perceived as subversive, simply because the architecture and street furniture did not allow for it.<sup>28</sup>

Arguably, the performance made the environment and the everyday strange for the security officers too, who, unexpectedly, showed a marked reluctance to intervene during the Rough Music inspired Guerrilla Performance. In rehearsals we had prepared for different eventualities, including the possibility of security intervening and escorting the performers from the premises. In discussion with security I emphasized the playful, fun, and exploratory elements of the practice, while the performers completed a performance criticizing the practices of the surrounding offices. It is possible that their willingness to buy my story was due to the 'magic circle' (referenced in Chapter Three) that both play and performance create with all of the appropriate signifiers: colourful costumes; overt, stylized, and satirical performances which offered performers some protection. Performance documentation

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<sup>28</sup> Security at Regent's Place had a history of tracking my movements. During the test performance (21 July 2016, which did not include the Guerrilla Performance, Section E) I had left a message in the public phone box, notably not situated on land owned by the Regent's Place Corporation. Shortly before participants were due to arrive, I asked a performer to double-check whether the note was still there, as a security officer had been interested in my actions. She reported that the note had disappeared. I had provided her with a spare copy in case this happened. That a security officer left Regent's Place to enter public space, and, in all likelihood, threw away my note, is interesting; as the officer had intervened without any cause on land which is not owned by Regent's Place.

demonstrates that the security officer was phoning someone, presumably a superior, to ask for guidance on how to respond (as illustrated in Figure 5.16). Such an assertion, that theatricality can offer protection, is difficult to prove, but participants similarly noted, ‘[the] performers were dressed differently so I felt like there was a distance, it was clear we didn’t know what was going on’ (*HOUND* Participants 2016d). After all, outdoor street performances frequently create an invisible demarcation, a type of ‘sacred space’ that passers-by are reluctant to cross. This reluctance may have been strengthened by the large informal audience: Triton Square was exceptionally busy, at the intentional peak of the lunch hour, with many workers lounging in the sun. Any actions undertaken by security officers would have not only become an integral part of the performance, but would also have required them to perform a primary role, in front of the sizable audience.



Figure 5.16: Screenshot of security phoning for guidance regarding a suitable response to *HOUND*.

### **Commitment to Dissent: Direction and Autonomy in Avoiding Didacticism Through Audio (Section A)**

‘It’s your mission not mine’ (Rees 2016, 9). A commonality amongst the most effective forms of theatrical dissent in the thesis case studies is the attempt to avoid didacticism by using the medium of art; by offering an affective, emotional experience, whereby participants may freely learn without feeling instructed or

hectored.<sup>29</sup> I wanted those who participated in *HOUND* to enjoy the experience.

Although *HOUND* was, at times, didactic, in content, tone, and approach; particularly when the script included content based on research regarding both the impact of austerity measures and the profit generated from these measures, it was not, however, as a whole, experienced as being didactic by participants. One factor that may have militated against the effects of didacticism was the use of humour in the narrative: for example, ‘the bookshop is a seething hotbed of protest; the kind with inspirational tea-towels’ (Rees 2016, 7).

All of the elements that encouraged individual commitment, discussed above, worked together to counter a didactic tendency, but the most important factor was that of the balance between direction and agency. Participants needed to be given the freedom to become co-authors, collaborators in the telling of the narrative, to construct their own meanings. To some extent, participants were offered few opportunities to resist or question the structure, to co-produce, or change the direction of the performance. Participants did not provide the material of the performance, but followed the trail which was laid out, and arguably, even became performance objects, manipulated by the performance structure, as Tina says: ‘I’m told that I can be a bit demanding, a bit bossy’ (Rees 2016, 3). The performance therefore relied upon willing, obedient participants. This was particularly problematic due to the performance content. In raising the subject of resistance and dissent, the performance depended upon social obligation. Indeed, the PaR was tightly structured in terms of staggered start times, to the extent that participants were instructed to begin the experience at a specific time and not before, not after.

Nevertheless, the performance provided scope for participants to experience a creative freedom to form their own narratives. Although Tina may have been heard, by participants, as the voice of authority, the form and nature of the performance was designed to allow participants freedom to create what Hayden Lorimer refers to as ‘embodied acts of landscaping’ (Lorimer in Wylie 2007, 166). In other words, participants experienced the landscape in a highly performative way: *HOUND* was composed of an assemblage of live interactions with performers and live

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<sup>29</sup> For instance, audiences of Liberate Tate’s work (Chapter Two) had interacted with politics successfully, through art: being drawn in and confronted by a political argument, whilst being afforded moments to construct their own understanding.



communications with Tina (via text), an encounter with other participants, as well as the use of pre-recorded tracks. With no knowledge of who was, or was not, involved, participants were afforded the freedom to construct their own narratives. As one participant stated, ‘you have to really look to yourself and trust yourself’ (*HOUND* Participants 2016d); as Tina directs participants, ‘maybe you just want to make your own mind up. Well, go and see for yourself...’ (Rees 2016, 11).

The option of communicating the script and directions through the mode of an audio walk, as opposed to a series of texts for instance, arguably offered more creative scope and freedom, in layering images of the everyday with the aural fictional world.<sup>30</sup> It established a:

Theatrical auditory space through the sound of voices speaking in the ear. Such works involve the listener-walker-participant as an active performer in the work through a multi-sensory involvement with specific places and landscapes. (Myers 2011, 70)

The audio walk gave the narrator the control of directing participants’ contemplation through making subtle, nuanced observations, whilst at the same time allowing participants to create their own narratives. As Tina reminds them: ‘whatever happens on Wednesday is what you make of it’ (Rees 2016, personal communication, 12 September).

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<sup>30</sup> Other similar experiences have communicated with participants through text messages, such as *HiddenCity* (a treasure hunt experience, where clues are offered through text messages in cities in the UK) and *Coney*. The option of performing the character of Tina offered an interesting opportunity to convey directly the shifts in mood whilst allowing for longer excerpts of text. The audio walk also potentially offered participants more physical freedom, as their smartphone or MP3 player could be placed elsewhere as they listened to tracks, and their gaze did not need to be centred upon the device.



Figure 5.17: Participants listen to the last audio track before the unsanctioned Guerrilla Performance (Section E).

The audio walk produced just such a sense of agency for this participant: ‘I was hyper-aware of what was going on around me, and the anticipation of looking out for potential Tina-related action meant that I created various narratives in my head’ (*HOUND* Participants 2016e). One participant, in noting, ‘there’s always a sense that you’re involved with yourself [in audio works], there’s almost a moment of privacy of experience’ (*HOUND* Participants 2016d), suggests that the mode did allow for the freeing of his imagination. A series of questions embedded throughout the audio-script encouraged personal reflection; interrogating how participants felt in specific environments and why that might be, for example: ‘Does that number leave you a little cold, standing static as you are, amongst the comings and goings, the counting? Does it make you feel...a bit insignificant? [...] No-one knows you’re talking to me. Does that give you a thrill?’ (Rees 2016, 4). And certainly, each question Tina posed remained unanswered unless the participant responded by reflecting and answering internally, therefore, almost having a continuous internal dialogue. Audio works undeniably encourage a sense of intimacy between the participant and the voice, even

though participants were entirely aware that they were listening to pre-recorded tracks and no live dialogue was occurring.<sup>31</sup>

There were several opportunities too for participants to engage in more meaningful forms of participation, such as the interactions with performers during Section B. Whilst the interactions were relatively few, they did afford participants moments of creative freedom, a rupture in the otherwise tightly structured experience. In these episodes, participants were able to create their own narrative, and many participants demonstrated highly creative responses in gaining Charlie's phone number, from a lengthy conversation about their on-off intimate relationship with Charlie to a complex explanation about Charlie's past misdemeanours resulting in a desire to take revenge (Rees 2016).

Further, the narrative regarding the character of Charlie was intentionally open, affording participants an opportunity to construct their own understanding of the character as fitting into one of two options, as laid out by Afoko and Vockins: 'there are two types of people: Strivers and Scroungers' (2013, 2). Charlie's hedonistic behaviour and personality traits were designed to fit equally well into either category. Tina has, after all, confirmed Charlie's character: 'you might have to lie, but don't worry – Charlie does' (Rees 2016, 13). Similarly open was Charlie's gender, with performers' referring to the character by name only, rather than by pronoun. Several participants, too, found that their image and understanding of the character shifted throughout the performance: 'the character of Charlie changed a lot for me, and I liked this aspect. I had a sneaking suspicion that Charlie wasn't exactly like everyone was making him out to be' (*HOUND* Participants 2016d). Another commented that the character shifted from the stereotype of Scrounger to Striver:

At the very beginning I thought Charlie was a drug dealer, however, the image changed when I entered Regent's Place. I thought then that he was a white male, in his mid-40s, a manager of a growing company. (*HOUND* Participants 2016d)

Indeed, as one participant commented, 'I think that the audience will project their own thoughts onto Charlie and perceive him as they see fit' (*HOUND* Participants 2016d), and according to feedback this is indeed what happened. Littered throughout Tina's script were regular reminders to look for Charlie, which heightened the awareness of

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<sup>31</sup> There were, however, live moments; when participants received text messages and images from Tina, for instance.

participants who scanned the landscape for Charlie and framed their experiences accordingly, selecting or deselecting people as they saw fit. One participant had such a clear image of Charlie in her mind that she approached a man and asked him if he were Charlie, despite Tina's instruction that Charlie would be carrying specific items (*HOUND* Participants 2016c).

Overall, the character of Tina, unlike Charlie, was not intentionally left open, but even so, it allowed participants the freedom to interpret a sufficiently ambiguous figure.

This participant struggled to form a clear image:

She was concerned and obviously at a point of distress, under a point of pressure that we couldn't map on or see. For me, Tina was fragmentary, I started to realize who she represented and then it changed. I felt early on that she represented something larger than the individual. (*HOUND* Participants 2016d)

The characterization did not achieve the intended result: participants did not frame the narrative in terms of austerity being 'a necessary evil, like a tough medicine' (Afoko and Vockins 2013, 2). This may have been because participants were not familiar, or at least conscious, of the frame itself, especially considering the fact that the frame had been taken out of context and, in quite an abstract way, applied to the character of Tina. In contrast, the frame of 'Strivers and Scroungers' was instantly recognized by participants, being perhaps less of a leap. Rather than understand a character as an abstraction, they only had to categorize a character as being either a Striver or a Scrounger, already perceived, at least by some, as a very clear image.

However, the interpretations of Tina's comments did relate, albeit more loosely, to the overall intention of debunking austerity-related myths, and were rich and generative. For one participant, Tina's illness related to the Strivers and Scroungers frame as she slipped into casting Tina as a 'scrounger': 'I oscillated between sympathy and irritation – why are you [Tina] going on about being sick all the time? And, like, yeah, why can't you help yourself?' (*HOUND* Participants 2016c). The participant expressed frustration at Tina's lack of motivation to help herself. Arguably, this response demonstrates the strength of this particular frame in shaping our perceptions.

Equally interesting were participants' own conclusions, some of which were very pertinent. As with participants' responses to Charlie, they projected their own

concerns onto Tina, creating unpredictable and creative connections in reference to their own lives and experiences:

It was interesting in what it raised about myself. [...] But then I thought, this is what I really care about, it revealed a lot about myself. (*HOUND* Participants 2016c)

Participants who likened Tina's illness to the sickness of the establishment and state raised the issue of disenfranchisement which, critically, undermines people's willingness to participate in political actions. Although they did not understand her to be the explicit personification of the economy, they did identify intended characteristics: 'I thought she was disenfranchised and I think that's what the sickness was representing – the sickness of the establishment' (*HOUND* Participants 2016c) and, 'Tina was the cancer of the state' (*HOUND* Participants 2016c). In the light of this, perhaps, then, *HOUND* could have benefited from entrusting participants further in writing an even more open script, following the 'show, don't tell' guidance. For, in analyzing performance responses, it became clear that to a degree their differing interpretations of Tina were unimportant, in that they all worked within the narrative frame.

### **Commitment to Collaboration and Collective Action: Pervasive Game (Section D)**

A pack always puts the slowest and wisest at the front. You have to stay together and keep pace with one another. It's not about the chase but about the pursuit. No one gets left behind. (Rees 2016, 16)

The importance of collaboration and collective action in sustaining dissent has been seen in all my thesis case studies. It was, therefore, important that *HOUND* participants should not only engage as individuals but also work with others. Engaging in the pervasive game (Section D) in *HOUND* presented a sudden shift for participants, in terms of mode, tone, approach, content, and perhaps most significantly, for the first time, participants were expected to commit to completing a task collectively, outside the safety of the New Diorama Theatre. They needed to respond to the environment as events unfolded.

The pervasive game intended to discover how far participants were able to re-create the magic circle of play (Chapter Three) in the public area of Regent's Place. Within the framework of the game and through simple instructions, their task was clear but demanded a pursuit of a fox in front of an informal, quite large audience composed of office workers who were eating their lunch in the square (as illustrated in Figure 5.18).



Figure 5.18: Participants chase the fox during the pervasive game in Triton Square, surrounded by informal audience members.

Participants proved to be, to a degree, committed to *HOUND* in completing the task. As one participant noted, this was achieved through the pervasive game being task-driven: ‘we became more united when looking at the map and finding X [...] the hunt helped unite us’ (*HOUND* Participants 2016f). Participants re-created the magic circle of play (Chapter Three), encouraged by Tina ‘to feel like a part of the pack’ (Rees 2016, 16). They felt emboldened, and this was demonstrated in their behaviour, confident in the knowledge, too, that they were partly protected by the form of play but also because, as one participant noted, ‘there’s safety in numbers’ (*HOUND* Participants 2016d) and, according to another, ‘I don’t think I would have the guts to

chase Charlie in public if I was by myself' (*HOUND* Participants 2016f).

One participant stated that she enjoyed the 'bonding, freedom, and protection of a larger group' (*HOUND* Participants 2016f). Another reported feeling emotionally affected: 'I was fairly moved when seeing a group of people looking for Charlie together' (*HOUND* Participants 2016f). However, when questioned whether this resulted from the sharing of a cause or from playing the game, the participant replied: 'I wasn't sure whether it was due to the injustice or it was because we were in a game' (*HOUND* Participants 2016f).



Figure 5.19: Participants committed to the collective pursuit of the fox, approaching Triton Square.

This shift in confidence was exemplified when participants demonstrated behaviour that was unexpected, or at least, undirected by Tina. Three participants, for instance, as soon as they received their objects (a horn, coconuts, and a gold sash which stated 'The Face of Austerity') began to behave differently: one, immediately, wore the sash, whilst the others began making noise with their objects, performing the movements of a horse in one case (some of which we can see evidenced in Figure 5.19). Similarly unexpected behaviour came from one participant as she entered the theatre, and upon seeing paper and pens, wrote the phrase, 'Charlie is Everywhere', which piqued the

curiosity of other participants, who believed she was part of the game, performing a rehearsed role. In these ways, participants began to perform their own commitment towards dissent.

Despite these moments of autonomy, collaboration between participants was problematic. There was little cohesion between group members in the way they approached the pervasive game, with participants splitting into smaller groups, for instance. From feedback it is clear that some participants were irritated by the collaborative process. One participant noted that ‘the most challenging part was actually the team work. [...] It felt nice to meet people who had the same goal – to find Charlie, but the team work didn’t seem too established and I felt a bit left behind’ (*HOUND* Participants 2016d). Another participant expressed frustration that some participants were more committed than others to maintaining the frame of the game: ‘it’s difficult to sometimes do things if everyone isn’t as into it, listening or paying attention’ (*HOUND* Participants 2016d), and yet another commented, ‘a few people were trying to lead. [...] When everyone isn’t as into it as each other it can make you self-conscious and less likely to get involved’ (*HOUND* Participants 2016f). One even stated a desire to work independently:

I found myself wanting to break away from the group because I wanted my own personal experience. [...] I did find the level of urgency rising and not enough people [...] rising to that challenge. (*HOUND* Participants 2016f)

This participant also noted that there was a degree of negotiation required in terms of power dynamics: ‘there were powers at play (some people really wanted to be in control, others being irritatingly laid back)’ (*HOUND* Participants 2016f).

The fact that collaboration was one of the more challenging aspects of *HOUND* is perhaps not surprising, especially considering that the majority of participants did not know one another. After all, the inherent difficulties in collaborative working practices (including hierarchies and power dynamics) are well known and continue to remain a challenge in sustaining social movements.<sup>32</sup> With no performer present to facilitate the activity, participants were left to their own devices to negotiate, pool their resources, and collaborate in a short amount of time. One participant wondered

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<sup>32</sup> Further analysis of the problems of collaboration in social movements is included in Chapter Four in relation to the Occupy London Stock Exchange protest camp.



whether further direction would have been helpful: ‘I didn’t know if there’s a way of nominating people for different bits of the challenges once you’re in a group so you all get to play to your strengths and not feel held back by anyone?’ (*HOUND* Participants 2016f). In many respects, the performance was asking a great deal of the participants. It is impossible to ascertain how far, if the collaborative card game instructions had been set up correctly (Section C), this activity may have created a more cohesive and communicative group. It is also worth noting that, as with any performance or experience, each participant arrived with different references, expectations, and level of investment. Some participants commented that they enjoyed the opportunity to discuss their experiences together, but this may, too, have contributed to the fact that participants had shifted from a gaming mode to a sociable, reflective one, which may have made it more difficult to return to a gaming mode (Section D). It becomes clear that Tina’s injunction, ‘No one’ should be ‘left behind’, deserves further attention.

### **Commitment to Dissent: Accessibility and Rough Music (Section E)**

The Research and Development workshop (Stage One), identified both the association of didacticism with the mode of Rough Music, and also articulated the opportunities such a mode affords for testing commitment to dissent. The unsanctioned Guerrilla Performance, inspired by elements of Rough Music, a highly theatrical, confrontational form, was found by those attending the workshop to be ‘not for the faint-hearted [...] takes no prisoners’ (Rees 2015a). As such, it was designed to be the most overt expression of dissent experienced in *HOUND*, demanding the highest level of commitment from participants. The issue of accessibility was raised several times by workshop attendees who questioned how far this performance mode was ‘for everyone’ (Rees 2015a). And so a key question remains: how far can this form provide for, and widen, access, an issue identified in Chapters Two, Three, and Four? After all, if theatrical dissent only speaks to the few and not the many then it would have failed to deliver many of its aims and would have compromised its values.

Each of the sections participants had previously experienced, from the audio walk to the pervasive game, was designed to situate them, ready and prepared, for this particular stage of the performance. The development – from beginning *HOUND* as

an individual (afforded privacy of experience and quiet seclusion) to engaging in a pervasive game in Regent's Place – was intended to extend dissent gradually in order to test how far participants were willing to engage in an unsanctioned Guerrilla Performance.



Figure 5.20: Performers arrive in Triton Square to perform the Rough Music scene.



Figure 5.21: Participants respond as performers, dressed in hunting attire, approach them.

The performance style, costuming, and props, especially when contrasted to earlier stages of *HOUND*, was brash and provocative. The performers' movements and intonation of voice were indeed 'larger than life' (as exemplified in Figures 5.20 and 5.21); and participants certainly appear to have been surprised by the performers' presence and demeanour. Each other section, after all, to a lesser or greater degree, situated the performance firmly in the everyday: the Rough Music scene was, most definitely, 'out of place'. It might have been the case that if performers had not dressed in such overt costuming, or presented their material in such an overt manner then some participants may have felt more comfortable in continuing their own performance.



Figure 5.22: Participants create an approximate semi-circle audience formation around the scene as it unfolds.



Figure 5.23: A participant is invited to make the sound of hooves with coconuts.

Experiencing such a shift in theatricality and in mode, did present problems. In terms of accessibility, as an anachronistic form, it was far removed in tone, style, and role for participants. First, it shifted the role of participants, from that played just moments before in their own pervasive game, to the role of a more traditional audience. Certainly, the style was interactive; they were being asked to use props and respond to the performers, but for the first time during *HOUND*, they became a more official audience, perhaps feeling disempowered, having enjoyed some autonomy previously. If we examine Figure 5.22, for instance, we can see that participants created a semi-circular formation to watch the scene as it unfolded; despite the fact that they had a poorer view of the action from that vantage point.

In this sense, this part of the performance may have, for participants, been experienced as didactic, therefore putting access in jeopardy. This feeling may have been exacerbated further by the presence of witnesses to their watching of the scene: the informal audience composed largely of people, probably employed nearby, on their lunchbreak. One participant, for instance, reports feeling ‘mortified [...] embarrassed’ (*HOUND* Participants 2016d) during this section of the performance. Indeed, we can perhaps even witness this if we examine Figure 5.23, as the participant appears to be in a state of discomfort, when offered coconuts. Significantly, she further stated that her feeling of anxiety may have resulted from her not having ‘clicked into that energy’ (*HOUND* Participants 2016d). The participant understands

*that* energy, belonging to the mode of Rough Music, as being distinctive, whilst another participant also discussed this section as posing a different dive ratio:

It's almost like an Olympic dive – it has to be very, very strong to operate and it can collapse quite quickly, but it's fun too, it's joy. It did draw my attention towards the split between the two modes, where it shifted. (*HOUND* Participants 2016d)

That Rough Music was perceived as being an Olympic dive suggests it was a level of theatricality too far: disproportionate to the forms experienced previously in *HOUND*. In this sense, my use of Rough Music may have been didactic in style, but arguably avoided being didactic in so far as it de-familiarized participants, who experienced a feeling of heightened alertness. Indeed, the fact that one participant did not 'click' into the energy may be immaterial; for she was aware that Rough Music offered a different energy, and that a 'clicking', a shifting of behaviour, was on offer.

Other participants noted that the heightened theatricality of Rough Music, the costuming, and overt style of performance had efficacy (as seen in Chapter Two and Chapter Three with BP or Not BP and EZLN): 'it's more acceptable to be shouting things about austerity if you're wearing a funny outfit and have a funny accent. You can get away with it' (*HOUND* Participants 2016d). Here, the participant indicates that there is some protection offered through the visible trappings of performance. Certainly, at this point, neither security nor the informal audience asked us to leave. Another participant commented that these precise performance mechanisms offered her enough safety and distance to participate:

[The performers] were dressed differently so I felt like there was a distance, it was clear we didn't know what was going on, and they're powering through, [...] suddenly, there was a moment when I was like, we're being dragged into a thing, it got very political all of a sudden but then a) it was stuff I agree with anyway, and b) I felt that there was enough separation that if shit went down, I could have easily been like, 'I don't know them'. (*HOUND* Participants 2016d)

Such comments point to the efficacy of these particular components of performance: the costume and the performance style. As the same participant went on to say: 'I felt like today was a day where I was ready to embrace that' (*HOUND* Participants 2016d). We cannot know precisely why she felt ready to embrace participating in an unsanctioned Guerrilla Performance on that day. Her willingness to do so may,

nevertheless, be indicative that the preceding performance sections had increased the gradient of risk for her to such a degree that she was in a position to commit to the heightened performance of dissent in the Guerrilla Performance. Moreover, there are clear indications, from at least some participants, that they fully embraced the form; their participation went beyond what was necessary, or polite: the social contract of performance. For instance, we can see that a participant cheers enthusiastically when the figure of George Osborne is lifted (in Figure 5.24).



Figure 5.24: Participants cheer when the figure of George Osborne is lifted by performers.

The inclusion of Rough Music elements in *HOUND* demonstrated some of its potential in freeing participants to behave differently, in a joyful and collaborative manner. If transitions between modes are carefully managed and strategies devised to prevent active participants becoming a passive audience then it is possible that the ‘energy’ it generates and consumes can encompass all who participate.

## Conclusion

It is, in many ways, problematic to apply the analysis and feedback from my PaR to wider research questions underpinning my thesis. Any conclusions made, therefore, come with a caveat that takes into consideration the limitations and constraints of the

methodologies employed.<sup>33</sup> The sample of audience members was small, and did not fully represent a range of demographics which would have provided opportunities for further analysis: gender, age, ethnicity, and socio-economic background. The unpredictable nature of the everyday, creating numerous unforeseen incidents, also meant that any findings are, necessarily, specific to that particular audience on 14 September 2016. If the same audience members had engaged with *HOUND* the following day, or even at a different time on the same date, they would have encountered a different performance; as the everyday moulded and shaped their experience. The moving parts within the landscape, people running to catch their train, a person waiting at the traffic lights, all became potential characters within the narrative. The performance, beginning at 11am, took into account the critical timing of the lunch hour at Regent's Place, and was scheduled to maximize upon the rhythms and pace of choreographed movement within the occupied sites; the informal audience, for instance, gathering in Triton Square for lunch. There were multiple uncontrollable factors, such as the unseasonably hot weather, which changed the performance aesthetically, spatially, temporally, and physically.

Nevertheless, although any conclusions are therefore necessarily tentative, the feedback given is, at least, highly suggestive in pointing to ways forward when considering theatricalized dissent.

*HOUND* was designed with the overarching aim of testing the efficacy of theatricalizing dissent. And, for some participants, the experience was indeed an overtly political one, provoking critical reflection:

It made me quite angry, because there were people walking through a space [Regent's Place], which, if you didn't know, you wouldn't know was private. I mean civil liberties; I have no problem with people sitting in their suits. But if you're not there doing the same as everyone else, then you are suspicious. It's fascinating. You can do whatever you want and be whoever you want to be. There was nothing about us walking from the forest [metallic structure on Triton Street] to the main square, but it caused a lot of problems with security. (*HOUND* Participants 2016d)

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<sup>33</sup> Time, resources, and budget constraints also informed the chosen methodologies. For instance, it would have been interesting to stage the performance at different times, with varied audiences; potentially introducing the aspect of working in teams, to provide a series of results where I could assess the efficacy of each mode by controlling more factors. Such an endeavour, though, would have required a much larger budget and creative team.

The response of on-site security, in casting participants as suspicious, persons of interest even, led to a rich, productive discussion regarding the politics of space. In particular, the ownership of space and perceived threats to that ownership, led to a questioning of what constitutes threatening behaviour in that context. One participant commented, ‘it suggests all kind of weird anomalies about the power of freedoms’ whilst another pertinently asked, ‘how much of it is about ownership of space?’ (*HOUND* Participants 2016d).

Overall, though, the performance did not entirely succeed in its aim of debunking myths surrounding the austerity narrative. The character of Tina, for instance, was not widely recognized as personifying the economy. Nevertheless, I would argue that something far more nuanced, and ultimately profound, was happening. As with Tomkins’s experience in Platform’s *And While London Burns*, the direct relationship between Tina’s voice and the walker is ‘stitched together via the city, its map, its history, our collective histories and futures’ (2011, 237). Participants experienced the landscape, moving through both the geography of the area and through the events of the past, bringing their own associations, memories, and narratives to the space and time they journeyed through. This traversing across and between times was particularly affective, according to participants, at the site of the historic battle between residents and property developers in Tolmers Square; perhaps exemplifying Schneider’s strength of repetition (as discussed in Chapter One):

An action repeated again and again and again, however fractured or partial or incomplete, has a kind of staying power – persists through time – and even, in a sense, serves as a fleshy kind of ‘document’ of its own recurrence. (2011, 37)

The staying power of the activism and sense of community once present in Tolmers Square was, potentially, made more pertinent and affective because *HOUND* participants were, quite literally, seeing and inhabiting an entirely different site. The square the activists had aimed to protect no longer existed, yet participants occupied the spot where a Victorian square had once stood: a past they were re-constructing from the historical photo they requested live. Moments such as this one provoked a sense of loss *and* commemoration, marking the historic efforts of the previous residents of Tolmers Square. Further meanings for participants emerged as the connections between the past and present were consolidated, as they brought their



own concerns to the site, the precarity of living in London: the housing crisis, ‘Generation Rent’ and gentrification. The fact that the residents in Drummond Street too are currently undergoing a similar experience to Tolmers Square’s previous residents is significant; tying the concerns of contemporary local residents who are situated less than a minute’s walk from Tolmers Square, with the past, and, so in a sense, continuing the battle of Tolmers Square.

The performance also allowed participants to contemplate their own responses to different sites. The strongest and most affective moments within the performance, then, were not the grander, public forms of theatrical dissent, but the quieter, more subtle moments, prompted by observational comments made in the audio walk, which concerned space, and the staging of political ideas within that space; the staging of ordered leisure within Triton Square, for instance.

Whilst the performance may not have provoked the political understanding I had planned, it did provoke strong emotions and critical responses from participants, based on new understandings of their own positions:

Going through the estate, I got lost as well, and it really made me think about how intimidated I was in that space and how comfortable I was in the other. I think that was a really well made point, quite poignant. (*HOUND* Participants 2016d)

If not framed in a conventional political rhetoric, responses, such as these, can be understood, in a broader sense, as being political. One participant considered Tina as representing those who feel ‘disenfranchised in the system these days, which is most people I think’ (*HOUND* Participants 2016d). Far from reading Tina as the economy, for this participant, Tina represented the ‘Everywoman, so that I could relate to [her] a lot’ (*HOUND* Participants 2016d). Rather than understanding Tina as the personification of a particular abstraction, this participant universalized Tina to represent widespread societal disenfranchisement. Participants projected their own concerns onto the performance and saw them reflected back, anew and slightly changed: ‘It really revealed a lot about myself’ (*HOUND* Participants 2016d).

The performance aimed to create both order in providing a cohesive, tightly structured experience and also disorder, giving participants freedom to participate, to perform, in a range of modalities, outside the security of a theatre; to find order, not underneath

the ‘chaos - utter randomness as you look around’ (Rees 2016, 4) of Tina’s world, which masks an essential order, but through it, to engender an ordered ‘mess’ which would produce a creative dynamism. The intention of the PaR was, in a sense, to guide participants from one stage to another, leading them by the hand to a point where the game enveloped them, creating a sense of joy and willingness to participate. However, the balance between order and disorder proved a difficult one to maintain; at times there was insufficient structure (from Section D to Section E, for instance): the fusion between the forms in order to create a continuous performance could have been more seamless; the transitions between the performance modes could have been smoother; fluidly, and gently bringing the participant from one modality to the next. At times, the abrupt shifts in theatricality (especially towards the latter section of the performance) jarred. Unlike the mode of walking, which, according to Solnit, ‘moves through space like a thread through fabric, sewing it together into a continuous experience’ (2014, xv), participants could feel the delineation of each mode leaving an imprint, which shaped the following experience.

Nevertheless, the unintended jarring of the shifts in mode worked to make the familiar strange. Participants may have felt unsettled, dislocated, overwhelmed even, but, to some extent at least, the jarring created a sense of alertness, of active engagement, and critical awareness. Furthermore, despite the problematic nature of the transitions between modes, the performance provided participants with a wide array of experiences, moments of heightened engagement which provoked profound, quiet reflection and evoked emotion:

I think it provided further confirmation of my views on austerity, I’d known theoretically about a lot of things but not really engaged with it. Perhaps the engagement of the day and meeting people has created a better emotional bond with those views. (*HOUND* Participants 2016d)

And throughout the performance participants felt a range of emotions: ‘I got angrier at times, then excited at times! [...] I felt really relaxed when I was listening to the tracks about historical facts around London, but then stressed and angry’ (*HOUND* Participants 2016d). Overall, from looking at the photographic evidence, we can see the engagement of participants in each of the performance modes, and often it is a joyful one.

Significantly, the pervasive game also demonstrated how even very gentle performances or activities can yet be perceived as subversive. The notion that the behaviour demonstrated by participants was perceived as threatening, simply by engaging in a game, articulates the need for further artistic exploration and experimentation in this area in order to articulate more potent forms of theatrical dissent. Despite the challenges that the collaboration in the pervasive game posed, the frame of a game did embolden participants' behaviour to such a degree that they engaged in a playful task in the highly orchestrated space of Regent's Place. Photographs (Figures 5.12; 5.18; 5.19) document the pleasure they took in such a simple task, which, in this context, became mischievous.<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps, though, the most interesting finding was unintentional, as O'Connor would state, a happy accident (O'Connor in Heddon, Milling 2006, 198). The performance of *HOUND* inadvertently mirrored aspects of Rough Music in a completely unforeseen fashion; not through masking, promenading or creating discord, but in establishing a sign system in which signs could be read. If we return to Ingram's discussion of the semiotic meaning of charivari performances (discussed in Chapter One) we can start to understand a strong correlation between the focus on characteristic symbols and signs in *HOUND* and Rough Music:

Cognitively, charivaris helped to organize a variety of experiences (domestic, political and festive) within a single conceptual framework, the connections being made through the principle of analogy or correspondence. Integral to the total pattern were the characteristic symbols which gave concrete expression to the underlying system of ideas and provided reinforcing layers of correspondence. (1984, 98)

Similarly, *HOUND* organized a variety of experiences (in this case performative, political, and playful) within the framework of a performance, where the pattern of signs and symbols in the landscape gave concrete expression to the underlying system of ideas regarding power structures in society. The role of surveillance, derelict buildings, and security represented overarching ideas and created a consistent through line within the performance. Casual remarks from Tina drew attention towards the ways in which design and architecture shape behaviour. The 'No Ball Games' sign in Munster Square, for instance, activated participants in encouraging them to read the

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<sup>34</sup> Of course, the notion of creating mischief has been examined in Chapter Three, when discussing *Climate Games*.

landscape accordingly, actively interpreting the multitude of signs and visual clues surrounding them.

In analyzing the efficacy of the PaR in dismantling and subverting the staging of austerity through theatricalizing dissent, I return to the critical question posed by Kershaw: ‘what are methods for, but to ruin our experiments?’ (2009a, 115). Two precise methods did, to a degree, ‘ruin’ my PaR experiment: first, in applying the practice of Rough Music to the model of an unsanctioned Guerrilla Performance and second, in understanding Rough Music as the expansion of a game and potential entry point into activism. Both of these methodologies proved problematic in practice, in terms of a shift in theatricality which unsettled some participants. Such ruin, however, was extremely generative. For some participants, it literally jolted them as they were put in a position where they questioned whether they were willing to participate in an unsanctioned Guerrilla Performance. It pushed them to their limits in terms of their individual commitment to dissent, demanding a stand of sorts to be taken: engage and interact or dis-associate from the performance.

### **Towards New Research Ecologies (Section F)**

This PaR marked the beginning of my explorations regarding the creation of dynamic research ecologies. The discussion, held after the performance of *HOUND* was an important part of this ecology. One participant remarked that he ‘quite liked that opening out to a larger, collective discourse’ (*HOUND* Participants 2016d) in relation to an informal discussion after the audio walk. The discussion of the more remarkable incidents, the sharing interpretations of space, behaviours, observations, and moments which were particular and unique to participants, was very valuable. This part of the performance demonstrated far more cohesive and smooth forms of collaboration than the pervasive game. Through the mode of reflection, participants were able to demonstrate a strong collaborative ethos which they had not exhibited in action. I had prepared a series of provocations and questions to structure the discussion, but the discussion in a sense took on a life of its own; as participants responded to one another, my questions became unnecessary. This part of the performance, initially understood as most helpful for my own research, became an important part of participants’ experience: a collective improvisation which gave time and space in

which to reflect. The discussion offered participants moments of empowerment and agency in contributing their own layers of narrative and interpretation to the performance.

Future research regarding theatrical forms of dissent will undoubtedly explore different performance structures: primarily, in creating a structure which allows the work 'to breathe'. In the discussion, one participant commented that he would have appreciated 'more time. I like the experience of allowing things to work through me which I think was lost a little bit' (*HOUND* Participants 2016d). My response to this comment was to ask, 'you would have appreciated more time, to allow the work to breathe?' (*HOUND* Participants 2016d). And this notion, of providing critical moments for an audience to pause, to take a breath, in a sense, and to allow the work to breathe, is significant, in creating time for the work to have an impact.

Additionally, the PaR was constrained by budget and resources. Future versions will benefit, too, from scale, in terms of numbers of performers and participants in order to create a much more accessible performance. There is also the opportunity to create a strong social media strategy to allow the performance to be disseminated across platforms; to create an online presence where iterations of the performance could be repeated, potentially reaching a much wider audience.

Overall, future performances that theatricalize dissent will need to practise the art of making strange in order to make conflict visible. The performance of *HOUND* did, to an extent, make conflict visible: the conflict between a disembodied, directing, absent voice and the embodied presence of the walker, following direction; the conflict between historical incidents of resistance and those currently working to suppress resistance; the conflict between sanctioned and unsanctioned play presented live and unrehearsed in front of participants in Regent's Place. To begin even unravelling the complex web of relationships between economic, political, and social power structures and institutions, performances need to acknowledge their existence, which *HOUND* took as a starting point. Yet, the depth of these interlocking connections, buried beneath what we understand and accept as normal, is vast. Unravelling and challenging what is accepted as normal, reinforced through architecture, societal expectations, behaviours, and institutions, will require multiple performances of

dissent, performed online, in person, in the theatre, and on the streets, in order to continue the practice of making strange.

## Conclusion

The impetus for performing theatrical dissent has obviously changed between the years 2013 and 2017, the years in which I researched, practised, and wrote my thesis. Profound political, social, economic, and ecological changes have taken place. I was overtaken by political realities in my own performance, *HOUND*, staged on 14 September 2016, as George Osborne (arguably, a pioneer in implementing austerity measures) was replaced by Philip Hammond as Chancellor of the Exchequer on 13 July 2016. In the formal UK political sphere alone we have seen the Scottish independence referendum in 2014; a re-election of a Conservative government in 2015; the EU referendum in 2016; the advent of Brexit; David Cameron's exit off the political stage and Theresa May's entrance on it; her near defeat in yet another election in 2017. This acceleration is not, it seems, restricted to the UK.

If we turn briefly to the world stage, the influence of US President Donald Trump has shifted the ground specifically in relation to theatrical dissent. If we consider Trump's use of Twitter, for example, as a tool to reach the electorate directly, and his highly performative style in directly contradicting what he brands as 'Fake News', evidently, we encounter new political realities in which to stage theatrical dissent; different circumstances in which to work. How far can we subvert performances of power through satire, for instance, if the most seemingly satirical performances to be found are performed by people in power, such as Trump?<sup>1</sup> Climate change activists, for example, have had to shift tack entirely, being forced into the defensive position of proving the existence of climate change, as opposed to climate change deniers having to provide evidence for their claims. However, it is also possible that such changes have produced good opportunities for practitioners of theatrical dissent as some people, at least, respond to a post-truth world by reasserting an allegiance to the values of truth, authenticity, and integrity.

It is also worth noting that the causes my case studies sought to raise – climate justice, ecology, the environment, democracy, and anti-austerity – have all attracted

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<sup>1</sup> I directed this question to the culture-jammer Igor Vamos (co-creator of the Yes Men) at a Sussex University workshop (26 May 2017). Vamos' answer, that he was not sure how to proceed in the current climate, was telling. A discussion followed where participants mooted the idea that the rise of fake news, or at least the idea of a rising popularity in fake news, did not leave space for culture-jamming tactics. After all, if people are suspicious of sources, then the surprise element of the Yes Men's tactics may have less impact.

heightened interest since 2013. If we take a closer look at the issue of austerity, for example, researchers have been occupied with documenting and disseminating the human cost of such measures, from the rise in food banks, child poverty, homelessness, and, for the first time in twenty years, a shortened life expectancy.<sup>2</sup> An event such as the Grenfell Tower fire on 14 June 2017 has firmly brought the effects of austerity, the human cost, into the wider public sphere. The extra scrutiny brought to these topics by community organizers, journalists, and researchers has provided further opportunities for theatrical dissent practitioners to attract those who would not necessarily see themselves as political activists; to widen the dissenting community.

It has been in this swiftly-changing context that activists and artists examined in this thesis have needed to find an effective response. My analysis of their responses suggests there are certain factors that are conducive to staging efficacious protest performance:

### **1. Strategy and tactics**

Staged theatrical dissent is but one aspect of the work undertaken. It also includes organization, planning, and research; as illustrated by the extent of BP or Not BP's research, lobbying, campaigning, and collaborating with grassroots organizations. It is essential to have a detailed understanding of the target, site, security protocol, legal implications, media platforms, as well as the staging and documentation of the performance.

### **2. The choice of target**

Political organizer and member of *Beautiful Trouble*, Nadine Bloch, has provided a methodology entitled 'The Spectrum of Allies' (as illustrated in Figure 6.1), a tool helpful for precisely identifying campaign aims and targets. The aim of many demonstrations and marches, such as the Stop the War march (2003), was to focus upon the section Bloch calls 'active opposition': in that particular case, the government, and MPs in support of the military invasion of Iraq. However, as Bloch highlights, such a strategy is problematic

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<sup>2</sup> The cost of these measures has been well documented. Food poverty, including the use of food banks, has been recorded by numerous studies (Cooper, Dumpleton 2013; Trussell Trust 2017; Ifan 2017); rising child poverty has also been widely reported (Robb 2017; Royston, Whitham 2017); as has the rise in homelessness (Fitzpatrick 2017; Butler 2017). An 'unprecedented' rise in the UK mortality rate was recorded in March 2017 (Seekings 2017).



in that, beyond the symbolic expression of dissent, targeting a campaign at the ‘active opposition’ is unlikely to yield results. Instead, a campaign is better advised to begin with:

- Active Allies: people who agree with you and are fighting alongside you.
- Passive Allies: people who agree with you but aren’t (yet) doing anything about it.
- The Neutrals: the unengaged and uninformed. (Bloch 2017)

The overall aim of campaigns, as the diagram illustrates, is to move people from an area of neutrality or inaction, to become active allies. Identifying precisely who these people, organizations, or parties may be is critical in terms of designing and staging theatricalized dissent.

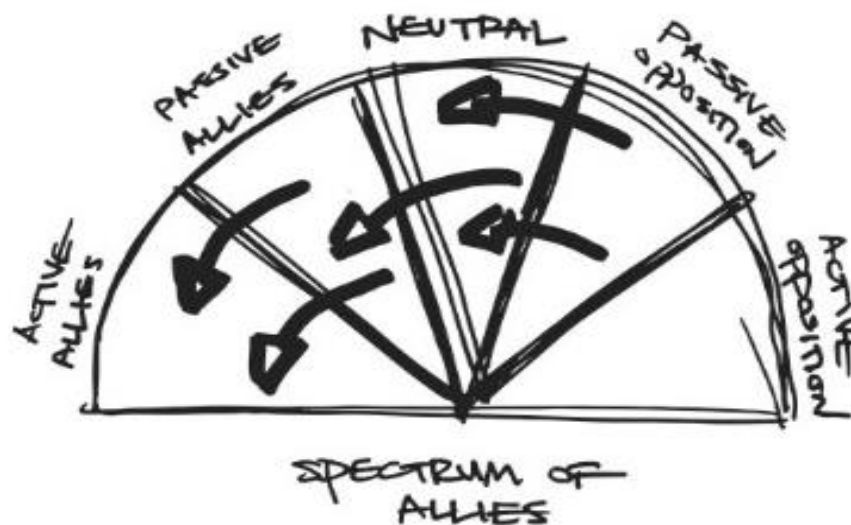


Figure 6.1: The Spectrum of Allies, Nadine Bloch.

If we consider Liberate Tate, and BP or Not BP in relation to this tool, both collectives aimed to persuade active allies (grassroots campaigns), passive allies (such as the PCS union), and neutral parties (museum visitors).

Although their Guerrilla Performances were staged in the site of active opposition, their performances aimed to mobilize people and organizations who were not already actively opposing their cause. In a similar way, this is

precisely what OLSX did, in functioning within the moral frame of St Paul's Cathedral. Its performances compelled Cathedral employees to respond. Giles Fraser, for instance, may have initially been a 'passive ally', but due to OLSX's performance of dissent, he shifted to become an active ally; publicly stating his opposition to the eviction of protesters, and resigning. The tactic of undermining the moral justification and authority of institutions is effective when the institution purports to hold certain ethical principles, as the dissonance of their position is exposed; which was the case with Liberate Tate's performances. I employed this tactic in *HOUND* in targeting participants and an audience that may have, at least partly, been composed of passive allies / neutrals / passive opposition; the participants equally may well have been passive allies or neutral.

### **3. Providing different shifts and tensions: a double-ness**

Davis summarizes what this double-ness may achieve:

A great artwork embraces paradox and contains multiple, sometimes contradictory truths. [...] it's this quality that gives a socially engaged art project the ability to reframe, reshape, or, for a moment, redistribute power. (in Davis, B., and others 2016, 454)

Creating theatrical dissent which offers participants or spectators diverse, layered experiences is a common feature of my thesis case studies. Occupy's performances of dissent, for example, momentarily redistributed power, bridging the everyday and moments of intense rupture. Similarly, the *D12* performance, framed as part of *Climate Games*, offered participants both the strength of solidarity and also the carefreeness of play through the use of simple, material objects. *HOUND*, in a similar way, was designed to create precise moments which pushed participants, even unsettling them, before offering space for critical realization.

#### **4. The importance of affect in avoiding didacticism**

Nato Thompson points out the potential dangers of not focusing upon affect:

We followed scientific knowing like a deity, and our over-reliance on facts, proof, and that which is visible and replicable has put us in a precarious relationship with each other, with the planet, and with all matter. To regain our sense of connection, agency, and empathy – which are vital to a just and sustainable society – we must consider the different kinds of questions and outcomes that artists are proposing as indispensable to our system of knowledge production. (Nato Thompson, in Davis, B., and others 2016, 462)

One of these different kinds of questions focuses on how affect may be channelled effectively in performances of dissent. James Thompson, in discussing applied performance, argues for the ‘end of effect’ (2011), stating that applied theatre is limited if it ‘concentrates solely on effects – identifiable social outcomes, messages or impacts – and forgets the radical potential of the freedom to enjoy beautiful radiant things’ (2011, 6). He discusses the affective dimension as having radical potential, which the case studies examined here have, to a degree, illustrated. However, separating the effect from the affect, at least when considering acts of theatrical dissent, is to do them a disservice: the performances in this thesis have been joint enterprises. To focus solely on effect, the political outcomes, messages or impacts is to risk creating didactic work (the telling, rather than the showing); whereas to focus only on affect, the artistic and emotional effects of engaging with the work, is to strip the work of its political intention. As such, these works cannot be understood as art first, politics second, nor politics first, art second. In efficacious acts of theatrical dissent, they are one entity.

Theatrical dissent should have a distinct affective dimension: to move participants and spectators emotionally is a critical tactic in inviting people to interact with, and respond to, a political argument. There is power, then, or as Thompson frames it, radical potential, in participating in, and witnessing, beautiful, radiant things. In terms of performing political commitment, we can relate this to the aesthetic present, to a lesser or greater degree, in all case studies examined. And, arguably, the works discussed in this thesis have produced radiance, including visual

radiance, in their work: from the sight of Liberate Tate performers using their bodies as instruments of dissent in marking the Tate floor with charcoal (Chapter Two), to the labour intensive art works created by Burning Man participants (Chapter Four); from the image of an oil spill, splurging down the British Museum's central staircase, created by performers animating umbrellas by BP or Not BP (Chapter Two) to the choreography of an Occupy General Assembly, with the crowd engaged in performing the same actions to express their opinions (Chapter Four). Of course, radiance is difficult to measure. It is personal: what moves one person may not move another. It is significant, though, that these works have drawn upon humour, play, the politics of pleasure, the creation of a TAZ in liberating time, imagination, and space, in order to enact protest. These tactics are designed to have an emotional effect on spectators: to inspire and delight. These practitioners have strayed far from the traditional protest repertoire precisely because these forms are, to an extent, predictable but more importantly, because they may not be engaging. It is important too, to acknowledge the role which affect plays in terms of sustenance. The participants in these works – the occupiers, the protesters, the performers – are emotionally connected to the protest performances they have staged, to each other, and the wider social movement. And what is more, these social bonds are strengthened each time theatrical dissent is staged, moving towards the sharing of experiences of 'meaning making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world' (Dolan, 2005, 2).

## **5. Making strange**

This is perhaps the tactic which has been drawn upon most overtly in my thesis case studies. It is the consistent through-line which brings each act of theatrical dissent together: whether discussing the effects of the gifting culture upon Burning Man participants, the audio-walk in *HOUND*, or the role of material objects in *D12* in *Climate Games*. The aim of shifting perception to raise political awareness, ensuring the critical alertness of spectators so that the world is seen slightly differently, is in itself an act of dissent which might be the prelude to a further and more sustained dissent. Whether the cause of a campaign relates to the environment, democracy, or austerity, shifting perception so that what is deemed

to be normal, natural, or innate, is understood to be none of these things, is the first step for mobilization.

If we return to the Spectrum of Allies, and consider a person who may be categorized as a Passive Ally, or Neutral, then the tactic of making strange may provide the catalyst, not only to jolt a received view of the world, but to tilt perception sufficiently to allow a shift in role to that of an Active Ally.

Since beginning this thesis in 2013, theatrical dissent or, as others may define it, forms of creative activism or perhaps socially engaged performance, have received a surge of interest, not only from activists, artists, and practitioners keen to utilize this form in the field, but also from the established art world. Activist MacPhee's feeling of being 'tired of artists fetishizing activist culture and showing it to the world as though it were their invention' (MacPhee in Thompson, N. 2012, 31) is particularly relevant here. Association with the art world, arguably, runs the risk of de-politicizing the work. Rehearsing well-trodden debates concerning whether theatrical dissent may be understood as 'art or activism' may seem to be a diversion; but the ways in which theatrical dissent is increasingly perceived as part of the art world means, now more than ever, that it is vital to retain our critical faculties in analyzing *what the work is doing*.

Classifying acts of theatrical dissent as art affords it a status, a discourse, a set of behavioural expectations, and efficacy criteria that differ from those used to measure protest performance as a form of activism. It can, arguably, dissent in topic but not in form, very much like the performance I co-created, *Make Tea, Not War* (2013), in posing questions but not in mobilizing or activating self-selecting audiences attending cultural venues. Critic Ben Davis summarized his concerns regarding socially engaged performance, 'is this strand of art a starting point for addressing social problems, or a distraction that keeps us from seeing their true extent?' (2013). He draws upon *Project Row Houses* (a rehabilitation project in Houston, Texas, which began in 1994 and aimed to transform 'shotgun' houses into a series of residences and artists' properties) to elucidate his point. However efficacious this project was, and continues to be, for many people, its list of sponsors makes for interesting reading:

Among the patrons listed [...], along with Chevron [...], is Bank of America – currently in the crosshairs for making a deliberate policy of deceiving home owners hit by the housing crisis, extracting extra profits by keeping them languishing in misery. (Davis 2013)

Significantly, corporate sponsorships such as these point to the efficacy of such projects; in this case, in improving the companies' tarnished reputations, it facilitates performances of generosity. Understanding *Project Row Houses* as a form of theatrical dissent, however, remains problematic precisely because it, as Davis would have it, acts as a distraction that keeps us from seeing the true extent of the social problems. The project, which aims to make visible the lack of affordable housing, is complicit in accepting funds from a corporation which has partly caused the problem it seeks to challenge. Such work can hardly be deemed radical, or threatening; however much good it does on the ground. If corporations do not perceive theatrical dissent as a threat, but seek to align themselves with the work, then it can hardly be deemed to be efficacious theatrical dissent. As funder Fisher summarizes, 'we need to acknowledge how art functions [...] as a symbol that distances the powerful from their ideology' (Deborah Fisher, in Davis, B., and others 2016, 438). Acts of theatrical dissent do not need to collude in this. Instead, they could seek to close that distance by bringing the ideology of the powerful to the forefront of their symbolic actions. Corporate sponsorships are just one example of the art world's influence in co-opting forms of theatrical dissent. Questions relating to audience accessibility, cultural spaces, and entrance fees are ways by which we can see how far theatrical dissent can be shifted from its aims. Theatrical dissent, after all, is not art which pretends to do politics, but which does politics.

The intersections between art, performance, and protest are obviously complex. During the process of researching this thesis, through study and practice, my understanding evolved considerably. My initial approach suggested that I thought of performance in either artistic terms *or* political impact: I was analyzing and participating in performances as though they were distinct from political impact. At a later stage, my written analysis neglected the performance side of things, seeing performances as measurable steps in a political campaign. It was only when I started to take on board how far each complemented and fed into the other that I began to

comprehend how significant it was to perceive the interventions, and what they were opposing, in performative terms. Perceiving and analyzing BP's corporate sponsorship of the British Museum, for instance, not as one performance of Corporate Citizen but as layered personas, was critical in understanding precisely the gains BP makes through its partnership. Comprehending issues, events, and actions in performance terms exposes how power works. It is a methodology which demands we see everything in terms of power; whether that is the construction of architecture which demarcates leisurely space in Regent's Place (Chapter Five, *HOUND*) or the ways in which inflatable cobblestones in *D12* in Paris (Chapter Three) brought people together; creating an unpredictable performance which unsettled security. After all, each of the case studies aimed to undermine or challenge a powerful entity. Unpicking and teasing out the performances of the powerful – in order to reveal their performative nature – is a critical means of executing efficacious acts of theatrical dissent.

Questions regarding efficacy have dominated this thesis. It has remained a 'thorny' (Rowe 2013, 5) methodology for analyzing theatrical dissent; its definition has shifted in accordance with the particular performance in question. Ascertaining the efficacy of performance in contemporary political protest for each case study has demanded the use of separate and distinct criteria; different benchmarks have been used to analyze the impact of each performance. An efficacious Guerrilla Performance staged in the Tate (Chapter Two), for instance, differs vastly, in terms of what it actually does, when compared to an efficacious performance of the everyday, staged as dissent in the OLSX protest camp (Chapter Four). Liberate Tate (Chapter Two), for instance, was deemed successful due to its potential impact upon policy, the extent of disruption, dissemination of the performance, its mobilization, and ability to shift tactics as events unfolded. The efficacy of OLSX's performances (Chapter Four), on the other hand, was measured differently, taking into account the impact of prefigurative performances of direct democracy on participants and informal audiences, its use of moral framing in drawing upon the narratives of the Church; the double-ness of its performances of precarity.

It is clear, then, that no universal conclusions regarding efficacious protest performance can be drawn: it is entirely context driven. And, unlike many performances staged in the theatre, it is extremely unpredictable, with multiple,

uncontrollable factors at play. If we take a closer look at *Climate Games*, for example (Chapter Three), we can see how far the realization of performances changed, in response to the aftermath of the terror attacks. The location of *D12* changed, the level of security was raised, as armed soldiers were positioned on the streets, protest was banned and deemed illegal, and a State of Emergency declared; the very premise of its performance, the realm of play, was challenged as participants questioned whether such a form was appropriate in a context of grief and mourning. My role, in liaising with security during *HOUND* (Chapter Five), also affected the performance outcome. Had I not fulfilled this role, there may well have been further intervention in preventing the performance being staged. Theatrical dissent, then, is a form of resistance which is always in flux, shifting, and adapting as events unfold.

In considering what directions theatrical dissent may take in the near future, in order to produce affective and effective performances, it, arguably, becomes more important than ever to re-define what we mean by efficacy. It has never been my intention to apply a simple univocal understanding of the concept of success. My attempt to ascertain whether theatrical dissent was successful or otherwise would, arguably, be to use too blunt an instrument for a form which is so multifarious. Rather, I argue for an understanding of theatrical dissent in multiple ways, according to varying criteria, which specifically takes into account the context in which it was staged. As Nato Thompson highlights:

To talk about efficacy is difficult because outside of capitalism, we have very few metrics for the production of subjectivity. Capitalism at least has math. But the production of a more compelling, open-minded, liberated experience is very hard to prove. (Nato Thompson in Davis, B., and others 2016, 439)

Throughout my analysis of case studies, I have used quantifiable indices, arguably capitalist indices, to assess efficacy: I have identified strategies which may increase the impact of performances judged partly in terms of its dissemination, and size of immediate and virtual audiences. However, this approach, on its own, is insufficient. We need to move beyond the quantifiable and take into account different metrics; affective ones. And in order to do so, we may need to develop our own vocabularies to capture and analyze a performance practice which is necessarily difficult to define: its constantly changing tactics, playing out at times on the fringes of society, eludes our grasp. Perhaps we need to collaborate in re-evaluating our definition of efficacious theatrical dissent, in order to develop a sustainable methodology to



instigate change. If we insist on measuring practice using capitalist metrics, as Thompson puts it, we risk tying ourselves in knots. Theatrical dissent is mischievous, disobedient, and rebellious – some of the characteristics I aimed to incorporate in *HOUND*. We therefore need to widen our definition of efficacy to encompass all that this practice has to offer: joy, radiance, hope, connection, empathy, imagination, solidarity. These alternative ‘metrics’ are often dismissed, understood as not being substantial; as being far removed from what is needed to instigate and implement change. It is, arguably though, what performance does best. It moves us; affects us; gets inside us. Theatrical dissent is no different in this respect. It may be argued that it is just this aspect that allows activists to avoid the ‘Cruel Optimism’ (Berlant 2011) of attempting the labours of Sisyphus, by focusing on, and experiencing, the gains in the affective sphere. And ultimately, this affective dimension will act to sustain social movements. In stating that

the real strength of art works that engage the social or the political is putting something on the table that is often impoverished – the ability to imagine another future (Noah Simblist, in Davis, B., and others 2016, 439)

Noah Simblist is extolling the power that theatrical dissent may unleash in igniting our imaginations, and even momentarily in capturing an alternative future. However, he goes further by claiming that works of theatrical dissent may not only ‘put on the table’ the riches of an alternative future but also, crucially, a ‘methodology to get there’ (2016, 439).

In working to instigate change though, the experience of failure and defeat are inevitable. As Peter Schumann, of Bread and Puppet Theatre states, ‘our non-success is the most single energizer. It [protest] never goes anywhere. So you have to try again. It doesn’t work. Politics don’t change. Wars don’t stop. People aren’t equal’ (Schumann 2014). Measurable victories are few and far between. This, however, does not serve as a reason to stop engaging. In some respects failure should be welcomed as a means of allowing new understandings to flourish, as Lisa Le Feuvre argues, ‘failure, by definition, takes us beyond assumptions of what we think we know’ (2010, 12) and it is thus eminently suited to the world of dissent which aims to take others to a world beyond the status quo.

Further, each failure sheds new light on future directions for theatrical dissent, fostering creativity, raising questions, and provoking new forms. The notion of ‘embracing failure’ is a fundamental concept in performance, from clowning to Live Art. As live artist Julia Bardsley states, ‘the prospect of things falling apart, and of trying to get to the place where we are on the edge of total incomprehension, but still holding on – there’s something life-affirming in that situation’ (Bardsley in Johnson 2014, 153). Significantly though, despite championing failure, she specifically denotes the arena of art, the theatre, ‘as a safe space for witnessing failure’ (2014, 153). She does not assess the impact of not only witnessing but *experiencing* failure in a space not deemed to be safe: a space outside of the theatre-estate. As consistently argued in this thesis, theatrical dissent treads a fine line between art and political action: it is both. It problematizes our understanding of these lines, and yet the notion of welcoming failure on stage is certainly different to embracing it within a social movement. With this in mind, it is critical to understand embracing failure as an important part of sustaining forms of theatrical dissent and social movements. It is imperative to understand that no act occurs in isolation:

There will have to be many, many small victories and tiny, inspiring acts that lead up to any movement that makes even modest systematic changes in society. (Davis 448)

If practitioners can embrace the fact that they will fail, and then fail over again, taking it as a challenge and a provocation, then theatrical dissent may sustain and energize communities as they continue to create ‘beautiful trouble’ (Boyd, Oswald 2012).

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## **Appendix Two: *HOUND* (2016) Email to Participants and Script**

Hello [insert participant's name],

You and I are going to get to know one another a little better. Are you comfortable? I wanted to make contact. I get lonely sometimes, and I thought it would be good to introduce myself to you. I'm Tina. Never liked the name much, but that's how I'm known.

I like your name. [insert name]– it sounds friendly. Are you friendly? But it also sounds solid, and certain.

Anyway, before I ask you too many questions, and get too personal, shall I tell you a bit about myself? Well, despite everything that has been going on lately, I'm excited about Wednesday. The 14<sup>th</sup> of September. I probably shouldn't admit to it but I love adventure. I know that I'm asking a lot, and you will be doing all the legwork, so to speak, but I'm still excited. In my former life, I used to take risks every day. Charlie takes lots of risks too. Hopefully Charlie's last risk was one too many...

I don't mean to worry you. It will all be fine. I wonder, do you like playing games? Well, it doesn't really matter. Whatever happens on Wednesday is what you make of it. And it's not really a game-ish game. Anyway, I will be here to help you.

Wear comfortable shoes, and keep an eye on the weather. Looks like it might be a sunny day. You will be outside a fair bit. Bring some water and snacks if you're the kind of person that needs a boost mid-morning. And it's best not to carry a heavy bag if you can help it. Travel light!

I can't tell you too much about it. I don't want anyone else to know what I have planned. I have attached a map for your reference.

This is important –

For Wednesday, you need to download the tracks that I have attached for you here to your phone (or MP3 player). Make sure you use WIFI and not your data, otherwise it will cost you. Try the first track to make sure it works.

On Wednesday make sure your phone is fully charged and you have a set of headphones, noise reducing ones if you have them. Make sure you are familiar with using your music player too.

Send me your mobile phone number by replying to this email.

You will then receive a text message about the meeting place and time.

When you receive the text message – just send me a message back saying YES.

Finally, put my phone number into your phone too (xxxxxxxxxxx) – under the name of TINA.

I can't thank you enough for your help.

All the best,

Tina



## **Track 1**

Hello. This is a test. It's a technical thing really, just to check that everything is working in time for the real thing. Do not race ahead, save the rest of the tracks for the day in question. No cheating.

## **Track 2**

Hello again. Thank you so much for coming. I'm really grateful. Let's begin, we're on a bit of a deadline. I take it that you're at the correct meeting spot? You should be in Euston Station facing the departures board. You should also be there at your allotted time. If you already know that you're running late, then do try to keep up. Like I say, I'm really glad you're here but we have an important task today, and I will need your full attention.

I know it's likely to be very busy. Find a spot amongst the people. I want you to look at the departures board information. Part of today involves being unseen, so let's pretend you are waiting for a train. For a bit of guidance on how to do so, look to your fellow passengers. Hands in pockets. Stare at the board. Do not look at your phone though. I want your full concentration. I'm told that I can be a bit demanding, a bit bossy. I just need your help.

It's only fair that you know why you are here, there, at Euston Station, rather than me.

The truth is that I have been unwell for a long time, 8 years now. Before you start feeling sorry for me; don't. I'm not useless. I still provide. But...things are quite grave. It seems like the whole world is worried about my condition. Headline news! For a while I had no firm diagnosis. Even now, the professionals disagree. I suppose I was touched by all of the attention; lots of people wrote, the Experts argued about it. But pretty quickly, one course of medicine was prescribed. And for better or worse, 8 years on, I'm still taking it.

The course of treatment has helped in some ways.....at least I think it has, that's what people keep telling me. But to be frank, in many ways I feel worse actually. Like anyone who is ill for such a long time, I feel like I'm treading water. At the moment, I feel like I'm drowning. The medicine is bitter. But the doctor says I need even more medicine to get better. And medicine is expensive.

Of course, it was Charlie who started all of this. I told you about Charlie, didn't I? A risk taker. A pleasure seeker. Hedonistic, never thinking about the consequences. Never thinking about the impact or the outcome. Not even caring that all that selfishness would lead directly to my illness. Charlie and I have a long history. And despite everything, I continue to provide. Even now. And all Charlie does is take. It's like stealing.

There are thieves everywhere. Probably some of the people around you right now are thieves. So, be careful today. But now I really think you should begin. I think it's about time I got some support. So I need you to help me find Charlie. When you are ready, text the word START to me.

### **Track 3**

You are probably wondering why we're here. Well, why not? With 42,000,952 entries and exits a year, you are either standing in a very successful brothel or the sixth busiest station in the UK. I'll let you decide. And maybe you'll be the forty two million, nine hundred and fifty third. Are you the sort of person who likes that fact and might store it for later? Or does that number leave you a little cold, standing static as you are, amongst the comings and goings, the counting. Does it make you feel... a bit insignificant? For me, I like numbers, I like order. This place looks like chaos – utter randomness as you look around. A heaving pinball machine of commuters and tourists, drifters and strays. But what I like is the façade. Underneath it all, it's one neatly ticking mechanism – a treadmill of tap in, tap out, whistle blows, train goes. Tap in, Tap out, whistle blows, train goes. One train enthusiast called it 'a great bath, full of smooth, slippery surfaces where people can be sloshed about efficiently.' I like that image, of all the suds spilling over and out into the streets, heaving and sucking in and out. We're back to the brothel again. But if you try, you'll hear the quiet efficiency of it. Ignore the hubbub and really listen. An assured hum of certainty. There's comfort in that. Certainty. Stability.

If you like, you could wander around the station, look at people...the action. No-one knows you're talking to me. Does that give you a thrill? More than that figure earlier did? See, I'm getting to know you already. Although it's not true of course. If you let your eyes gaze a little higher than the departures board you'll see a border of cameras. Quite inconspicuous at first, you'd probably never even look up there. But they are looking down at you. Watching where you walk. Watching where you stand still. If

you like you could pick a camera and give it a cheeky wave. Maybe all the cameras will turn to look at you. Maybe no-one's watching at all. What do you think?

This station has a story. It was named after Euston Hall in Suffolk, the ancestral home of the Dukes of Grafton, the main landowners in the area. This place was more or less farmland back then and the locals protested, of course, farmers waved pitchforks. But as you can see, it was to no avail. It was the first intercity railway station in London, adjoining London and Birmingham. Bringing people together. Like so many things in life that are designed to connect people though, it quickly became divisive. Why? Well, because it's so ugly for a start. 'Hideous', 'lacking in style', 'a dingy grey, horizontal nothingness' and utterly of its time. I can sympathise with that. Not the appearance, although people do insult me. People like Charlie. They misunderstand me, they blame me. But I don't mean any of that. I mean being of my time. I bear the symptoms of my time, all the hallmarks of it. I'm in a situation which might sound familiar but which is utterly unique. In the future there might be a cure but...

Anyway, where were we? We were here, in a humming concrete box, talking about pitchforks and protests, facades and facelifts. Those who go beyond the superficial still find this place divisive. A lot of them would say knock the whole thing down and start again. Which is what they want to do, sort of. If they get the expansion they're hoping for, then this area will change, develop, progress. Houses will be demolished – some much needed; some investment properties with transient tenants and magnolia walls; others with purpose-built but neatly apportioned rooms, utility rooms, spare rooms, gardens. So yes, houses will be demolished but something new will be constructed in its place.

New high speed trains will connect people like never before, and divide others. It's swings and roundabouts really. Well, unless they happen to be in the path of all those new expanded platforms that is...

You *are* being watched though. You knew that, of course. If you look up towards the ceiling you will see how well observed you are – those little rectangles on the edges of the ceiling house CCTV. Do a 360 degrees turn, taking in the cameras. If you're feeling brave, give a cheeky wave.

Listen, that's enough from me. We need to get a move on. Play the next track.

#### **Track 4**

Go back to where you started – facing the departures board. You should see the Body Shop to your right. If the departures board is 12 o'clock, turn to face 5 o'clock. Can you see Fat Face? Walk in that direction.

There's an escalator too, with the first class lounge upstairs. No, we're not going there. Instead, keep walking towards WH Smith and Fat Face. By the way, I am offering you a completely impartial set of directions. There are of course other stationers and clothing stores. However, there is an exit close to these stores and it is the one you need. So go on, exit the station at the yellow sign saying 'Way Out, Number 2, Euston Road'. It's above the door and it says 'Way Out, Number 2, Euston Road.'

*Chillin Hard (Kevin MacLeod) music plays for one minute.*

You should be outside now. Turn right towards the statue. See a figure? That's Robert Stevenson, a railway man. Walk towards him.

*Chillin Hard (Kevin MacLeod) music plays for one minute.*

When you reach the statue, turn left – you will see a sign saying Podium and some trees. Walk towards them. To your right you will see a sculpture celebrating the works of Erwin Piscator, no less. If you know who he is, that is. No-one will think less of you if you don't. Take a small detour towards this if that sort of thing interests you. Otherwise, head straight for the trees.

*Chillin Hard (Kevin MacLeod) music plays for 30 seconds.*

There is a small green in front of you and beyond that, the busy Euston Road. Follow the pavement around to the left. Notice its curve and its definite control of your direction. You could have strolled with the grass between your toes but if you had, you'd only have ended up at a fence and had to double back. So be like me, follow advice. Follow the course.

You should pass the Euston Tap. It looks like two temples, with a road in between it. It's actually a pub – more Charlie's kind of temple. Make your way to the nearest

traffic lights and cross with care. When you have crossed Euston Road, play the next track.

*Chillin Hard (Kevin MacLeod) music plays for two minutes.*

## **Track 5**

Good. I want you to go through the gate into the garden up ahead. Breathe deeply in and out. Can you smell the flowers? The trees or blossom? If you turn your back to the road can you block out the smell of exhaust fumes? When you look down at your feet are you in London? Do you have to be? When you see some engraved paving stones, feel free to take a look. Keep your wits about you though. Whatever smells nice or otherwise, we are in London after all, and you have no idea where Charlie might be. Charlie's stolen from me and won't hesitate to steal from you.

Today I'm going to take you on a walk through London. Let's call it a way of getting to know me. I can't remember a time when I wasn't here, although things haven't always looked the same. I've had crashes; I've had booms; ups and downs... But if we get caught up in nostalgia we'll never get anywhere. Why don't you find a bench, by the way? You don't have to stand to attention.

I say some things have changed. But this hasn't. Friends House. It's been here since 1927. Of course their leading attraction nowadays may well be their well-reviewed café on Tripadvisor, or their 1000 capacity auditorium. It's called "The Light" Have you seen it? But then, it depends what you're looking for. George Fox founded the Quakers, whose natural domain tends to err on the side of compassion, humanism, equality, pacifism. That's what we know them for. Friends indeed. And yet, on their emergence, they were lauded as a blasphemous challenge to the social and political order. Their conscientious objection during WW2 was reviled by many. A slyer fox than we've been led to believe. Certainly, this building has housed many movements. Occupy has found shelter between its walls. The Stop The War coalition organised the largest protest in human history in this building: the demonstration against the Iraq war, if you were wondering. Or maybe you were there. Inside, the bookshop is a seething hotbed of protest; the kind with inspirational tea-towels. We can't go on, the people say. We can't take any more. We must resist. Some people say resistance is futile, but I try to stay out of it. Keep taking the medicine, keep my head down. So the

Quakers are feisty. Friendly on the outside, but with a bite when it comes to the important things – prison reform, social justice. When the cause is right. Or the price. Because let's not forget that just like Euston station, this is a piece of prime real estate. Plenty of rooms in here. And let's recall that our dear old BBC described the Quakers as natural capitalists. A new label. I don't know what you'd call people like Charlie – natural consumer perhaps. The Quakers have done rather better for themselves though. Founding financial institutions such as Barclays, Lloyds and Friends Provident, and sweeter enterprises like Cadbury, Rowntree, Terry's and Fry's. Does that surprise you? It seems we don't always know people as well as we think we do. It seems we have friends all around us. Time to move on to the next track.

### **Track 6**

I haven't quite told you everything. This isn't an open top bus tour of London and a sit down in some nice gardens. You have an objective here. I need to find Charlie and you need to help me. It's helping yourself really – people like Charlie ruin things for all of us. The thing is, I've fallen out of touch. I'm too tired. The constant yo-yoing of my condition means I just don't have the energy to try and regulate everything.

Gestures, promises, but Charlie never gets back to me or gives me what's mine, and it seems like nothing ever really changes. I'm not saying I've given up, but it is difficult.

So this is where you come in. I can't reach Charlie anymore. But you could. A fresh face like yours. There's one of Charlie's acquaintances inside the building. Well, that doesn't surprise you does it, given everything I've told you about the kind of friends you have here? This person is in the café and they're not at all hostile I'm told. I need you to go on a fact finding mission about Charlie's current whereabouts, and most importantly, you need to get Charlie's phone number. We can try and do this the nice way. Make a phone call, be reasonable. Probably best if you leave me out of it though. We don't want to overcomplicate this.

Use your time with this person to find out as much as you can about Charlie. Perhaps you could say you recognise them from a long time ago. Charlie's always lived in this area. Maybe you saw them on Facebook. Be creative. They won't be hostile, but they're not stupid either. And you're a stranger. Asking all about their friend. Although, I suspect if you scratch the surface you might find they're fed up with Charlie too. Use this, exploit it. Find out everything you can, then get out of there.

You might have to lie, but don't worry – Charlie does. You might have to do things you wouldn't normally do. That's okay too.

The person in the cafe will be reading a book with a black and white cover called *There is Nothing*, and probably scribbling notes furiously. Make of that what you will. Maybe you could use the book as an "in" – pretend you've read it, tell them you like their handwriting. Ask them if they're okay because they look stressed and tired and could use some company. Maybe not that one. Maybe none of them, it's your mission not mine. Be sly. Be brazen. Charlie would. If I wasn't feeling so numb from the medicine, I might be able to think of a better way. But I can't. I hope you can!

So go inside, make your way to the reception and turn right towards the café and bookshop. They will be there, right now. Don't forget, whatever it takes, make sure you get that phone number. Once you have, play the next track. I'm relying on you.

### **Track 7**

Are you outside? If not, get outside the building, the way you came in. Now I need you to call Charlie – Charlie may not even answer (I wouldn't be surprised) – but it's important to try. If Charlie answers, try to find out a location. What are you waiting for? Call now. When you have made the phone call, move onto the next track.

### **Track 8**

Leave the Meeting House the way you came in, passing through the garden, and exiting through the gate onto Euston Road. Turn left and walk towards the phone box on the corner.

*Chillin Hard (Kevin MacLeod) music plays for 45 seconds.*

I wonder what just happened. I hope you did well on your task. Cross Euston Road at the traffic lights and aim for the London Euston Rail pole that is visible.

Once you have reached the other side, and this may take some time, as it is a very busy road after all, you will see that the building across the street has signs on the glass saying Café Caritas. Cross the smaller road, Melton Road, until you are standing in front of the main entrance. This building is also the Royal College of Practitioners. Not the right kind of doctors for me... so no need to go in. Charlie won't be there. If you're facing the main entrance, you need to turn right now and walk north up Melton Road, away from Euston Road.

*Chillin Hard (Kevin MacLeod) music plays for 45 seconds.*

Have you noticed the shift between the grander building and nondescript office building on your left? This is a transport union. If you peek down below in the basement you may even see some leftover posters – it seems they’re not very tidy. Soon, you’ll need to cross a zebra crossing, be careful but keep walking, keep going straight. Leave the Euston tide behind you.

*Chillin Hard (Kevin MacLeod) music plays for 55 seconds.*

You’ll see a decrepit old Underground station on the corner. A deep red colour. It used to be the home of the Charing Cross, Euston and Hampstead Railway. Granted permission in 1893, the plan was that it would serve Euston, St Pancras and King’s Cross but for the remainder of the 1890s they struggled unsuccessfully to raise the capital needed to fund its construction. After much more political quibbling and plan altering, and after three outright rejections, it was opened in 1907. Yet it languished, falling into disuse only seven years later in 1914. Since then it’s been used as an electricity substation. What a grim tale. Perhaps after three rejections it would have been more prudent to lay the plans to rest. Build something more useful. Houses perhaps.

*Chillin Hard (Kevin MacLeod) music plays for 20 seconds.*

Turn left into Drummond Street. The sign for the street name is on the side of the Ibis Hotel. Walk down Drummond Street. You’re heading west now.

*Chillin Hard (Kevin MacLeod) music plays for 1 minute, 45 seconds.*

Are you hungry? In a short while you will reach a collection of shops, businesses and homes - the smell of spices and cooking will hit you. Tempting to stop but I’m afraid we’ve no time. You wouldn’t know it now but a few decades ago, an empty shop along this street was nicknamed ‘the pet shop’ – as people could watch rats playing behind the glass. The council came around eventually and white-washed the windows. The locals called this a symbolic gesture. Anyway, as you can see, none of that now. Keep walking until you reach a pub on the corner called the Crown and Anchor. It looks nice in there but you know what I’m going to say. No time to go in, keep walking and cross at the zebra crossing.

*Chillin Hard (Kevin MacLeod) music plays for 20 seconds.*



Once you've crossed the road, turn left and leave Drummond Street behind you. Walk straight on and take the first right into Tolmers Square. If you've reached the Speedy Café, you've walked too far! You'll see a sign. Wait there. Then move on to the next track.

### **Track 9**

Tolmers Square. It's got a grand gate hasn't it? It beckons you in. I can be taken in by labels, excited by headlines on gateposts. They can make me giddy or dizzy or even quite breathless. Perhaps I keep revealing too much. Maybe you just want to make your own mind up. Well, go and see for yourself...

Walk through into Tolmers Square, passing the blue door, 7AB. No, we're not going in there but into the square instead.

Why don't you do a circuit, anti-clockwise of the square? If you're not too good on clock faces, that means once you're in Tolmer's Square, turn right and walk in a loop. I'm not being patronising. You just never quite know who you're working with. Anti-clockwise, as though with each step you're dredging back the hours and minutes and pushing against the relentless march of time. We will go back in time in a moment but for now can you be in the moment? Look at the skyline, look at nature. What jars for you? What works? What are you thinking?

*Look Back (Moby) music plays for 45 seconds.*

Keep walking until you see a sunken amphitheatre outside the Square Tavern pub. Go and have a seat on the stone bench, why don't you?

Housing. It's a constant topic in Britain. And people have been talking about the housing here for longer than you would believe. Tolmers Square was the scene of a battle between tenants and property developers. Between students and squatters, intellectuals, political parties, neighbours and friends...and property developers. It was once a very attractive 19<sup>th</sup> century square; alive with atmosphere; 'everyone knew each other', says a former resident. And now, it looks like a graveyard (said the press in 1973). Would you like to see it in its former glory? I can send you a picture. We're back to the Euston expansion; we're back to who owns the space; we're back to the Quaker spirit of resistance. Funnily enough, we really are back to the Quakers as The Rowntree Foundation even gave the local campaigners money to support their

campaign. In 1971 the Hampstead and Highgate Express wrote, 'If Tolmers Square had been in Paris rather than London, it would be lived in by artists and intellectuals, poor but learned, who would value the proximity of the British Museum and the university, and would live there an industrious life of modest tranquillity. And the church would still be a church. And there would be some trees. And because it is in London it is going to be knocked down.'

Because it is London it is going to be knocked down. Is that what London is known for, then? Knocking things down...that would please someone like Charlie.

Deconstructing everything one greedy handful at a time. Did you see that mound of green in the middle of the square as you entered, or perhaps when you were pushing back the hands of time on your circuit? That's where a cinema used to be; the cheapest in London. It used to be bigger than that bit of green grass, obviously.

Tickets used to be 15p and played to packed houses. The last films ever played were a double bill: 'The Looters' and 'Die Slowly, You'll Enjoy it More'. Someone there with a sense of humour.

Some of the residents held out against developers for over 17 years. As you can see, looking around you, they couldn't hold out forever... bit like the farmers at Euston. It's not just me who feels like my life goes in cycles then. The headlines back then must have looked much the same. So let's play a game – written nearly 50 years ago, or, just a minute ago – 'British cities are in chaos. While thousands of houses stand empty there are not enough homes for people to live in.' Yes, I find it hard to tell too. How about this one: 'We live in a society where over 100 people have made more than £1million each out of property since 1945. We also live in a society where the number of homeless people has more than doubled over the past five years. These facts are of course interconnected.' Ah okay, that one was far too easy. The figures were too modest. I'm sure 100 people have made £100 million. Or more. In the name of progress, to build what is needed for Britain to prosper. You think I'm being facetious, but I'm not. What does one small square matter when you pit it against the might of human progress? I'm too tired to care, I'm just asking the question. Would you like a photo by the way? Of how things used to be? If so, pause the track and text 'PHOTO' to me, Tina. That's at least one thing I could do for you.

Anyway, you'd better hurry up inside the pub in the corner, the Square Tavern. Go inside and see if you can find Charlie. Hard to know what Charlie will look like now – but Charlie never goes anywhere without a rucksack so if in doubt, look for this. Approach the table, sit down and ask, 'Are you Charlie?' That's it. I know, easier than the last time... what are you waiting for? Time to go in.

### **Track 10**

OK, time to leave Tolmers Square. I'm sorry that you missed Charlie. Perhaps you shouldn't have been so slow. Was the 'No Dirty Boots' sign still up? Haven't been in such a long time... anyway, I do really appreciate what you're doing... sorry to be so grumpy. It's the medication, call it a side effect. It's just hard. You really need to find Charlie for me... When you're outside the pub take a left towards the main busy road, Hampstead Road. Here you need to cross the road – I have to direct you to use the traffic lights – I have no insurance for this kind of thing. See the traffic lights to the right? Cross here.

*Chillin Hard (Kevin MacLeod) music plays for 1 minute, 45 seconds.*

Always busy here. This may take some time, but once you've crossed, take a left, walking past the local Sainsbury's, past bus Stop T and S.

*Chillin Hard (Kevin MacLeod) music plays for 30 seconds.*

Take a right at a sign saying Regents Place down a grey and green alleyway. Have you noticed the difference beneath your feet? That's because this space is taken care of, invested in. Attention to detail. I like that. Trees and silver slates beneath your feet. Keep walking.

*Chillin Hard (Kevin MacLeod) music plays for 30 seconds.*

A funny little staircase of hedges to your right. Keep walking straight towards the Square. Is Charlie here?

Ahh, that's nice. A lot of people based here care about me a lot. Their whole daily existence is focused upon me... That sounds arrogant maybe but it's true. To your right, 10 Brock Street, that's where Facebook is based... 31 million UK users – that's about 60% of the UK population... the office space is very fun. You can't see it I'm afraid (you're not allowed in) but there's a climbing wall, a sweet shop and sleeping pods... if you turn around and look towards Starbucks, you'll see an office building

tower. HMRC are based here, whilst Santander are just opposite... British Land are just around the corner too, as you can see – in fact, there are 63 companies based here – with a very fine list of contacts. I'm very popular around here. The people around here seem to think that my medication and treatment plan is working well.

Time to move on.

Make your way towards the giant colourful plant pots. Odd choice I know, but at least it's bright and cheerful. Can't really stand glum décor. Now, with Facebook to your right, turn right at the Refinery, you'll see a silver food van.

*Chillin Hard (Kevin MacLeod) music plays for 30 seconds.*

After turning right at the silver food van, walk straight ahead. You should soon see a brightly coloured, rainbow striped hut ahead. To your left, a cycle rack – lots of health conscious people work here. There's a health club too, around the corner. No time for that though, I'm afraid. Keep walking.

*Chillin Hard (Kevin MacLeod) music plays for 20 seconds.*

By now, you should be passing the Diorama Arts Studios or thereabouts. A zebra crossing should be visible to your left, make your way towards this and cross the road. I will wait for you to safely cross the road...

*Chillin Hard (Kevin MacLeod) music plays for 40 seconds.*

Take a few steps right before taking an immediate left turn into Stanhope Street.

Can you feel the difference underfoot? That's Camden Council for you – the difference in paving stone quality is quite noticeable. You should keep walking, passing what used to be the Lord Nelson pub on your right. Walk until you see a red, pink, yellow and orange vertically-striped building ahead of you. No accounting for taste, although, it makes no difference to me. Once you get there stop and turn left.

*Chillin Hard (Kevin MacLeod) music plays for 45 seconds.*

In front of you, you should see a sign saying Buckleberry. Just in case you're interested, as this kind of thing interests me, a 2 bedroom flat in the Buckleberry building goes for around £2000 per month. Keep walking straight ahead, but instead of taking the ramp, take the right fork, passing a concrete sports court. Anyone playing there today? Thought it wasn't likely, but, you never know. At the end of the

courts, you should see an underpass, walk through here. I'm interested - how do you feel? Are you comfortable here, or more comfortable back in Regent's Place? Is there something about polished corporate space that feels safer than the space people eat in, sleep in, live in? Is it odd to feel at home there, when here you're amongst homes? In a square where you're just a statistic, did you in fact feel more anonymous than you do here? Where nobody cares at all. Do you think Charlie is nearby? Can you see Charlie?

*Chillin Hard (Kevin MacLeod) music plays for 1 minute.*

Keep walking straight on, you'll pass the church on your right. You're now walking towards a grey office block, and will pass another church on the corner. It's on the other side of the road, in a greyish/black ugly rounded building that won't reveal itself to be a place of worship until the last moment. Appearances can be deceptive, can't they?

*Chillin Hard (Kevin MacLeod) music plays for 40 seconds.*

You've just walked up Laxton Street and now should be at a main road. Take a left, you should notice yellow decorative gates in front of you. They don't really seem to go anywhere, nor open or close anything. If you've walked up to them, you've gone too far. Instead, take a right just before them. You will see a Regent's Place sign, and a small security box. Usually, a man sits in a high visibility vest inside. You could give him a cheery wave if you like – you've done that once already today.

*Chillin Hard (Kevin MacLeod) music plays for 1 minute.*

Once you've cleared security, Santander Bank should also become visible from here. Sometimes you can see people going up and down in the lifts. As you keep walking, keep an eye up above on the left hand side. Soon you should see a woman walking, walking, walking. Sit in front of her and watch.

*Chillin Hard (Kevin MacLeod) music plays for 1 minute.*

She never seems to get to anywhere, does she? I can relate to that. Treading water, propping everyone up, keeping a nice steady pace, while Charlie... Charlie just idles and cheats and takes what's mine. And yours. Somewhere Charlie's hiding the world's longest I.O.U. Well, I've had enough. My doctor tells me we need to end this 'something for nothing' culture. We need to dig deep, we need to keep on course.

Keep looking at her. At me. When I say I can't take any more, that I'm not getting better, that I'm getting sick while Charlie's still living in the land of milk and honey, they say it takes time. It's a bitter pill but we have to take it. There's no alternative, Tina. There. Is. No. Alternative. Well, I don't have any more time. And nor do you. I want what's mine.

Look behind you to see the New Diorama Theatre. Go in and ask the person in the café if they can direct you to the table that's reserved for Charlie. Maybe you'll finally meet. Hurry now, we don't have much time.

### **Track 11**

Well done. You caught Charlie. That miserable, cunning fox who steals from me. Who steals from you. A scrawny, frightened little thing really when it came down to it. How did it feel to be a hound? Was it exciting? Did you surprise yourself? Maybe you liked to feel like a part of the pack, caught the scent of blood, felt powerful, felt justified. And now you have it. What's yours. What's mine. Except, you don't look that happy... and I'm still not feeling any better. The doctors have told me time and again that if we can just get what's ours, if we crack down on Charlie then we'll be on the road to recovery. But my flesh is rotten. That £15.27 couldn't buy a sticking plaster big enough. And despite all your best efforts I'm still sick.

Look up and look around you. You're here for a reason. Do you remember where the Facebook building was? Turn around and look at it. They paid no tax in 2012; none in 2013; and in 2014 they paid just £4327 in corporation tax (despite an average earning of £210,000). That's quite a punch in the guts for me. A jolt from the defibrillator you might say. Still, figures, figures – listen to me. Just hold on tightly to your coins. We are living in austere times. We're living on the edge and we need to steady the course. We've already caught our target. We know that the real nerve damage is done by Charlie.

What's funny though, if you look over at the block just behind Starbucks (that well known tax-abiding coffee chain), is that HMRC, the tax man himself, is sitting over there as a close neighbour of Facebook. They could have popped over and asked for the money in small change. But ironically they've spend £27,000 on Facebook adverts in the past year. Now all of these facts and figures give me quite a headache; they're troubling in the extreme, but I'm clear headed enough to recall that this amount of

money is significantly more than what Facebook handed back in tax. A pity really, when they're close enough to drop in for a cup of sugar.

Another good friend rests nearby – it's getting to be like the Quakers. This one is close to my own heart. The nondescript building on the way to the new diorama theatre was the HQ of ATOS – famous for its testing of the sick. If you're well, you work, right? I'm sick and I can agree to that – we're all in this together after all. I'm someone who knows, because I'm ill a lot – I keep taking the medicine and I trust the experts when they tell me that it's going to make me better. Oh. Except the ATOS test did find terminally ill cancer patients fit for work, which means they were denied financial support. Still, there are always charlatans out there. Charlie-tans. The Mail called it a tough new test to weed out the work-shy. A strange phrase that. Shy and coy. Not the words I'd use to describe Charlie myself. More like skiver, scrounger, sucking the teat of the state until it runs dry. I'm covered in cuts and you don't see me complaining. So I'm a defender of ATOS. Never mind that 1,300 people died after being told to go back to work. People die, that's part of life – no one's to blame for that. And they got such a hounding in the press, that in the end they gave up the contract anyway. Didn't do too badly though. They are still in receipt of multi-million pound contracts via the PIP (Personal independence Payment)...and they paid no corporation tax in 2012 either. Although, I can't understand why HMRC haven't been round. They haven't exactly got far to go. Look at the lengths we've gone to today. Look how hard we've tried, all the information we've gathered, all the hunting we've done.

I feel like I don't have the energy to tell you about the other powerhouses round here. JP Morgan at 1 Triton Square who invest in companies that produce cluster bombs, despite an international ban. Or their good friend Santander, who also invest in arms. British Land, who built extensive office blocks over historic conservation land in East London. So we're back to the property developers again.

I really do feel quite sick.

But...we caught Charlie, didn't we? Charlie who steals from me. And steals from you.

To survive  
we'd all turn thief  
and rascal, or so says the fox,  
with her coat of an elegant scoundrel,  
her white knife of a smile,  
who knows just where she's going:

to steal something  
that doesn't belong to her -  
some chicken, or one more chance,  
or other life.



### Appendix Three: *HOUND* Estimated Timings for Audio Walk

Friends Meeting House (FMH) Route	Euston Station introduction	Walk to FMH	FMH Garden	FMH actor introduction	FMH Actor	Call Charlie	Walk to Tolmer Sq (incl Drummond Street)	Tolmer Square	Tolmer Sq Actor pub	Brief Triton Sq	Long version of triton including Estate	New Diorama	Arrival New Diorama
Player 1	10.55-11.02	11.03-11.09	11.09-11.12	11.12-11.15	11.15-11.20	11.20-11.21	11.21-11.32	11.32-11.39	11.39-11.44	11.44-12.00	11.44-12.00	12:00	
Player 4	11.15-11.22	11.22-11.28	11.28-11.31	11.31-11.34	11.34-11.39	11.39-11.40	11.40-11.51	11.51-11.58	11.58-12.03 (out)	12.03-12.19	12.03-12.19	12.19	
Player 7	11.30-11.37	11.37-11.43	11.43-11.46	11.46-11.49	11.49-11.54	11.54-11.55	11.55-12.06	12.06-12.13	12.13-12.18 pub?	12.18-12.26	12.18-12.26	12.26	
Café Caritas Route (Long)	Euston Station introduction	Walk to FMH	FMH Garden	Walk to Café Caritas	Caritas actor	Café Caritas Actor	Call Charlie	Walk to Tolmer Sq (incl Drummond Street)	Tolmer Square	Tolmer Sq Actor	Brief Triton Sq	Long version of triton including Estate	Arrival New Diorama
Player 2	11am - 11.07	11.08 - 11.14	11.14-11.17	11.17-11.22	11.23-11.25	11.25- 11.30	11.30-11.31	11.31-11.38	11.38-11.45	11.45-11.50(out)	11.50-12.06	11:50-12:06	12.06
Player 5	11.20-11.27	11.27-11.33	11.33-11.36	11.36-11.41	11.41-11.43	11.43-11.48	11.48-11.49	11.49-11.56	11.56-12.03 (pub)	12.03 - 12.08	12.08	12.08-12.24	12.24
Café Euston Route	Euston Station introduction	Euston Actor	Call Charlie track	Walk to FMH	FMH Garden	Walk to Tolmer Sq (incl)	Tolmer Sq	Tolmer Sq Actor	Brief Triton Sq	Long version of triton	Arrival New Diorama		
Player 3	11.10-11.17	11.17-11.19	11.19-11.24	11.24-11.25	11.25-11.31	11.31-11.34	11.34-11.45	11.45-11.52	11.52-11.57 (pub)	11.57-12.13	12.13	12.13	
Player 5	11.25-11.32	11.32-11.34	11.34-11.39	11.39-11.40	11.40-11.46	11.46-11.49	11.49-12.00	12.00-12.07	12.07-12.12 (out)	12.12-12.28	12.28	12.28	
Player 8	11.35-11.42	11.42-11.44	11.44-11.49	11.49-11.50	11.50-11.56	11.56-11.59	11.59-12.10	12.10-12.17	12.17-12.22 (out)	12.22-12.30	12.30	12:30	

## **Appendix Four: Structure *HOUND* Script (Actors)**

### **14<sup>th</sup> September 2016**

**9.30am** *Sian meets photographer and videographer.*

**9.45/9.50am** *All actors meet at Temple Studio, Warren Street.*

*Sian leads warm up / discussion regarding day and then sets up first costume / second costume, and props. Actors get into costume and are issued with props:*

*Rhiannon – four objects in bags (rucksack and umbrella)*

*Howard – four objects in bags (rucksack and apple/crisps)*

*Jack – There is Nothing Book (and notebook)*

*Hannah – Amsterdam Guide (and notebook)*

*Ella – newspaper crossword*

*Jenna – foxes tail/ game puzzle/ envelopes with technology*

**10.30 am** *Actors leave the studio and get into first position*

*Actors text Sian when in position.*

*Sian goes to Starbucks; sets up two phones and texting structure. Photo for Tolmers Square image.*

*Helen in New Diorama for Jenna (phone number)*

**Carl** – MP3

*Sian texts Jenna*

**Alan:** Headphones

*Sian texts Jenna*

*Track 2: audience texts START to TINA*

**John:** Start

**Tina:** (John) Good. Now play the next track.

*Sian texts Jack/Rhiannon: John started*

**Carl:** Start

**Tina:** (Carl) Good. Now play the next track.

*Sian texts Ella/Howard: Carl started*

**Alan:** Start

**Tina:** (Alan) Good. Now play the next track.

*Sian texts Hannah/Rhiannon: Alan started*

**Kelsey:** Start

**Tina:** Good. Now play the next track.

*Sian texts Jack/Howard: Kelsey started*

**Grace:** Start

**Tina:** Good. Now play the next track.

*Sian texts Ella/Rhiannon: Grace started*

**Dadiow:** Start

**Tina:** Good. Now play the next track.

*Sian texts Hannah/Howard: Dadiow started*

**Laila:** Start

**Tina:** Good. Now play the next track.

*Tina texts Jack: Laila started*

**Maeve:** Start

**Tina:** Good. Now play the next track.

*Sian texts Hannah/Howard: Maeve started*

*Actors finish interaction. Get changed. Text Sian when finished with last participant. When the last of the actors arrive, text Sian, alerting her to location of participants. When Sian responds, they walk to BUS STOP KA, near to the main site, ready for the Fox Hunt part of the performance.*

*At New Diorama, Jenna texts arrival and departure times of audience members.*

*Audience arrive at Mark X*

**Audience:** I am here

**Tina texts audience:** Listen. Wait here for instructions.

**Sian texts Jenna:** Into position

**Tina rings public telephone box (020 7387 3356):**

It's time to play the hounds, and go on a hunt. Charlie is nearby. In the forest.

A pack always puts the slowest and wisest at the front. You have to stay together and keep pace with one another. It's not about the chase but about the pursuit. No one gets left behind. Be sly, like the fox. You must find Charlie and grab the tail. All will make sense when you have the tail.

*Jenna texts Sian when audience takes tail/ start listening to tracks*

**Sian texts actors:** X minutes from now.

**Sian (in x minutes):** Osborne go

**Sian:** Fox hunt go

*Fox Hunt happens. Sian and Jenna perform security liaison, on standby to answer any questions. Hunt ends. Sian and two performers lead audience to New Diorama. Sian gives out programmes. Rest of performers go to Temple Studio, change, and return to New Diorama.*

## Appendix Five: Collaborative Game Instructions

# THE GAME

### The Rules

You will need to work in pairs but people will arrive while you are playing and so sometimes there will be an odd number of people. Nothing's ever simple, but don't leave them out. Engage them in the game while they wait for a partner. The first pair will need to introduce the concept to the third and fourth person and so on.

### **For the first pair**

1. Select **one card** from the **pile labelled 'Hound'**.
2. Look at the word/phrase on the back of the card.
3. Individually, write down on the **paper** provided the four ideas or concepts that you believe are most important or relate most strongly to that word. For instance, if the card said 'a good game', then you would write down the 4 most important components of what makes a good game, or you'd write down your 4 favourite games, or the attributes of players that may lead to a good game. It's in your hands.
4. When you have both written down your 4 words or phrases, share them with each other. Between you, decide which 4 ideas out of the total 8 are the most important/relevant (you will need to negotiate and try to reach a consensus of which 4 other ideas to dismiss). You can try and be persuasive, you can challenge, you can even politely agree with things you disagree with. Write your chosen 4 words/phrases on the **blank cards** provided for you, which are labelled 'Your Answer'.

*(Continue working through the Hound cards in the same way until the second pair arrive)*

**When the second pair arrive, introduce them to the game. Once they have completed instructions 1-4, work as a whole team on number 5:**

5. Pair 1 share their 4 most important/relevant ideas relating to the first chosen word with Pair 2. Pair 2 does the same. Between all four of you now, you will need to jointly decide which 4 ideas are most important/relevant, meaning that 4 more ideas will need to be dismissed. Can you agree?

*(Both pairs continue with another card until the third pair arrives.)*

6. Explain the game to pair 3 when they arrive. Each pair should follow steps 1-4 for a new card. Then complete step 5 with all 3 pairs involved. Discussion may be tense. You can only keep 4 ideas.
7. Explain the game to pair 4 when they arrive. Play one more (brief) round with a new card. Can you find consensus?

*Keep your game cards in the spare bag and keep these with you.*

**Now open the orange envelope.**

You have failed in your task. Charlie is still out there.

I have to be honest, I am disappointed. Maybe I was expecting too much from one person.

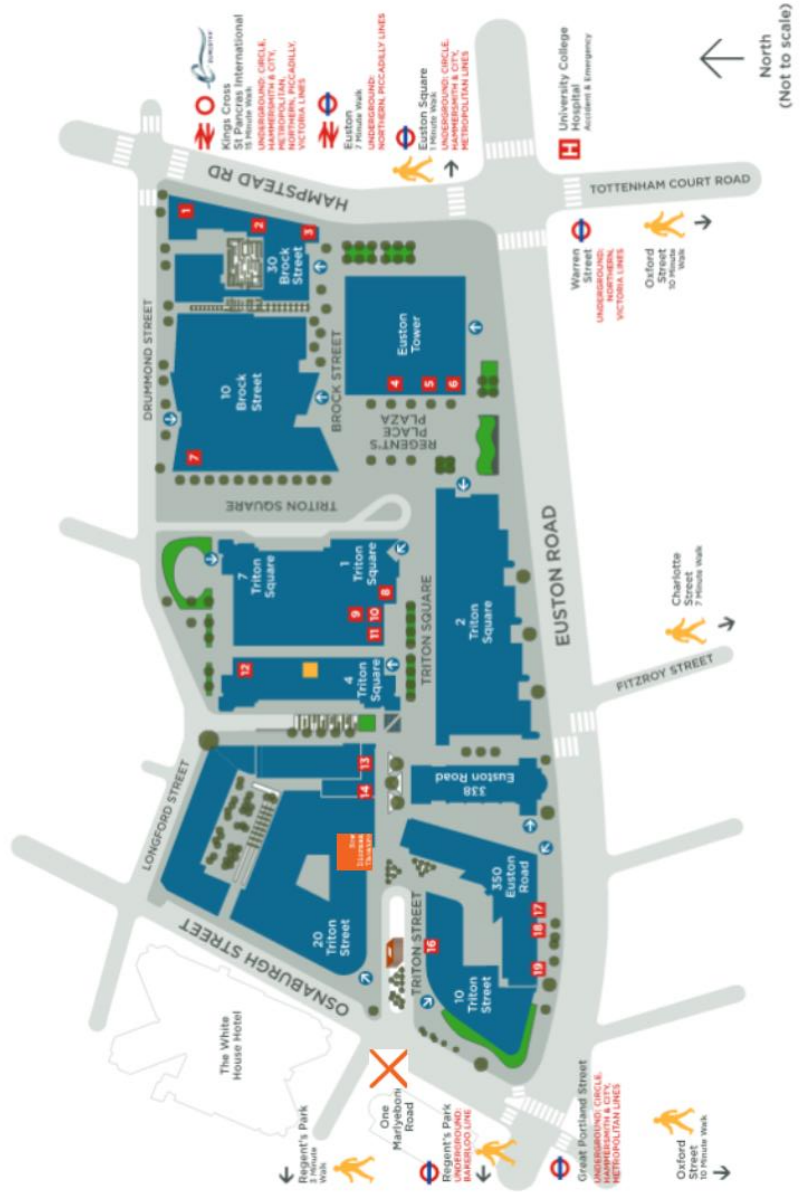
You will need to wait here until the 8<sup>th</sup> person arrives.

Let's try something else, in the meantime.

A game.

**When the 8th person arrives and  
you have played a brief round of  
the game,  
open this envelope.**

## Appendix Six: Map for Participants



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