

LISTENING ACROSS A DISTANCE

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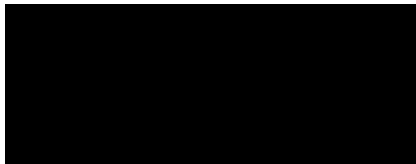
ABSTRACT

This research project seeks to explore the embodied intimacies and conflicts produced in performative art practices, through the reciprocity of two bodies speaking and listening to one another. Through my studio research I produced two intimate performance works, which hinge on a process of memorising a story (or stories) and coaching a participant to recite the stories verbatim. This task is destined to fail, as the limits of the works (one hour per story) exist in friction with the limits of human memory. Instead I seek an opportunity to develop a temporary relationship that emphasises the intricacies of intimate relations and their development through conversation. The first performance developed through my studio research, *The News of the Building of the Wall* (2016), takes Franz Kafka's short story of the same name as its source material. Following this, *Something Like Dancing* (2017–) uses three short stories I have written as the material that is taught to the participants.

In my exegetical research, I analyse my two performance works through a framework of Franz Kafka's short story *The News of the Building of the Wall: A Fragment* (1971), Mette Edvardsen's performance artwork *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine* (2010–), Yorgos Lanthimos's film *Dogtooth* (2009) and Roland Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (1978). These texts each produce sets of complex, embodied relations that reflect on those developed in my own performances. Drawing on the thinking of Hannah Arendt, Baruch Spinoza, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes and Adriana Cavarero, my written research proposes a *politics of listening* that is demonstrated in my practice. A *politics of listening* is not just attending to sound; it is paying attention to people's use of their voice in the act of speaking. This account can take any form, and cannot be reduced to language. In this exegesis, the word *listening* determines and stands in for a wider act of registering other's accounts for ourselves. Through this exegesis I develop a politics of listening, which attends to an expression of the other not revealed through semantic language, but revealed through what is 'spoken' around this voice.

DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.



Jacqueline Shelton

23 August 2018

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LISTENING ACROSS A DISTANCE

What embodied intimacies or conflicts are produced in performative art practices, through the reciprocity of two bodies involved and responding to one another while speaking/listening?

STRUCTURAL NOTES

A structural element to note: in this exegesis I have spread my appendices throughout the text. Appendices are thought to be 'extra' or subsidiary material that is tucked away at the end of the document. A bodily appendix is a worm-like sac attached to the colon that is expendable, and can be surgically removed when it becomes problematic or painful. Likewise, texts like to treat their appendices as extras tucked away at the end, which people tend not to read (it is surely not just me). I find this a problematic way of positioning these texts, as they are neither secondary nor unnecessary to the rest of the writing – they merely operate on a different register. Much of these are my own writing, or that of others which provides the textual contexts for, or even the contents of, artworks that are focused on bodies relating and engaging. These appendices are to be understood as key informers of the exegetical text. Therefore, I have spread the appendices throughout, so that they run alongside the body of the text – in some instances as a framework for writing, and in others as a harmonising commentary. These appendices will be cited appropriately, and for clarity they will be differentiated from the body of the text through use of a different font and placement on the page.

INTRODUCTION

RELEVANT ARTWORKS

The News of the Building of the Wall, 2016

On 22 November 2016 I was presenting my one-on-one performance work *The News of the Building of the Wall* as part of the Australian Centre of Contemporary Art's offsite program *The City Speaks*.¹ I was waiting at Signal, a community art space on the banks of the Yarra River, for you, my anonymous friend, to show up for a performance of the work. This work began a new trajectory of my PhD research, diverting from a focus on laziness into a performative interrogation of voicing, storytelling and embodied relations. It is a performance that orbits Franz Kafka's short story of the same name.² Participants in the work engage in a one-on-one task of learning Kafka's story, led by my own recitation and memory of it, without visual cues beyond the site, the river and myself.

You showed up and we hugged, enquired after each other and stepped into the sunshine. I led you a few metres across the paved courtyard and stopped, turning to you. I explained that I was going to tell you a story and recited it to you, holding eye contact the whole time. It was hot; the sun beat on my back. I was sweating partly from the heat, but from nerves as well. Your eyes were greener than I remembered. One of your eyebrows was messy and the hairs stuck in a funny direction. I could see the pores on your nose and the creases below your eyes. You looked at my eyes for a while, then my chin, then my shoulder, then my forehead, then my mouth

1 Jacqui Shelton, *The News of the Building of the Wall*, 2016, live performance.

2 Franz Kafka, "The News of the Building of the Wall: A Fragment", *The Complete Stories*, Franz Kafka (New York: Schocken Books Inc, 1971).

and then my eyes again. I finished the story and told you that I would now be helping you recite it. You laughed nervously, half-joking that you would never be able to.

We started walking and repeating sentences one at a time until you had committed each to memory, stringing the following sentence onto it. Sometimes you stepped in rhythm with your saying. You were initially embarrassed, but relaxed into it, and forgot your self-consciousness. It is an initially awkward, uncomfortable work in most instances. A provocation is set up (literally provoking some people) and an authorial hierarchy. What a participant does with this is what makes the work – whether they ask questions, whether they obediently learn the script, whether they want to walk or sit down. To access the work one must submit to the hierarchal structuring of initial knowledge flow. Ultimately, enjoyment is beside the point – a relationship is established, a challenge of intimacy and discord.

As we walked we spoke of the embankment, and I watched the embankment of the river rushing up to meet us. As I assisted you through wording of the sentence about ‘this much-discussed hour’ (see appendix 1.1), I thought to myself that maybe this hour of the performance would come to be discussed, and we were writing its future. I smiled while recounting the boat pulling up to shore as we walked past a man stow away his row boat in the boat club sheds. I could not have planned that, but had hoped. I was curious how the scene of the performance would unfold for you, as though we were narrating an improvised play starring the cast of the whole city.

We found a spot along the river to sit down. I was listening for the story. I listened to your thinking. I watched your knees lean against each other as your legs formed tents in your pants. You spoke in a different voice when you were reciting the story and when you were speaking directly to me.

By now we had both relaxed into the relationship and lay together facing the river. It flowed in the direction we had been walking. The session was finished and you had memorised about three quarters of the story in an hour. I thought you had done really well, but you were not happy with it.

Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine, 2010–

Over two consecutive days in Brussels, in May of 2017, I had two stories told to me by two separate human-books as part of Norwegian performance artist Mette Edvardsen's performance work *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine*.³ I wanted to experience this work because it uses storytelling and memorisation to actively inhabit a space of embodying a text and the intimacy that develops between a performer, designated as a book, and a participant, or reader. I picked up the 'book' from the 'library' – the place where all the 'books' hung out waiting to be greeted by their readers. It was *Against the Forgetting: Selected Poems* (2004) by Hans Faverey, a Surinam-Dutch poet hardly known outside of Holland.⁴ The human that was book suggested we go outside as it was a nice day, and as we were walking to the park I asked his name. He insisted his name was *Against the Forgetting*, but I convinced him to tell me his human name: Bruno. I was not allowed to use that name until the work was finished.

The park was closed, so we sat on some stairs in the sun. *Against the Forgetting* told me that he was a book of poems with multiple chapters. He would recite the contents and I could elect to begin reading wherever I wanted. Between each poem he would fold his hands into each other as

3 Mette Edvardsen, "Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine", accessed 26 April 2016. <http://www.metteedvardsen.be/projects/thfaitas.html>

4 Hans Faverey, *Against the Forgetting: Selected Poems*, trans. Francis R. Jones (New York, NY: New Directions, 2004).

though he were the turning the pages of a book. His hands would start palms facing up and one hand would fold over slowly so that the palm of one hand landed in the palm of his other. I could stop him and repeat a poem or any line, and could flick to new sections of the book whenever I pleased. I chose an entry at random and he recited the poems to me, holding his own hand briefly between each.

I would re-read, or got him to repeat, poems I liked. I moved between sections randomly, trying to get a sense of the poetry collection as a whole. The whole time, he grasped and released his own hand in a self-contained handshake, a folding in on himself like a closed book. I remember themes of winter, love poems, loss poems, peaches and sun. Towards the end of the allocated half hour, I asked him his favourite poem. He told me he could not have a favourite poem because he is a book. I asked him to fall open to the page he naturally opens to when resting on his spine. This either irritated or amused him, it was hard to tell, but he did so anyway, beginning from approximately the middle of the collection. I was distracted by the sun burning my shoulders. At some point, I was brought out of my reverie. The book seemed to be describing this relationship I found myself in: a woman sitting in the sun with her hands folded in her lap, just as I was doing. I listened harder, wondering whether this was Bruno or *Against the Forgetting* speaking. I was not sure.

When we returned to the library, Bruno told me that an element of the project involved him transcribing the poems as he remembered them, in both Dutch and English, and these being published into a new book called *Against the Forgetting: Selected Poems by Hans Faverery* by Bruno de Wachter.⁵ I bought the book, to search for this point that his human-self seemed to leak through his performance as object, or see if I

5 Bruno de Wachter, *Against the Forgetting: Selected Poems by Hans Faverery* (Brussels: *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine*, Kunstenfestivaldesarts, 2016).

was mistaken in my listening. I went to a bar and read the book, for the second time that day, witnessing the words sitting silently and neatly on the page rather than noisily next to me. Bruno had devised a new form of punctuation that he applied to the poems, which focused on the rhythm and spacing of the poems as he remembered them, supplanting this with underscores.

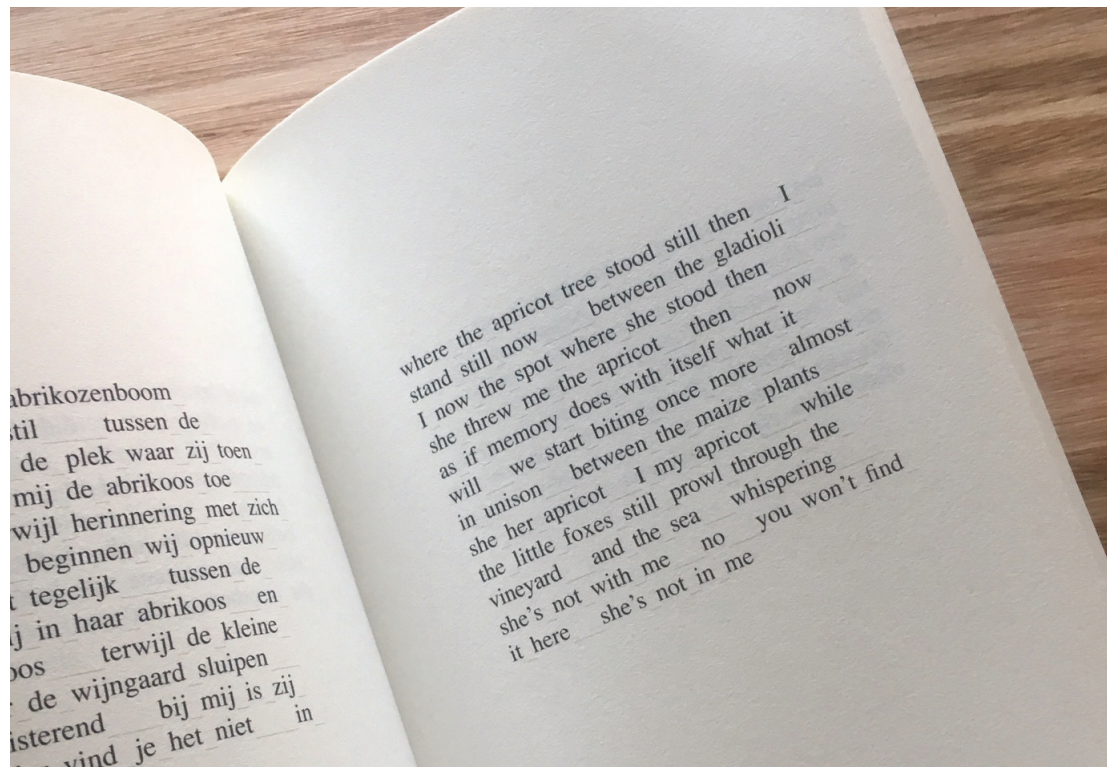


Figure 1: Bruno de Wachter, *Against the Forgetting: Selected Poems by Hans Faverey* (Brussels: *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine*, Kunstenfestivaldesarts, 2016). Image by Jacqui Shelton.

I could not find the poem as I remembered it, but there were a few that corresponded in different ways. Rather than hands in lap, there was an elbow resting on a knee, or the affectionate use of 'You'. I felt certain that Bruno had made up the poem, yet the way the language fitted the poem caused me to doubt its origin – perhaps I imagined it.

Dogtooth, 2009

In November 2017 I re-watched *Dogtooth*, a favourite film directed by Yorgos Lanthimos.⁶ I decided as I sat on the couch that I would not fall asleep this time, as I do in most films. The film follows three teenagers who live isolated lives, without leaving their house, because their over-protective parents say they can only leave when their ‘dogtooth’ falls out. The trio spend their days listening to homemade tapes that teach them an alternative vocabulary. Any word that comes from beyond their family home is instantly assigned a new meaning. Eventually, the elder daughter takes a barbell to her face, smashing her mouth repeatedly until her ‘dogtooth’ falls out – the tooth that represents her childhood, and her freedom.

As with all signifying systems, the one in the family’s language works because it operates on distinction and difference. If the new words are not symbols, what they do resemble is something akin to allegory. As Walter Benjamin writes in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1977), in allegory ‘any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else... [all] of the things which are used to signify derive, from the very fact of their pointing to something else, a power’.⁷ *Dogtooth* constitutes itself around this primary allegorical disjunction: any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else. This fertile ‘any’ becomes the principle of formal possibility of the film, and becomes its logic of violence as well. Violence is in the gesture of disjunction itself. Or, put another way, violence takes the form of a logic of distance.

6 *Dogtooth*, directed by Yorgos Lanthimos, co-written with Efthymis Filippou (Greece: Boo Productions, 2009).

7 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: NLB, 1977), 175.

I watch the beginning of the film. Over a close-up of a finger pressing ‘Play’ on a portable cassette player, the acousmatic voice of the mother recites to the three young adults the new words of the day. Prior to this new language, is a pale yellow screen that displays a straight line, a line in the shape of a dogtooth, and a sine line.

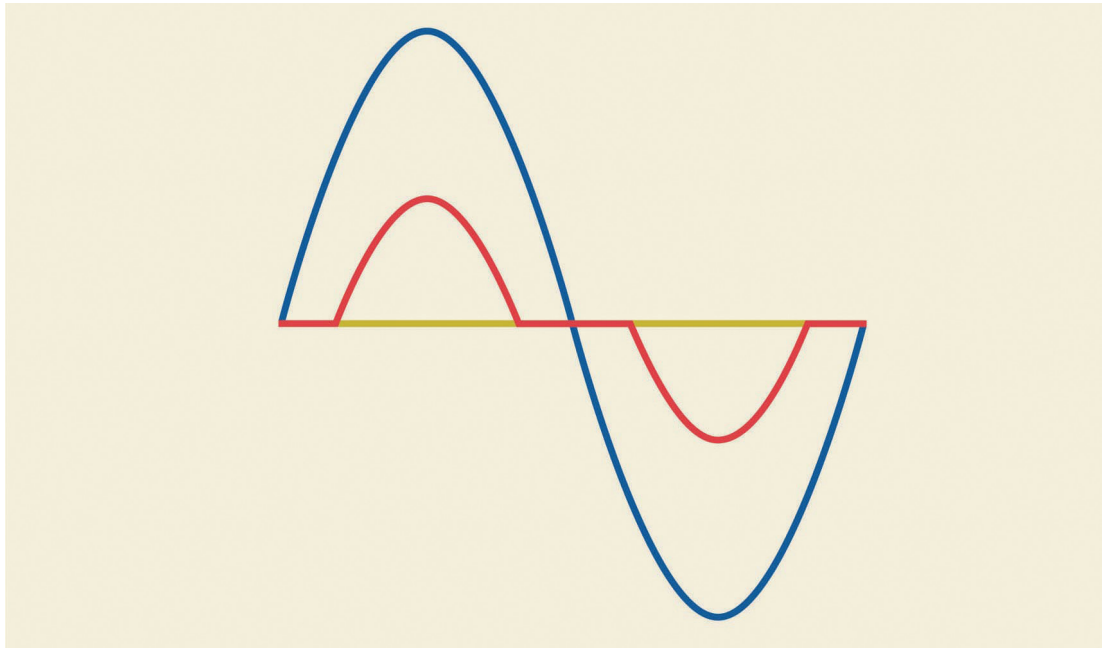


Figure 2: Video still from *Dogtooth*.

This transforming line establishes extension between two points as the founding visual principle of the film.⁸ From a straight line is generated an image: the curves of canine teeth (those used for ripping and tearing, the ones the father says must fall out before a child is ready to leave home). This transforms into a sine line, a trigonometric function used to express infinite series or to solve differential functions, which defines the relationship between physical quantities and their rates of change. It is a curvy line often used to measure sound and light waves, and physically models itself on the image of a wave in a watery surface.

8 Eugenie Brinkema, “e.g., *Dogtooth*”, *World Picture 7*, distance (2012), accessed 15 May 2017. http://www.worldpicturejournal.com/WP_7/Brinkema.html

This relation between the straight line, which produces tension between two points, and the curved line that maps rates of change between two variables, is interrupted by the non-mathematical line of the dogtooth. The dogtooth shows the intensity and violence produced in the film through the relations between distinct bodies, and distinct definitions and meaning. Any word in the film indicates the possible logic of discordance through its translation and representation of something else. In his essay *The Task of the Translator* (2002), Walter Benjamin describes a translation as a gentle tangent to a work. A translation ‘touches the original lightly and only at the infinitely small point of the sense’, underscoring that the event of this touch, rather than the point at which they touch, sets the conditions for the future of the translation and the original.⁹ The dogtooth, both in its interruption of a line and in the role it plays as instigator of both violence and freedom for the children, demonstrates this moment of translation on which the logic of the film precariously rests.

Something Like Dancing, 2017–

In October 2017 I began developing and performing this work to my supervisors and close friends. This is the work to be performed for examination. *Something Like Dancing* is a performance art piece, not unlike *The News of the Building of the Wall*, which emphasises the distinct relationship developed between myself and a participant in the work as I teach them to recite stories. The stories that make up this work are ambiguously autobiographical short stories that I wrote.

9 Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator”, *Selected Writings Volume 1*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 253–264.

The work is structured around three stories. It is designed so that I begin by reciting the third story, after which the participant learns the first story. As they learn the story, the narrative slowly unfurls. The participant only discovers each story's narratives as they memorise it. In the second sitting, I begin by reciting the first story. This is a way to link the sittings, to give the participant a sense of how well they remembered the story, bridge the time elapsed between sittings, and to complete the story, had the participant not made it the whole way through. Following this, I teach them the second story. Logically, in the third sitting, I recite the second story and teach them the third. Due to this structuring, the work exists as a loop – opening with the telling of the final story and closing with its learning. As a result, the participant is not given an opportunity to re-hear the third story. They are left with its memory as the stories blur together across the time they were learnt.

In an early performance, I met the participant in a particularly shady bar in the Melbourne city centre. The bar was decorated with plush, worn chairs and couches, unimportant sporting paraphernalia and faded green carpet. I leapt right into reciting the third story to the participant. It often surprises people, the immediacy of being recited a story at such close quarters – as though no one expects to be told a story, as though this is so far removed from the conversations people have every day. It is also unsettling to have someone stare, and can distract from listening. After reciting the third story, we begin by learning the first. The participant usually has a few questions about sentence structure and words chosen. Some participants are completely taken out of the experience by sentence structuring they disagree with, and some are open to following the words via my authority. At an indeterminate moment, something often shifts: a participant moves from feeling self-conscious, embarrassed or intimidated, to feeling beholden to the story. Were they to stop memorising, or end the work, they would not know how the story ends. As they learn it, the story becomes woven into them. This process

literally plays out as a practice of weaving or sewing. While sewing, a needle punctuates cloth, circling over the same point with a looped thread in order to strengthen the meeting of thread and cloth created, reinforced through repetition. In the practice of weaving, different fabrics and threads are entangled back and forth with one another until they create an entirely new whole object – a tapestry or image of tiny threads working as whole. The *puncture* of the work is the point of frustration at fragments of a story that can't quite be remembered, or imagined images of the events described. This is slowly reinforced through the repetition of the words, until these fragmented sentences and estimations of words form a whole story in the participant's memory. A gap can form between the languages of the stories, between what I say and what they recite, no matter how strictly I enforce a verbatim rendering. Yet the story still accounts for the same thing. In this gap, of resistance and attention, of translation between bodies, the work acts.

IT IS ALWAYS A BODY THAT CASTS A SHADOW ON ANOTHER BODY

This exegesis begins from the outset with a first-person account of a research project, jumping between key moments of exposure and interaction with artworks produced during, or experienced as part of, the research process. From here, I move outwards, into an examination of the relations formed between acting bodies within these artworks. Here, I will designate a number of 'embodied relations' that will anchor each chapter, so that each chapter evolves around an exploration of both *intimacies* and *conflicts* between bodies. I refer to *embodiment* and the *embodied self* as a starting point, for which the interior/exterior dichotomy is a false one. I will show that experience is not essentially private and interior, but situated, intersubjective and social. A subject, or self, is constituted *through* experience, not by it, and through those it comes into contact with.

As a means of answering my research question, ‘*What embodied intimacies or conflicts are produced in performative art practices, through the reciprocity of two bodies involved and responding to one another while speaking/listening?*’, each chapter will be framed by a relational state between two acting bodies – proposing the *intimacies* or *conflicts* experienced through my performance works. Examining these embodied intimacies and conflicts is a way to account for the relationships that develop between me and a participant when performing my works. These relationships will be further unpacked by analysing my experience of Mette Edvardsen’s *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine* (2010–) – a performance work in which I played the role of the participant. The focus of this exegesis is on performative art practices that are seated in conversation, or unfold in a one-on-one context between a performer and a participant without the use of props, outside of the gallery space and involving a reciprocal engagement with one another. I designate these works as *performative art practices* not only as a means to situate them within the practice of performance art, but also to acknowledge the *performative* nature of the relationship developed in the work, meaning that each actor and participant in the work is required to literally *perform* or take action. The performances examined are all indebted to memorising text, and how this text can be communicated between bodies by speaking and listening to one another. This exegesis is primarily focused on the procedural unfolding of these performance works. I attend to the contents of Kafka’s short story *The News of the Building of the Wall: A Fragment* (1971) in chapter one, the poems recited to me by the human-book *Against the Forgetting* in chapter two, and the stories that are recited in *Something Like Dancing* in chapter three. However, what primarily frames the research is the effects felt by those engaging with one another through these works. These effects, or intimacies and conflicts, will frame each chapter as key terms to be witnessed in the relationships developed between the two performing bodies. Chapters one and two will explore relations developed in *The News of the Building of the Wall* (2016), and

clarify a politics of listening, to be outlined below. Chapters three and four will then turn to *Something Like Dancing* (2017–) to further tease out the embodied relations developed in these performance practices.

I frame these intimacies and conflicts according to the definitions Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza articulates in *Ethics* (1989), as the effects of one body acting in relation to another body.¹⁰ Spinoza does not use the term body in a specifically corporeal sense, as he refers to all ‘bodies’ being one substance, and that everything that exists is merely a modulation of this substance – be it a corporeal body, a plant or an idea. I refer to the body in this exegesis as the corporeal body. When referring to Spinoza’s ‘body’, I will include quotation marks, like drawn squiggly lines signifying the movement of an object in a drawing, to present this shifting between substances. For Spinoza, one can only comprehend the effects of one’s body on a *plane of immanence*, or comprehension, relating to other ‘bodies’. It is in this context that I use the term *relation* and *relational* throughout this exegesis, to determine and describe the relationship that occurs between two or more ‘bodies’. When my body encounters another ‘body’, I could be enhanced as this other ‘body’ agrees with mine and adds to my power. Alternatively, I am decreased and decomposed, if this other ‘body’ has greater power in opposition to my own and blocks my potential to act. These two modes of experiencing effects, or relations with other ‘bodies’, are called *passions* by Spinoza, and are a lens through which he considers whether interlocuting bodies *compound* (produce joy) or *decompose* (produce sadness) our own power.¹¹

10 Benedictus de Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Andrew Boyle and G. H. R. Parkinson (London: J. M. Dent, 1989).

11 *ibid.*

These *passions* are both one of two sorts of affectations, and refer to the power of being acted upon, or of effects that come from external relations. The other affectations are *actions*, which refer to one's own power of acting, and originate internally. I will be returning to the category of actions shortly, in relation to a politics practiced in the exegesis, but want to linger further on the *passions* or effects acting bodies have on each other. In his book *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (1988), French philosopher Gilles Deleuze explains:

each body in extension, each idea or each mind in thought are constituted by the characteristic relations that subsume the parts of that body... When a body “encounters” another body, or an idea another idea, it happens that the two relations sometimes combine to form a more powerful whole, and sometimes one decomposes the other, destroying the cohesion of its parts... But as conscious beings, we never apprehend anything but the *effects* of these compositions and decompositions: we experience *joy* when a body encounters ours and enters into composition with it, and *sadness* when, on the contrary, a body or an idea threaten our own coherence.¹²

In this exegesis, I will frame each chapter through terms that describes the conditions of two bodies relating, as potential compositions (*intimacies*) or decompositions (*conflicts*). What remains ambiguous, however, is a clear determination of whether these associations produce intimate or conflicting relations, as in each performance of the work a unique interaction of distinct bodies occurs. These associations in the performance present a relationality between bodies, which can produce both positive or negative effects. Because of this, these terms describe a moving back and forth between two bodies. By proposing these

¹² Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1988), 19.

descriptions of two bodies relating as the *effects* of the work, I introduce a framework for a reading of the work at the intersections of these bodies, as opposed to presenting resolute results on the effects one body had on another. To do this, I propose these effects of the performance as intersubjective effects that fill the space between the two bodies performing the work. To clarify, my use of the term ‘intersubjective’ follows the intuition that subjectivity is not a stable objective point upon which an intersubjective relation is developed. A subjective ‘sense’ (and I mean that in the true definition of the word: a feeling) of self is profoundly affected by each different ‘other’ that enters into relation with oneself. This, I believe, is Spinoza’s approach to ‘bodies’ meeting, as he presents the view that the contents of our thoughts are determined by our mind’s relation to other minds – as intersubjective effects – defining the individual by means of inter-relation to others. By intersubjective effects, I refer to the effects acting bodies cast upon one another in this space of relationality, as effects that predetermine the self, the other and their relations.

These effects will be listed at the beginning of each chapter, with their etymology, and carry through the chapter as a unifying theme. For consistency, I have used the Oxford English Dictionary Online throughout as my source for this etymology.¹³ A leaning on etymology in this exegesis implies a listening to languages’ roots as a means to make sense of the present. Sometimes the initial context for language and its meaning no longer applies in a contemporary setting, yet the words remain. This I use as an excuse to be loose with the etymology of words and mould it to my own use. The framing effects used are:

13 OED Online. June 2018. Oxford University Press. www.oed.com

Reciprocal	(chapter 1)
Occupy	(chapter 2)
Agency	(chapter 2)
Complicit	(chapter 3)
Shadow	(chapter 3)
Distance	(chapter 4)
Embarrass	(chapter 4)

To briefly examine these terms, it is clear that this structuring presents a number of conflicts within itself. ‘To reciprocate’ opens chapter one as a moving to-and-fro, or a rubbing between acting bodies. Reciprocity implies a mutual benefit and is derived from the Latin word *reciprocus*, meaning a moving backwards and forwards.¹⁴ Reciprocity is not always for mutual benefit, but a mutual give and take, a play of *composition* and *decomposition* that presents two bodies on an acting plane.

This mutual reciprocity is then undermined with the presentation of a gesture of occupation in chapter two. ‘To occupy’ implies a taking up of space and time, at times a violent colonising of a space or another’s time, which is inherently *not* reciprocal. Occupation presents a composition of one body at the expense of the other’s decomposition. Within the performances described in this exegesis, the ‘body’ that occupies another is often a text, a story or a memory of another body’s vocal impression. The act of listening implicitly involves a process of occupation, as a voice travels from a throat it occupies and springs forth into the ear canal of another, lodging and inserting itself into memory.¹⁵ Memorising a text is

14 “reciprocal, adj. and n.” OED Online. June 2018. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/view/Entry/159531?redirectedFrom=reciprocal>
 (accessed August 12, 2018).

15 In this exegesis, the word *voice* refers to the expulsion of air and sound produced by the vocal organs, both as a means of communicating semantically, as well as other bodily expressions and sounds such as sighing, laughing, coughing, et cetera.

a conscious making space within oneself to be inhabited. To remember what another person said demonstrates how the other occupies oneself. To occupy also implies a keeping busy – to occupy one’s mind, one’s time or to occupy oneself with the work. Occupying oneself with memorisation involves an intentional opening of oneself to be occupied.

This sense of occupation, as a keeping busy or an intentional engagement with new information, implies a decision. Chapter two continues with the condition of ‘agency’, as the capacity of an actor to act in a given environment. In the decision to memorise or to be kept busy through occupation, a capacity for agency creates space: the ‘body’ with agency chooses to have another ‘body’s’ shadow cast upon itself. This is seen both in an openness to new knowledge, and in an openness to vulnerability in intersubjective relationships. Just as the relationship developed within the works discussed in this exegesis is equally open to conflict, intimacy and the messy cohesion of the two, the actions of occupying and asserting one’s agency can have fluctuating consequences on the self and on the other.

In chapter three, the conditions of ‘complicity’ and ‘to cast/receive a shadow’ are presented as relations between acting bodies. This chapter is written discursively, as an imagined conversation between me and an interlocutor in the performance work *Something Like Dancing*. To be complicit describes an involvement with another, often in regards to an illegal act. It is derived from the Latin verb *complicare*, meaning ‘to fold together’.¹⁶ A sense of folding together performs both the opening and closing of corporeal and mental boundaries within acting ‘bodies’. A fold both hides and reveals in the same moment. To fold *together* implies a

¹⁶ “complicit, adj.”. OED Online. June 2018. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/view/Entry/250771?redirectedFrom=complicit>
(accessed August 12, 2018).

communal, reciprocal hiding and revelation. A Deleuzian fold announces that the inside is nothing more than a fold of the outside.¹⁷ Deleuze's thinking proposes a variety of modalities of folds – from the fold of our material selves, our bodies, to the folding of time, or simply memory. Indeed subjectivity might be understood as precisely a topology of these different kinds of folds. The fold in this sense is also the name for one's relation to oneself.

A shadowing presents a similar marking of another body as an implication of an engagement or relation. Shadows are always in-between objects – a point of subtraction between the bodies. The object that casts the shadow could be seen to be affecting the cast-upon object negatively, as it hides or overrides the object. A knowledge of self is determined through the shadows cast upon us by other 'bodies'; this is how one knows themselves and their body. Following this logic, to be cast by a shadow implies an accrual of knowledge. To cast a shadow, and to be cast by a shadow, is a means of expressing how bodies are complicit in a process of self-determination in a reciprocal exchange.

This is all beginning to sound neat and optimistic, yet I have conveniently pushed aside the negative, *decomposing*, effects of these intersubjective relations. Occupying is not just a sense of taking the other in willingly, but is just as often a process of forced removal, or forceful entry. Colonial occupation is a nation extending and retaining its authority over another nation and its people, territories and resources with the aim of developing or exploiting them to benefit the colonising country – a darker shadow which decomposes the sovereign state while developing beneficial economies for the occupier. An agency is an administrative division of a government, enforcing laws on other bodies. An agent is a

17 Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

body that exerts power and is at times involved in espionage – a secret power sneaks in without detection. In chapter four, the effects used are ‘distance’ or a practice of relational ‘embarrassment’. Here, distance presents a practice of quarrel, estrangement, discord or a standing apart. ‘Embarrass’ finds its roots in the French *embarrasser*, which literally means ‘to block, impede’, and the Italian *imbarrare* – ‘to bar’ – literally, to hold at a distance. To look embarrassed presents a relational practice of embarrassment, an embarrassment or distance determined by the other’s gaze (the appearance that I am embarrassed) and to witness the other’s embarrassment mirrored back. To look embarrassed is to see the shadow the other casts on oneself, and wish to escape it. Chapter four explores the complications of intimacy and coming too close in *Something Like Dancing*, as determined through this vibration of embarrassment.

HANNAH ARENDT’S DISCLOSURE OF UNIQUENESS IN PLURALITY THROUGH SPEECH

Above I outlined the structure of my thesis through the effectual relations between bodies experienced in intersubjective performance practice. Below I give attention to some of the key theorists I use throughout the exegesis, and how I intend to navigate their thinking. I will talk through these theorists in the chronological order in which their thoughts entered into public discourse. Through this chronology I will navigate each of their politics in relation to a process of embodied voicing. I will then map my own politics of listening from this, which will be demonstrated throughout the exegesis and in my final work for examination.

I begin with a key touchstone throughout the exegesis, Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition*, first published in 1958, in which she addresses

problems of diminishing human agency and political freedom.¹⁸ Arendt is interested in the *vita activa* (active life) as opposed to the *vita contemplativa* (contemplative life). Arendt proposes three fundamental human activities: work, labour and action. This exegesis does not have the scope to cover these all in depth, but for the context of my research I will be focusing on the activity of *action*, the ‘only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality’.¹⁹ Action, as mentioned above in reference to Spinoza, opposes the *passions* or effects felt by other bodies acting upon oneself. Actions refer to one’s own power to act, originating internally and projected, according to Arendt, into the plurality.²⁰ Arendt explains that plurality is ‘specifically *the* condition... of all political life’.²¹ Plurality determines the condition of humans living together, and acting together, in their multitudes, while occupying their own uniqueness – ‘plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone who ever lived, lives, or will live’.²² Plurality is a central feature of action. If to act is to take initiative and bring the unexpected into the world, it cannot be done independently of a presence of a plurality of actors who from their different perspectives can witness what is being done. Action – to the extent that it requires appearing in public, making oneself known through words and deeds, and eliciting the consent of others – can only exist in a context defined by plurality.

18 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition: Second Edition*, trans. Margaret Canovan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

19 *ibid*, 7.

20 Despite their differences, Arendt and Spinoza present a close use of the word ‘action’, with regards to a power to act projected outwards, as a becoming visible in a space of appearances. For an in-depth comparison of their approaches to action, see: Kim Sang Ong-Van-Cung, “The Vulnerability of the Common: Spinoza Versus Arendt on the Individual and the Social”. Lecture (California: University of California, Berkeley, September 5, 2012), accessed July 5, 2018. <http://criticaltheory.berkeley.edu/?event=the-vulnerability-of-the-common-spinoza-versus-arendt-on-the-individual-and-the-social>

21 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7.

22 *ibid*, 8.

I will continue to refer to the public and private realm throughout this exegesis, to both examine how speaking and storytelling bridges this threshold of self and other, and to challenge distinctions between what is semantically expressed and what is felt or communicated through the body. When I refer to storytelling, I refer to the social and cultural activity of sharing stories, which Arendt defines as the vital bridge between the personal and the public realms, the site in which ‘politics’ occurs.²³ Arendt distinguishes between the public and private realm, and the social, as a means to determine in what realms different activities are enacted. She maps a history of the distinctions between these realms and how they have developed from late Roman and Greek antiquity to modern times. She defines public space as a space of political action, in opposition to the private space in which activities that sustain life exists (for example, eating, housekeeping, sex, personal hygiene etc.). These distinctions have previously caused consternation among theorists who felt this determination was presented on the presumption that all ‘men’ (read, human existents) had access to the public, political space. Her concept of ‘free political space’ originates from the Greek *polis* – from equal human beings with the freedom to articulate, debate and express their opinions. Consequently, this *polis* is a privileged minority of those with authority, education and in a position to be considered ‘equal’, as opposed to those voices and bodies that are ‘disregarded’ due to their position outside of this society of political freedom of expression. As well as this, there is a feminist concern that this public space was in fact inherently inaccessible to women, as well as minorities such as people of colour, slaves and the homeless. The concern is that these people did not operate ‘freely’ in the public sphere at the time, and were therefore unable to participate freely in the *polis* Arendt determines. From a feminist perspective, Arendt was at her most provocative while offering

23 *ibid*, 43.

insight into the ways in which different facets of one's identity affect social and political opportunities. Arendt recognised that what typically passes for a gender problem is not a matter of gender at all, but a peculiar kind of loneliness. As argued by feminist academic Kimberly Maslin, the dynamics at work in 'the woman problem' are, at their core, challenges of human existence.²⁴ She explains that Arendt left feminists with the conceptual framework to understand that the so-called 'woman problem' occurs most prominently when constant engagement in labour and a lack of solitude lead to a self-denial. In this self-denial, loneliness becomes an ontological condition rather than an intermittent reality, precluding the kind of connectedness (plurality) necessary for political action.²⁵ In line with the necessity of the plurality, Arendt's determination of a public space of *polis* was not intended as a literal space of engagement in 'public' (as in government, in the street, at work, et cetera), but as an engagement with plurality through *action*. This could be situated inside the household but outside of the *labour* of living, through conversations and support between friends (a good example of this as a wider phenomenon are consciousness raising groups, a form of activism popularised by US feminists in the 1960s). Arendt says that 'the *polis*, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be'.²⁶

Arendt acknowledges that the term 'public' has two closely related phenomena: the 'world itself, as it is common to all of us and

24 Kimberly Maslin, "The Gender Neutral Feminism of Hannah Arendt", *Hypatia* vol. 28, no. 3 (Summer 2013), 585–601.

25 *ibid*, 588.

26 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 198.

distinguished from our privately owned place in it'.²⁷ This is the world determined by the human artefact and 'to affairs which go on among those who inhabit the man-made [sic] world together'.²⁸ To this side of the public, Arendt has a lot to say, but it is not so immediately relevant to my own research. In the other sense, which I turn to, 'public'/*polis* means *public appearance*: 'everything that appears in public can be seen or heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity. For us, appearance – something that is being seen and heard by others as well as ourselves – constitutes reality.'²⁹ Such a public space is created 'wherever men [sic] are together in the manner of speech and action', and it is this conception of a public space determined by the meeting of bodies in action that I will be attending to in this exegesis.³⁰ For Arendt, through a modern conception of public/private life (determined less so through markers of space such as walls, than by what is expressed to one another through the action of speech) a rupturing of these spaces occurs not through the action of 'stepping outside' the private space of the home, but through the disclosure of speech:

Compared with the reality which comes from being seen and heard, even the greatest forces of intimate life – the passions of the heart, the oughts of the mind, the lights of the senses – lead an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, deprivatised and deindividualised... into a shape to fit them for public appearance. The most current of such form occurs in storytelling... Each time we talk about things that can be experienced only in privacy and in intimacy, we bring them out into a sphere where they will assume a kind of reality which, their

27 *ibid*, 52.

28 *ibid*, 52.

29 *ibid*, 50.

30 *ibid*, 198.

interiority notwithstanding, they never could have had before. The presence of others who see what we see, and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and of ourselves.³¹

One of the key functions of action, through the disclosure of speech, is the disclosure of the identity of *who* speaks. Arendt emphasises human distinctness, or uniqueness, in plurality. Distinctness, as opposed to otherness, is a point of distinguishing oneself, through the action of speaking, in which a person communicates themselves and not merely *something* (such as thirst, anger or excitement): 'Speech corresponds to the fact of distinctness and is the actualisation of the human condition of plurality... of living as a distinct and unique being among equals.'³² In other words, a speaker reveals *who* they are as opposed to *what* they are. This is a key point of Arendt's that I will be returning to throughout this exegesis: through speech, one constitutes their uniqueness through action as an actualisation of plurality. This is the context in which I will continue to use the term uniqueness. Uniqueness is key to plurality, for a plurality without uniqueness would be a totalitarian society. Thus, speech is an integral action of political change that inserts and privileges the uniqueness of each existent in their political actions. Arendt states that one of the weaknesses of action is that it is fragile, subject to forgetfulness and time passing. She asserts that to re-tell deeds as stories preserves them. These stories become the life story of the *who*, or the life story of the person who acts/speaks. In order to be preserved or received, these stories in turn need an audience, or a community of listeners, who become transmitters of the deeds that have been immortalised. Arendt explains:

31 *ibid*, 50.

32 *ibid*, 178.

The realm of human affairs... consists of the web of human relationships which exists wherever men live together. The disclosure of the “who” through speech... always fall[s] into an already existing web where their immediate consequences can be felt. Together they start a new process which eventually emerges as a unique life story of the newcomer, affecting uniquely the life stories of all those with whom he comes into contact. It is because of this already existing web of human relationships... in which action alone is real, that it “produces” stories with or without intention as naturally as fabrication produces tangible things.³³

This web of human relationships, which produces stories and accounts for actions, is the plurality of the *polis*, made up of unique singularities that determine one another through speech and storytelling.

JACQUES DERRIDA, ROLAND BARTHES AND THE PLEASURE OF THE TEXT

In 1966, Jacques Derrida delivered his lecture ‘Structure, Sign and Play’ at the conference ‘The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man’ at John Hopkins University in Baltimore. This lecture was published the following year in *Writing and Difference*, a collection of a number of Derrida’s early essays, as ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences’.³⁴ Briefly, this lecture dealt with the limitations of structuralism, a system of analysis that deals with individual elements of language and culture as embedded in, and able to reveal, the workings of larger structures. Derrida admires structuralism’s reflexivity and abstraction, but argues that it does not go far enough in analysing the

33 *ibid*, 184.

34 Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences”, *Writing and Difference*, Jacques Derrida, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978), 278–293.

effects of language and its meanings. He showed *structures* as free-floating, or *playing*, relationships. This, in his thinking, is due to the reliance on the 'centre' of the structure. The centre both closes off the play of the structure, and is what makes it possible. Derrida heralded this event, or rupture, in structuralism as that which would come about when the 'structurality of structure' (the reliance on the centre) had to begin to be thought and considered.³⁵ He necessitates this decentring, or re-thinking the structurality of structure, by stating that it is crucial to 'begin thinking that there was no centre, that the centre could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the centre had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions come into play'.³⁶

This lecture came to be programmatic of Derrida's deconstructive method alongside *Of Grammatology*, his book published in the same year.³⁷ This book approached structuralism through a deconstructive process that analysed the concept of the 'sign'. For the linguist and semiotician Ferdinand de Saussure (the most influential semiologist at the time), the sign had two components: the signifier (or referent) and signified (the thing to which the referent is referring or pointing). Regrettably, I do not have the scope here to pursue this lineage further. I will say that while this two-part sign formation will be critically questioned later on, what interested Derrida was the presumption that the relation between the signifier and signified was stable.³⁸ In other

³⁵ *ibid*, 280.

³⁶ *ibid*, 280.

³⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1997).

³⁸ Particularly with the growing popularity of Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), an American Pragmatist who identified 10 sign formations, one of them being a physical sign (i.e. a footprint in the sand), that were taken up to describe the indexical nature of film and photography. Charles S. Peirce, Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss, and Arthur W. Burks. *Collected papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960).

words, through his theory of *différance*, he showed how a space, almost an abyss, opened between the signifier and the signified, making meaning itself unstable and wholly relational. Furthermore, he noted that ‘language and writing are two distinct systems of signs; the second *exists for the sole purpose of representing the first*’.³⁹ He used the term ‘phonocentrism’ to criticise Western philosophy’s tendency to consider the written word secondary or derivative of oral speech. He deconstructed this binary opposition by arguing that speech can be seen as derived from writing as easily as writing is seen as derived from speech.

This brief attention paid to *Of Grammatology* is to set the scene around Derrida’s relationship to speech and writing, and his designation of this binary opposition being a key feature of western logocentrism. In the same year as *Of Grammatology* and *Writing and Difference*, he also published *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl’s Phenomenology*.⁴⁰ In this book, Derrida argues that when Husserl describes lived-experience, even absolute subjectivity, he is speaking of an interior monologue, an auto-affection as hearing-oneself-speak. According to Derrida, hearing-oneself-speak is, for Husserl, ‘an auto-affection of an absolutely unique type’.⁴¹ He describes the auto-affective voice as the most *ideal* of signs: ‘phonic signs... are “heard” by the subject who utters them in the absolute proximity of their present. The subject does not have to pass outside of himself in order to be immediately affected by its activity of expression.’⁴² Derrida determines, structurally and in principle, that no consciousness is possible without the voice – the voice *is* consciousness – and in conversation, the

39 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 30.

40 Jacques Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, trans. Leonard Lawlor (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2011).

41 *ibid*, 67.

42 *ibid*, 65, emphasis in original.

propagation of signifiers encounters no obstacle because it puts two phenomenological origins (or first-person consciousness) of pure auto-affection in relation:

To speak to someone is undoubtedly to hear oneself speak, to be heard by oneself, but also and by the same token, if one is heard by the other, it is to make the other *repeat immediately* in himself the hearing-oneself-speak in the very form in which I have produced it... This possibility of reproduction, whose structure is absolutely unique, *gives itself* as the phenomenon of an unlimited mastery or an unlimited power over the signifier, since the latter has the form of non-exteriority itself.⁴³

This non-exteriority shows that in speaking-to-oneself, there is no external detour from the hearing to speaking – I hear myself speaking in the very *moment* I speak. However for Derrida, in this very moment, there must be a miniscule hiatus differentiating me as the speaker *and* the hearer – this is necessary to hear-oneself-speak. This hiatus differentiates me from myself – a gap without which I would not be a hearer *as well as* a speaker (for example, through another form of auto-affection, when I look in the mirror it is necessary that I am distanced from myself, despite witnessing myself). This hiatus in speaking-to-oneself introduces a temporal nature to the relation:

If we now remember that the pure interiority of phonic auto-affection assumed the purely temporal nature of the “expressive” process, we see that the theme of a pure interiority of speech or of “hearing-oneself-speak” is contradicted by “time” itself... Like the relation between and inside and an outside in general, an existent

43 *ibid*, 69.

and a non-existent in general, a constituter and a constituted in general, temporalisation is at once the very power and very limit of the phenomenological reduction. Hearing-oneself-speak is not the interiority of an inside closed in upon itself. It is the irreducible openness in the inside, the eye and the world in speech.⁴⁴

As with the structure of the sign, this temporal spacing of hearing-oneself-speak introduces an irreducible openness to the *inside* of this auto-affective relation, which Derrida also presents as *différance*: ‘the operation of differing that, at once, splits and delays presence, subjecting it by the same action to the originary division and originary delay’.⁴⁵ He believes that *différance* is necessary for all forms of auto-affection, via the auto-affective spacing or constant deferral of the signifier to an outside. Going further, Derrida brings the written word *back* into relation with the voice as a stabilising expression of speaking: ‘If writing completes the constitution of ideal objects, it does this only insofar as it is phonetic writing. Writing comes to stabilise, inscribe, write down, incarnate a speech that is already prepared.’⁴⁶ He asks, ‘in what way is writing – the common name for signs that function despite the total absence of the subject, by means of death – implied in the very movement of signification in general, in particular, in speech that is called “live”?’⁴⁷ He shows that writing is implied in the *very movement* of signification contained in the temporal, live nature of hearing-oneself-speak, via this auto-affective openness or spacing. Writing is presented as a *différance* in auto-affection, or of hearing-oneself-speak:

44 *ibid*, 74.

45 *ibid*, 75.

46 *ibid*, 69.

47 *ibid*, 80.

*The history of metaphysics is the absolute wanting-to-hear-itself speak. This history is closed when the absolute infinity appears to itself as its own death. A voice without différance, a voice without writing is at once absolutely alive and absolutely dead.*⁴⁸

Following this consideration on the vocal auto-affective relation, I want to return briefly to another of Derrida's essays in *Writing and Difference*. In 'Violence and Metaphysics', Derrida respectfully takes Emmanuel Levinas's writings to task and focuses on his ethical philosophy and openness to the Other. Derrida states that 'the concept (material or language), which is always *given to the other*, cannot encompass the other, cannot include the other. The... vocalic dimension which opens the original direction of language, cannot lend itself to inclusion in and modification by the accusative or attributive dimension without violence.'⁴⁹ Levinas develops his ethics from the experience of the encounter with the other, the relation of engaging face-to-face with the other being the privileged relation in which the other's proximity and distance are strongly felt.⁵⁰ Levinas placed emphasis not just on the face-to-face encounter, but on the communication or speech that occurs in this meeting.⁵¹ Derrida expands on the need for the speech in the encounter with the other: 'I can only, I *must* only speak to the other; that is, I must call him in the vocative, which is not a category, a *case* of speech, but, rather the bursting forth, the very raising up of speech.'⁵² Through this, he signals the need for speech in an encounter with the other's face, determining the mute glance as a violence that does not

48 *ibid*, 88, emphasis in original.

49 Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics", Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago. 1978. p., 95.

50 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1979).

51 Jill Robins, "Visage, Figure: Reading Levinas's Totality and Infinity", *Yale French Studies*, no. 79, Literature and the Ethical Question (1991): 135–149.

52 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 103.

respect the other, as hearing and seeing are implicitly related in an encounter that seeks to respect and not consume. ‘Violence, then, would be the solitude of a mute glance of a face without speech, *the abstraction* of seeing. According to Levinas the glance *by itself*, contrary to what one may be led to believe, does not *respect* the other. Respect, beyond grasp and contact, does not seek to consume.’⁵³ Derrida challenges Levinas’s idea that face-to-face can be the only ethical communication, as opposed to written communication, which Levinas determines unresponsive:

that the writer absents himself better, that is, expresses himself better as other, addresses himself to the other more effectively than the man of speech? And that, in depriving himself of the enjoyments and effects of his signs, the writer more effectively renounces violence?... The limit between violence and nonviolence is perhaps not between speech and writing but within each of them. The thematic of the trace (which Levinas distinguishes from the effect, the path, or the sign which is not related to the other as the invisible absolute) should lead to a certain rehabilitation of writing.⁵⁴

Returning to a chronological tracing of the history of the politics of the voice, I move now to a brief positioning of Roland Barthes in the discussion. A year after Derrida delivered his John Hopkins lecture, and in the same year as publishing *Of Grammatology*, *Voice and Phenomenon* and *Writing and Difference*, Barthes published his essay ‘The Death of the Author’.⁵⁵ After being influenced by Derrida’s challenge to structuralism, Barthes argues against the tendency in literary criticism at the time to

⁵³ *ibid*, 100.

⁵⁴ *ibid*, 102.

⁵⁵ Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author”, *Image Music Text*, Roland Barthes, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 142–164.

rely on aspects of the author's identity – their biography, politics and intensions in the text – to distil meaning in a reader. For Barthes, 'to give a text an author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish with a final signified, to close the writing'.⁵⁶ Barthes presented the *text* not as 'an object that can be computed'⁵⁷, but as a body that 'practices the infinite deferment of the signified', which: 'accomplishes the very plural of meaning: an *irreducible* (and not merely an acceptable) plural. The *text* is not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination.'⁵⁸ Barthes's articulation of the death of the author is a recognition of this severing of authority and authorship. Instead of discovering a single meaning, readers of a text discover that writing, in reality, constitutes a multi-dimensional space, which cannot be deciphered, only disentangled. At the end of 'The Death of the Author', Barthes proposes an approach to the text that considers pleasure, 'for the Text, it is bound to *jouissance*, that is to a pleasure without separation'.⁵⁹

This theory of textual pleasure leads Barthes to publish his book *The Pleasure of the Text*, in 1973.⁶⁰ Here, he pursues further his theory on a text being open to readers' own unstable identities, which each reader brings to the text and enjoys all the more for this engagement. The text is a space that opens up thought unique in the reader: 'The pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas – for my body does not have the same ideas I do.'⁶¹ He explains that 'whenever I attempt to "analyse" a text which has given me pleasure, it is not my "subjectivity"

⁵⁶ *ibid*, 147.

⁵⁷ *ibid*, 156.

⁵⁸ *ibid*, 159.

⁵⁹ *ibid*, 164.

⁶⁰ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998).

⁶¹ *ibid*, 17.

I encounter but my “individuality,” the given which makes my body separate from other bodies and appropriates its suffering or its pleasure: it is my body of bliss I encounter’.⁶² Barthes divides the effects of texts into two: *plaisir*, ‘pleasure’, and *jouissance*, which is translated literally as ‘bliss’ but also carries the meaning of ‘orgasm’ and a sense of pain, or the joy of pain. This corresponds to a further distinction Barthes makes between ‘readerly’ and ‘writerly’ texts (these terms he first introduces and elaborates on in his 1970 text, *S/Z*).⁶³ Barthes argues that ‘writerly’ texts are more important than ‘readerly’ ones because he sees the text’s unity as forever being re-established by its composition: the codes that form and constantly move around within the text. The reader of a readerly text is largely passive, whereas the person who engages with a writerly text makes an active effort, perhaps re-enacting the actions of the writer himself. Although one may experience pleasure in the readerly text, it is when one sees the text from the writerly point of view that the experience is *blissful*.

The erotic drives of the body, of which the voice is an expression, make the voice ideal for subverting the orders of language and thus of politics. Barthes propositioned a *writing aloud* which would be carried by the *grain* of the voice, an erotic mixture of timbre and language.⁶⁴ He said that the aim of *writing aloud* would not be the clarity of messages or the ‘theatre of emotions’, but the ‘the language lined with flesh, a text where we can hear the grain of the throat, the patina of consonants, the voluptuousness of vowels... the articulation of the body, of the tongue, not that of meaning, of language’.⁶⁵ From his interest in the erotic,

62 *ibid*, 62.

63 Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller, Richard Howard and Honoré de Balzac (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).

64 Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 66.

65 *ibid*, 66.

corporeal nature of language, and writing outside of language, Barthes took his process of writing through an alphabetical organisation of fragments, honed in *The Pleasure of the Text*, and developed further in *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (1978).⁶⁶ The alphabetical fragments that make up the text refuse to form a syntagmatic chain, refuse to become a 'story'. Every fragment contains a 'figure', briefly defined, and followed by a text composed of two to ten numbered paragraphs that bespeak a point or identify a lover's experience. *Lover's Discourse* shows the elusive protagonist's attempt to search for signs by which to show and receive love, revealing the illusory nature of the pursuit of an idealised reality. Through this, Barthes challenges the reader's views and understandings of the social constructs of love, without asserting an alternative or definitive theory. He illustrates a fictional, structuralist reflection on a lover seeking to identify and be identified by an anonymous, amorous other. Barthes's final introductory statement proclaims, 'So it is a lover who *speaks* and who *says*' – emphasising in particular the *discourse* in the unrequited relationship, not the lover.⁶⁷

Returning again briefly to Derrida along this chronological stepping, in 1996 he delivered two seminars in Paris, which were then published together as the book *Of Hospitality*.⁶⁸ Here, Derrida approached the philosophical, literary and political definitions and practices of hospitality via the pivotal question of the foreigner. The question of the foreigner becomes, in Derrida's view, 'the question of the question', the origin of all questions and, implicitly, of philosophy itself. His re-readings of Plato's *Crito*, *Statesman* and *The Apology of Socrates* centre around the foreigner as an interrogative figure that unsettles certainties about

66 Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).

67 *ibid*, 9, emphasis added.

68 Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

human subjectivity: about what we are and what we fear; what disturbs and obsesses us; what we remember and what we want to forget. The foreigner question is initiated by the idea that ‘this foreigner, then, is someone with whom, to receive him, you begin by asking his name... to whom you put a question and address a demand... the minimal demand being: “What is your name?”... Does hospitality consist in interrogating the new arrival?’⁶⁹ This interrogation demanded of the foreigner is also framed through a problem of what language a person is expected to ask for hospitality in: ‘In what language can the foreigner address his or her question? Receive ours? In what language can he or she be interrogated?’⁷⁰ Derrida recasts hospitality as an ethical problem, regarding language and an address to the other, and what is asked of the other in a face-to-face encounter in regards to hospitality. Regarding the foreigner question, he believes that ‘we have come to wonder whether absolute, hyperbolic, unconditional hospitality doesn’t consist in suspending language, a particular determinate language, and even address to the other. Shouldn’t we submit to a sort of holding back of the temptation to ask the other who he is, what her name is, where he comes from, etc.’⁷¹ Hospitality, host and hostage remain inextricably linked as the one who hosts is, in effect, hostage to the one that he hosts, as it is the guest himself who harbours the possibility of hospitality. A host is also a living cell in which a virus multiplies, or a person or animal that has received transplanted tissue or a transplanted organ, demonstrating an entrapment of unconditional hospitality.

69 *ibid*, 27.

70 *ibid*, 131.

71 *ibid*, 135.

MAPPING A POLITICS OF LISTENING

Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero deals with the voice at the intersection between vocality and politics. In 2000 she published her book *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, an account of the relationship between selfhood and narration.⁷² Cavarero's theory of the *narratable self* shows how narrative models in philosophy and literature can open new ways of thinking about formation of human identities. By showing how each human being has a unique story that can be told about them, Cavarero launches a shift in thinking about subjectivity and identity, which relies not upon categorical or discursive norms, but seeks to account for the unique *who* each one of us is.

In *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (2005), Cavarero builds on Arendt's *uniqueness in plurality*, elaborating on the *vocalic uniqueness* of a voice and its echo of resonance in communication. She starts from this given uniqueness of every voice and re-reads the history of philosophy through its peculiar evasion of this embodied uniqueness:⁷³

The voice is invoked here because of its destination to speech, but in such a way that speech is never authorised to erase the reciprocal communication of uniqueness that the voice announces and deserves to it. It could thus be called a politics of voices, or a politics where the speakers, no matter what they say, communicate first of all for their vocalic uniqueness and the echo of resonance as the essential prerequisites of verbal communication.⁷⁴

⁷² Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (UK: Routledge, 2000).

⁷³ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice: Towards a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

⁷⁴ *ibid*, 210.

She posits a new relationship between *logos* and politics – one in which the voice is not about speaking in order to hear oneself (seeing this auto-affection as narcissistic and internal), but is deeply relational and bound up with the other. She is critical of what she sees as solipsism of both traditional metaphysics and Derrida's critique and deconstruction of speech within it. She argues that the history of metaphysics has constructed a system that neglects uniqueness and relationality with regards to the voice. Her strategy is to overturn this approach that subordinates speech to thought and emphasise that speaking means 'to communicate oneself to others in the plurality of voices'.⁷⁵ Cavarero looks to the part of the vocalic that is in excess of language, over and above the linguistic system. This is the phatic function of the voice, the 'I am here' communicating singularity of an existent being flesh and bone. This is what she calls the 'vocal ontology of uniqueness'. Cavarero arrives at this vocal ontology of uniqueness through Arendt's influence on her thinking, believing that the real subject of politics can only be the agent of action, and that the action itself (speech) expresses embodied uniqueness.

Female figures provide a crucial counter history for Cavarero, one in which the embodied, expressive, voice triumphs over the immaterial semantic language. Reconstructing this counter history, Cavarero proposes a 'politics of the voice' where the ancient bond between *logos* and politics is reconfigured, and where what matters is not the communicative content of a given discourse, but rather *who* is speaking. Countering a history of metaphysics that focuses on the binary of written word and spoken word, Cavarero introduces a consideration of the 'meaning filled voice' as a key signifier of a uniqueness, informed by Arendt's disclosure of the *who*. Cavarero believes that the uniqueness revealed through speech does not sit in the *logos* of language, but in

75 *ibid*, 13.

the *phōné* of the expressive voice – the inflections, rhythms, breathe, volume, sighs and hiccups – which sit outside of language but are equally expressive of a person. This valuation of the vocal stems from her belief that it is prejudiced to think that what is outside of speech is nothing but insignificant leftover. Rather than consider these forms of corporeal expression – which may express something of a body that a language could not communicate – *as noise*, Cavarero enforces a politics of voices that attends to the *phōné*, or expressive voice.

Following Cavarero, there are a number of other texts that I cite, which I will touch on briefly here to complete a thorough map of important references. Chapter one focuses on Franz Kafka's short story *The News of the Building of the Wall: A Fragment* to examine various thresholds between physical spaces, corporeal bodies and familiar/foreign binaries in performative relations and storytelling. I consider the physical threshold of the body and the home, or the familiar, and how this is traversed through storytelling's inherent relation to journeying. I make reference to Walter Benjamin's essay on Nikolai Leskov, from the book *Illuminations* (1968), which focuses not just on the author but on the practice of storytelling in opposition to engagement with the novel.⁷⁶ Benjamin's first measure of storytelling is its oral nature, and its orientation towards practical interests – all stories contain something useful, Benjamin argues, whether that useful information is obvious and on the surface or is embedded within the narrative in some way.⁷⁷

I also look to the verbal and physical communications between the father figure and the boatman in Kafka's story to establish the physical intimacy found in the acts of speaking and listening. This references

76 Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov", *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 83–109.

77 *ibid.*

Slovene philosopher Mladen Dolar's determination of the voice as a bodily extension of the mouth. In his book *A Voice and Nothing More* (2006), Dolar uses Derrida's idea of 'phonocentrism' and revives and develops Jacques Lacan's claim that the voice is one of the paramount embodiments of the psychoanalytic object (*objet a*).⁷⁸ Dolar investigates the object voice on a number of different levels: the linguistics of the voice, the metaphysics of the voice, the ethics of the voice, the paradoxical relation between the voice and the body, and the politics of the voice.⁷⁹ Artist and writer Brandon LaBelle's book *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary* (2014) expands on Dolar's thinking, surveying the oral cavity as the central channel by which self and surrounding are brought into relation.⁸⁰ Questions of embodiment and agency, attachment and loss, incorporation and hunger, and locution and the nonsensical are critically examined. He emphasises the mouth as a vital conduit for negotiating 'the foundational narrative of proper speech'.⁸¹ He unsettles assumptions around voice and vocality in favour of an epistemology of the oral, highlighting the acts of the tongue, the lips and the throat as primary mediations between interior and exterior, social structures and embodied expressions.

I take a small moment here to summarise some of the key points I take from these theorists, before moving on to a more explicit determination of my own 'politics of listening'. Arendt emphasises the plurality of humans acting together – the *polis*, in which politics are enacted. She argues that action is a practice of politics, a making oneself known through words

78 Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2006).

79 This raises an important diversion from the exegesis – a psychoanalytic analysis of the voice – which falls outside the scope of this project, but presents fertile ground for future research.

80 Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).

81 *ibid*, 137.

and deeds, which is ideally enacted through speech as the action that reveals the *who* of the speaker. This is what determines a uniqueness of a person in the plurality. Self-determination arises through an engagement with the other, and through the ongoing revelation of the *who*, whereby a *narrative self* is revealed. Informed by his development of deconstructive theory, Derrida emphasises the ontological position of hearing-oneself-speak and the potential of the stabilising position of writing in this auto-affective relationship. Derrida supports Levinas's ethics of a face-to-face engagement with the other, and further emphasises the need for speech in this engagement to prevent the 'violence' of a mute glance, which consumes, rather than respects, the other. He takes this further by again arguing for a rehabilitation of writing, claiming that writing provides an opportunity to communicate 'face-to-face' with the other while further clarifying what is expressed. Derrida then considers the condition of hospitality, in which he challenges the semantic language of a proper name in its ability to ask of the 'foreigner' what hospitality they seek. He argues, instead, that unconditional hospitality does not entail suspending language, but in resisting the temptation to demand of someone where they come from and *who* they are, in order to offer hospitality. This I tie to Arendt's disclosure of the *who* through speaking, in that who someone uniquely is and what it is they need cannot be proffered through a name of explanation, but is a *narrative self* that is revealed over time. Barthes emphasises the *grain* of the voice, an erotic mixture of timbre and language, rhythm and corporeal indicators. He also places emphasis on the *writerly* text as a blissful mode of reading, through which the reader inserts themselves into the text and alters it. LaBelle also places emphasis on the corporeality of a voice, as a marker of the individual, especially highlighting the acts of the tongue, the lips and the throat as primary mediations between interior and exterior, social structures and embodied expressions. Highly influenced by Arendt's disclosure of the *who*, Cavarero focuses on the nexus of voice and politics, arguing for a recognition of uniqueness via the expressive voice, or *phōné*,

as opposed to the semantic voice, *logos*. She gives credit to Derrida's deconstruction of the spoken/written language binary, but states that he does not adequately cover what is expressed through speech *outside* of language. In doing this, she also references Barthes's *grain* of the voice, which seemingly moves closer to an expressive voice, but stipulates that Barthes's examination of the erotic voice is directed towards a universal body, an abstracted lover, as opposed to a singular, unique being expressed through this voice.

Following this determination of speaking and listening as a corporeal, political engagement, I argue for vocalic uniqueness as revealed by the corporeality of a person speaking, and how attending to this fosters a politics of listening to bodies, through bodies. This research project proposes a *politics of listening* that not only attends to sound, but also pays attention to people's use of their voice in the act of giving account of themselves. This giving account can take any form, and cannot be reduced to language. The word *listening* stands in for a wider act of registering others' accounts for ourselves vocally and expressively. Through this exegesis, I will seek to articulate a *politics of listening* that listens for an expression of the other, revealed not through semantics, but through what is 'spoken' around this. In order to do this, I have produced performance works that facilitate an extended, face-to-face dialogue in which a speaker hears herself, attends to and listens to the other, and experiences her own words repeated back to her. For this to work, the performance works are 'scripted' through stories that are told back and forth; in time, the speakers are given the opportunity to listen to what is communicated beyond the spoken word: a glance; a shift in tonality, volume, cadence or rhythm; a sign of frustration or a reluctance to go on. This exegesis seeks to demonstrate that it is through *this* disclosure of uniqueness through the *corporeal* voice, the 'erotic' embodied voice, occurring in the face-to-face encounter with the other, that a practice of finely attuned listening is accessed.

To demonstrate a politics of listening in my performance works throughout this exegesis, chapters one and two will define and perform these politics through a consideration of my performance work, *The News of the Building of the Wall*. These chapters will follow, respectively, the themes of reciprocity in speaking, the occupation of a voice (or body), and the agential challenges in both my performance work and the proposed politics of listening. Having demonstrated how these politics are enacted in this format of performance, chapters three and four will turn to my work *Something Like Dancing*, to further investigate and tease out the influences acting ‘bodies’ have on one another through speaking and listening. By showing a complicity and desire in the development of a *narratable self* through speech, how bodies ‘cast shadows’ or affect an other through their voice and attentive listening, and how these processes of relating intimately can produce distance and embarrassment, I will examine the conflicts and intimacies experienced in the performance works I have produced as part of this research.

RECIPROCITY AND VOCAL UNIQUENESS IN STORYTELLING

RECIPROCAL – Etymology: < classical Latin *reciprocus*, *reciproque* *adj.* + -al *suffix*. < Middle French *reciproque* (French *réci-pro-que*) (adjective) reciprocal, mutual (first half of the 14th cent.), (of a pronoun) reflexive (15th cent. as *recep-proc*), (noun) equivalent or corresponding gift or return (15th cent.) or its etymon classical Latin *reciprocus* moving backwards and forwards (especially of tides), leading backwards and forwards, moving contrary to its original direction, affecting both parties equally, (of a type of argument) convertible, (of words) used with both active and passive signification, (of circumstances) marked by alternations of fortune, in post-classical Latin also (of verses) showing the same metrical scheme when read from either end (4th cent.), compound formation < two unattested adjectives derived respectively < *re-* *re-* *prefix* and *pro-* *pro-* *prefix*.⁸²

This chapter looks to Franz Kafka's short story *The News of the Building of the Wall: A Fragment*, as the source text for my performance work, *The News of the Building of the Wall* (2016). By unpacking this text – being the words recited throughout the performance by me and the participant – I will examine the dynamics of storytelling as a meeting of public and private domains through speaking. I will show that the physical intimacy demonstrated in the storytelling both described in the story and experienced through my work initiates a reciprocal bridging of corporeal thresholds through knowledges shared, via the conduit of the mouth, and through the voice that surprises the listener and expresses itself *outside* of language. In this chapter, I argue for a practice of voicing and listening that attends to the expressive voice as a key sign of the uniqueness of the

82 "reciprocal, adj. and n.". OED Online.

speaker. I will then support this with a demonstration of listening that attends only to semantic language, excluding voices that operate either in other languages or express themselves otherwise, from a political space of listening. I will use this to show the importance of a politics of listening that heeds what is beyond language, and how a lack of aural reciprocity in listening can be violent.

APPENDIX 1.1

The news of the building of the wall now penetrated into this world – late, too, some thirty years after its announcement. It was on a summer evening. I, ten years old, was standing with my father on the riverbank. In keeping with the importance of this much-discussed hour, I can recall the smallest details. My father was holding me by the hand, something he was fond of doing to the end of his days, and running his other hand up and down his long, very thin pipe, as though it were a flute. With his sparse, rigid beard raised in the air, he was enjoying his pipe while gazing upwards across the river. As a result his pigtail, object of the children's veneration, sank lower, rustling faintly on the gold-embroidered silk of his holiday gown.⁸³

STORYTELLING

The key drive in Kafka's short story is the act of storytelling as a process that brings people together, allowing knowledge and news to travel, and histories to be continually re-written. This story was among the notes and letters Kafka's close friend, Max Brod, collected over the years.⁸⁴ Kafka told Brod that he wished for all the material to be burnt once he died. After Kafka died, Brod decided to publish the writings he had collected anyway, and it is partly due to Brod's disregard for Kafka's dying wish that Kafka is widely regarded as one of the major figures of twentieth

83 Kafka, "The News of the Building of the Wall: A Fragment".

84 John Updike, "Introduction to Franz Kafka", *The Complete Stories*, Franz Kafka (New York: Schocken Books Inc, 1971).

century literature.⁸⁵ Kafka's story recalls the narrator as a child by the river with 'their' father (the child in the story is not gendered). A boatman enters and conveys some news before leaving, his physical arrival and departure points towards a reciprocal motion of moving backwards and forwards. The father shares the news with their family that a 'great wall' is being built to protect an imperial emperor from demon tribes. This story pursues a consideration of the distinction between what is familial and foreign on many levels, and presents allusions to intimacies, conflicts and boundaries – be they physical, familial, domestic, littoral, temporal, racial or sovereign boundaries.

Through the encounter with the boatman, there is an expansiveness of time implied which continues to pull through Kafka's story. The narrator describes that the news 'now' penetrates the world 'some thirty years after its announcement', then goes on to recall an event some distance away in the past.⁸⁶ To what exactly the thirty years refers remains ambiguous. Perhaps it is the time it took for the child to hear about the wall's construction, or the time since then that the rest of the world came to know it. Time and water are themes for travelling and unravelling concrete boundaries in the story. In his 2002 book *The Politics of Storytelling*, anthropologist Michael Jackson explores and expands on Arendt's notions of storytelling's political potential, bringing stories from all around the world into cross-cultural analysis.⁸⁷ Focusing on the violent and volatile conditions under which stories are told – or silenced and disregarded – he explores the power of narrative to re-make reality, enabling people to symbolically alter their relations and help reclaim

85 A side remark: Dora Dymant, Kafka's lover, destroyed all the material that she had kept of his. I wonder if "Kafkaesque" tragedies would be seen differently were they based on stories written for his lover, as opposed to the stories Kafka gave his friend?

86 Kafka, "The News of the Building of the Wall: A Fragment", 280.

87 Michael Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression, and Intersubjectivity* (Copenhagen, Denmark: Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2002).

an ability to be heard. He notes that ‘stories are so commonly and conspicuously *about* journeys – between such disparate realms as town/bush, heaven/earth, the land of the living/the land of the dead – that one may see in journeying one of the preconditions of the possibility of narrative itself’.⁸⁸ The vocal act of storytelling as a recording of history via memory implies a journeying across subjectivities, sites and temporal conditions that is fluid and ‘authored and authorized dialogically and collaboratively in the course of sharing one’s recollections with others. This is why one may no more recover the “original” story than step into the same river twice.’⁸⁹ The child’s recollection bridges the temporal parameters of their memory, yet also demonstrates this journeying between distinct spaces. Just as the father returns home to share the news, so the boatman returns via the river to his own world.

Jackson uses Arendt’s thoughts regarding storytelling and the political realm, as detailed in my introduction, to look at cross-cultural experiences of trauma and storytelling. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt defines storytelling as the vital bridge between the personal and the public realms, the site in which ‘politics’ occurs. It is her view that storytelling is never simply a matter of creating either personal or social meanings, but an aspect of the ‘subjective-in-between’, in which a multiplicity of private and public interests are always problematically in play.⁹⁰ Arendt’s private realm denotes a conglomeration of singular and reclusive subjectivities, described by Jackson as being ‘deprived of the reality that comes from being seen and heard by others’.⁹¹ This could be the private domestic space, the home in Kafka’s story, the subjectivity of one’s own singular experience (as told by the narrator) or, again in

88 *ibid*, 48.

89 *ibid*, 41.

90 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 182–184.

91 Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling*, 31.

Jackson's words, the 'the hidden, reserved, clandestine field of the personal in which certain thoughts, intentions, and desires are masked because they are not considered compatible with the *res publica*'.⁹² He explains:

If... stories are neither the pure creation of autonomous individuals nor the unalloyed expressions of subjective views, but rather a result of ongoing dialogue and redaction within fields of intersubjectivity, then the very notions of selfhood and subjectivity that are brought into relief in the European tradition of storytelling are themselves creations of a *social* relation between self and other, and do not exist "outside of, or prior to" the narrative process.⁹³

This exchange between bodies is vital for storytelling as these accounts-of, or accounting-for, are always addressed outwards, towards another, as a social practice of self-determination. Both the listener and the speaker are formations of this social relation. Ideas of selfhood and subjectivity are developed in relation to, or in dispute with, other subjectivities with which one orbits on the narrative plane. This is not only within the bounds of a story but in the social process of sharing stories. The stories we tell ourselves or tell others make up much of our system of relating to the world. Before an event becomes a story, it is an experience. Likewise, our notions of self are determined by how they are reflected upon and repeated in light of past experiences.

In Kafka's story, when the boatman arrives at the embankment to share his news with the father, he comes bearing a story that was spread to him via the rumours of other boatman on other rivers. However, to the father (who can know nothing of the boatman's histories, pains, loves

92 *ibid*, 31.

93 *ibid*, 43.

and personality) he is simply the man who brings the story across the water. Despite their intimacy and the emotion of their interaction, their meeting was a fleeting exchange which acts to determine for each character his own self and position within the story. In regards to storytelling, Walter Benjamin explains:

experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn... the figure of the storyteller gets its full corporeality only for the one who can picture them both... as someone who has come from afar... [and] the man who has stayed at home... who knows the local tales and traditions.⁹⁴

This is my initial marker, suggesting the physical intimacy that exists in storytelling (mouth to mouth). This meeting of the local (private, domestic, interior) and far away (public, afar, other's body) shows that this political space of storytelling as a bridge is not one operating on a purely vocalic, sonorous level. In Kafka's story, we see the moments of charged physical intimacy as those that convey the weight of the story or of a relationship more intensely than the implied words spoken. The boatman embraces the father (is even close to undressing) as they communicate 'mouth to mouth'. The father caresses and embraces the child, head in his hands, not long after he embraces his pipe, an extension of his mouth and throat.

APPENDIX 1.2

At that moment a bark drew up before us, the boatman beckoned to my father to come down the embankment, while he himself climbed up toward him. They met halfway, the boatman whispered something in my father's ear, in order to come quite close he had embraced him. I could not understand what they said, I only saw that my father did not seem to believe the news, that the boatman tried to insist upon its truth, that when my father still refused to

94 Benjamin, "The Storyteller", 84.

believe it the boatman, with the passion of sailors, almost tore the garment from his chest to prove the truth, whereupon my father fell silent and the boatman jumped noisily into the bark and sailed away. Deep in thought my father turned toward me, knocked his pipe out and stuck it in his belt, stroked my cheek, and pulled my head toward him. That is what I liked best, it made me very happy, and so we came home. There the rice pap was already steaming on the table, several guests had assembled, the wine, was just being poured into the goblets. Paying no attention to any of this and having advanced no farther than the threshold, my father started telling what he had heard.⁹⁵

VOCALITY AND BODILY THRESHOLDS

In his book *Lexicon of the Mouth*, artist and writer Brandon LaBelle emphasises the mouth as a vital conduit for negotiating ‘the foundational narrative of proper speech’.⁹⁶ Detailed through the ‘micro-oralities’ of laughing and whispering, stuttering and reciting, eating and kissing, LaBelle draws attention to the mouth and the tension between its relation to language, as an abstract socialising system, and our embodied, sensual experiences. By privileging the mouth in his consideration of voicing (he goes on to use the term *mouthing*) LaBelle is able to unsettle the limits of embodiment and put into question the separation of exterior and interior, the material world and the depths of the body, in a way that locates political storytelling in a specific, bodily orifice. I think in this context of the throat as a cord that unravels and carries a voice outwards, as though it were an invisible communicative umbilical cord, connecting a speaker and a listener in a reciprocal, mutually dependant exchange. LaBelle emphasises that the voice is something expelled from the body but which *never* leaves the body behind. He says:

95 Kafka, “The News of the Building of the Wall: A Fragment”, 280.

96 LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 131.

The voice does not move away from my body, but rather carries it forward – the voice stretches me... as a body bound to its politics and poetics, its accents and dialectics, its grammars as well as its handicaps.⁹⁷

The intimacy portrayed between the boatman and the father demonstrates their throats reaching towards each other, carrying their own subjectivities to define one another within the context of the storytelling event, thus communicating mouth-to-mouth. Their throats engage in a reciprocal dance that extends beyond the interiority of their selves and into the public space of their engagement through voicing. The emphasis on physical touch and silent communication within the story is used to heighten this detail that the storytelling body carries so much more than words, through the embodied process of storytelling and physical communication. The actions of hands in the story – holding hands, caressing the pipe, beckoning closer, embracing, tearing clothing, stroking cheeks, pouring wine – produces an altogether different narrative which suggests alternate eroticism, revealing the import of what else is to be expressed or ‘listened’ to beyond semantic words. Benjamin ties the habitual use of hands in storytelling to labour and a positioning of storytellers as labourers or craftspeople passing time or sharing experiences: ‘storytelling, in its sensory aspect, is by no means a job for the voice alone. Rather, in genuine storytelling the hand plays a part which supports what is expressed in a hundred ways with its gestures trained by work.’⁹⁸

These bodily thresholds, approached both physically through touch and subjectively through speaking, refer to the complicated complicity of storytelling between the characters, and an intensely embodied

97 *ibid*, 5.

98 Benjamin, “The Storyteller”, 14.

intimacy that goes beyond touch. The way storytelling affects those present is a sort of implantation of self into another position – while remaining squarely within one’s self – that requires an imagination of a third, in-between position through which the story is transported. This position is reducible to neither one’s own nor the other’s: a view from in-between, a space of intersubjectivity itself. Here, imagination enables one to see things in their proper perspective – to put that which is too close at a distance in order to understand it without bias and prejudice. This distancing, or discord, of closeness is part of the dialogue of understanding for whose purposes direct experience establishes too close a contact and mere knowledge erects artificial barriers.⁹⁹

This motion towards an in-between space – a bridge – implies an imagined collapse of corporeal boundaries in on each other. Mladen Dolar claims in his book *A Voice and Nothing More* (2006) that the birth of voice is marked by ambivalence and that not only does the voice influence the insides of the listener, but also comes from the insides of the body and exposes those insides to the other.¹⁰⁰ This thinking follows Benjamin’s storytelling that travels mouth-to-mouth and influences LaBelle’s thoughts on the interiority of voicing/mouthing being fixed in and always implicating the internal body. The other in the relational space of storytelling – the opposing body that is listening or speaking – is a visitor or guest who enters both physically and intimately via their voice. There is an implicit reciprocity in the need for the other on this relational plane. When speaking, a listening ear is needed in order for words to be spoken – even if said listener is the internal ear of the speaker themselves. There is an intimacy produced through this reciprocal need for one another in order to have a voice. In her book *For More Than One Voice: Towards a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (2005), Italian feminist

99 Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling*, 249.

100 Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 211.

philosopher Adriana Cavarero discusses the voice as being for the other, or listening ear, and the implicit reciprocal engagement of bodies communicating through voice notwithstanding language:

In the etymology of the Latin *vox*, the first meaning of *vocare* is “to call,” or “invoke.” Before making itself speech, the voice is an invocation that is addressed to the other and that entrusts itself to an ear that receives it... The voice is always for the ear, it is always relational.¹⁰¹

A voice is influenced in its reception due to the body that voices and the body that listens, and the dynamic of the voice refracting back and forth between the two. When thinking through the politics of voicing, this can be considered by thinking through audibility. There are the voices that may be regarded as noise and, therefore, dis-regarded because there is no body to receive them, and there are the voices that are given a platform to speak because there is a listener waiting to receive them.

To address the politics and audibility of voices, it is helpful to consider Aristotle’s differentiation between voice and language.¹⁰² The immediate differentiation lies in the distinction between mere voice (*phōnē*), which conveys desire, pain and expression outside of linguistics, and the meaning filled voice (*logos*), which is capable of determining right (truth) and wrong (falsity). Aristotle uses this discrepancy to differentiate between human and animal, political and bare life (*bios* and *zoe*), those being included and those being excluded from the political community (or those only included by being excluded, as in the case of people whose voices may not be listened to in a political community, but whom other

¹⁰¹ Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 169.

¹⁰² Stuart Elden, “Reading Logos as Speech: Heidegger, Aristotle and Rhetorical Politics,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 38, no. 4 (2005): 281-301. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40238270>.

people seek to speak on behalf of). When a voice enters into contention for a common political stage, it is in order to make the invisible visible and to make the heard hear-able. And since it gives voice to the unheard, it necessarily struggles on the political plane for its account not to be perceived as noise. I want to consider in this context the challenge not only of ‘speaking for others’ but also, ‘speaking for oneself’, and whether it is really about speaking as opposed to being heard, and who is in fact listening, or receiving a voice.

In terms of speaking for oneself, I return to Derrida’s concept of hearing-oneseft-speak as outlined in my introduction, through his challenge to logocentrism or the binary positioning of writing and speech in western philosophies. Cavarero positions Derrida’s deconstruction of the distinction of *phōné* and *logos* as operating within a realm which fails to address the *physical* immediacy and reciprocity of the voice due to his emphasis on the immediacy of the voice as language, as opposed to expressive sound. She shows Derrida’s characterisation of *logos* as a presence of someone who can hear themselves as they are speaking is a confirmation of the self – my existence is proved by the very fact I can ‘hear’ myself talking. Cavarero feels that Derrida presents metaphysics as a self-referential figure of vocal expression, a monologue, which is not common practice in life – people live through conversations and dialogues. She emphasises instead that the voice of vocal performance is not through hearing ourselves speaking, but communicating with the other. I do not entirely agree with her here. As I have sought to demonstrate, Derrida does engage with a voicing to the other in his reading of Levinas and in regards to the foreigner question, but Cavarero provides an important reading of Derrida here in regards to listening for an *expressive* voice in a relational horizon – something that would be impossible to express through writing. She explains that:

It is regrettable that... Derrida does not take the opportunity to note that... the speakers address one another. Thus, a *relational horizon*, rather than an auto-affection, would open a polyphony rather than a monologue for the voice – if this is indeed the theme. There would also be an opening where the voice could make itself heard as a vibration in a throat of flesh, which announces the uniqueness of the one who emits it, invoking the other in resonance... Much metaphysicians ignore that... this is the life – always fragile and singular – which is committed in the voice. It is enough to listen attentively – something that, evidently, philosophers refuse to do, perhaps because they are concentrated on the silent and solitary work of writing.¹⁰³

Cavarero demonstrates that the problem in Derrida's argument for the written word as signifier equal to (or more metaphysically present than) the spoken *word* is that this analysis considers the single voice as it is spoken or written, via *language*. He does not consider the *expressive* voice, the *phōné* or life of the voice, as being the key distinctive force by which the voice is directed towards a listening ear, and therefore ignores this key potential for vocalic presence and resonance. By addressing the voice as the letter, or as spoken language, Derrida does not look to its reciprocity and vocal performativity.

Whether coming from the infant, the boatman or an interlocutor in conversation, the voice presents a physical encounter that is for the ear of the other, or is experienced physically by the listener. At times, this intrusive voice is like an unexpected or uninvited guest – the voice that appears without warning. This is the voice that interrupts, or unsettles physical sensibilities. A voice can be felt in anxious and excited twists

103 Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 234.

and turns of the small intestine; as slow, heavy dread in the large one; or as light airy nerves in the stomach. Ranjit Hoskote, contemporary poet and art critic, reflects in his essay, 'Notes Towards the Possibility of Transformative Listening' (2010), on the potential of the voice to disrupt its receiver:

it disrupts rather than smothering the textures of the listener's experience; it demands that the listener engage with its meaning in a full bodied manner, placing his or her entire being on the hazard. The act of attending to such a voice, the voice of the Other, the sometimes sublime and terrifying Other, breaks and re-makes the attending itself.¹⁰⁴

This sense of engaging in a 'full bodied manner' implies an engagement beyond the immediacy of the situation. It implies that a listener's personal history and future will be affecting and affected by this process of listening. In traversing limits that ordinarily demarcate different social domains, or that separate any particular social order from all that lies beyond its margins, stories have the potential to take us in two different dimensions. Michael Jackson explains these dimensions of storytelling as either confirming our belief that otherness is just as we had imagined it to be (validating illusions or prejudices), or confounding and calling into question our ordinarily taken for granted notions of identity and difference, and so push back and pluralise our horizons of knowledge.¹⁰⁵

An unexpected or uninvited voice instigates this relation of voicing and listening in a manner that gives a voice to the unheard and produces a reciprocally engaged (yet not always positive) empathy for, or intimacy

¹⁰⁴ Ranjit Hoskote, "Notes Towards the Possibility of Transformative Listening", Initiative Humboldt-Forum (Berlin: Haus der Kulturen der Welt, April 2010), lecture.

¹⁰⁵ Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling*, 43.

with, the other. In Kafka's story, it is the boatman who approached the narrator and their father from afar, appearing without warning. The boatman is 'foreign' to the father in a sense, as the father knows 'all those who usually pass by here, but [he] was a stranger'.¹⁰⁶ The urgency with which the news is shared and the way this disrupts the father's body is shown in his delivery of the news to the guests and family: 'Paying no attention to any of this and having advanced no farther than the threshold, my father started telling what he had heard.'¹⁰⁷

The father stands at the threshold and projects his voice across it, as though he cannot enter the home until the news is shared. Placed in the position of foreigner or outsider, he announces his arrival just as the boatman did at the embankment, the threshold between land and water. It is at this point that the father brings the news into the family home – an expression of the private sphere. At this moment, the threshold of the home is crossed not only physically by the father entering (*returning*) but also by the news he brings with him. This expression of the public and private is further accentuated by the meeting of bodies around the dinner table – eating and drinking, an incursion of the outside world into the privacy of the body via the mouth.

Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin explains, through the Renaissance writer François Rabelais, that in medieval Europe the critical power of storytelling depended on a wealth of oral, anal, genital and visceral imagery, drawn from bodily life.¹⁰⁸ Through common and relatable images of eating, drinking, digesting, defecating and sex, the lines

¹⁰⁶ Kafka, "The News of the Building of the Wall: A Fragment", 280.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*, 280.

¹⁰⁸ Mikhail Bahktin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

between social classes could be crossed and rank parodied.¹⁰⁹ However, as Jackson explains, the critical vitality of storytelling springs not from the body imagery alone but from a direct, lived relationship between personal and social bodies.¹¹⁰ The act of storytelling challenges the boundaries between different subjectivities, or between private and public space, by enacting this intimate blurring *through* the body, involving forms of mimetic play, gesture, intimacy and phatic communication that challenges the logocentric expression of meaning. In storytelling events, the broaching of the boundary between private and public space is commonly lived through as a physical, sensual and vital interaction between the storyteller and the listeners *physically* reach out, sit closely together, sing, laugh or cry as one.¹¹¹ Appropriately, the grotesque realism of continent/incontinent bodies, and of open and closed bodily boundaries – such as the boatman’s embrace and the father’s caress – derives its discursive power not only from its analogical line to the opening and closing of boundaries of the social body, but from the fact that it is lived out in the context of the storytelling event itself. These symbolic and political thresholds, between private and public self, play a part in the story as a way of physically distinguishing between a figure that delivers news and receives it. As it is delivered or shared, the thresholds are crossed – the boatman embraces the father; they meet physically and intimately, bridging political and sensual thresholds.

APPENDIX 1.3

Of the exact words I have of course no recollection, but owing to the exceptional circumstances which cast a spell even over the child, the meaning became so clear to me that I venture nevertheless to give some version of what my father said. I am doing so because it was very characteristic of the popular point of view. My father said something like this:

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling*, 46.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, 46.

An unknown boatman – I know all those who usually pass by here, but this one was a stranger – has just told me that a great wall is going to be built to protect the Emperor. For it seems that infidel tribes, among them demons, often assemble before the imperial palace and shoot their black arrows at the Emperor.¹¹²

THE BOATMAN AS FOREIGNER AND THE SILENCING OF SUBORDINATE VOICES

This meeting of the other at a threshold, of sorts, also applies to a meeting of different languages in need of translation, and how in encountering the other whose language we do not speak there more in the voice to be attended to. Take, for instance, when you encounter someone on the street, and do not speak the same semantic language. Perhaps they are upset and this is communicated through the tone and volume of their voice, the rush of their breath. Perhaps you assist them – they communicate vocally to you something to be taken as ‘thank-you’ but not in those words. This requires an attention to what is expressed vocally outside of language, as a key sign of the uniqueness of the speaker. A form of listening that attends only to language prevents these intimacies and communications from occurring – renders them as noise. A politics of listening heeds this expressive communication; a lack of this aural reciprocity can be experienced violently. Before continuing, it is important here to further elaborate on the conceptualisation of the ‘foreigner’ or ‘other’ for this exegesis. I refer to the foreigner (including the adjective form: foreign) and the other not as a person from another country, but as one foreign to oneself, outside of the body that is *I*. In *Of Hospitality*, Derrida opens his lecture, ‘Foreigner Question: Coming From Abroad/From the Foreigner’, by highlighting a question that

112 Kafka, “The News of the Building of the Wall: A Fragment”, 280.

would have been missed in the English translation of the lecture had the translator not included the original French words: ‘Isn’t the question of the foreigner [*l’étranger*] a foreigner’s question? Coming from the foreigner, from abroad [*l’étranger*]?’¹¹³

In French, the words for foreigner and abroad are interchangeable, and perform a covering and exposure of each other. He goes on to clarify: ‘How should we understand this difference of accent?’¹¹⁴ He uses this question to demonstrate that the *foreigner question* is not only addressed *to* the foreigner, but comes *from* them, from abroad. In the title, the difficulty in the translation of ‘*venue de l’étranger*’ into ‘coming from abroad/from the foreigner,’ points to the problem of what is considered abroad, and what is considered foreign. For the two are not mutually dependent. Derrida’s translator Rachel Bowlby notes that due to the disparities between English use of the words *abroad*, *strange* and *foreign*, she found it best to lay out the two translations, separated by a forward dash ‘/’. This shows a drawn distinction (via the line of the forward dash) between the two words, *abroad* and *foreign*, which implies their potential confusion through translation. In order to show their meaning, it is important to show that the question is coming from abroad, and comes from the foreigner. In Kafka’s short story, the boatman was a ‘foreigner’ but was not necessarily from abroad. In the translation of Derrida’s lecture, the forward dash ‘/’ works as a linguistic threshold over which the question from abroad and the question of the foreigner approach each other. The ‘/’ is a threshold between words and vocality due to translation, but the difference between the bodies present in Kafka’s story can be thought of as a threshold that operates similarly. The foreigner in this story is determined by exclusion from the house, the body or knowledge, and the ‘/’ indicates the many thresholds approached in the story. Hence,

113 Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 3.

114 *ibid*, 3.

the threshold is a physical and symbolic point at which knowledge is shared, both at the domestic threshold and the embankment: the threshold of land and water, and the thresholds of bodies and subjectivities meeting. Before the threshold is crossed, it marks the difference, or draws the line, between who knows the 'news' and who does not.

The situations approached by the foreign voice are not only the physical spaces of a doorway or embankment, or the distinctions between the performative bodies that give or receive voice. In Kafka's story, the boatman is not the only 'foreigner'. In the news he delivers, he refers to 'infidel tribes' – literally 'unfaithful communities' (with an underlying allusion to savagery) who do not adhere to the rule of the Emperor. The knot here being that the Emperor is much more likely to be a nationalistic foreigner than the people attacking him. These people are excluded by a physical wall, unable to enter the space of authority and power. The wall only exists as rumour for the father and child, but it is assumed to be a physical reality for these 'tribes'. These voices are excluded from the imperial *logos* (referred to as imperial due to the labelling of the Imperial Palace and the designation of these people as 'tribes') and perceived as noise. The recording of them (via literature) is used for political means as demonstrating a 'foreign' entity that is a threat to the authoritarian Emperor. What these voices have to say is not heard beyond the noise of a violent threat to which they have been reduced.

It is a problematic simplification of these phonetic binaries to conceptualise background or expressive noise (the voice of the linguistic other that is not understood) in opposition to *logos*. It is equally problematic to try to draw voices across these conceptualised boundaries via translation or notation in order to give them their deserved political and logical weight. This plays into the patriarchal positioning of semantic language as superior to expressive noise (and positioning of widespread

‘global’ languages over local ones), and the long-standing (though long contested) correlation between the feminine, the body and the expressive (or hysterical) voice. Cavarero ties this problematic distinction to Ovid’s nymph Echo, whose voice reverberated in contrast with Narcissus’s reflected image, thwarting her attempts at approaching him romantically.¹¹⁵ This repetition of self by both characters demonstrates an echo in the feminine register – a vocal returning. It shows that Narcissus’s exemplary narcissism ensures he is only able to enter into ‘dialogue’ coherently with himself, unable to re-semanticise – or engage reciprocally with – the sounds Echo repeats. It is a voice that results, like residual material, from its subtraction from the semantic register of *logos*:

There is a sort of affinity between the nymph Echo’s fate and [those forced] to keep silent. It would seem that these female figures have in common the fact that they are denied access to rational universality of a language reserved only for the male subject... The binary economy of the patriarchal order would be, in this sense, rather simple: on the one hand, the body and the voice, and on the other hand, the mind and speech... The devocalization of *logos* aims to eliminate the very ambiguity by leaving the feminine figures to embody what remains – namely, the voice.¹¹⁶

An echo is a bodiless voice or reflection of soundwaves bouncing off a surface. Somewhere along the way Echo lost her body and was cursed to exist forever as an unseeable sound travelling between surfaces or other bodies. Her lack of body becomes the impetus for the subjective uniqueness embodied in the voice. Here, Cavarero refers to voicing in the feminine register as an expression of a subordinate voice within a patriarchal order. This is shown to be a voice that is silenced, othered

¹¹⁵ Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 207.

¹¹⁶ *ibid*, 207.

or not listened for as it is outside of the privileged conception of logical, semantic voice, which in philosophy has a history of being tied to the masculine. This situates my above analyses of the ‘foreigner’ within this ‘feminine’ register of subordination. This helps me to consider the expressive voice of the relational other in speaking through this frame of the ‘feminine’ echo, moving beyond a boundaried space of female identity. I want to highlight Cavarero’s continued referral to the ‘feminine’ voice, in opposition to the masculine, as an expressive and subordinate register. When reading, I find Cavarero’s writing most helpful to read the feminine register as the subordinate, not aligned with an essentialist expression of femininity but as an expression of that which is *not* masculine, patriarchal, colonial, imperial, white, et cetera. She uses western philosophy’s problematic history of aligning the ‘feminine’ with the subordinate as a way to reclaim and re-think the power structures that systematically devocalise people in a range of intersecting circumstances.

Echo’s existence between bodies – existing outside of a singular body of her own – leads to a practice of the oral construction of stories and histories, which do not exist as singular knowledges recorded via books and media. This existence of knowledges between bodies is practiced in many instances and communities throughout the world to differing extents. In Kafka’s story, the boatman acts as colonial settler, arriving from elsewhere and re-determining – *overwriting* – a history. In her essay ‘About the Poetics and the Politics of Voice’ (2015), Iris Dressler describes an instance where German scholar Hans Lichtenecker recorded voices of Namibian people in 1931.¹¹⁷ Lichtenecker assumed the ‘primitivism’ of these people, to whom he conceded no linguistic sophistication (or that which sits outside of a western notion of *logos*) and, feeling they

117 Iris Dressler, “About the Poetics and Politics of the Voice”, *Acts of Voicing*, ed. Christine Peters, Hans D. Christ and Iris Dressler (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2015), 215.

would soon become extinct, sought to preserve the sound of these voices with recording technology. This is a violent exclusion of voices from conversation and political discussion. Annette Hoffmann engages this history through her research on the potential of sound archives as historical sources for the understanding of colonial knowledge production, and as aural traces of colonial histories. She reveals that these speakers tried, though futilely at the time, to use the situation as a political stage: they complained about Lichtenecker's behaviour, bemoaned German colonisation and genocide in Namibia, and demanded payment for their services rendered and never compensated for.¹¹⁸

In her essay 'Verbal Riposte: Wilfred Tjiueza's performances of *Omitandu* as responses to the racial model of Hans Lichtenecker', Hoffmann explains that Herero praise songs do not tell stories.¹¹⁹ These praise songs are known as *omitandu* or *omutandu* in the singular, from the Otjiherero language spoken by approximately 300,000 people across Namibia, Botswana, and Angola.¹²⁰ They refer to events and political contexts, personal and local histories, and convey genealogies and legal claims. Speakers performing *omitandu* do not explain the histories of their stories and instead expect an informed audience – listeners are invited to engage in an exegetical activity and complete the stories to which the songs allude.¹²¹ Hoffman explains:

when severed from the vast textual fabric of the repertoire of orature in Herero, *omitandu* become fragments of a continuous performative negotiation whose discursive details are hard to

118 *ibid*, 216.

119 Annette Hoffman, "Verbal Riposte: Wilfred Tjiueza's Performances of *Omitandu* as Responses to the Racial Model of Hans Lichtenecker", *Acts of Voicing*, ed. Christine Peters, Hans D. Christ and Iris Dressler (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2015).

120 *ibid*, 323.

121 *ibid*, 323.

trace, especially if they were created decades ago... It is neither possible nor does it make sense to separate this intertextual archive from written literature, because orature takes up written text and elements of *omitandu* or *omihiva* and *omatjiva* (dancing songs for men and women) have been integrated into written texts.¹²²

The assumption that storage media – both digital/analog recordings and written/transcribed recordings – ensures neutrality or truth has long been questioned, due to selective recording and inclusion – a problem which applies to all archives and all documentations. The desire – which can be attributed to western or colonial schools of thought – to contain and record a singular, complete history or knowledge often relies on books and technology. The oral form of knowledge archiving and sharing that Lichteneker misrepresented through digital and written recordings excluded the Namibian people from ‘public’ conversation. Since audio and written recordings naturally isolate parts of a complex, flexible fabric of performed recitations, the knowledges and performances lose their resonance through these recordings.

In opposition to knowledges recorded textually, oral histories are embodied in relations between people, and never seek to account for the entirety of a story. This operates like storytelling, which exists as a practice of oral history, embodied in the storyteller’s bodily memory. Storytelling and oral histories are actions in the intersubjective process of politics that plays out in the social sphere between distinct bodies. Though stories may be the vital bridge between the private and public realms, this unique gesture of being in-between can just as trenchantly exaggerate differences, ferment discord, and do violence to lived experience. For every story that travels across time and space to share

122 *ibid*, 323.

news and experience, untold others remain in the shadows, censored or suppressed.¹²³ Within the context of Kafka's story, the 'infidel tribes' were given no voice or opportunity to present their likely warranted offense against the imperial Emperor. This emphasises the weight Arendt placed on storytelling as an element of the *vita active* – the activities, both conceptual and physical, through which human beings produce and reproduce themselves in the world.¹²⁴ Stories and storytelling are shared activities that take us out of ourselves. They belong to the in-between spaces of intersubjectivity, a domain of 'conflicting wills and intentions'.¹²⁵ Storytelling is a modality of working with others to transform what simply befalls us into forms of life, experience and meaning that are collectively viable. Stories are a form of relating that brings thinking down to earth, working within the everyday world of human struggle, encompassing a plurality of perspectives, in order to gain an enlarged view of human experience.¹²⁶

I have examined Kafka's short story *The News of the Building of the Wall: A Fragment* as a frame for re-thinking storytelling and how one can speak or listen across a breaking down of the public/private binary, across thresholds of distance and over corporeal boundaries. Through this, I have sought to demonstrate a reciprocity required in engaging with the other. Physical intimacy is implied in this engagement not just through a physical proximity, but through an implicit imprint of the body, the throat and the mouth in the expressive register of a person's voice. It is this expressive cadence, or *grain*, of the voice, that not only shows a person's uniqueness through speech, but in all the vocal utterances and expressions that occur outside of language. I demonstrate here that

123 Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling*, 31.

124 Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

125 *ibid*, 182–184.

126 Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling*, 246.

a politics of listening attends to these vocal expressions, in a reciprocal engagement that requires the ear of the other, and that this attention to the *phōné* functions as a more ethical practice of listening and aural engagement.

A POLITICS OF LISTENING IN *THE NEWS OF THE BUILDING OF THE WALL*

OCCUPY – Etymology: Irregularly < Anglo-Norman and Old French, Middle French *occuper* to take possession of, seize (1306), to fill a certain space (1314), to employ (c1360), to hold possession of (late 14th cent.), to inhabit (1530), to exercise (an employment) (1530), to fill time (1530), also reflexive, to busy oneself with (c1330) < classical Latin *occupāre* to seize (by force), take possession of, get hold of, to take up, fill, occupy (time or space), to employ, invest (money) < *ob-* *ob-prefix* + the same stem as *capere* to take, seize (see capture n.). Compare Italian *occupare* (a1294), Catalan *ocupar* (13th cent.), Portuguese *ocupar* (14th cent.), Spanish *ocupar* (1438).¹²⁷

AGENCY – Etymology: post-classical Latin *agentia* meaning action, activity (from 11th or 12th cent. in British sources; already in 8th cent. denoting a farm); from classical Latin *agent-*, *agens*, present participle of *agere* meaning to do, act, (see act v.) + *-ia* suffix. Act, v., classical Latin *āct-*, past participial stem of *agere* to drive, to come, go, to cause to move, to push, to set in motion, stir up, to emit, to make, construct, produce, to lead, bring, to drive back or away, to urge, incite, to do, perform, achieve, accomplish, to take action, to do something, to work at, to be busy at, to be busy, to work, to stage (a play), to take a part in (a play), to perform (a part) in a play, to perform (in a play), to play the part of, to behave as, to pretend to be, to strive for, to carry out, execute, discharge, to manage, administer, to celebrate, observe, to spend (time), to experience, enjoy, to live, to proceed, behave, to transact, to discuss, argue, debate, to arrange, agree on, to decree, enact, to press, urge, plead, to deliver (a speech). The semantic development of the English

¹²⁷ "occupy, v.". OED Online. June 2018. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/view/Entry/130189?redirectedFrom=occupy>
 (accessed August 12, 2018).

word has been considerably shaped by association with agent. Compare also French *agence* trade office (1653, earliest denoting such an office in a foreign country), position or function of an agent (1697), Italian *agenzia* (1678 or earlier, originally in sense 'position or function of an agent').¹²⁸

This chapter follows the previous chapter's examination of the reciprocity of vocal relations, with an examination of how a 'body' (in a Spinozian sense) comes to occupy another through speech. I will do this through a focus on Mette Edvardsen's performance work *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine* (2010–) and my own work *The News of the Building of the Wall* (2016).¹²⁹ As well as thinking through a process of *embodied occupation*, I will also think through the challenges to the participant's agency present in these two works, often precisely due to this sense of occupation. I consider how both works perform a bridging of physical intimacies and intrusions through the performative process of storytelling and memory, and argue for a relationship between slowness, memory and embodiment. This brings focus to how memorisation implicates the physical body in a text, demonstrating communication through speaking as an intimate exposure of an inner, embodied self. By determining the corporeality of a person speaking, I will demonstrate how the process of voicing and listening produces a vocalic uniqueness, and how this determines a politics of listening. The practice of listening that attends to the *body* implies an intimacy and conflict of close engagement. Within this relationship, problems of agency arise. I address these by looking to *The News of the Building of the Wall* to consider that to practice a relational model of engagement I must think beyond exclusive forms of agency.

128 "agency, n." OED Online. June 2018. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/view/Entry/3851?redirectedFrom=agency> (accessed August 12, 2018).

129 Mette Edvardsen, *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine*, Kunstenfestivaldesarts, BOZAR, May 2017, live performance.

APPENDIX 2.1

oblivion_knows_no_time____water_would_not_know_time____nor_does_a_
 circle_knows_time____I_do_not_wish_to_know_time____so_in_the_end____
 even_mohammed____is_forever_leaving_the_same_tent____moving_towards_
 his_mountain____together_with_the_shadow____which_is_becomming_his_
 peacock____hesitant____almost__hesitating____just_like_a_mountain_
 looking_seaward____through_its_sieve____to_see_its_fall____before_night_
 comes____and_does_not_care¹³⁰

MEMORY AS EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE

Mette Edvardsen's work *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine* is a living library of books.¹³¹ Performers, often dancers, choose a book and memorise it, before reciting it to 'readers' or viewers. On her website, Edvardsen says:

To memorise a book, or more poetically 'to learn a book by heart', is in a way a *rewriting* of that book. In the process of memorising, the reader for a moment steps into the place of the writer, or rather he/she is becoming the book.¹³²

This 'becoming the book' demonstrates an embodiment of the text, and in turn affects how the text plays out in the embodied process of its telling. It is a reciprocal process of both occupying a text and allowing said text to occupy one's body. Edvardsen developed her idea for the work from Ray Bradbury's dystopic future in *Fahrenheit 451*, where books are outlawed and burnt, and a society of underground readers memorise books in order to preserve them.¹³³ In memorising these books,

130 Wachter, *Against the Forgetting*, 85.

131 Edvardsen, "Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine".

132 *ibid.*

133 Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973).

the performers make them their own through the continuous cycle of forgetting and remembering, which is implicit in the act of memorisation. Through the nuances the performers add to their memory of the book, the book is re-written in each performance. In the living library, the *performer* and the *book* become interchangeable. As a viewer, I engaged in this work by *reading a book*. This one-on-one reading, or performance, located me in a space similar to that of uninterrupted reading. Unlike reading a paper book, I could not follow the text with my finger or see the sentence structure and punctuation on the page. I could ask the book to repeat itself, to jump to a different section or go back to a point of interest.

When I first experienced Mette Edvardsen's work in 2017, I 'read' *Against the Forgetting: Selected Poems* by Hans Faverey, as recited by a human book. The human-as-book, named Bruno, had an extensive knowledge of this collection of poems in both Dutch and English, and could jump between pages and sections of the text. This presentation of a text, by a body, leaves an immediate impression on the listener of the implicit labour involved in memorising a whole book. On this occasion, I had just finished reading Milan Kundera's short novella *Slowness*.¹³⁴ *Slowness* is a reflection on modernity, technology, memory and sensuality. The story follows a number of characters over the course of one evening with their narratives interwoven by the end of the book. Kundera reflects:

There is a secret bond between slowness and memory, between speed and forgetting. A man is walking down the street. At a certain moment, he tries to recall something, but the recollection escapes him. Automatically, he slows down. Meanwhile, a person who wants to forget a disagreeable incident he has just lived through starts unconsciously to speed up his pace, as if he were

134 Milan Kundera, *Slowness* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1997).

trying to distance himself from a thing still too close to him in time.

In existential mathematics that experience takes the form of two basic equations: The degree of slowness is directly proportional to the intensity of memory; the degree of speed is directly proportional to the intensity of forgetting.¹³⁵

In *The News of the Building of the Wall*, I memorised a short story by Franz Kafka, and invited participants to engage in an hour-long one-on-one performance, during which I recited and taught the story to them. There were no visual cues beyond the site we were in, and they had to attempt to learn the story verbatim with only my recitation as a guide. It was an intimidating task but also a task not designed to be completed, so that when the participants each left the work, there was something unresolved between us. This chapter will examine how my work and Edvardsen's work explore a spanning of intimacy and intrusion through storytelling and memory. Briefly taking Kundera's *Slowness* as a framework for thinking through memory, the memorisation of text in both Edvardsen's work and my own proposes a slow stretching of the story. The process of memorisation involves repetitive recitations of the same sentence over and over, the same paragraph over and over, so that movement through the text is slowed to a snail's pace. By slowing a reading, every word is examined and questioned, and the text sits heavily in the body it moves slowly through.

135 *ibid*, 39.

APPENDIX 2.2

when_there_is_nothing_left___to_do_it_for___to_do_it_with___it_stops_of_
 its_own_accord___the_fingers_leave_their_hand__and_drop_their_hands___
 the_feet_are_free___bite_the_dust_one_by_one____whatever_is_still_lying_
 there___is_suspended____word_for_word____only_the_wind_still_blows____
 till_it_runs_out_too___wherever_it_will¹³⁶

These two artworks both hinge on memory and a relationship between performer and participant. In Edvardsen's work, a performer embodies a book, and presents themselves to a viewer as a text to be read and spread open. Starting a new book, I open it to its centre, crack the spine and riffle through the pages. The text is retrieved from the performer's body in its performance. The labour of countless hours spent memorising is implicit in the work, sitting within the relationship as an unspoken awe at the grasp of memory the living book holds. In *Against the Forgetting*, this meant a whole book of poems, in two languages – not just words but poetic rhythms and nuances of expression as translated by the 'book' himself (referring to Bruno), structuring the poetry towards a recall against his own forgetting. In *The News of the Building of the Wall*, the process of memorisation is more explicit: I enforce this process with a participant. We recite lines and slowly build in their memory a structure of the text. They leave with an assemblage of the text, which occupies their mind for the day. This was demonstrated to me through their accounts of trying to remember the text while at work or reciting it to friends.

Memory is a way of thinking through how text and knowledge are embodied. By memorising a text, one literally sews it into oneself; it becomes part of one's physical being. As in sewing, the story initiates a *puncturing* of the personal, presenting a relational space that opens up

136 Wachter, *Against the Forgetting*, 81.

with the other. This is constantly reiterated and ‘sewn over’ through the repetitive process of memorising. If memory is a trace of what is stored in ourselves, the process of committing to memory is a practice that can be examined as moving *towards* the embodiment of the text. In *The News of the Building of the Wall*, the knowledges shared took the form of memorised words and intimate encounters, accumulating in an archive of experiences that circled the story – an ongoing chain of re-citation.¹³⁷ Instead of picking up a book to access the story, this information was accessed and shared by conversation, memory and physical movement, with the movement of the body and visuals of the site assisting in the memorising process. This demonstrates the agency of the body in memory. Agency, the present participle of Latin *agere* being ‘to set in motion... to do, perform’, figuratively ‘to keep in movement’ as a body’s continuous unfolding of corporeal knowledge.¹³⁸ I open the body; I crack its spine.

In her book *Art of Memory*, British historian Frances Yates describes the practise of mnemonics in Ancient Greece.¹³⁹ Mnemonics were used to assist in the vocal sharing of knowledge and were cultivated by the sophists and philosophers, and frequently used by Plato and Aristotle through to the Renaissance. The visual mapping of mnemonics in an interior space implicates the body’s movement through this space. This reflects an externally known space in the interior memory as the body physically occupies this interior space, as a means of expelling this interiority via speech:

¹³⁷ Here I hyphenate the word ‘recitation’ to accentuate the repetitive ‘citing’ of a text in this performance work. By repeating the words of the original author over and over, to commit these words to memory, the participant and I enter into a chain of citation – citing the author and one another’s voices – a citing that repeats endlessly.

¹³⁸ “agency, n.”. OED Online.

¹³⁹ Frances Amelia Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

In order to form a series of places in memory... a building is to be remembered, as spacious and various a one as possible... We have to think of the ancient orator as moving in imagination through his memory building whilst he is making his speech, drawing from the memorised places the images that he has placed on them.¹⁴⁰

Rhythm is another mnemonic device, utilised by me and a participant in the work walking along the river to provide rhythm to our recitation. In line with the slow process of memorising, this was always a slow, steady walk – a distracted walking that operated as a method for bodies moving and thinking. Rhythm and repetition is key in storytelling, and this art is lost when the stories are no longer retained. Walter Benjamin argues that the more self-forgetful the listener is, the more open she is and the more deeply she listens, the more the story is imprinted in her memory – as though a letting down of personal barriers allows a story to enter. When the rhythm of walk has seized the listener, she listens to the tales in such a way that the gift of re-telling them comes to her all by itself. This, he explains, is the nature of the web in which the gift of storytelling is cradled.¹⁴¹

INTIMACY AND CONFLICT IN THE NEWS OF THE BUILDING OF THE WALL

This exegesis argues that the intimacy experienced in the performance works *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine* and *The News of the Building of the Wall* arises due to the immediacy of intersubjective relationships developed through speaking and listening. Listening inherently implicates a relation through an attendance to the other. In his story *The King Listens* (1988), Italo Calvino tells the story of a king whose

140 *ibid*, 3.

141 Benjamin, "The Storyteller", 83–109.

palace becomes an allegorical ear, and his paranoia of rebellion leads him into a state of restless aural surveillance.¹⁴² He listens for sounds as beacons of danger, and it is not until he hears an unseen female singing a love song that he is able to break this surveilling mode of listening. Upon hearing the song, he recognises a voice that comes as an expression of a singular body, and listens to the sonorous quality of her voice rather than the words of the song:

A voice means this: there is a living person, throat, chest, feelings, who sends into the air this voice, different from all other voices... a voice involves the throat, saliva.¹⁴³

In my work *The News of the Building of the Wall*, I dictate Kafka's story to a participant, yet the listener recognises me as the story's narrator. It is felt that I am speaking as the child in the story, despite that clearly not being the case. Through extended eye contact and the exchange of words, it is not the story that we communicate in this exchange, but something of ourselves. The words enable a communication that happens outside of language. Likewise, in my experience of Mette Edvardsen's performance work, *Against the Forgetting* expressed himself as the book, but was unable to keep the intrusion of himself (Bruno) out of the recitation.

The sense of hearing that is privileged here, by Calvino and in Edvardsen's work, transfers the perception of uniqueness from the corporeal surface, from the face, to the internal body, characterised by the highly sensitive passageways of its internal organs.¹⁴⁴ What is so intimate about this experience is the exposure of an internal self, literally

¹⁴² Italo Calvino, "The King Listens", *Under the Jaguar Sun*, Italo Calvino (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 33–64.

¹⁴³ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 4.

through the act of expressive voicing as it is characterised by the *grain* of internal passageways and orifices. This is followed by an implantation of my expressive voice, and the story, in the participant's memory, and a re-occurrence of this voice in the participant's consciousness in the hours and days following the work. Australian author Romy Ash expresses her sense of this voice in a commissioned response to *The News of the Building of the Wall*.¹⁴⁵ By focusing on my mouth and the father's pipe in Kafka's story, she describes the work as an intimate encounter that sticks in her memory.¹⁴⁶ What remains in her memory is the intimacy of the encounter, not the details of the story:

I watch her mouth move, the shapes it makes of the words. I laugh. I listen but I can't get a sense of the story. Just images that stand out: a father running his hand over a child's cheek, a long and slender pipe, a gold, silk embroidered holiday coat. I look back into Jacqui's eyes and she hasn't stopped looking into mine. When she does stop speaking and when she looks away, I feel it with shock.

"Is that the end?" I ask.

The shock is not so much about the end of the story, as the end of the intimacy. Although it was unwanted and unexpected, I feel it as a loss.¹⁴⁷

This shock of intimacy was also felt when Bruno seemed to insert his own poem into those he was reciting as *Against the Forgetting*, diverging from the text to reveal an element of himself. A poem he recited made me

145 Romy Ash, "News of the Building of the Wall – a response to Jacqui Shelton", *Australian Centre for Contemporary Art*, 2016, accessed 12 December 2016.
<https://www.accaonline.org.au/news-building-wall-%E2%80%93-response-jacqui-shelton>

146 *ibid.*

147 *ibid.*

think through this ‘hoping that I exist’, which is expressed via the human body as book.¹⁴⁸ This work presents a book occupying a human form; a book’s desire to be vocal and recognised on an intersubjective plane. It reveals the intimacy that can form between oneself and a book – like a longing to read or love of a book – as directed towards another body. Benjamin explains the difference between storytelling and reading a novel through the distinction in the human engagement that is required to access the story. He says that a man listening to a story is in the company of a storyteller, and that even a man reading a ‘story’ shares this companionship. The reader of a novel – an object distinct from an oral, autobiographical story – is isolated more so than any other reader. The reader seizes upon the material more jealously than anyone else.¹⁴⁹

APPENDIX 2.3

as_soon_as_I_raise_my_eyes__the_invisible_has_slipped_away__and_I_begin_
to_see__what_I_see___memories_of_what_I_have_seen__and_whatever_I_will_
see____by_seeing_I_keep_remembering__hoping_that_I_exist___especially_
when_I_look_at_her___how_she_runs_her_hand_through_her_hair_like_that___
her_elbow_resting_on_her_knee___and_she_says_something_to_me¹⁵⁰

The human-book *Against the Forgetting* played a role that bridges these two previously distinct modes of narration, both embodying the novel and presenting it as an oral, personal story that is shared and developed through our intersubjective relationship. The ‘jealous’ seizing of the novel’s material is directed instead onto the human body that presents the text. The human-as-book expressed himself through the book not only semantically but also emotionally, through his own language implanted within the poems. Through his occupation of the text, it evolved into an inherent expression of his body, as the book’s ‘throat’ reached to communicate with me via his voice.

148 See appendix 2.3

149 Benjamin, “The Storyteller”, 93.

150 Wachter, *Against the Forgetting*, 127.

In *The News of the Building of the Wall*, the vocalised story comes to occupy a physical interiority of the participant in my work, embedded in their memory and consciousness. This was demonstrated through participants' repeated accounts to me about their recitations of the story. One participant emailed me a few hours after her performance to tell me that she had been trying to recite the story all day at work – distracted by the story's repetition in her head, she could not focus. Another told me how that evening he had told the story to his young child. Another told me of a dream in which she recited the story perfectly to a crowd despite not being able to remember the story in her waking state. Two friends who live together said they tried reciting the story together after they had each completed the work. This arrival of the story, embedded in their intimate socialising and dreaming consciousness, reveals the intimate arrival of a foreign voice, being my own, and the ways my voice came to physically occupy a space in their body. Not neatly contained within the timeframe of the artwork, the story entered and invaded their private-selves. The spoken word is reliant on the body that listens for it or deflects it. This plurality relies on an echo: between bodies, voices, memories and physical relations.

A politics of voices exists at this point of intimacy. The voice, as an expression of the body, situates vocal expression as an inherently intimate experience, so it is important to remember a distinction of a unique body that delivers the voice. To consider the voice as a generalisation or a marker of all voices is to completely remove it from a body, to disembody the voice. A voice unshackled from a body, due to such generalisation, is without intimacy as it is not only without a throat, but is without the throat's encasing body. The throat is useless if not connected to a body – it has no lungs so cannot speak. A voice is without intimacy if it is without the *whole* of a body or, in other words, without *someone*, a particular person.

Roland Barthes reflects on how vocality, textuality and the voice's sensuous nature have exerted considerable influence on contemporary thought. In *The Pleasure of the Text*, when he refers to a voice's sensuality, its *grain*, he refers to the generalised, universal voice.¹⁵¹ In other words, it is a voice without unique sonorous qualities, not dissimilar to the king's selective listening in Calvino's story.¹⁵² Barthes's focus on the *grain* of the proper voice concerns the 'materiality of the body that springs from the throat, where the phonic metal is forged'.¹⁵³ His attention is on the oral cavity, as the erotic locus, and on the corporeality of the voice *in general* – he does not focus on the unique imprint of the person who speaks. In *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, the voice he refers to is not that of a unique existent. He seeks to identify the experience of the protagonist in relation to *a* lover, *any* lover, and by emphasising the *discourse* in the unrequited relationship, he directs his thinking towards the discourse of the lover, and not the lovers themselves. This establishes his referral to a generalised, universal voice of the lover. Whatever isolated and directed incidents may be described throughout, the book serves to analyse a discourse. Adriana Cavarero elucidates on this problem by explaining that the grain of the voice has to do with the way the voice works, at times musically in language.¹⁵⁴ Barthes is interested in a 'song' as a primary place of sonic and musical texture from which language grows. As Cavarero explains:

The task of the voice is therefore to be a pathway, or better, a pivotal joint between body and speech... Barthes does not write of a body whose singularity is foregrounded, nor of a voice whose uniqueness

151 Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*.

152 *ibid.*

153 Roland Barthes and Roland Havas, "Listening", *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, Roland Barthes, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 245–260.

154 Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 15.

is given any importance. Rather, the grain refers to a body of the voice and should be understood as “the way in which the voice lies in the body – or in which the body lies in the voice.”¹⁵⁵

Cavarero shows here that Barthes’s demonstration of body and voice are still presented as general categories of depersonalised pleasure, in which the embodied uniqueness of each existent (something Barthes never discusses) is dissolved along with the general categories of the subject and the individual. Barthes focuses on a vocality that far from being pure and simple sonority, or a mere bodily remainder, consists in a power relating to semantic language, or speech. If the power of the voice is held in its speech, there is an instant structuring of semantic language over expressive voicing and identifiers particular to *a* body, not *the* body proper. To ignore the rhapsodic or expressive voice, and take Kafka’s short story or *Against the Forgetting* at their basic semantic value, would be to erase the bodies that deliver these stories from existence. The bodies would be reduced to objects that deliver text – to books. To listen beyond language is to acknowledge that Bruno made himself known in the text, addressing me sitting in the sun. This seats the text in the exchange between us, rather than in the mind of the poet some thirty to fifty years ago. The sonorous body is made again in each new relation, and it is these relations and expressions to one another that create unique subjectivities. The intimacy of developing oneself in relation to the other is the essence of storytelling.

This intimacy of storytelling and listening is not always a wanted or comfortable thing. As described in my experience of Mette Edvardsen’s work and in Romy Ash’s reaction to my work, the intimacy that invades can be uncomfortable. There is a level of conflict necessary or inherent in any intimate, close contact. I pause here to clarify the *conflict of*

155 *ibid*, 15.

intimacy in the work, as I will continue to refer to these terms throughout the exegesis. In this conflict sits the discomfort people feel in such an intimate encounter with a potential stranger (which is sometimes even more uncomfortable if we are not strangers, as for the duration of the work our relationship is reconfigured). When performing the work, a relationship is fast-tracked due to its vulnerability: the work relies on the participant's presence and attention, which relies in turn on them submitting to the framework I have presented and trusting my knowledge of the story. It is an unequal and entangled relationship. In her book *Support Structures* (2009) London-based artist Céline Condorelli expresses the difficulty and conflict in working closely with, or in support of, someone – what she refers to as *proximity*:

No support can take place outside a close encounter, getting entangled in a situation and becoming implicated in it... it cannot rely on intellectual awareness or abstract information, but requires a proximity and intimacy. This unarticulated moment is one of an intimate, un-named knowledge; someone is listening, someone hears something... a sudden, initial erasure of distance demanding a decision which cannot in any way be impartial... But this intimacy entails some violence as well, the violence of support: providing support and being supportive implies not only being in contact, but being right up against the subject of concern... To be this close is never objective, nor impartial; it develops implication, too close to be innocent and too messy to be clear.¹⁵⁶

156 Céline Condorelli, *Support Structures* (Berlin, New York: Sternberg Press, 2009), 15.

APPENDIX 2.4

distance____what_does_distance_matter__how_does_distance_work?____
 can_it_even__unwind_a_man___and_then___wind_him_up_again?_____of_
 course___it's_the_principle_that_counts___if_there's_a_principle_that_
 counts¹⁵⁷

In other words, this point of intimacy and closeness is the point at which self-interest merges messily with the interests of the other. It is the point at which the public and private become entangled, via care for the other and an engagement with them. Or, in Jacques Derrida's words in *On Friendship*: 'The specific political distinction, to which political actions and notions can be reduced, is the distinction between friend and enemy.'¹⁵⁸ It is this strain of *conflict* or *violence* that I refer to in reference to my works – a conflict of being too close and implicated in each other's interests. This also signals Derrida's need for speech in an encounter with the other's face: 'Violence, then, would be the solitude of a mute glance of a face without speech, *the abstraction* of seeing.'¹⁵⁹ He shows the need for speech in coming close in a relationship that seeks to respect the other, to avoid the violence of the mute glance, further emphasising the importance of listening and speaking in the close encounter. This 'sudden, initial erasure of distance demanding a decision which cannot in any way be impartial' is performed through the vocal meeting of singularities.¹⁶⁰ The way I come to occupy a participant in the work, through the re-appearance of the text in their memory at a later time, demonstrates a subtle conflict of interior occupation. This conflict or discord is indebted, then, to the body, at the point where interiority and exteriority meet through speaking and listening. In *The News of the Building of the Wall*, as in Edvardsen's *Time has fallen asleep in the*

157 Wachter, *Against the Forgetting*, 29.

158 Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 2005), 85.

159 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 100.

160 Condorelli, *Support Structures*, 15.

afternoon sunshine, this development of self within a relation pushes against the corporeal and emotional intimacy between the two bodies. This performs an intrusion of self into other through storytelling.

AGENCY (OR LACK THEREOF)

The voice is a site of performance, agency, silences and confusions; difficult to grasp (yet easy to swallow); both inside and outside the body at the same time; and as intangible as it is socially and politically weighty. Voice quite literally refers to, speaks to, or enacts performativity and action: it can name things, give demands, testify, scream, sigh or hiccup. In the relational exchange of listening and speaking, vocalic uniqueness is essential in identifying a speaker's need for the other – in order to speak there must be an ear waiting to receive the voice. This physical immediacy and reciprocity of speaking feeds into the dialectical practice of storytelling in *The News of the Building of the Wall*, and results in a complicated sense of agency that is felt in the work.

The intimacy developed in *The News of the Building of the Wall* is possible due to the work's framework of an extended coaching process of recitation and repetition, in time revealing the inadequacy of language to fully express oneself. Constantly undermining each other are the power dynamics implicit in my role as the 'leader', and the agency of the participant to drive and shape how the work unfolds (through their commitment or refusal). I often refer to this power play as the 'violence' of the work. This violence or conflict, as outlined above, unfolds through a negotiation of agency for both actors in the performance, and through the intimacies developed through speaking and listening.

In his book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (1991), Jacques Rancière offers a framework for education in which the student is given greater agency than the teacher to control

their own learning.¹⁶¹ Rancière contrasts the conventional model of education that depends on the teacher's agency and power with the work of the early nineteenth century theorist Joseph Jacotot. Jacotot insists that 'all men have equal intelligence' and replaces the stultification produced by traditional educational methods (in which the instructor seeks to replicate pre-existing knowledge in the mind of the student) with 'emancipation'.¹⁶² Through emancipation, students create their own knowledge in response to their own needs. For Rancière, the ideal educator is 'ignorant' and disavows their pedagogical authority, serving to liberate the capacity for learning already latent in each individual.¹⁶³

In his essay 'The Noisy Optimism of Immediate Action: Theory, Practice, and Pedagogy in Contemporary Art' (2012), Grant Kester explains that the book – like the work of art – in Rancière's analysis is a prosthetic device that simultaneously frees the reader to construct their own 'translation' of the knowledge, and insulates them from the 'violence' of the authoritarian teachers.¹⁶⁴ This introduces a shift in reading Rancière's analysis: authority is not challenged, but displaced, onto the book. The world remains divided into those who compose texts and those who consume. It still remains the unique responsibility of the author to 'raise up' these subjects from the 'swamp of self-contempt' (a formulation that bears an unfortunate resemblance to neoconservative arguments that poverty is the result of a lack of self-esteem among the poor and working-class).¹⁶⁵

161 Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1991).

162 *ibid.*

163 *ibid.*

164 Grant Kester, "The Noisy Optimism of Immediate Action: Theory, Practice, and Pedagogy", *Contemporary Art, Art Journal*, vol. 71, no. 2 (2012): 86–99.

165 *ibid.*, 96.

When applied to *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine*, this model positions Bruno as the book through which I am granted freedom and emancipation to learn. I, as the reader, become the emancipated student, presented with a text and the opportunity to do with it what I will. In this instance, I chose to pursue the text and re-engage, and to test the authority of the body that delivered the text to me with a third point of access – a book itself. The composition of the text came to me filtered through the original author's intentions; the book in which these were recorded; the translator's working of the text; Bruno's engagement and memorisation; and finally, the presentation of the text via Bruno's vocal recital, indebted to his own memory and its influences.

When examined through the frame of Rancière's text, *The News of the Building of the Wall* positions me as the *authoritarian teacher*, enforcing the learning of prescribed knowledge on the participant. Kafka's story is positioned as the book to which they have access, but only through my own imperfect memorisation of it. Does this prevent a participant's own 'translation' of the text being utilised, as I purport to enforce a verbatim knowledge of the source text? Could this be looked at as a distinction between Barthes's *readerly* and *writerly* texts, this distinction acting not through the content of the text but through the body/book that presents it? And, where does a participant's 'choice' and potential desire to end the work or not memorise the text come into play? A participant can leave at any point, but likely feels beholden to completing the work, or perhaps even the work undermines a part of their ego or self-confidence – they would like to stop, but do not want to let me down, or do not want the awkwardness of telling me no more. But is this actually a problem in the context of this work, or a generative moment of further provocation in the development of a relationship? I navigate this 'problem' by opposing a participant's access to the work against their potential need for, or anxiety around, agency. Some people will not have a problem with the work's structure, and would not even consider rebelling against it

while experiencing the work. Others will, and art must account for this difference (just as the solution to a bad painting or overly long video work is to literally leave the room). All artworks set up a provocation, and in my performance works the provocation is more explicit than that put forward by (many) paintings. If a person chooses to stop performing the work, the simple solution is that they stop experiencing it. Like pressing pause on a song you dislike and never pressing play again, an experience of the work is determined by this moment of exit.

Rancière posits his pedagogical method as a means of subverting authority and giving power to the student, as a means of flattening the subtlest of hierarchies: intelligence. The student determines what they will put in, and when to stop. However, through this comparison of authorities, Rancière forecloses the possibility that reflective mediation might occur through less *exclusive*, or singular binary forms of agency. For surely in an intersubjective meeting, two bodies may enact their agency in differing ways? Rather than viewing pedagogical agency as the unique property of specific individuals, either belonging to teacher or student, one can instead look at it as fluid and transpositional over the course of an engagement. I argue that the agency within *The News of the Building of the Wall* is thus more evenly distributed than initially obvious. Both the participant and I engage in a close reading of Kafka's text, the text and its author being the true authority in the work and how it progresses. The participant's power in the work sits in their own memory and interest, and their own means of progressing through the work determines the uniqueness of each iteration of the work. The participant must choose between their own feelings of agency and freedom to leave the work, and their access to the stories and the work as a whole.

Rancière's valorisation of the book as authority only retains critical traction in opposition to the stance that reading is a passive activity – he 'reinvents' reading as a newly active or transformative activity. However,

the performative nature of the text and the generative nature of its reception are well-known in contemporary critical theory and artistic practice. Reading a book is neither less active nor more so than any other form of mediated social interaction – such as having a book recited to you. As Kester explains, one does not have to subscribe to phonocentric notions of presence to believe that forms of social interactions outside those mediated by authored texts, crafted objects or scripted events are subject to their own unique conditions capable of producing different experiential effects.¹⁶⁶ Following this line of thought, I encounter in Rancière an underlying, though unintended, disregard for the experience of a *reciprocal* vocal exchange of the face-to-face encounter.¹⁶⁷ Rancière's text focuses on a pedagogical hierarchal structure, and how this can be subverted, but does not consider the pedagogical engagement via conversation on a horizontal plane. Kester explains that it is this ambivalence around the *dialogical encounter* that accounts for the reassertion of the artist/intellectual's authorial prerogative in contemporary art criticism or theory.¹⁶⁸ This insistence on a static mode of authorial agency is even more striking as the pedagogical turn in contemporary art has been characterised by a range of collaborative practices where the norms of authorship have been used as a locus for creative intervention. Yet, in his essay *Death of the Author or the Life of the Artist* (2010), Rancière argues that contemporary art's retreat into the idea, as opposed to the material or the personal, tends to transform the paradoxical property of the impersonal work into the logical property of an inventor's patent.¹⁶⁹ This would indicate that even within

166 *ibid.*

167 This face-to-face is in reference to Levinas's face and the other as discussed in my introduction.

Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*.

168 *ibid.*

169 Jacques Rancière, "Death of the Author or the Life of the Artist", *Chronicles of Consensual Times*, Jacques Rancière, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010), 101–105.

the horizontal dialogical encounter, the authorial hierarchy persists. Regardless of the participant's influence on the work, the contemporary artist is more strictly the 'property holder' of the idea of the work – today the author *par excellence* is supposedly the one who exploits what already belongs to him, his own image.¹⁷⁰

By inhabiting a relational model of engagement and learning, the two performance artworks discussed demonstrate a need to consider the reciprocal vocal exchange of the face-to-face encounter in a politics of listening. This dialogical model undermines, to an extent, the artist's authorial right in the work, which becomes determined by the flexible, transitory nature of intersubjective relationships. Due to this, the work relies on, and has an intense engagement with, the other in the performative exchange, in order to resolve and access the work. This produces an intense intimacy, which forecloses a *violence of proximity* – an expectation to perform not just on the part of the performer but on the participant as well, implicating this relationship in the resolution of the work. These relations are fixated on the way the body and the text entwine through the expressive voice as it stutters beyond and around language. Where these thresholds between self and other (or self and a character we purport to be) erode, an invasion of self into other is performed. This meeting of self and other presents the potential for the *occupation* of a body – be that by a text, another body, a memory or a sense of unease.

170 *ibid*, 104.

MOUTH TO MOUTH

COMPLICIT – *adj.* the state of being an accomplice, partnership in wrongdoing or an objectionable act. Etymology: back formation of *complicity*, from French *complicité*, from Old French *complice* accomplice, comrade, companion (14c.), from Late Latin *complicem*, accusative of *complex* partner, confederate, from Latin *complicare* to fold together, from *com* with, together + *plicare* to fold, weave.¹⁷¹

SHADOW – *n.* Comparative darkness; image cast by a body intercepting light; *v:* To cast a shadow upon, to cover or obscure with a shadow. Etymology: representing Old English *scead(u)we*, oblique case of *sceadu* strong feminine; the nominative singular, with the variant form *sceade* of the oblique case, and the by-form *scead* neuter, are represented by *shade n.*, q.v. The Germanic cognates show some variation in declension and gender: Old Saxon *scado* masculine or feminine (Middle Low German *schade*, *schadewe*, modern Low German *schadde*, *scharde*, *scharre*, *scharr*; compare modern West Frisian *skaed*, East Frisian *schād*, North Frisian *skaar*).¹⁷²

This chapter examines the stories written for and performed in *Something Like Dancing* (2017), a performance work that unfolds over three discrete one-on-one sessions.¹⁷³ *Something Like Dancing* focuses on the relationship developed between the participant and yself as storyteller, and delves into the storytelling process – expanding the story through a process of learning, recitation and repetition. This chapter is split into

171 “complicit, adj.”. OED Online. June 2018. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/view/Entry/250771?redirectedFrom=complicit>
 (accessed August 12, 2018).

172 “shadow, n.”. OED Online. June 2018. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/view/Entry/177212?rskey=FxIDLp&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed August 12, 2018)

173 Jacqui Shelton, *Something Like Dancing*, 2017–, live performance.

two parts. Part one considers what drives one to tell stories (especially those that may be considered autobiographical) and how the relational event of storytelling determines a desire for the interlocutor or listener, through the production of a *narratable self*. Part two looks closely at the content and connections between the stories I have written for the work, in order to show how these narratives leak into the relationship developed between a participant and me. I then build on this to consider the implications of *scripting* a conversation through these stories and what the implications are of this in regards to the speakers' *narratable self*. This chapter is written dialogically, as an imagined conversation with an imagined participant in the work, as a means of demonstrating and considering the complicity that develops between us. This dialogical mode of writing is reflective of the processes of learning the stories in the work, through which knowledge of the stories and their content builds over the course of a conversation. Through the fictitious conversation developed, I present an analysis of *Something Like Dancing* that pivots on intersubjectivity, exchange and the non-linearity of the stories' existence. This is explored literally in terms of a partnership, but also poetically as a 'folding together' of the two subjectivities involved with one another in conversation.

The conversation below is between two characters: J representing me, and X representing a fictional participant in the work. I have named my interlocutor in this conversation 'X', demonstrating a meeting of two 'I's, or unique subjectivities, leaning towards one another. This leaning towards, both in the form of the X and in the performance of *Something Like Dancing*, implicates the two bodies involved in an engagement. Through their momentary intersection, these bodies (two I's) create an entirely new figure (X) through a relational exchange. Quotes from the stories recited sit as a subplot below the body of this text as footnotes,

interrupting and threading through the conversation.¹⁷⁴ The stories' disjointed, fragmented exposure prevents the reader of this text from entirely grasping them as a whole. It is important that I be able to communicate the threads of connections between the three stories, while not revealing the stories as a whole text, as they are intended to only exist vocally in the performance work.

A DIALOGUE. PART ONE.

Scene: The balcony of a bar in Melbourne. J has just finished performing *Something Like Dancing* for X, and they meet afterwards to discuss the work and the stories.

J (returning to the table)

Here you go! I know champagne is your weakness so I figured why not?

X (sits curled in a chair, wrapped in a jacket and scarf)

Yes, great!

J (places a drink in front of X and takes a seat)

Anyway, that was great, and I really appreciate you being up for the work, I will have to work on my own memory a bit more though.

X Yes, but I liked the holes in your memory. I felt like we were both struggling through it and there was a sense of solidarity, and these slippages in your memory combined with my own. They played to the slippages of the stories together, and between us, they become objects that could not be held on to as a whole.

¹⁷⁴ Appendix 3 is broken up and positioned as footnotes in this chapter, as the stories are referred to in conversation. This is delineated by quotation marks, and labelled accordingly.

- J True. This space between us is different with everyone, sometimes I feel like I am coming really close to a person but sometimes it feels like this huge space is opening between us.
- X Yes, for me the whole experience of the work was quite evasive, actually. The sense I got most was this granular knowledge being spread and sifted through, yet escaping or constantly just out of reach. Tides of water flowed through the stories, and there was both a breaking down of, and reinforcing of, physical barriers between bodies. The experience, I think, was like standing in a tide and the water washes against your ankles, until it is difficult to pull yourself out, to disengage – you could fall over with the effort. The stories slowly sucked me in through the slow reveal of one sentence at a time, at the speed at which I can learn them, so that the action unfolded in slow motion.¹⁷⁵ Perhaps sticky is a better word than slippery, then.
- J I like this analogy – a slow sucking or current enforced by the tide, a current that pulls you in. Water currents are perhaps the most obvious theme carrying through these stories, especially bodies of water in relation to corporeal bodies. The human bodies in the stories seem fluid, as though they could leak into each other. Of course our bodies are made mostly of water, so are in fact a sort of water body. I also consider many of the water bodies to have a corporeal element – the two small seas as two bodies leaning towards each other, with an in-permeability or distance created by this ‘wall’ and the idea of touching being impossible.¹⁷⁶ Yet, it is also highlighted that the water is drawn to itself. Think rain drops on

175 Appendix 3.1 (henceforth appendix will be referred to as A) ‘I sat with my feet cooling in the water and watched a woman pull herself out of the pool, lifting herself up with her upper body and swinging a leg around, placing a foot on the pool’s lip.’

176 A 3.2 ‘Quantum physics proves it is impossible for you to actually touch anything, as the electrons in the atoms that make up your skin repel the electrons in any other matter, so at this moment you are floating above the surface you sit on.’

the window. In scientific terms this is called cohesion – the attraction of molecules to molecules of the same kind.¹⁷⁷ The same physics that draws water together also pushes bodies apart.¹⁷⁸ This acts like the wall in the story, dividing water bodies.¹⁷⁹

- X Yes, it makes me think of these different ways of containing water (or things in general), and these cycles or changes in form or container – sweat/soft-drink/pool/lungs for instance, ocean/sea/hole/bucket, port/tears/sake/sex. Was it at a port? I like seeing what my memory does. Water is sort of your thought-conduit it feels like, or one of the ways you feel out relations between things across these stories. I think there are a number of themes that create a messy cohesion between these stories.¹⁸⁰
- J For sure. Before getting too deep into these themes, I want to think about the internal drive to tell a story, especially to tell a story about oneself, which all stories ultimately become in some way. Walter Benjamin says in his essay on Nikolai Leskov's stories that 'the storyteller takes what he tells from experience – his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening.'¹⁸¹ Even if the story is not about my experience I filter it through my own account of the situation or my own feelings in relation to it. A story gives account without explaining itself. It is left open.

177 See "Cohesion" in In Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. Retrieved November 19, 2017, from <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/124597/cohesion>

178 This occurs at a molecular level: electrons that make up all matter are negatively charged, and push away from other electrons – this is called 'electron repulsion'. Electrons repel other electrons of a similar charge, and attract positively charged protons. If electrons touch each other it causes a nuclear reaction. So, yes, by this logic one cannot 'touch' anything but, following this, no atoms touch one another – all are massless particles. Electron fields do, however, overlap, so one could argue that getting infinitesimally close to other matter, as we do, equals touching. I am not a scientist nor do I claim to actually understand this so have taken many liberties here.

179 A 3.3 'Each sea is abutting and gently leaning against the same impenetrable wall.'

180 This section is taken from an email discussion with my friend and participant in the work Melissa Deerson.

181 Benjamin, "The Storyteller", 86.

- X So, do you refer to the desire to tell stories as a sort of self-narration? Where do they come from, and what do they carry forward, of yourself and those you tell them to, into the world?
- J Yes, I think it's a way of showing who one is and presenting it to the world. The 'narratable self', a term coined by Adriana Cavarero in her book *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, is a way of referring to the idea that we are each the protagonists of our own life story.¹⁸² A narratable self is outside of memory, it is not only what I remember of myself but it is what I recognise as me and project towards others in relating to them on a daily basis.
- X So, you are dependent on others in presenting this narratable self to the world. A kind of reciprocal vulnerability and exposure is necessary in your relationship with the other in order for them to recognise you in these stories. This reminds me of Arendt's disclosure of the *who* through speaking.¹⁸³ She describes storytelling as a meeting of public and private space that reveals a person's uniqueness in the plurality. Storytelling implies an engagement of bodies and knowledges but also implicates a speakers' private, internal self.
- J Yes, and this reciprocity ties the two bodies through their mutual complicity and internal exposure. Each person affects the other in the relational space of storytelling. These effects acted on one another help each person in the storytelling event gain a sense of self, which can occur only in relation to the other. Gilles Deleuze expresses this in his reflection on Spinoza's effects outlined in *Ethics* as the shadows acting bodies cast on one another as a self-determining practice.¹⁸⁴ He writes:

182 Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*.

183 Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

184 Gilles Deleuze, "Spinoza and the Three Ethics", *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Gilles Deleuze, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Micheal A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1997), 141.

Effects refer to effects just as signs refer to signs: consequences separated from their premises. We must also understand “effect” optically and not merely causally. Effects or signs are *shadows* that play on the surface of bodies, always between two bodies. The shadow is always on the edge. It is always a body that casts a shadow on another body. We have knowledge of bodies only through the shadows they cast upon us, and it is through our own shadow that we know ourselves, ourselves and our bodies. Signs are *effects of light* in a space filled with things colliding with each other at random.¹⁸⁵

So, in effect, I cast a shadow on any participant in the work through this meeting and exchange, while at the same time their presence affects, or colours, the work.

- X This process of affecting the other through storytelling and speaking/ listening generates this reciprocal dependence and exposure, which makes the self narratable. This is what is unique about the engagement of storytelling – it is inherently public as it ties acting bodies together through these meetings of ‘edges’ and ‘shadows’. Each person is complicit in one another’s existence as it is only through the casting of another’s ‘shadows’ upon us that we get to know our own self. However, storytelling is also a private engagement with an imperfect memory, knowledge and personal expression. Shadows, as the ‘dark image cast by someone or something when interposed between an object and a source of light’, act as storytelling does. Shadows exist in between as an intersubjective space, overlaying the public onto the private, or vice versa. Shadows are also a way of visualising the storytelling process, of people speaking and

¹⁸⁵ *ibid*, 141.

influencing, and being influenced by one another. Storytelling is a similar process of bodies relating, as is shadowing.

- J Yes. I use storytelling as this process for acting together, as a way to look at how these social relationships develop. I would like to focus on the temporary relationships developed at a one-on-one scale in the work, which is arguably more in-line with traditional, modernist models for art engagement. Even when thinking about how to engage socially with another body, as an artwork, there is a shifting between private experience and social experience with this other person. This relational model of storytelling makes important the unique individual I engage with through each individual performance of the work, not a collective engagement. The narrative work of my memory constantly, involuntarily, continues to tell me my own story, and I am immersed in the spontaneous auto-narration of my memory. Memory is characterised by the structural mistake that it claims to have seen what is instead revealed by the other. I cannot know about myself without another person telling me stories about who I am, which are then added to my own memory of myself. Without this relational model, I would only have my own auto-narration. Cavarero explains this better, hold on.

(J reaches into her bag, brings out a book and flicks through it. The book is Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero's *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, and is an account on the relationship between selfhood and narration. Cavarero's theory of the 'narratable self' shows how narrative models in philosophy and literature can open new ways of thinking about formation of human identities. By showing how each human being has a unique story that can be told about them, Cavarero launches a shift in thinking about subjectivity and identity that relies not upon categorical or discursive norms, but seeks to account for 'who'

each of us uniquely is.)¹⁸⁶

J (finds what she is looking for)

Here it is. I think you would like this book actually. She says:

The narratable self – as the “house of uniqueness” – is for this reason not the fruit of an intimate and separated experience, or the *product* of our memory. It is neither the fantasmic outcome of a project, nor the imaginary protagonist of the story that we want to have. It is not a *fiction* that can distinguish itself from *reality*. It is rather the familiar sense [*sapore familiar*] of every self, in the temporal extension of a life-story that is this and not another.¹⁸⁷

X So, you have this sense of the other’s life-story existing, without knowing what it is, and the recognition of your own life-story which you don’t necessarily know. This sense of different stories is what determines human uniqueness and provides a platform for a relational conception of storytelling or autobiography. Like when Arendt says that a unique being is such only in relation to the plurality of others which are also unique themselves.¹⁸⁸

J Yes, she does. In Arendt’s view, the problem of narration, and the importance of biographical narration, is not configured as a narratological question, but concerns – exclusively and in total indifference to the text/life story – the complex *relation* between every human being, their life-story and the narrator of this story. Arendt is concerned with the idea of a self that is expressive and relational.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, 41.

¹⁸⁷ *ibid*, 34.

¹⁸⁸ *ibid*, 43.

¹⁸⁹ *ibid*, 41.

However, it is not only the *who* of a person that appears to us in their unique corporeal form – the unique sound of their voice – but also the *who* that comes to us as a narrative self with a unique story. Arendt believes that the other as a narrative self is quite separate from any consideration of their story. It is not necessary to know the other's story to know they are a unique being whose identity is rooted in said story.¹⁹⁰ To distinguish the narratable self from the content of their story, or memory (despite the fact that the self cannot lie in perfect isolation outside this text of their story), removes or ignores the role of personal memory. This vanishes as a result, leaving un-interrogated the reciprocity of the narrative scene and its dynamic of reciprocal desire. So, I need to hear and quantify my story in order to determine a sense of self in relation to the other.

- X Okay, so by separating the unique self from the contents of the life-story, we move quickly past the fact that each person has a sort of concept of their life-story, via memory, but this does not define it. We, you and me, each want our own story told back to us, or confirmed, to further extend and clarify this slippery sense of self that rests on it.

- J Yeah. Through this discussion on memory, I mostly want to emphasise the centrality of a desire, through which one looks to recognise themselves in the narrated story. This is orientated in the expectations of the one who is narrated and the work of the one who narrates.¹⁹¹ The text, or contents of my stories, are unimportant for you to recognise me as an individual, but are central to my own seeking of my stories in others. This helps explain the rigid framework of learning these stories verbatim. As you come to tell these stories yourself, they come to be yours, and the contents matter to you. Autobiography and biography are bound together

¹⁹⁰ *ibid*, 35.

¹⁹¹ *ibid*, 41.

as strategies for the rhetorical construction of self, through conversation and engagement with the other. Through personal memory, or a self-told story, a person is always seeking to hear their story told by someone else.

- X So hearing your life-story told to you determines your understanding of identity, which cannot be found through introversion: it is a relational practice of storytelling. The desire in storytelling is, simply put, a desire for the other or those that I am in conversation with.
- J Yes, and by broaching these boundaries of what is my story, what is yours, we hear 'our' stories told in the work.
- X Oh god, so these are my stories now?
- J Well, not so simply, but you did just tell them to me in the first person. I think memory and perceptions of self are messier than that. I mean, what do you feel your relationship with the stories is now you have memorised them? Maybe it will only be clear in time, in the coming months.
- X I will have to sit on that. For now, are you hungry, I might get some food?
- J Look, I could go some chips.

A DIALOGUE. PART TWO.

Scene: Same, but later.

- J Okay, so I know you wanted to talk about the actual stories as well and the themes in them.
- X Yes. Just as I felt a slippage between us in the performance of the stories, within them, I think water is used as a way to consider broaching

corporeal, language and spatial barriers. It pushes boundaries such as those between bodies, between languages spoken, and between physical spaces.

- J Yes, very much so. For instance, when the woman exits the pool and leaves a footprint, there is a sense that water travels, and also that it breaches the space of a 'shore' or edge of a water body, traversing the shore of the pool.¹⁹² The footprint leaves a physical mark that soon disappears but nevertheless remains part of this piece of concrete.¹⁹³ In another story, when the women are carrying the buckets across the landscape, the water is able to travel from an ocean to an inland sea; it works like a river that sits waist high above the land, carried by hands.¹⁹⁴
- X Well, this consideration of a shore could also be that between liquids and the corporeal body, thinking through how water and corporeal bodies also exist in opposition to one another in the stories. For instance, when the protagonist of one story and her father cry, tears act as a salty secretion that settles and dries on the skin, a liquid that leaves the body and settles on its exterior surface.¹⁹⁵ This happens again in a different story when sweat pools on the protagonist's body.¹⁹⁶
- J This corporeal shore, a surface that liquid settles on before being taken into the body, is also expressed in the salty white film caked on to hair and skin. This has erotic insinuations too, and again could refer to

192 A3.4 '... pushing herself out of the water. She left a wet footprint on the concrete and a trail of them to her towel.'

193 A3.5 '... they shone and faded and became part of the ground.'

194 A3.6 'They each gave an overflowing bucket to their neighbour and then pivoted to receive the next, so that from above Sky watched the water travelling from a far-away ocean, across the landscape, over the wall and into the city.'

195 A3.7 'After a period of sobbing I got up to go for dinner.'

196 A3.8 '... and could feel beads of sweat pooling on the shelves of my body.'

secretions that leak from or are expelled by a body.¹⁹⁷ When writing the story, I was thinking about how the ocean left a dusty white residue on my arm when the salt water evaporated, which I then licked off. In a sense, my mouth was then taking in a foreign body of water, being the ocean, or what was left of it.

This is also reminiscent of the choking boy. Rather than coughing up water and it then evaporating, I consume what is left after the water evaporates on me.¹⁹⁸ Across the stories, there is a chain of consumption and expulsion of liquids through the mouth. Lemonade is felt against the insides of cheeks, an interior skin that is sensitive and able to feel more. The oral skin is seen to be sensitive to liquids such as lemonade, chlorinated water, salt water and fluid languages.¹⁹⁹

- X So mouths seem to be allegorically passing water back and forth as the stories are passed back and forth through their repetition. The water blocked the boys throat and stopped his ability to breathe or speak, reducing his ability to communicate. In the same story you then say that secrets must be shared mouth to mouth, further clarifying the boy's communicative limitations.²⁰⁰ 'Mouth-to-mouth' is also an allusion to CPR and a sharing of life (or of dislodging language from the back of a throat).
- J Yes, this is a somewhat convoluted reference to Walter Benjamin and Brandon LaBelle's ideas relating to speech. They each contemplate the

197 A3.9 '... unmoored memory of a white salty film caked onto hair and skin before being licked off.'

198 A3.10 '... the boy hung onto the side of the pool, choking on water.'

199 A3.11 'I took a sip from a can through a straw and felt lukewarm lemonade tickle the inside of my cheeks...'

200 A3.12 'Though writing secrets down doesn't relieve them, they need to be shared mouth to mouth.'

voice as a bodily expulsion and for which a mouth is necessary to tell a story.²⁰¹ Yet it is also a reflection on this life force that is communicated or threatened by an uninvited intrusion of the body's physical boundaries.²⁰² Communicating mouth-to-mouth questions an impulse to write down, or represent as sign, face-to-face engagement with another person. This opposes vocal expression to the written word. Escaping like the footprint that evaporates, the conversations in my work remain only through the participants' verbal accounts and memories; I do not document this work.²⁰³ The stories themselves focus on the embodied relations that unfold between acting bodies (corporeal bodies, bodies of water), which are marked through bodies meeting or gesturing, but the stories themselves contain no actual verbal communication between the characters.²⁰⁴ The only 'semantic' or language orientated communication is the elderly couple's note, as a record of their offer of hospitality.²⁰⁵ This suggests a future meeting between characters, but is not used or appreciated as a literal invitation. More than anything, it is a trace of the relationship that develops between me as protagonist and the couple. The couple's offer of hospitality demonstrates how unnecessary it is for a person to account for themselves through language. They felt they knew me well despite the language barrier or my inability to account for myself in their language. In his lecture 'Foreigner Question', the first of two lectures in *Of Hospitality*, Jacques Derrida asks, 'if [the foreigner] was already speaking our language, with all that that implies, if we already shared everything that is shared with a language, would the foreigner still be a foreigner and could we speak of... hospitality in regard to him?'²⁰⁶

201 La Belle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*; Benjamin, "The Storyteller".

202 A3.13 'I imagined forcing my lips onto his small ones, as both the most violent act I'd ever commit, and the most intimate introduction...'

203 A3.14 'The damp patch he left shimmered and shrunk into the ground.'

204 A3.15 'Despite being limited to communicating through hand gestures...'

205 A3.16 'Recently, I found the scrap of paper with their address on it, and stuck it on my fridge.'

206 Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 15–16.

Derrida presents this question to contrast the other, or foreigner, with the absolute phenomenological other who is not identifiable by name, language or nation, and considers the question of what is required to be demanded of someone in order to offer hospitality. The couple felt able to offer me hospitality as they felt they knew me after the time we had spent together and the communication we shared, despite the language barrier.²⁰⁷

- X Here it is shown that storytelling extends beyond the use of the mouth and the voice to communicate, and in fact implicates the body. This bodily communication occurs via means of gesture, physical expression, expulsion of breath and noise. The touching, gesturing or even hitting present in these stories implicates hands gestures and how we use our bodies in this way to communicate.

- J Yes, an example being when the child hits his friend on the back to prevent him choking – this is a gesture made with love, though in another context could be violent.²⁰⁸ Thinking through communication in hand gestures and bodily movements is a way to think through the physical proximity of two people, the closeness required in order to work together or to help one another, and how this can be a violent intrusion at times. There is an intense closeness required in order to communicate with our bodies: one needs to be physically present (yet actually touching and merging is impossible, as the celestial Sky reminds us while referring to her extensive physics knowledge). So there is this *violence* in drawing someone as close as possible, and at that limit of intimacy there is a push away, a block. This works against whatever cohesive force is drawing water bodies, corporeal bodies, together.²⁰⁹

207 A3.17 'As I got up to move they gestured that they wanted me to stay and sit with them.'

208 A3.18 'I watched as his friend hit his back with an open palm.'

209 A3.19 'Water is cohesive and sticky, and magnetises to itself...'

- X On the other hand, there is essential intimacy in the physically distant mode of communication demonstrated by communicating the news of a death over the phone.²¹⁰ The father is able to expose his emotions from behind the telephone, at a distance, when he is not physically present. This push and pull of near and far, of binary boundaries or distances being challenged, moves towards occupying a space that avoids a binary positioning – both close and held at a distance. This distance in proximity is allegorically considered through the two seas ‘knowing each other only through smell’ – an intimate knowledge of another without the benefit of physical presence or a line of sight.²¹¹
- J Yes, exactly. This push and pull of distance is not unlike this relationship developed between you and me, or me and any other participant in the work. By repeating lines back and forth about mouths meeting, bodies leaking, a couple flirting and their secret eye contact, there are moments in which we are challenged by describing a scene that mirrors the scene of our performance.²¹² One may begin to think: is every eye contact made the same as the eye contact in the story? No, but this asks the question of the relationship, and this is uncomfortable. It is a forced intimacy. It pushes something in our relationship to its edge.
- X True. The structure of the performance also creates a detached or distant mode of communication, like that between the father and protagonist over the phone, or the metaphor of saving a life being like passing a note.²¹³ Performing the work we were limited to the script of the stories. Our own relationship develops around this language through the

210 A3.20 ‘I heard my stoic father cry for the first time when he told me over the phone.’

211 A3.21 ‘The Seas knew each other only by smell.’

212 A3.22 ‘They flirted, and touched each other’s arms, made secret eye contact and giggled together.’

213 A3.23 ‘... and pretended it would be like slipping him a note on how to breathe.’

personal expressions we inject into them. We are outside of the stories yet entirely implicated within these narratives.

- J The stories do act as a sort of cipher through which communication passes. Meaning and intension are taken to a space, the story, and exchanged for words recited. Communication passes through multiple described sites and experiences on its way from one person to another, the spaces described in the stories and the distinct spaces we each visualise. The story as a vessel for other communication operates as a framework into which new meaning is injected and received. Which makes me think about how this meeting of people and singularities plays out through the descriptions of a port town, a site where goods and services are exchanged and people are always coming and going.²¹⁴ In the story, the port plays a role as the location of the news of death. This site of transition and exchange mirrors its operation as a physical space of exchange of goods and services, and a metaphysical space of mortal limits.
- X Yes, this distinction between life and death is another threshold I noticed that is constantly present in the stories. The child that was perhaps never at risk of drowning still stirs fears of an unexpected death, and the chain of women from the other story died in the creation of the two seas. The port acts as a sort of littoral space of death, and an exchange of bodies is enacted in your desire to connect with or supplement your grandfather with the figure of the elderly man.²¹⁵ The intimacy with this stranger is a substitute for the intimacy with your grandfather, who you were not able to see before he died. This you then seek out and mirror in the strange intimacy that forms between you and me through the performance of the work.

214 A3.24 'On the day I found out my grandfather was dying I was far away in a foreign port town...'

215 A3.25 '... and met a man just like him.'

- J True. The threshold of life and death is often approached in storytelling through an address to the familiar and the far away, the light and dark, or daytime and night time. The stories each occur at these permeable parameters of light, waking and night. At dusk by the pool or over an evening meal shared – in fact, each story broaches dusk or dawn.²¹⁶ By approaching these thresholds, the stories situate themselves in a physical and temporal between-ness – a dusk or a dawn, a shadow line – as they operate within the space created through conversation and in the interlocutor's memories.
- X The stories act as a shadow of your meetings, the mark made on one another's memory through this dialogue. Shadows are always in-between objects – a point of subtraction between the object that casts the shadow and that it is enforced on.
- J The development of the word shadow is related to meadow – *shadow* is to *shade* as *meadow* is to *mead*.²¹⁷ Historically, shadow and shade were the same word, just as meadow and mead were; but this is no longer the case. As I understand it, when used as a noun, *shade* is relative darkness, and a *shadow* is the phenomenon that causes darkness. A tree casts a shadow, which causes shade. A *shadow* is *shade* within clear boundaries. In a relational sense, the *shade* is the impact of two bodies. This shadowy shade is what exists 'on the edge' as the purple of indistinct light at dusk or dawn, or the edge of this meeting of individuals through storytelling. After completing the performance, each of us leaves the work with a shadow of the other affecting us – the distinct relation developed through the work, and the way the stories sit in our memory.

216 A3.26 'It was dusk and the pool was almost empty, the brightness of the day fading to purple.'

217 "meadow, n.". OED Online. June 2018. Oxford University Press.

[http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/view/](http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/view/Entry/115386?rskey=2DWfIX&result=1&isAdvanced=false)

Entry/115386?rskey=2DWfIX&result=1&isAdvanced=false (accessed August 12, 2018)

- X So the knowledge of the stories exists for me as a *shadow* of you in my memory. It is as though aspects of your *life story* has been projected onto me and I now occupy it through my own narration of it, and it is known to me from the narrator's perspective as though it were my own. The process of shadowing by acting bodies is like an invisible mark-making which implicates me in your life story. The two seas project an imagined image of each other based on smell, each acts as a substitute for something else that is absent – a knowledge of the other based on images and associations external to the relationship.²¹⁸ The two seas each think of each other as scents reminiscent of periods in time, lacking in an image of the other: a crisp morning or a sweaty dusk.²¹⁹
- J Yes, they are close and essentially the same, both the sea, both touching the same wall, but are also completely different.²²⁰ The wall loops around the interior sea, enclosing it, and keeping the exterior sea from entering and mixing. The loop of the wall is what makes the seas' ongoing relationship, and magnetism to each other, possible. The wall suspends this attraction without the possibility of resolution. Likewise, the loop of *Something Like Dancing* prevents a resolution, and is always open to the future vibrations of the work in the participants' memory or relationship with me. The performance ends due to a time limit, which makes the 'completion' of the work (being the full memorisation of the stories) difficult. Yet the work continues to reverberate through a story that a participant in the work takes on as their own: they take a shadow of me with them. This irresolution is consistent with the stories' trajectory. Day becomes night, a person is indefinitely locked out and a strange

218 A3.27 '... the Seas contented themselves with lapping against their own sides of the wall in their own steady rhythm.'

219 A3.28 'Outside Sea thought the green, contained, inside sea smelt like hot damp earth in a forest, or a perfumed sweaty nape at dusk. Inside Sea thought Outside Sea smelt like white light fresh mornings before the sun crested the wall...'

220 A3.29 'There are two small seas that are close to each other but do not flow together.'

relationship develops across the passage of life/death, which proposes itself to a future relationship.²²¹

- X Before I have to go, in relation to the *narrated self* we spoke of earlier, and how a person desires to hear their own story told back to them or confirmed by the other, how do you position the way this work operates? What I mean is, the focus on storytelling as determining a life story seems to be challenged by the fact that participants in the work are repeating your own stories back at you, but cannot insert their own stories into the process.
- J Well, the stories told are written by me, so I think arguably could not be constituted as my *life story* as these are embellished instances from my memory. As this work unfolds, it is not a sense of the other's life story that develops, or even my own – there is not a sense of anything about me being affirmed through this process. If anything, it is the opposite! What really becomes clear in the relations developed through the work is the instability of my own sense of self. A part of me is listening to the stories to be able to affirm or correct them, but a large part of me is attending to what the person opposing me is communicating to me outside of the language of the stories. Do they seem uncomfortable, are they enjoying themselves, what new language do they bring into the story and why? A lot of my attention is given to watching facial expressions and over-analysing what I take to be an exasperated sigh. So what I have found, and I would not have anticipated this, is that though the text of the stories is so central to the work, what is communicated through them says more about the relationship I develop with this person. It is the narratological desire to hear or affirm this life story that produces the circumstances under which we can communicate and develop a relationship with the

221 A3.30 'They offered that I stay with them next time I was in the country, I said I would though knew I wouldn't see them again.'

other without the pressure of making conversation. So, through this structure or practice of storytelling and sharing narratives, a situation arises in which I can engage with another person and we can truly attend to a communication outside of language, an expression of that person's self beyond the logical thoughts they may construct. This I present as a way to actively engage in a practice of listening that listens to the expressive self, outside of language. The contents of the stories in this work are a large part of the experience, and important to consider because they create an imagined visual plane that the work exists in. Though ultimately, they enable a particular condition under which a relationship can be developed, and are a means to this end.

X (finishing her drink)

So do you feel you know me more through this process, than I could express through language?

J Well, I would not say more, but would argue I know you differently to what your language expresses.

The conversation ends abruptly, and we have not come to a resolution about the stories' influence on the relationships developed. I take this opportunity to consider that a reading of the work is to be found not only through the stories' contents and the many revealing aspects of what is said, but in the embodied relationship produced through this saying and listening. Writing these stories, my thinking about the stories' relations was much simpler and shallower. It is only through their performance, and the corresponding conversations, that they have slowly unravelled, and continue to do so. This demonstrates a true shadowing between the participant in the work and me, as we each affect and determine one another's experience of the performative storytelling process. Themes of water bodies, corporeal bodies, boundaries, communications (and its failings), and conflict erect a space for relating that is open to a number

of potential readings by the performers due to the unique intimacy developed through each iteration of the performance. In the next chapter, I will turn to an examination of the effects experienced in the relationship that occurs in the work, and what intimacies and conflicts are produced through this process.

DISCORD AND EMBARRASSED GESTURES IN *SOMETHING LIKE* *DANCING*

DISTANCE - Etymology: Old French *destance*, *distance* (13th cent. in Littré), < Latin *distāntia* 'standing apart', hence 'separation, opening (between); distance, remoteness; difference, diversity', < *distānt-em* present participle, distant *adj.* By a further development, Old French *destance* had the sense 'discord, quarrel', which was also the earliest in English. In senses adopted directly < Latin, the form *distance* was used in Old French, and this soon became the only form in English. The chronological appearance of the senses does not correspond to the logical development in Latin.²²²

EMBARRASS - Etymology: Apparently < Middle French, French *embarrasser*, †*embarrasser* to put (a person) in a difficult or awkward situation (a1571), to confuse, perplex (a person) (1580, originally used reflexively), to impede (a process, especially the normal use of something) (1690) < Spanish *embarazar* (c1460), probably < Portuguese *embaraçar* (15th cent.) < *em-* *em-* prefix + *baraço* cord (1260; early 12th cent. as †*baraza*), apparently originally with reference to animals being restrained by a cord or leash; further etymology uncertain and disputed: see J. Corominas *Diccionario critico etimológico castellano e hispánico* (ed. 2, 1981) at *embarazar*. With the *a.* forms compare *im-* prefix, and also (< Spanish) Italian *imbarazzare* to hamper or impede (a person, action, or process), to block (a road or place) (a1600; compare *imbarazzato* hampered, obstructed (c1535)), to confuse, perplex (a person) (a1685).²²³

222 "distance, n.". OED Online. June 2018. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/view/Entry/55580?rskey=517U8i&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed August 12, 2018).

223 "embarrass, v.". OED Online. June 2018. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/view/Entry/60793?redirectedFrom=embarrass> (accessed August 12, 2018).

In the previous chapter, I focused on the content of the three stories written for, and taught to, the participants in my work, *Something Like Dancing*. These stories and their contents bled into the experience of the work, marking it with a focus on the permeability of water bodies and human bodies approaching one another, as well as the means of communications that occur outside of, underneath, and around language. In this chapter, I will examine the intersubjective intimacies and conflicts produced through this process. These will be framed through the underlying themes of distance, or discord, and embarrassment, and how these feelings reverberate through the relationships developed in my performance. I will show that in *Something Like Dancing* it is through the development of intimacy and exposure of the self through speech that discordance takes place. In *Something Like Dancing* this intimacy presents a conflict between what occurs and what is said (or what cannot be said): a close but not-quite re-staging of a recited text, the citing of a text through one's body language, which causes us to look outwards in embarrassment. I will begin the chapter with a closer look at this text and the vocal practice of the lover, briefly using William Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet* as reference.²²⁴ From here, I will use Barthes's descriptive gesture 'The Other's Body' to consider the face-to-face engagement within my work, both in the intensity of watching and being watched; 'Talking' to think through voicing as a demand; and 'Looking Embarrassed' to explore the distance and awkwardness that develops via a relational practice of embarrassment. These three romantic gestures equally apply to *Something Like Dancing*, and by questioning the work through each gesture I can determine what embodied intimacies or conflicts are produced.

224 William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. G. Blackmore Evans (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Throughout this chapter, I will also be making comparative reference to Yorgos Lanthimos's film *Dogtooth* (2009) and its depiction of intimacy and discord/distance, re-compositions of bodies, and language as a signifying skin, to further clarify my thinking on embodied relations within my own work.²²⁵ The film's three young-adult siblings spend their days listening to homemade tapes that teach them an alternative vocabulary, so that any words from beyond their family home are assigned a new meaning. Hence, they believe 'the sea' is a large armchair, 'zombies' are little yellow flowers and a 'cunt' is a large lamp (producing a humorous moment when the 'cunt' switches off and the room becomes dark). The controlling parents intimidate their offspring into submission, inventing a brother whom they claim to have ostracised for his disobedience. Eventually, the eldest daughter takes a barbell to her face, smashing her mouth repeatedly until her 'dogtooth' falls out. The violence expressed in the film is markedly removed from that in my work – it is physical violence against bodies, against family members and against an individual's liberties – yet I find the film's themes of control, substitutive language, repetition and (often unsettling) intimacy an appropriate lens to view my own performance through.

A LOVER'S DISCOURSE

This chapter will be structured around three *gestures* or *figures* from Roland Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* as entry points to address the intimacies and conflicts in the reciprocal pedagogical relationship.²²⁶ In *A Lover's Discourse*, Barthes presents the speaking between lovers as one of extreme solitude.²²⁷ *A Lover's Discourse* challenges the reader's views and understandings of the social constructs

²²⁵ *Dogtooth*.

²²⁶ Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*.

²²⁷ Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, 8.

of love, without asserting an alternative or definitive theory. Barthes illustrates a fictional, structuralist reflection on a lover seeking to identify and be identified by an anonymous, amorous other. The book contains a list of 'fragments', sourced from literature and Barthes's own philosophical thoughts, of a lover's point of view, which are presented as gestures or figures of the lover at work. The gestures are presented as signs, or signifiers, presented in an order that Barthes insists are 'distributive but not integrative; they always remain on the same level' as these gestures 'cannot be classified: organized, hierarchized, arranged with a view to an end'.²²⁸ Through this process, Barthes seeks to achieve *neutral writing* in order to avoid any labels that may carry implied meaning or identity. He tried to create a novelistic form of rhetoric that does not seek to impose a meaning on the reader, and thus he wrote *A Lover's Discourse*, which shows the protagonist's attempt to search for signs by which to show and receive love, revealing the illusory nature of the pursuit of an idealised reality.²²⁹ The protagonist of the book is both easy to criticise and sympathetic, understandable and relatable from a reader's perspective. For clarity, the protagonist in the book is a fictional character, but based on the assumption that the characterisation stems from Barthes's own experience of desire. Therefore, I will refer to the text and the protagonist as though it were written in the first person.

I use Barthes's text on an anonymous lover's gestures or movements because it presents a movement towards the other through its figuring of an unrequited love. Each 'fragment' taken from Barthes's text, and expanded on below, acts as a frame through which to examine the relationship, process and reverberation of a performance event that invites another into this relational meeting of singularities. Barthes's 'lover' reflects a reciprocal determination of self-recognition that I have

²²⁸ *ibid*, 8.

²²⁹ *ibid*.

previously discussed in the context of voicing and storytelling. The back-and-forth voicing that forms *Something Like Dancing* shows a reliance on the other in determining one's own position in the work, and forms a reciprocal relationship between the two performers through repetition of stories and physical closeness.²³⁰

Shakespeare's famous lovers, Romeo and Juliet, develop a 'lover's discourse' on two registers: at the intersection of their singularities or extreme solitudes, and through their repeated declarations of love and devotion.²³¹ In one sense, a semantic dialogue of words connects the phrases of Romeo and Juliet to the thread of meaning. In another sense, it is a dialogue between expressive voices that reciprocally communicate two bodies whose reality, in their 'dear perfection', can do without the prohibited proper name. Here, 'dear perfection' is used in reference to Juliet in Act II, Scene II, where she declares Romeo as unique, separated from the proper names Romeo Montague ("Tis but thy name that is my enemy; though art thyself"), and therefore recognised 'without the title... which is no part of thee'.²³² This refusal of the proper name is further famously demonstrated in the line: 'What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other word would smell as sweet.'²³³ This shows a distinct recognition of the other's *unique self* through their voice, without identifying name. Romeo responds, and shows his recognition of Juliet by saying: 'My ears have yet not drunk a hundred words of thy tongue's uttering, yet I know the sound.'²³⁴ The lovers allude to a space in which the world of speech and names of linguistic and social rules are nothing. The lover recognises their distinctive, desired one purely through voice –

230 Shelton, *Something Like Dancing*.

231 Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*.

232 *ibid*, Act 2, Scene 2.

233 *ibid*, Act 2, Scene 2.

234 *ibid*, Act 2, Scene 2.

despite language, names or other signifiers brought into play to confuse them.²³⁵ Romeo recognises Juliet's seeking of him, communicated outside of language: 'She speaks, yet she says nothing, what of that? Her eye discourses, I will answer it.'²³⁶

As *Something Like Dancing* provides a script for our conversation, the participant and I express a dialogue that operates semantically, following the meaning of the story. I use 'we' and 'our' a number of times in this chapter, and clarify that I do not seek to universalise the experiences described, instead referring to me and the participant in the work as 'we'. Yet the focus on words that have nothing to do with our relationship expresses a reciprocal communication of singularities not unlike the lovers' disregard for proper names. The stories are utilised as a vessel for embodied communication. It is only here, where we actively and reciprocally communicate a materially given vocal uniqueness *outside of* conversation, that we constitute the context of our relationship. Vocalic expression, as demonstrated here through our exchange of repeated utterances and noises, helps conceive of a politics of listening in terms of a contextual relation, which implies the figure of a speaker who exposes, first of all, herself as a singular body.²³⁷

APPENDIX 4.1

*The Other's Body**Corps/body*

1. The other's body was divided: on one side, the body proper – skin, eyes – tender, warm; and on the other side, the voice – abrupt, reserved, subject to fits of remoteness, a voice did not give what the body gave. Or further: on one side, the soft warm, downy, adorable body, and on the other, the ringing, well-formed, worldly voice – always the voice.

235 *ibid*, Act 2, Scene 2.

236 *ibid*, Act 2, scene 2.

237 Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, 209.

2. Sometimes an idea occurs to me: I catch myself carefully scrutinizing the loved body... To *scrutinize* means to search: I am searching the others body, as if I wanted to see what was inside it, as if the mechanical case of my desire were in the adverse body... this operation is conducted in a cold and astonished fashion. I am calm, attentive, as if I were confronted by a strange insect of which I am suddenly *no longer afraid*. Certain parts of the body are particularly appropriate to this *observation*: eyelashes, nails, roots of the hair, the incomplete objects. It is obvious that I am then in the process of fetishizing a corpse. As is proved by the fact that if the body I am scrutinizing happens to emerge from its inertia, if it begins *doing something*, my desire changes; if for instance I see the other *thinking*, my desire ceases to be perverse, it again becomes imaginary, I return to an Image, to a Whole: once again, I love.²³⁸

THE OTHER'S BODY

Barthes's fragment on the other's body follows a close examination of the body of the desired subject. The body of the subject is split in two, between the physical body and the voice, and then split in two again through his mode of looking. This presents a standing apart from one another, an estrangement of distance that clarifies the body of the subject and the one who looks as two distinctly unique entities. In the first instance, the body proper – "tender, warm, downy, adorable" – is examined, looked upon tenderly, before in the second instance the body becomes *scrutinised*, or *searched*, in a cold and astonished fashion. In Barthes's description, the body is figured as a corpse: lashes, nails and roots of the hair are examined, these parts of the body that are already dead despite the body's apparent downy warmth. The body is divided into its smallest fragments as a means of examining the residue of who these fragments once may have been.

²³⁸ Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, 71.

The observed body undergoes a similar visual dismemberment in *Dogtooth*. Here, the visual language of the film presents fragmented bodies, close-ups of legs or arms, amputated by the parameters of the image frame: two thick torsos, and bent angles of knees and feet.²³⁹ The body is seen re-composing itself as two outward-facing palms or knees enter the frame, reflected in the mirror. The privileged shot of the film frames a set of indeterminate limbs (for instance, three calves and a wrist) while voices speak off-screen, presenting an acousmatic voicing for the unidentified body parts. If a voice comes from the throat, this cinematic framing of the shot presents the impossibility of an amputated leg speaking. This framing and fragmentation of the body visually separates what is seen from what is heard, so that the voice that comes from the body is shown as a voiceover to the body's minute movements and relations to other bodies in the frame. The disjuncture between what is said and what is seen performs a breaking of the body into fragments and variations to be examined – a body divided: 'On one side, the body proper... tender, warm; and on the other side, the voice.'²⁴⁰ This division of the body severs the voice from its corporeal source, performing a redaction of the embodied self that would otherwise spring from it.

Through a process of intense watching, I was surprised by both the exposure I felt, and the seeming exposure of the participant, as I performed *Something Like Dancing*. As the participant focused on trying to remember the exact phrasing of the story, they would often look into space, at a point on the table or at their hands. I watched them as they sought the words in order to follow what they were saying and correct them. I found this mode of watching intrusive and voyeuristic. It demonstrated a mode of watching another person so rare and so in line with Barthes's description of the scrutinisation of an inert, fragmented

239 *Dogtooth*.

240 Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, 71.

body. I would notice an eyebrow hair at a funny angle, lines under eyes that were not there previously, the line at the corner of a mouth twitch or how neat their fingernails were. This mode of looking felt like watching someone sleeping: unsettling and invasive. This practice of watching is almost exclusively reserved for lovers or parents watching children, so presents an embarrassing discord in the context of engagement with those not known intimately. I am reminded of *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine* and how Bruno could become object through this process of memorisation through the embodiment of a book.²⁴¹ In *Something Like Dancing*, I know each participant intimately through the intensity of my gaze – watching and noticing parts of a person – which is not returned due to their focus on the story. There was also a focus directed towards me. As the participants slowly recite and learn the stories, each with their own autobiographical renderings of me, they tell my own experiences back to me. Speaking these stories, in first person, it is as though these participants are performing me, or occupying a space I should be in.

When the body Barthes desires activates (as the people I am watching do), he awakes from his cold inspection. The body begins doing something – it speaks. When the body emerges from its inertia, it can be seen again by Barthes as ‘an Image, a Whole’, and the mode of desire shifts.²⁴² This action of speaking is designated as being abrupt, reserved and subject to fits of remoteness – ‘the voice did not give what the body gave’.²⁴³ At the same time it is the body’s ability to think and express itself that removes it from its objectified position of corpse, object that is desired, and projects the body as a thinking, acting being. The body alive in motion and thought is the body as “an Image... a Whole” that Barthes loves. The

241 Edvardsen, *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine*.

242 Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, 71.

243 *ibid*, 71.

body I watch in *Something Like Dancing* is both frozen in thought, and bought to life due to their thinking; presenting a fragmentation of the body as voice, body proper and interlocutor.

APPENDIX 4.2

*Talking**Déclaration/declaration*

1. Language is a skin: I rub my language against the other. It is as if I had words instead of fingers, or fingers at the tip of my words. My language trembles with desire. The emotion derives from a double contact: on the one hand, while an activity of discourse discreetly, indirectly focuses upon a single, signified, which is "I desire you," and releases, nourishes, ramifies, it to the point of explosion (language experiences orgasm upon touching itself); on the other hand, I enwrap the other in my words, I caress brush against, talk up this contact, I extend myself to make the commentary to which I submit the relation endure.
2. The energy of commentary shifts, follows the path of substitutions. Initially it is for the other that I discourse upon the relation; but this may also occur in the presence of my confidant: from you I shift to he or she. And then, from he or she I shift to one: I elaborate an abstract discourse about love, a philosophy of the thing, which would then in fact be nothing but a generalised suasion. Retracing our steps from here, one might say that every discussion of love (however detached its tonality) inevitably involves a secret allocation... In the Symposium, we may find this allocation: it may well be Agathon whom Alcibiades is addressing and whom he desires, though he is being monitored by an analyst, Socrates.²⁴⁴

244 Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, 73.

TALKING AND VIOLENCE

In Barthes's entry under *Talking*, he figures talking to a subject as a means of approaching them amorously, as a caress, which is both confronting in its uninvited 'point of explosion' and tender in its touch.²⁴⁵ It feels as though, short of being permitted contact with his desired subject, Barthes constructs a context for amorously engaging through words and language. Here, the reciprocal action of voicing is interrupted by avoidance of the subject. Barthes's discourse focuses *discreetly* to a point around the singular message of 'I desire you', implying that this may not be a welcome message. I notice especially Barthes's focus on *language* and *words*, which act as a skin that is extended and rubbed against the subject of his desire, and could be configured as a skin that coats the voice in a semantic framework. Barthes admits that he speaks and extends himself to make this commentary 'to which I submit the relation endure'.²⁴⁶

Language, as a skin that coats the voice and extends towards the other, is presented as a skin for signification in *Dogtooth*.²⁴⁷ Here, words seek to find a logic of substitution not unlike the process of a participant in *Something Like Dancing* speaking my words as a substitute to their own. Every word that might name something previously unseen or forbidden from the family home, is re-inscribed by the parents with new meaning in relation to their intimate domestic sphere. In the encounter Barthes describes, he approaches his desired lover through an address, speaking to him as an extension of the body that has been shown to exist in the voice. Previously, I have described speaking and voicing as a relational and self-determining endeavour, but am here pulled up by the very

²⁴⁵ Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, 73.

²⁴⁶ *ibid*, 73.

²⁴⁷ *Dogtooth*.

fact that it may be unwanted. The unsolicited nature of the address is important to think about both in terms of Barthes's potential lover, but can also be figured in relation to the way I solicit and submit the participant in my work to recite and learn a story I have written within a rigid framework. I visited this briefly in chapter two in relation to Kafka's *The News of the Building of the Wall: A Fragment* and my own work by the same name, considering how the 'foreigner' or outsider surprises a listener with their announcement or news.²⁴⁸ Through this process the outsider usurps an invisible physical barrier between the local and the foreign, lodging the memory in the listener's mind (in the case of the child, remembering the story via a chain of physical touches between his father and the boatman).²⁴⁹ If this violence is what cements the memory in place, how does the unwanted encounter figure in the reciprocity of speaking, which implies a level engagement from each interlocutor? To recall briefly Adriana Cavarero's relational model of speaking:

From a vocal perspective, the reciprocal communication of the speakers lies in the symphony of a double relationality. One regards the uniqueness of a voice that is for the ear; the other resounds in the musicality of language itself. Both have a physical, corporeal substance. The logos that is shared in the voices... is a logos that vibrates in throats of flesh... Speech – voice and signified, rather than signifying voice – bridges these two shores. Even when it begins communicating something, obeying the universal codes of language, it still communicates singular voices and, at the same time, the rhythmic cadence of a resonance that links these voices.²⁵⁰

248 Kafka, "The News of the Building of the Wall: A Fragment".

249 Ash, "News of the Building of the Wall – a response to Jacqui Shelton".

250 Cavarero, *For More than One Voice: Towards a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, 198.

Cavarero's shaping of speech as the expression and relation of singular voices linked through their resonance presents an embodied, physical expression of voicing as both a communication of singularity, and a resonance of co-existence and relationality – voicing discloses one's uniqueness in plurality. Speaking implicates the ear of the listener as well as their throat, and on some occasions this resonance is arrhythmic in its cadence. In the context of Barthes's gesture of a declaration, the act of talking as a caress and the proposition put towards the participant of *Something Like Dancing*, I see the receiver of a story in both instances being initially implicated in the position of listener. Before a subject can recall and repeat back to me my stories, the relation is built on the *obligation* for them to listen. Tracing an etymology of the word 'listen' finds me at a crossroads of meaningful origins: Old English *hlosnian* (to listen, hear; attend to, obey); Greek *klyo* (hear, be called) and *kleos* (report, rumour, fame, glory); and the Germanic root *hlus* (list, to give ear).²⁵¹ In contemporary Italian, the word *sentire* means both to feel, which denotes physical feeling with the body, and to listen, as characterised by feeling with your ears.²⁵² The force of listening can be interpreted as both an involuntary and emotional physical force, but it is also an act full of control. It is through this force that Barthes controls his subject, and through which I initially control the participant in my work, producing a violence of listening.

This is not a physical violence. A productive definition of violence in this context is Jean-Luc Nancy's account, in *Image et violence* (2005), as 'the application of a force that remains foreign to the dynamic or

251 "listen, v.". OED Online. June 2018. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/view/Entry/109008?rskey=8kfwni&result=2&isAdvanced=false> (accessed August 12, 2018).

252 See 'sentire' in Collins Italian to English Dictionary Complete and Unabridged Edition. Sydney: Harper Collins.

energetic system into which it intervenes'.²⁵³ Nancy also explores a violent closeness through his own heart transplant and the violence of his body being occupied by a *foreign* heart in *L'Intrus* (2008), which I will return to shortly.²⁵⁴ The force that intervenes with the system here (by which I mean the elder daughter's body in *Dogtooth* and the intimacy of the relationship within *Something Like Dancing*) is not foreign or external to that system: it intervenes as the familiar, stirred from within. If the force of violence in *Dogtooth* does the things we expect violence to – wreck, destroy – it does so from itself, on itself. Violence is thus auto-affective, or internal to the system, in both *Dogtooth* and *Something Like Dancing*.²⁵⁵ This auto-affective violence unleashes and liberates and is a form of a new kind of something that is not unlike freedom. The auto-affective 'violence' of *Something Like Dancing* comes from a discomfort that arises when faced with one's own capacity for un-practiced memory – it is not a blow I deliver, but comes from the participant's own response. It can be figured as Derrida's violence of the mute glance – caught in my watchful gaze, a participant feels they must speak. This auto-affection is especially apparent in *Dogtooth*'s violent climax: the moment in which the title of the film is given its full reckoning. Standing in front of a mirror, the elder daughter smashes the side of her face with a barbell, knocking out her dogtooth, and symbolically transgressing her childhood, conforming to the letter of the father's law. The barbell's impact enforces a 'bloody distance' or the violence of closeness, a reverberation or moving-towards that is a gesture towards touching, deemed impossible by the Sky character in the third story learnt in *Something Like Dancing*.²⁵⁶

253 Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 16.

254 Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Intruder [L'intrus]", *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

255 Brinkema, "e.g., *Dogtooth*".

256 'Sky told me that quantum physics proves it is impossible for you to actually touch anything, as the electrons in the atoms that make up your skin repel the electrons in any other matter, so at this moment you are floating above the surface you sit on.' See appendix 3, chapter 3, citation 5.

At each meeting, I recite in full the story that the participant learnt at the previous session, while trying to hold eye contact with them. This is intended to initiate the process of looking and intimacy, and on most occasions the participant looks away. This eye contact is perhaps too awkward, too intimidating or too distracting to their listening of the story. This visual imposition heightens the power structure within the work; asserting me as the one who ‘holds’ the knowledge, as demonstrated through my recitation. The held gaze presents something else in the work. An unarticulated moment is one of an intimate, unnamed knowledge – I am listening, I am watching, and this travels in both directions between us – which presents an initial erasure of distance, or amplifies distance through the intimacy of discord. This intimacy is confronting, arguably violent, and uncalled-for in the setting the work is presented. Barthes decides that every discussion of love has a secret allocation, a subject that the text is directed to in disguise. So, this eye contact poses the question of addressee to a participant – perhaps this story was written for them.²⁵⁷

The violence in *Something Like Dancing* arises within the relationship developed – a violence of proximity. It is not a violence enacted on one body by another, but a conflict in the implicated intimacies of the work. It is a violence of support, of a sudden erasure of distance. The pedagogical process of learning the story binds us together, and reverberates across the duration of the weeks taken to perform the work. We are bound: I need the participant in order for the work to be completed, and they need me in order to hear how the stories end. However, the relationship and the process is left open and irresolvable, through the potential that they may not memorise the story, and the looping nature of the work’s construction. There is no finish or end, just the point at which they have reached the end of the first story they heard. The relationship

257 Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*.

reverberates in future meetings, and there is a bleeding of experience, memory and embodied knowledge into this space. This reverberation or discord between the two bodies pushes into the future, extending the irresolution of conflict and intimacy between the participants in the work as a question they carry with them.

APPENDIX 4.3

*Looking embarrassed**gene/embarrassment*

1. Werther is making a scene (just before his suicide) with Charlotte, but the scene is interrupted by Albert's arrival. No one speaks, and the three move about in the room, looking embarrassed; various trivial subjects of conversation are launched, all of which falls flat. The situation is charged. With what? With the fact that each person is perceived by the other two in his role (of husband, of lover, of stake), without its being possible to take account of this role in the conversation. What is heavy is the silent knowledge: I know that you know that I know: this is the general formula of embarrassment, a frozen, white modesty which takes the insignificance (of remarks) as its insignia. Paradox: the unspoken as the symptom... of the conscious.
2. Accident happens to bring together several friends in this café: a whole bundle of affects. The situation is charged; though I am involved in it and even suffer it, I experience it as a scene, a carefully drawn and well-composed tableau (something like a slightly perverse Greuze); the situation is crammed with meanings, I read them, I follow them in their last articulations; I observe, I decipher, I enjoy a text bursting with legibility *for the reason that it does not speak*. I merely see what is spoken, as in a silent movie. There is generated in me (a contradiction in terms) a kind of *alert fascination*: I am nailed to the scene and yet very wide awake: my attention constitutes a part of what is being acted out, nothing is external to the scene,

and yet I read it: there are no footlights – this is an extreme theatre, Whence the awkwardness – or, for some perverse types, the pleasure.²⁵⁸

EMBARRASSMENT AND DISTANCE

Barthes describes a scene from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (2012), a story of a young man who kills himself over an unrequited love (demonstrating a reliance on the desired and death without the desired). In this scene, three protagonists in a love triangle find themselves in an awkward, charged situation, as each knows the other's role yet is unable to take account of this in conversation. While the love triangle is not relevant to the relationship in *Something Like Dancing*, the heaviness of this silent knowledge, the unspoken as a symptom of the conscious, plays out through the communication that occurs outside of the words being recited. There is both a concentrated focus on the content of the stories, as well as the interactions and communications that occur outside of this predetermined language due to the structure of a scripted engagement. Here, I focus explicitly on the nuances of communication that operate underneath or around these stories, through silences, gestures, body language and directions of looking.

Through Barthes's focus on *looking* embarrassed, as opposed to *being* embarrassed, he emphasises a relational practice of embarrassment. This embarrassment is indicative of an engagement with the desired subject and an analysis of this engagement, and what is being communicated through body language. The focus on what is seen ('I merely *see* what is being spoken, as in a silent movie') diverts attention from the subject of conversation, what is *heard*, paying attention to the affect in the

258 Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, 122.

situation as though listening with the eyes. Likewise, this occurs in the engagement with the participant of *Something Like Dancing*. As Barthes says: ‘the situation is crammed with meanings, I read them... *for the reason that it does not speak*’.²⁵⁹ Looking embarrassed opposes being embarrassed, as looking is directed externally, towards a subject, whereas being embarrassed (without getting entangled in the question of ontological being, a subject outside the scope of this exegesis) is an internalised reflection of self in relation to external stimuli. Looking embarrassed sees and reacts to the embarrassment of the other, and engages in a new form of address through communication that lends itself to *looking over listening*. If our listening facilities are occupied by the memorisation of stories, our eyes are busy looking for other cues and communications.

The direction of this looking, like the direction of listening, is towards the interlocutor in a situation. In *Something Like Dancing*, the participant and I regard each other: my attention constitutes a part of what is being acted out. Nothing is external to the scene of the performance. Through speaking, we extend our bodies towards each other – via throats producing noises – yet this exchange also occupies the orifices of the ears and the eyes. As the stories are learnt, they are pictured in the minds of the participants, and this image is projected onto the performance event. The voice is an extension of the body; the voice reaches towards and seizes a listener. As shown in chapter one, by speaking, my throat and the participant’s throat reach out towards one another – a gesture charged and mirrored in the stories. Just as the voice is an extension of the body that reaches towards an interlocutor, the stories, through their lodging in our throats, become extensions of us and our relationship. Through looking (embarrassed), we also reach out to the other, and engage in a

259 Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, 122.

level of communication seated in what we see as well as what is heard.

Mapped in the previous chapter, the stories that make up *Something Like Dancing* follow a sequence of imagined and real communications: bodies meeting and communicating across divides of distance, language and space. The similarities between situations of people communicating and attempting to bridge these thresholds, between understanding and misunderstanding, point to the potential for them to be echoed. A participant in the work will repeat a line about a couple's secret eye contact and might then re-think any eye contact that may have happened through the course of the work. They may think about what it means to know and recognise someone by their smell or an imagined vital meeting of lips. Our eyes follow these physical gestures traced within the performance with a level of embarrassment, or self-consciousness. An innate awareness that *nothing* is *external* to the work provides a space of heightened relational awareness. An engagement in the work does not directly mirror these described circumstances, but the tension lies in the possibility of this situation and the repeated iteration of this possibility. The communication between the father and the protagonist over the phone implies a physical distance yet an emotional intimacy, and the final story of the seas confirms that despite how closely one may be drawn to another, it is impossible to touch. So likewise it is this distance between me and the participant that presents the potent potentiality of intimacy.

Distance suggests a standing apart – a separation, an opening or difference, a gap in space. The word 'distance' derives in part from the Old French *destance*, which means *discord* or *quarrel*: the condition of being at variance, dissention or dispute, such that one can find fifteenth century references to 'making war and great distance' and 'bloody

distance'.²⁶⁰ Conversely, 'war' derives from Indo-European languages *wers-*, which means to bring into confusion – the condition of war, dispute and combat, being largely one of confusion.²⁶¹ This notion of distance – as a spatial void or measurement of space that also simultaneously suggests discord, quarrel and confusion – is demonstrated through the intimacy between me and the participant or between Barthes and his lover. This remoteness holds a forced intimacy. A 'bloody distance' suggests both a remove and a corporeal closeness – one that marks the precise gap that is apart but nevertheless simultaneously allows for blood-letting, close enough to strike.²⁶² 'Bloody distance' is a form of distance that suggests the possibilities for a transgression of spatial distance for maximum bodily and intimate discord. The notion of 'bloody distance' shows the taut pressure of the specific relation between distance-from at a gap, but also distance-to for a violence that has yet to arrive. This is another way of framing the violence of proximity and support, detailed in chapter two, in relation to the intimacies found in the performances of *The News of the Building of the Wall*.²⁶³

This discordant distance – the distance that is close enough to enable quarrel – preserves intimacy at a remove, and removes intimacy at the same time. To tell one's own story is to distance oneself from oneself, to double oneself, to make of oneself an-'other'. The *other*, therefore, is here the illusory product of a doubling, the supplement of an absence or the

260 "distance, n.". OED Online.

261 This connection was inspired by a passage in Michael Chabon's novel *Moonglow*. Michael Chabon, *Moonglow* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2016).

262 'bloody distance' is in reference to what Macbeth spits in Act 3 'Banquo was your enemy. [...] So is he mine; and in such a bloody distance / That every minute of his being thrusts / Against my near'st of life' (3.1.113-17).

I owe this thinking on violent distance to literature and to media theorist Eugenie Brinkema's insightful essay on the film *Dogtooth*.

Brinkema, "e.g., *Dogtooth*".

263 Shelton, *The News of the Building of the Wall*.

parody of a relation.²⁶⁴ Within the relationship developed in *Something Like Dancing*, each figure in the engagement must, once closer, retain that dimension of distance from the other that was their initial mark of difference. ‘Embarrass’ literally means ‘to impede’ – demonstrating a physical pushing away of something that approaches too close.²⁶⁵ What is close is pushed to a distance, while what is distant must hold fast to, even when close, a mark of what is not near or familiar. Consider, for example, Jean-Luc Nancy’s intruder in *L’Intrus*, in which he recalls:

The intruder introduces himself forcefully, by surprise or by ruse, not, in any case, by right or by being admitted beforehand. Something of the stranger has to intrude, or else he loses his strangeness... If, once he is there, he remains a stranger, then for as long as this remains so—and does not simply become “naturalized”—his coming does not stop: he continues to come, and his coming does not stop intruding in some way: in other words, without right or familiarity, not according to custom, being, on the contrary, a disturbance, a trouble in the midst of intimacy.²⁶⁶

This intrusion of the stranger implies an ongoing overstepping of personal boundaries, which allows the participant and me to be both intimate and in discord with one another – strangers. In her essay ‘e.g., *Dogtooth*’ (2012), media theorist Eugenie Brinkema argues that the moments of the greatest discord and quarrel in the film *Dogtooth* are also the ones marked by a collapse of spatial distance, the closing of a gap and bridging of intervals on the level of the singular body, where a stranger has been obliterated of its strangeness on the plane of a singular figure.²⁶⁷

264 Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, 84.

265 “embarrass, v.”. OED Online.

266 Nancy, “The Intruder [L’intrus]”, 161.

267 Brinkema, “e.g., *Dogtooth*”.

In *Something Like Dancing*, as in *Dogtooth*, it is through accord, or modes of intimacy, that discordance takes place. Discord and distance do not, then, involve or retain a mark of exteriority at a spatial remove – discord involves becoming ever intimate; discord folds. The key performance of this paradox in the film hinges on the body of the elder daughter, through her self-inflicted violence. Each time, the moments of the greatest discord and violence in the film require the closing of gaps and the coming-too-close of skin to skin, self on self. The love triangle that forms within the confines of the family home (between brother, sister and the female guard their father employs to have sex with the brother) imbues the film with this ‘silent knowledge’ of the dangers of being close. In *Something Like Dancing*, as in Barthes’s gesture, this closeness presents a discord between what occurs and what is said, or what cannot be said. This is a close-but-not-quite re-staging of a recited text, citing a text through one’s body language, which causes us to look outwards in embarrassment.

Through a re-contextualisation of the three gestures “The Other’s Body”, “Talking” and “Looking Embarrassed” from Barthes’s *Lovers Discourse* as questions that examine embodied relations, I have been able to further spend time with the relationships developed between myself and the participants in *Something Like Dancing*.²⁶⁸ These relationships remain difficult to pin down and define categorically in this paper, as each relationship differed in its affect and intimacy, remaining open and unresolved, not unlike Barthes’s relationship to his desired. Each of Barthes’s ‘gestures’ acts here as a question, against which I can consider a relational practice of discord: the voyeuristic observation of the other’s body in the performative exchange, language as a skin that wraps the voice through a pedagogic framework, and the legibility of what is not said but seen. I have used Barthes’s text on anonymous lover’s gestures

268 Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*.

or movements as the text presents a movement towards the other. This essence of moving toward implies the ongoing movement and development of relationship continuing to the most minute degree.

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

This exegesis asked what embodied intimacies or conflicts are extracted from performance practices, particularly those that are indebted to two bodies engaged in a process of recitation and listening. This was initially approached through my studio practice. In 2016, I produced the work *The News of the Building of the Wall*, which presented a shift in my practice towards an interest in intimate, one-on-one performances. This particular framework for producing performances focused on the relationship developed between performer and participant in the work, rather than any material outcomes. Following the work's ephemeral logic, these performances were not documented.

The News of the Building of the Wall took Kafka's short story of a similar name as its source text. Through a process of memorisation and repetition, the text came to be incredibly familiar to me and to those who participated in the work. This text offered a number of antagonisms to the dynamic of the work, due to its focus on communication, spatial and bodily thresholds, touch, the river and political borders. Following the development of this work, I became aware of Mette Edvardsen's work, *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine*.²⁶⁹ This work came to be a key counterpoint for my own work, as a one-on-one performance that similarly engaged in a process of memorisation and recitation. Unlike my work, Edvardsen's only required memorisation and recitation on the part of the performer. In this work, the audience is less active, despite the level of personal engagement required to engage with the person/*book*.

²⁶⁹ Edvardsen, *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine*.

This work presented a means of accessing a text via a human body, or of accessing a body via the text.

In 2017, I was challenged with the idea of writing my own text as material for my performance works. I had previously preferred to stick to a deferral of authorial ownership by collaging excerpts from other's writing into messy bodies of text that often suggested, but never actually said, what I wanted them to. Given my emerging interest in following what could be expressed of a person in their voice, and how a speaker could be revealed through their recitations, it made sense to submit to this vulnerability of writing. I eventually wrote the three short stories that make up *Something Like Dancing*. These were finalised around October 2017, and I have been performing the work since.

To answer my research question through the discoveries made in these works, I have framed my exegesis through a number of experienced *conflicts* or *intimacies* that arise. These *conflicts* or *intimacies* focus on the effects of the relations that develop through the performative, reciprocal engagement of speaking and listening to one another in these works. These effects have framed each chapter as key terms to be witnessed in the relationships developed between the two performing bodies. These I have situated in relation to Spinoza's theory on the effects that acting bodies have on one another, which can be classified as *compositions* or *decompositions*, dependant on whether the encounter with another body has a positive or negative effect. Following this, I loosely aligned the intimacies that the artworks produced as compositions, and the conflicts or negative feelings as decompositions. These can be conceptualised as the *shadows* a body casts on another. In my own work, it is initially apparent that I cast a *shadow* on the participant through the imposed memorisation of a text. What took more time to register is how that participant casts a shadow on me, or how I do on them beyond the text in which the work is grounded. To follow how these intersubjective

relationships developed in the performance, I structured my chapters loosely around a number of these effects, designated at the beginning of each chapter. These were considered loose *themes* for each chapter, through which I followed a number of lines of thinking regarding voicing, the politics of listening, intersubjective engagement and intimacy. These themes are reciprocity, occupation, agency, complicity, shadow, distance and embarrassment.

As well as utilising these terms as literal answers to my research question, I sought to demonstrate a politics of listening through my exegetical research. Influenced strongly by Hannah Arendt, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes and Adriana Cavarero, I outlined a *politics of listening*. This sought to listen for what a person expresses of themselves outside of semantic language, and to privilege this at times unintended expression as arguably more indicative of a person's unique self, due to the body's rendering in voice. This *politics of listening* encapsulates not only the attention paid to what is communicated through a person's timbre, cadence, vocal rhythms and body language, but also seeks to move past the privileging of a proper name and semantic language to identify and better understand a person.

Through my written research, I have explored a reciprocity of speaking, and the ways in which storytelling implicates an individual within a political space of plurality. I have sought to show that reciprocity is essential in speaking and listening, not merely in the logic that a voice exists for the ear (either that of the other or the auto-affective) as an extension for the mouth, but also in that to be vocal is how people *act* in the world. I look to storytelling as a means by which oral experience is communicated and the space of the subjective-in-between is accessed, a space in which a multiplicity of public and private interests are always at play. Stories are a result of a *social* relation between bodies communicating, and provide a platform for verbal communication that

not only makes politics personal (through its narrative renderings), but also makes the personal political in its reception and engagement with a wider population. Stories told vocally, or ‘mouth-to-mouth’, implicate a body in their delivery and reception, as the voice is inherently bound to the body. This unsettles the limits of embodiment and calls into question these binary limits of interior and exterior, the private and public, and locates these intersubjective relationships in a specific bodily space. Through this attention to the corporality of the voice, I have sought to develop an argument that places emphasis on the expressive voice, which communicates outside of language, as it is this voice that lends itself to reciprocity and vocal performativity. The voice, as directed towards physical presence and a face-to-face engagement, privileges an attendance to what is communicated outside of language, both through the expressive voice and through the body that is forever knotted to it. It is in this attention to what is communicated by the other through their expressive voice and body language that I have sought to demonstrate a *politics of listening*.

In my artworks, I have shown that the practice of memorisation foregrounds an involved relationship with a ‘text’. Given that in these instances that text is situated in another person’s body, a temporary intimacy with that person develops. Through this intimacy, a body is further revealed. Implicated in this intimacy, there exists a *violence* of proximity. This violence I positioned at the point of coming close to another person, in order to listen, offer support or engage intimately with them. It is not a physical violence, and is arguably a marker of intimacy. This sudden erasure of ‘distance’ between two bodies engaging in communication introduces a discord to the relationship, demonstrated in the uncomfortable intimacy that develops in *The News of the Building of the Wall*. In this space of discord, a participant in the work is confronted with their seeming lack of agency in the structure of the performance. This tension provides the groundwork for the intimacy of the relationship

to develop, presenting a situation in which agency is not static, and shifts continuously across the horizontal relationship. The relationships developed within the work remain difficult to define categorically, as with each new performance a new relationship develops, but by tracking these through a number of effects and discordances produced I have been able to carve out a space of attention that is given to the other in the work. Ultimately, the proposition is to practice a moving towards the other, a listening that is attentive to what is not said, and an engagement with what cannot be expressed via language in our daily encounters.

By examining the stories I wrote for *Something Like Dancing*, I have established how themes of fluidity, boundaries, communication and human contact were woven throughout. I argued that the narrative of the stories, while important to the experience of the work in highlighting aspects of a relation, is ultimately secondary to the communication that occurs between me and the participant. Through the practice of sharing stories, a situation was developed in which I engaged with another person and attended to what we communicated to one another through our expressive voices.

As with all research, this project had its limitations. The particularity of this project meant that I was only ever able to assess the experiences and outcomes of the performance works via conversations with participants at a later date. This was limiting in terms of how I may assess the effects the works have had on the participants, as there are those who did not wish to engage in further conversation about it, and those who may have revealed only the partial truth of their experience – whether due to politeness towards me, or due to the desire for their own privacy. Indeed, given these works are so focused on the experiences felt in the relationship (as opposed to what is conveyed through language), it could be argued that I have no way of ever determining a participant's experience of the work, and the true effect it had on them. I have had to make peace with this

limitation, as it is true for most works of art. I see this limitation as one I am happy to accept, and one that complements the participant's agential limitation upon entering the work. In order to experience this work, a participant must be content to sit in the discomfort of not necessarily knowing where it is leading. In order for me to perform this work, I must be content to sit in ignorance of how the work actually works, or performs, for a participant. To continue the analogy used throughout the exegesis, this is not a painting that I can appraise on the wall. There is no way that I can visualise or witness this relationship developed from any position but my own.

Other limitations to the works included those that are in fact my own personal limitations – given English is the first and only language I speak, until I learn another language these works have limited access to those who also speak English. I have performed versions of the works with people who speak English as a second language, opting to have them repeat sentences back to me one at a time rather than memorising them, when memorisation was too difficult. This limitation also applies to the Deaf community, as to have an Auslan translator present would undermine the intimacy of the work. This is regrettable, as it limits the accessibility of the work for many in the art community and beyond that identify as Deaf, a problem I would like to eventually overcome.

OUTCOMES

As discussed above, this project produced a number of outcomes. These were the written exegesis and two performance works – *The News of the Building of the Wall*, and *Something Like Dancing*. *The News of the Building of the Wall* was developed soon after upgrading my degree from a Master of Fine Arts to a Doctor of Philosophy. This work marked a significant shift in the research and focused my interest in one-on-one performance practices with no material outcomes. *The News of the Building of the*

Wall was first presented through a residency at art space Testing Grounds in Melbourne, in an abandoned lot between the Arts Centre and the Australian Ballet in Southbank which has been repurposed as a temporary arts and performance space. Performing the work here clarified for me that it was important that this work be presented in a public space, allowing the intimacy of the performance to carve out a private space of its own. It also clarified the need for the performance to be completely immaterial, relying only on the encounter between bodies speaking and the environment they found themselves in, with no physical or visual cues beyond this to assist in memorising the stories.

This work was then included in the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA)'s 2016 offsite program *The City Speaks*. Here, the work was re-located to the banks of the Yarra River, which presented a scene for the unfurling of the text in the multitudes of activity in this site. This site, I feel, was successful for the presentation of Kafka's story, as there were enough parallels between the story and the site to allow for occasional coincidences and mirroring between the scripted conversation and the space occupied by the performances. The river was also not *too* illustrative of the story, which I feel would have undermined the personal relationship between acting bodies. The metropolitan riverbank was distinct enough from the rural river described to allow a participant in the work to develop their own imagined visuals in their head.

The presentation of this work through ACCA's programming allowed for knowledge of it to reach a wider audience, so that I was able to perform this work with a number of people who I did not already know. This was a positive development, as I was able to prove to myself that the intimacies formed through the work were not just a strengthening of pre-existing relationships, but were able to be conjured from a relationship that was initiated by the work. It also demonstrated how a public presentation of this work would operate practically, including how meeting points, booking

systems and the solicitation of new participants could be navigated.

Following this, I worked on developing another performance for examination. Through this process it became clear that there were some key restrictions I had to work within: that the outcome be immaterial, involving nothing but the two bodies involved in conversation; that the engagement be a one-on-one encounter; that the performance not be documented in any way, to retain its privacy and emphasis on the relationship that develops as opposed to how the performance 'looks'; that the work be moveable and able to be performed in any location (as long as it was not too noisy); and that the engagement follow a predetermined 'script' or story. After developing and selecting three short stories, I began performing this work as *Something Like Dancing* for my supervisors and friends.

The title, *Something Like Dancing*, came from a note I had written to myself on my phone, which described a number of ideas for potential gestures or themes to orientate the stories I was writing around. It became a key to describing the work; a phrase that I felt would help describe the recitation and repetition of stories as a process. Being something *like* dancing implies a dancer's continual repetition of a movement, gesture and sequence, until they have the choreography embodied in their muscle memory – often with an image of themselves reflected back at them in the dance studio mirror as they practice. It also implies a *leading*, which happens in partnered dancing – such as ballroom dancing or tango – traditionally involving a *leader* and a *follower*. This demonstrates the relationship that develops, with me acting as leader or choreographer teaching a follower the stories. Yet, I also feel this work relates to a looser form of dancing, which one might practise at a party, at a nightclub, in their bedroom or after some good news at work. This is the dancing of embodied expression, communicating to someone across the room something outside of language (I love this song;

this is fun; I got that promotion; I am happy; would you like to dance with me?), and presenting an invocation to the other to engage in an equally physical, embodied expression.

Without lingering too long on a work that I have already written so many words about, and which you as examiner are soon to experience, I will move quickly on to the implications of this research, and where I situate my own unique contribution to knowledge. This is strange to define categorically in a context that seeks to further my own studio practice and engagement. It is also something arguably no one else could do – and in terms of producing a body of writing about my own work, most definitely something no one has done before. This research project has been an incredibly generative process, both in finding my own voice in my practice and how this can generate methodologies for future making, but also in terms of developing my writing practice. This I still have an uncomfortable relationship with, but if this research has taught me anything it is that discomfort can be a productive path to new knowledge and relationships. I feel this research has also generated new knowledge and a contribution to the field that challenges traditional performance and art-making practice, opening a space to consider engagement with participants in a work, and how one can listen and attend to *them*, over the idea of ‘the work’. I have articulated a *politics of listening* that focuses on a direct engagement with what the ‘other’ communicates outside of language. Though I do not purport to claim that this is the first time a researcher has sought to advance an empathetic, intimate attendance to those one cannot speak to, I have offered a unique framework for doing so within a performative practice of storytelling. This situates an artwork not only outside the white cube, or in the public sphere, but in the direct engagement with another person – a practice that defines a person’s political engagement with the plurality; a practice that occurs daily, hourly, at every level of intersubjective engagement.

These outcomes, and the habits, practices and knowledges developed along the way, will lead to further exploration in my practice on the relationship between writing and voice, embodiment and intimacy, and performance and art making. This process has already begun to lead to a number of future outcomes – performances, video works and written works – which are sadly outside the scope of this exegesis and its focus. However, in attempting to articulate how I have engaged with others through a focused attention to the *expressive voice*, and how it is that I have demonstrated this in intersubjective relations, I hope that this project contributes to performance practice and art-making, and suggests how to practice a vulnerable attention to others daily.

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